

# HARBORD VILLAGE RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

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To: Infrastructure and Environment Committee

Re IE 27.8 Tree Bylaw Review Report

Feb. 21, 2026.

We are grateful for this ongoing work to expand protections to our trees.

Specifically, we urge the following:

- expand bylaw protection of trees on private property to 20 cm, DBH;
- expand the distinctive tree/heritage tree protections to public lands including parks;
- initiate pilot projects in several diverse neighbourhoods to test ways to turn broad public support for trees to actual individual decisions to protect and plant;
- take advantage of existing tree inventories to create forest management plans, to maximize protection by ensuring coherence in planning, predictability and ongoing assessment.

There is no time to wait.

First, you have widespread support. In September 2025, your surveys show 98 percent of respondents consider trees important to their quality of life, 93 percent say ‘very important.’ 85% are concerned about tree loss (p. 12). Most recently, we see similar numbers in a more recent report on the future of Queen’s Park North where 94% loved the park’s shady trees and lush greenery (p. 54 Community Engagement Phase 1 Summary: <https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/97cd-queens-park-north-revitalization-phase-1-engagement-summary.pdf> )

Second, there is unprecedented loss. Inventories of trees in Harbord Village, an area bounded by Bathurst, Bloor, College and Spadina, provide a case study. Between 2008 and 2018, we lost 1371 trees, half on city property, half in the neighbourhood. This represents a 30% loss of stems. Our canopy cover sat at 21.9 %, and a City report in 2018 confirmed this loss at 22.3%. Given 25% of our trees were surrounded with over 50% hard surfaces, 12 percent of our trees were encircled by 90% hard surface, it is not unreasonable to believe this trend will continue, absent quick and purposeful intervention.

The reason? The lead forester on our inventories, James Steenberg, now at Dalhousie University, attributed the bulk of the loss to disturbance: construction damage and paving.

His further work suggests in our neighbourhood, tree loss is more associated with owned properties than rented. Owners renovate. We can build on such insights to create neighbourhood level programmes to foster tree planting.

We recommend setting up a series of pilot projects, particularly where communities that have existing data can have a city-led pilot studies to figure out what works and what doesn't to meet the 40% canopy goals. In Harbord Village alone making up that deficit was 480 stems a year for 10 years.

*Distinctive tree initiative on private lands:*

In Harbord Village, out of pure good luck, a pre-contact 150-250 year old bur oak had been quietly growing, neglected, enduring on a shared property line between paved parking spaces behind Brunswick Avenue. Suffocated by concrete, its survival was threatened by water stress. Community engagement led to fundraising. Working with a neighbour and Robert Mays of the Transportation department, we created permeable cuts to improve water penetration and with luck that tree has a future ahead.

*Extend the distinctive tree identifications to public lands including parks:*

These are an easy way to create heroes out of our urban forest.

Our bur oak is cousin to the oak savannah forest survivors who have stood for 250 years in Queen's Park North. The 25 signature trees in this pre-contact forest remain full ten generations after Simcoe, surviving invasions, world wars, epidemics, amid progress, need status and special protection now.

*Forest Management Plans:*

A Forest Management Plan plans to give those the best crack at survival.

There is ecological value, social value in understanding the critical stewardship role residents have with the nature that survives among us, that creates our oxygen, that raises our hearts when we hear the song of a returning redwing in spring. It is also part of our shared history, from Indigenous lands to 1793, when the first job facing soldiers accompanying John Graves Simcoe was to clear a patch in the wall of forest lining Toronto Harbor so they could even pitch their tents. The miracle that trees have survived from before Toronto became a city is something we must not ignore. Do no harm.

Best,

Sue Dexter

Harbord Village Residents' Association.