

Support for Grants and Incentives Program - Expanding the Urban Forest on Private Lands

Date: April 25, 2025

To: Infrastructure and Environment Committee

From: Executive Director, Environment, Climate and Forestry

Wards: All

SUMMARY

In 2021, Toronto City Council adopted a tree canopy cover target of 40 per cent by 2050 and approved a Tree Planting Strategy to achieve this target. According to the 2018 Tree Canopy Study, the city of Toronto has an average canopy cover of 28.4-31 per cent. The canopy study also recognized that 55 per cent of the city's land area is privately owned, providing significant potential to expand and improve equitable distribution of the urban forest.

As directed by the Tree Planting Strategy, the City's Urban Forestry Grants and Incentives Program was developed. This program focuses on increasing tree planting and stewardship activities on private land through funding partnerships with residents, landowners, and eligible organizations and institutions. This program provides Toronto residents equitable access to native trees and shrubs and the numerous benefits they provide. To administer this program, staff are required to collect information from residents engaging with urban forestry grants and incentives to organize events, inform proper distribution of plant material, determine eligibility, track survivability, improve monitoring, and expand tree planting on private lands.

The purpose of this report is to renew City Council authority for the continuation of the Grants and Incentives Program and enable staff to collect the necessary data that will help advance the City's strategic priorities to invest in people and neighbourhoods, tackle climate change, and build resilience. This report also requests City Council acknowledgement that the Environment, Climate and Forestry division has supported applications for funding opportunities from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities' Growing Canada's Community Canopies (GCCC) initiative for tree planting in Toronto. If approved for funding, projects will support planting of 200 additional caliper trees in 2025 and support the City's commitment to achieve a healthy, sustainable urban forest with a canopy cover of 40 per cent by 2050.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Executive Director of Environment, Climate and Forestry Division recommends that:

1. City Council authorize the Executive Director of Environment, Climate and Forestry Division (or designate) to negotiate and enter into agreements, including funding agreements, to support the implementation of the Tree Planting Strategy recommendations, each in a form satisfactory to the City Solicitor.
2. City Council authorize the Executive Director of Environment, Climate and Forestry Division (or designate) to collect the necessary personal information from participants to enable improved administration of the Grants and Incentives Program, including promotion, programming, and monitoring.
3. City Council authorize the Executive Director of Environment, Climate and Forestry Division (or designate) to apply for funding through the Federation of Canadian Municipalities' Growing Canada's Community Canopies (GCCC) initiative directly or in partnership with external organizations to the available limit for tree planting within the jurisdictional boundaries of Toronto.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

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

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting on February 27, 2025, Infrastructure and Environment Committee received the Strengthening Toronto's Tree Canopy: Report on Climate Resilience and Tree Equity. [Agenda Item History - 2025.IE19.9](#)

At its December 15, 2021, meeting, City Council reaffirmed Toronto's target of 40 per cent tree canopy cover by 2050 to align with the City of Toronto's TransformTO NetZero Strategy. In this report to Council, Urban Forestry reported on the development and implementation of the Tree Planting Strategy with specific details on the city's efforts to increase canopy expansion on private land. [Agenda Item History - 2021.IE26.6](#)

At its meeting on January 29, 2020, City Council directed the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation to use the findings included in the 2018 Tree Canopy Study to inform ongoing urban forestry program planning and strategic resource allocation through revisions to the Urban Forestry Service Plan in 2020 and report back to the Infrastructure and Environment Committee. City Council also directed the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation to report in the third quarter of 2020 on the City's strategy to increase tree planting on private land and potential programs to assist with maintenance of trees on private land. [Agenda Item History - 2020.IE11.1](#)

At its May 24, 2017, meeting, City Council approved a 2017 grant allocation of \$1.01 million to the Toronto Parks and Trees Foundation funded from the 2017 Approved

Operating Budget for Parks, Forestry and Recreation. Approved the continuation of the existing grant allocation to Toronto Parks and Trees Foundation of \$200,000 and approved the expansion of the existing grant allocation to LEAF from \$50,000 to \$100,000 with continuation of both grants subject to raising \$1 in donations from the private and public sector for every \$1 of City grant. [Agenda Item History - 2017.PE19.1](#)

At its November 8, 2016, meeting, City Council adopted "Actions to Grow Toronto's Tree Canopy". City Council also directed the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation to develop a Tree Planting Strategy based on the recommendations included in the report "Actions to Grow Toronto's Tree Canopy" and report back in the third quarter of 2017. Additionally, City Council adopted the following policy with respect to the receipt of replacement tree planting funds collected under the Street Tree and Private By-laws (City of Toronto Municipal Code, Chapter 813, Articles II and III): c) that the future expenditures for the Tree Planting Strategy be included as part of future Operating Budgets and funded by withdrawals from the Tree Canopy Reserve (XR1220). [Agenda Item History - 2016.PE14.2](#)

COMMENTS

Urban Forestry Grants and Incentives Program

Since 2017, the Urban Forestry Grants and Incentives Program has facilitated planting trees and enhancing stewardship activities on private lands through funding partnerships to help improve the health, resilience, and expansion of the urban forest. The program consists of (1) Community Grants which provide matching funds to eligible organizations and institutions, and (2) Incentives aimed directly to residents and grassroots groups by providing them with free native trees and shrubs and subsidized private tree planting services. Since 2017, the Urban Forestry Grants and Incentives Program has invested and leveraged more than \$22.8 million and funded 226 projects to plant over 118,000 trees and shrubs on private land, and engaging over 314,000 people across Toronto. For a detailed overview of the program impact, see the Urban Forestry Grants and Incentives Impact Reports (Attachments 1 and 2).

In consultation with Legal Services and City Clerk's Office, Environment, Climate and Forestry is seeking Council approval to renew the grants and incentives programming under the Tree Planting Strategy and to request municipal authority to update its "Notice of Collection" to collect necessary personal information such as home address, name, and email, to enable promotion, programming, and conduct monitoring surveys.

Upcoming Federal Funding Agreements for Private Land Planting

In addition to programming on private land described above, Environment, Climate and Forestry actively seeks external funding opportunities and partnerships to support additional tree planting on private land. The [Growing Canada's Community Canopies \(GCCC\) Fund](#) is a \$291 million initiative, ending in 2031, funded through the Government of Canada's 2 Billion Trees program. The GCCC aims to plant at least 1.2 million new trees across Canada to help increase carbon sequestration and support nature-based solutions to combat the impacts of climate change. For all projects led by

municipal partners, City Council must acknowledge those partnerships and that funding allocated to partners within its jurisdictional boundaries will count towards the GCCC's lifetime contribution to Toronto. There is a \$10 million limit of total funds for tree planting and a \$1 million limit for associated infrastructure activity costs that can be awarded for tree planting projects in Toronto.

Environment, Climate and Forestry has supported two project applications submitted for tree planting in 2025, in partnership with Local Enhancement and Appreciation of Forests (LEAF) and Toronto Transit Commission (TTC). LEAF is a non-profit community organization that educates and engages people about the importance of trees and urban forest stewardship. If approved for funding, LEAF's initiative will provide native trees to Toronto residents located in equity-deserving, low-canopy neighbourhoods. LEAF will engage residents to promote tree health and stewardship through tree care resources and monitoring and maintenance protocols. TTC Green acts to increase resiliency to extreme climate events, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and enhance biodiversity of local ecosystems. If approved for funding, TTC's initiative will include tree planting at TTC stations and bus loops with low canopy cover to be enjoyed daily by commuters and local communities. A summary of project deliverables is provided below:

LEAF - Toronto Tree Equity Project - Total Project Value \$100,000.00

Funding Request: \$50,000, City of Toronto Cash Contribution: \$50,000

Planting 100 native caliper trees on privately owned land free of charge to Toronto residents located in low tree equity and Neighbourhood Improvement Areas.

TTC Green: Increasing Canopy Cover at TTC - Total Project Value \$81,859.00

Funding Request: \$38,870, City of Toronto Staff In-Kind Contribution: \$4,102

Planting of 100 large caliper trees at select TTC stations with low tree canopy cover to promote tree equity and improve local environmental conditions.

The above applications in partnership with City of Toronto include a total funding request of \$88,870 that will count towards the limit of \$10 million available for tree planting within Toronto's jurisdictional boundaries if approved.

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SIGNATURE

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ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 [Urban Forestry Grants and Incentives Impact Report 2017 - 2020](#)

Attachment 2 [Urban Forestry Grants and Incentives Impact Report 2021 - 2024](#)