

Application to Remove a City-Owned Tree - 108 Watson Avenue

Date: October 19, 2021

To: Toronto and East York Community Council

From: Acting Director, Urban Forestry

Wards: Ward 4 – Parkdale – High Park

SUMMARY

This report requests that City Council deny the request for a permit to remove one City-owned tree located at 108 Watson Avenue. The application indicates the reason for removal is due to limited growing space, the condition of the tree, and to provide access for planned renovations to the basement and front porch.

The subject tree is a Colorado blue spruce (*Picea pungens*), measuring 14 cm in diameter. The Tree By-laws do not support the removal of this tree as it is healthy and maintainable.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Acting Director of Urban Forestry recommends that:

1. City Council deny the request for a permit to remove one City-owned tree located at 108 Watson Avenue.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There are no financial implications resulting from the adoption of this report.

DECISION HISTORY

There is no decision history regarding this tree removal permit application.

COMMENTS

Urban Forestry received an application for a permit to remove one City-owned tree located on the City-owned right-of-way fronting 108 Watson Avenue. The subject tree is a Colorado blue spruce measuring 14 cm in diameter. The request to remove this tree

has been made due to the concern over limited growing space, the condition of the tree, and to provide access for planned renovations to the basement and front porch.

The arborist report did not provide a condition rating, but noted that the lower canopy shows signs of cytospora cankers.

Urban Forestry staff inspected the tree and at the time of inspection determined that it is healthy and maintainable.

The small amount of brown needles observed is symptomatic of a fungus-borne disease known as cytospora canker, commonly found on Colorado blue spruce trees. The disease primarily affects lower branches, causing needles to turn brown and drop off. The tree can be pruned in accordance with good arboricultural practices to remove affected branches and manage the disease. Trees with cytospora canker can survive in a healthy and maintainable condition for many years. Pruning, along with routine tree maintenance, will also help alleviate issues of growing space.

The application did not provide specific details about the proposed construction work other than that renovations were planned for the basement and front porch. Construction work should be planned around City-owned trees and can be addressed once plans are drafted and appropriate permit requests are submitted.

Through this inspection and review of the arborist report, staff have concluded that the removal of the subject tree is not permissible under the Tree By-law, *City of Toronto Municipal Code Chapter 813*. As a result of the above noted findings and in support of protecting and growing the City's urban forest, a permit to remove the tree was denied by Urban Forestry. The applicant is appealing this decision.

Should City Council approve this request for removal of the City-owned trees, in accordance with *Section 813-10.B of City of Toronto Municipal Code Chapter 813, Trees, Article II*, permit issuance must be conditional upon the applicants providing payment of the appraised value of the tree to be removed (\$1,166), agreeing to have the tree removed at their expense, as well as providing satisfactory replacement planting. In this instance, it would be appropriate for the applicant to provide five replacement trees which can be achieved in a combination of on-site planting and cash-in-lieu of planting. The applicant will also be required to provide a tree planting security deposit to cover the cost of removal, replacement and the cost of maintenance for a period of two years for all trees planted on City property.

The Colorado blue spruce tree at 108 Watson Avenue is a valuable part of the urban forest that provides numerous aesthetic, social and economic benefits to the property owner and local community. Toronto's urban forest provides \$55 million in environmental benefits every year including improved air quality through pollution removal, lower storm water management costs by reducing runoff, and carbon sequestration that lessens the impacts of climate change. Through shade and transpiration, increasing urban tree cover can mitigate exposure to extreme heat events. A higher density of trees in a neighbourhood has been shown to significantly improve physical and mental health, such as reducing blood pressure and stress levels and

promoting physical activity. Trees also make urban environments aesthetically more pleasing which raises property values.

Protecting the urban forest is a key strategy for building resiliency, as it continues to face increasing natural pressures such as storms and invasive pests. The 2013 ice storm resulted in the removal of over 3000 City-owned trees. The Emerald Ash Borer beetle has killed approximately 860,000 ash trees across the City. As a result, if the City aims to reach its canopy target of 40 per cent, it is imperative that the City protect healthy trees from injury and removal whenever possible. The improved condition and size of the urban forest will support the City of Toronto's goals to improve quality of life and well-being that enables a diverse, sustainable, innovative, growing and thriving city.

In accordance with the City Council-approved Strategic Forest Management Plan, Toronto's Official Plan, Toronto's Biodiversity Strategy, and the Tree By-law, the Colorado blue spruce at 108 Watson Avenue, as a valuable part of the urban forest, should not be removed.

CONTACT

Nicholas Trevisan, Supervisor, Tree Protection and Plan Review, Urban Forestry
Tel: 416-392-7390, Email: Nicholas.Trevisan@toronto.ca

SIGNATURE

Kim Statham
Acting Director, Urban Forestry
Parks, Forestry and Recreation

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – Figure 1: Arborist report photograph showing the Colorado blue spruce tree at 108 Watson Avenue; May 4, 2021

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