

Tree Bylaw Review

Environment, Climate and Forestry

Presentation to the Infrastructure and Environment Committee

February 25, 2026



The Value of Toronto's Urban Forest

- 11.5 million trees in Toronto
- \$7 billion structural value
- \$55 million annually in ecological services
- For every dollar spent on annual maintenance, Toronto's urban forest returns between \$1.35 – \$3.20 worth of benefits and cost savings each year
- Healthy tree canopy can increase property values by 5-10%
- Tree canopy can reduce daytime urban heat by 9 degrees celcius
- 1 large tree can provide a day's oxygen for 4 people



Toronto's Tree Bylaws

- This report focuses on Toronto Municipal Code Chapter 813, Trees and Toronto Municipal Code Chapter 658, Ravine and Natural Feature Protection, collectively referred to as the Tree Bylaws
- The purpose of the Tree Bylaws is not to prevent removal or injury to protected trees, rather, to regulate tree protection, require replacement trees and to undertake compliance and enforcement when necessary
- The Tree Bylaws effectively support necessary housing development and city building while balancing critical ecological services, climate resilience and tree canopy goals

Tree Bylaw Review Inputs

The Tree Bylaw Review report was informed through:

- Jurisdictional review of eight Canadian municipalities
- Four constituency group engagement sessions
- Four public engagement sessions
- Public online survey, generating over 6400 responses
- Input from City of Toronto divisional staff and City Councillors
- Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing meeting



What We Heard from Survey Respondents

- 98 per cent consider trees important to their quality of life
- 85 per cent expressed concern about tree loss
- 85 per cent agree the City should do more to protect healthy trees on private property
- 60 per cent favour lowering the private tree protections from 30 cm to 20 cm diameter at breast height
- 67 per cent support increased financial penalties
- 75 per cent support a Distinctive Tree Category
- 67 per cent support Ravine application fees



Tree Bylaw Review Report

- This report presents a comprehensive set of actions, while supporting housing delivery, climate resilience and sustainable city building. The recommendations will:
 - Amend Tree Bylaws in 2026
 - Pilot a new incentive for tree maintenance on private property in 2026 with a report back in 2027
 - Update operational procedures and processes in 2026 and 2027
 - Direct further study on private tree size threshold and additional enforcement tools with a report back in 2027

Enhanced Protections for Toronto's Largest Healthy Trees

- Large trees provide significant ecological benefits, an ideal urban forest should be at 10%; Toronto at 2%
- A new Distinctive Tree Category would strengthen protection for healthy trees larger than 61 cm in diameter
- Distinctive Trees are subject to all existing permit processes, and staff may deny applications to injure or remove in service of tree protection
- A new Distinctive Tree Maintenance Incentive Program would assist homeowners with maintenance costs



Lowering Private Tree Size Protections

- Toronto's Private Tree Bylaw currently protects trees 30cm dbh and larger. This is higher than jurisdictional counterparts
- Lowering the private tree size threshold to 20cm would provide earlier protections for younger trees to support long term canopy growth
- This change would result in an estimated annual increase of over 3,000 private tree permit applications, or 50% increase over current volumes
- Implications to current resources, staffing and service standards for both permit and compliance and enforcement staff
- If City Council agrees in principle to lowering the size threshold, staff will prepare an implementation plan and report back in 2027

Stronger Enforcement Tools

This report presents an enhanced compliance and enforcement framework based on education, fees, orders, and fines through prosecution, including:

- Enhanced public access to tree bylaw contravention and permit data
- Updated foundation for fine recommendation guidelines
- Updated tree replacement planting ratios for contraventions
- Creation of a stump diameter regulation
- Protection of newly planted private trees through enforcement actions and development approvals



Strengthen Tree Bylaw Enforcement

To encourage compliance with the tree bylaws, the City is considering higher financial penalties for violations. This could include supplementary fees for unauthorized removals, higher fines and increased compensation requirements. The goal is to make sure consequences are fair and consistent, and match the seriousness of these illegal actions, while promoting transparency and accountability.

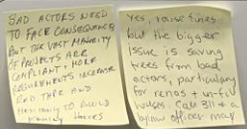
What's Being Considered:

- Enhancing enforcement tools to improve compliance.
- Adding supplementary fees for unauthorized activity.
- Making unpaid fees recoverable via property tax roll.
- Updating fines to reflect industry standards and/or increased penalties.
- Reviewing contravention inspection fees annually to match service costs.
- Using compensation ratios to ensure fair, proportional penalties.

Why This Matters:

- Increases financial accountability without relying on prosecution.
- Ensures the City recovers value for damaged or removed trees.
- Promotes fairness, transparency and cost recovery.
- Aligns enforcement with current standards and public expectations.

Your Feedback

Support:	Oppose:	Additional comments?
		

Ravine and Natural Feature Protection Application Fees

- This report recommends introducing a requirement of a non-refundable permit application fee tree permits under the Ravine and Natural Feature Protection Bylaw.
- Estimated to generate \$0.43 million in cost recovery annually
- Permit exemptions will remain in place for stewardship projects, not-for-profit housing projects and low-income homeowners

Application Fees for Ravine Protection

Currently, application fees for removing or injuring protected trees apply to private and City-owned properties, but not in ravine-protected areas. To ensure a fair and consistent approach across Toronto, the City is considering introducing these fees in ravines to help cover the cost of reviewing and processing permits. Voluntary stewardship activities—such as planting native trees, removing invasive species, or restoring habitats—would remain exempt to support conservation efforts.

What's Being Considered:

- Introducing application fees for tree-related work in ravine-protected areas.
- Most applications are construction related, highlighting the need for sustainable funding model.
- Fees would follow the same structure of the Private and Street Tree Bylaws, reflecting staff effort and ensuring fairness city-wide.
- Voluntary stewardship projects would remain exempt to support conservation.

Why This Matters:

- Supports cost recovery and reduces pressure on the operating budget.
- May enable additional staffing, improving review timelines and service quality.
- Promotes a consistent, fair system while continuing to protect Toronto's natural areas.

Your Feedback

Support: [6 colored dots: 3 blue, 2 green, 1 yellow]

Oppose: [4 colored dots: 1 green, 1 red, 1 yellow, 1 blue]

Additional comments?

Do not charge fees for TRCA, municipal or Federal projects.

How fees? New homes already pay extra for tree removal permits. Why not just charge a fee for tree removal? All tree work should require a permit. Homeowners + TRCA?

"Voluntary" conservation projects are a home owner's responsibility. What do we do something to their conservation property to ensure a conservation plan is required?

Comprehensive Approach for Toronto's Essential Natural Infrastructure

- City Council reaffirmed its commitment to achieving 40% tree canopy cover by 2050, recognizing that healthy natural infrastructure is essential for quality of life and a sustainable city
- This report reflects a comprehensive and balanced approach to improving Toronto's Tree Bylaws which work together with critical city building goals of housing delivery to support a sustainable city
- Following direction from Infrastructure and Environment Committee and City Council, recommendations will be implemented starting in 2026 and be completed in 2027

Thank-you

