

Why London needs to Fund its Urban Forest Management Strategy and Why its Urgent

I am speaking to the need for the City to allocate some funding toward starting to implement the Urban Forest Management Strategy that was approved by Council last year. As per regular procedure, City Staff forwarded a business case to the budget process to request funds to start implementing the strategy but unfortunately, there is currently no money in the 2015 Budget to move the Strategy forward.

I would like to make a quick clarification at this point. I'm here on behalf of ReForest London but ReForest London is not seeking funds for ourselves. I hope to show you why its important for you to start to implementing your Urban Forest Management Strategy this year: why its urgent. The dollars in the business case are for the City itself to undertake new levels of protections, plantings and maintenance.

I also want to acknowledge that City of London has shown its commitment to the urban forest in the past and Council and staff support and drive many ways of making our city greener, healthier and leafier.

ReForest London is still very proud to have the City of London as a founding partner in London's Million Tree Challenge. However, our collective urban forest is in trouble and we all need to take greater action.

[SLIDE - case)

Where is the UFMS business case you might ask? Well, it's referred to in your Budget Document as Deferred Additional Investment on page 49 in the Key Considerations section. If fully funded, the Business Case would add 0.1% to the tax rate and cost the average household \$2.48.

[SLIDE - benefits)

Why is the Urban Forest Management Strategy Important?

I think everyone understands well that trees provide dozens of benefits to our community. You name it and trees probably help it:

- Reducing skin cancers
- Promoting walkable streets
- More outside activity by kids and adults
- Reduction in respiratory disease
- Savings in storm water management
- Increase property values
- Positive mental health impacts
- Reduction in physiological and mental stress
- Even decreased crime rates

The list goes on and on. In the dozens and dozens of ways we want to make our community better and improve our quality of life, trees help.

[SLIDE – asset table)

Our urban forest is a community asset just like roads or libraries. You might be surprised to find out how valuable an asset it really is. By replacement value, our urban forest has higher value than our recreation facilities or our corporate facilities for example.

It seems really natural in a budget process that assets like roads and storm water have substantial maintenance and improvement budgets assigned to them. We are looking to have a similar priority placed on London's green infrastructure.

If my math is right, starting to implement the UFMS strategy is 0.1% of the asset value we are trying to protect and grow. If I had to guess, other forms of infrastructure enjoy much higher levels of investment to maintain them, than 0.1%. I can tell you in my experience in this building

over the years, trees have simply not got the priority nor funding needed in comparison to other forms of infrastructure.

Actually, trees are the only infrastructure that GROW in value after they are installed instead of depreciating. A \$350 street tree can provide 10x that amount in ecological services over its lifetime.

[SLIDE – 4 categories of action)

What Will UFMS do?

There is no silver bullet in protecting and growing our urban forest. The Strategy recognizes this and categorizes required activities as:

- Plant More
- Protect More
- Maintain Better
- Engage the Community

Movement on all these fronts is important.

[SLIDE – Size matters)

Why is more action urgent?

Every year we delay more proactively building our urban forest is a year lost forever. By comparison, imagine, if we delay a specific road widening one year, that road will still be there a year later and the widening will still look the same when complete.

It doesn't work that way with trees. If we delay in protecting a big mature tree, that tree is lost to us for our lifetime. And once we plant a new tree, you can't make it grow faster to catch up the time we delayed in planting it.

Most of the trees that will comprise our urban forest for the next 20 years are already in the ground. Our window to act and have any significant impact over the next 20 years is realistically this year and next. We need better protections to ensure existing trees mature to our full benefit and we need to plant many more new trees to literally set the roots for our future urban forest.

[SLIDE – canopy targets)

Last year, Council sent the UFMS back to staff to increase the canopy targets. This shows London in comparison to other municipalities. We are actually very happy with the new canopy targets even they may be lower than other municipalities.

They are a stretch target and they have a solid plan behind them to achieve them. The problem right now is that we are not funding that plan.

[SLIDE – canopy cover trajectory)

When last measured, our tree canopy was about 24%. Recent estimates place our current canopy about 22%. The loss is due in large part to Emerald Ash borer but also to natural mortality of our oldest trees and of course also development pressures. Our canopy cover is declining instead of growing.

Some of you may know that when Emerald Ash Borer started to devastate our 400,000 ash trees, the City approved an EAB Strategy to deal with the removals and the replanting. Unfortunately, that strategy was significantly underfunded and years later, we are still struggling to replant the trees and canopy cover we lost.

Without reasonable investment to maintain and grow, our canopy cover is headed down to 15%. That's if we don't get hit by any major impacts like new invasive bugs or diseases, or regular droughts, regular extreme freezes or god forbid a tornado or icestorm.

Our canopy cover is headed in the wrong direction.

We need concentrated efforts to reverse this trend. And honestly, we need them now not later. Trees are easily cut and take a long time to grow to maturity. Every year we lose we can never get back.

All these trajectories are possible for London. If we want to avoid being on the wrong end of one, we need to get the Urban Forest Strategy in full action.

I hope you will be able to find a source of funds for this very important aspect of our quality of life.

We need to start this year.

Thank you.

Dean Sheppard
ReForest London, Executive Director