
May 25, 2022

To Infrastructure and Environment Committee Chair and Members:

Re: Report on Pervious Planting Spaces on Private Property

Toronto's urban forest offers several significant benefits including air quality improvements, energy conservation from shading, reduction in stormwater runoff and water quality issues, carbon sequestration, noise reduction and decreased erosion, environmental benefits and savings from which are estimated to be worth \$55 million annually. Investing in Toronto's urban forest is investing in the welfare of Torontonians. While the tree population was found to have increased from 10.2 to 11.5 million trees between 2008 and 2018, the total leaf area has decreased by about 11%, amounting to a loss of benefits provided by the urban forest.

The Tree Canopy Study was adopted by City Council in 2020, and since then many actions have been taken to address challenges to the urban forest and to progress towards the City's target of expanding canopy cover to 40% by 2050. The investment of over \$4 million and leveraging of over \$9 million in matching funds in tree planting and stewardship to support canopy expansion on private property through Urban Forestry Grants and Incentives program had resulted in over 53 000 trees and shrubs planted between 2017 and 2020 and an increase in the quality of street tree condition. The use of fees and fines to encourage compliance with the City's Tree Bylaws has strengthened the protection of trees. Addressing tree canopy at the neighbourhood scale through a tree equity approach to planning and service delivery helps improve the inequitable distribution of the urban forest. And of course, monitoring and managing insect pests will address the decreasing tree condition. These actions address the continuous press and pulse dynamics faced by Toronto's urban forest, where permanent and short-term changes in abundance or density affect the ability of the urban forest to absorb change and disturbance and still maintain the benefits.

Key to expanding canopy cover is increasing the available planting space. Pervious spaces, such as tree, grass, shrub and bare earth land covers are potential planting space for new trees as they absorb water that supports tree growth, termed as soft landscaping. Further, the quality of pervious space for maximizing tree canopy through tree planting is dependent on whether the space is adequate for tree growth. Pervious spaces for tree planting require both, enough space on the surface for the tree trunk to grow unimpeded, and enough space below the surface for root growth. In contrast, impervious spaces such as buildings, roads, parking lots and sidewalks increase surface water runoff and do not support tree growth. Trends show that since 1999, impervious cover is increasing while pervious cover is decreasing, a change which is often permanent, presenting negative implications towards space for tree planting and reaching the canopy cover goal.

Minimum requirements for soft landscaping pertaining to the space between garden and laneway suites and the main residential building, as well as the front yards of residential buildings provide the necessary pervious space for tree planting and are integral to help us meet our goals. It is especially important to actively recognize opportunities to bolster the resilience of the urban forest to ensure sustainable and increasing benefits offered to Torontonians. However, since approvals, there is evidence that the policies to promote this are not being fully implemented. City Council must work to ensure that zoning by-laws allow for maximum tree canopy expansion to reach the target of expanding tree canopy to 40%.

Recommendation:

1. Infrastructure and Environment Committee request the General Manager, Parks Forestry and Recreation, in consultation with the Executive Director, Municipal Licensing and Standards, the Chief Building Official and Executive Director, Toronto Building, and the Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning to report back to a future meeting of Infrastructure and Environment Committee regarding potential strategies to protect and enhance the City's tree canopy and growing space, while also supporting infill housing growth in the City's Neighbourhoods, and that the report is returned before City Council provides further guidance on Expanding Housing Options in Neighbourhoods.

Thank you,



Councillor Mike Layton
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