

Urban Forest Strategy Presentation for the Planning & Environment Committee

Presentation by: Amber Cantell, Vice Chair, Trees and Forests Advisory Committee

Date: June 3, 2014

TFAC was formed to provide advice on the formation and implementation of London's Urban Forest Strategy, with a view to maximizing the retention of existing trees, woodlands and natural areas. Our members have been heavily engaged with the process of developing the UFS over the past several years, and on behalf of TFAC, I would like to thank all the City of London staff, councillors, community organizations, business, volunteers and the consulting team who collaborated to develop the strategy.

Having a long-term UFS is a great step forward for us as a city. We live in an era of growing environmental and public health challenges, in which trees play an important part.

Understanding the value of the UFS depends on having a sense of just how valuable trees and forests are to a community.

The structural value and the environmental services – the clean air and water we get from trees, as well as stormwater and other benefits – has enormous value, calculated at 1.5 billion dollars for our city.

But trees have a very important health connection that is often overlooked too. Like many communities, London has been struggling for several years now with the loss of hundreds of thousands of our trees due to Emerald Ash Borer, or EAB. A recent study done in the United States found that the spread of the emerald ash borer, which poses no direct threat to humans but has killed more than 100 million trees in the United States, was associated with an additional 21,000 human deaths from cardiovascular and lower respiratory disease. That sort of loss is often invisible to us, but that impact is there.

(Source: Donovan, G.H.; Butry, D.T.; Michael, Y.L.; Prestemon, J.P.; Gatzolis, D.; Mao, M.Y. 2013. The relationship between trees and health: evidence from the spread of the emerald ash borer. American Journal of Preventive Medicine. 44: 139–145)

Trees also play an extremely important role in cancer prevention. One in three cancers is skin cancer, making skin cancer by far the most common kind of cancer here in Ontario. Over 90% of those cases are believed to be caused by over-exposure to solar radiation, which could have been prevented by shade. So almost one in three cases of cancer could potentially be prevented by trees. Similarly, the inverse is also true: if we lose our canopy cover – if we lose trees – there will be a direct impact on cancer rates here in London.

(Sources: www.cancercare.on.ca, <http://www.canadianskincancerfoundation.com/about-skin-cancer.html>)

And we are facing a loss of trees. In light of our changing climate, the plan also recognizes importance of planning for emergencies in our forests. We *know* we are going to see more severe storms here in Ontario, and more storms like the ice storm that recently devastated Toronto's forests. We also know we are going to be having more frequent droughts, which will increase the stress on our existing trees and food security.

We are still dealing with the fallout from the Emerald Ash Borer, and experiences in the northern United States suggest that Asian Longhorn Beetle (ALB) may not be far behind, and many times worse. Where EAB affected about 10% of our trees, ALB might affect as much as 40%. This is the reality we are living in as a society today, and we need to be developing these long term strategies to help mitigate those impacts, so as to protect the quality of life Londoners have come to expect in our city, and to protect those natural ecosystems on which we depend.

On this note, one of the important things TFAC pushed for in the UFS was the inclusion of **woodland cover targets**. The name of our advisory committee explicitly references both trees and forests, and we see this reflected again in the Strategy's breakdown of our urban forest into two categories – “green infrastructure” (basically standalone street, yard and park trees) and “natural capital”, or forests.

However, so far the Strategy only contains targets for canopy cover (basically the tree or shade cover), and only has plans to develop targets for woodlands - for how much *forest* we should actually have here in the Forest City, as opposed to just “trees” or “shade” - in five or more years.

It is important to recognize (as mentioned by one of the earlier presenters) that it is possible to have excellent canopy cover without having any forest cover – you could achieve a high canopy cover solely through standalone trees in yards, boulevards, etc.

Similarly, in terms of targets, you could even cut down most of the trees in a forest, put sod down between them, and after a few years see no loss of canopy cover – even though you've completely destroyed the ecosystem.

Just as you wouldn't have a Transportation Strategy that sets targets related to cars but not public transit, you would not expect to have an Urban **Forest** Strategy that sets targets for trees, but not forests.

That said, what is clear is that given the nature of climate change, and the growing impacts we as a community continue to face from pests such as EAB and Asian Longhorn Beetle, we cannot just go about “business as usual”. These are not usual times. We have to be proactive. And this Urban Forest Strategy is the key. We risk losing many of our trees over the coming decades, and

if want to preserve and even improve the quality of life for Londoners, we have to be acting now.

Therefore, on behalf of the Trees and Forests Advisory Committee, I strongly encourage council to **adopt the Urban Forest Strategy**, and to allocate the resources necessary to ensure its successful implementation and thereby enable us to keep the forest in this, our Forest City.