

URBAN FOREST STRATEGY COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

QUESTIONS & DISCUSSION ITEMS FROM THE TFAC EDUCATION SUB-COMMITTEE

Date: July 19, 2021

OVERVIEW

The creation of a communication strategy is an important strategic action under the “Engage the Community” strategic direction within the Urban Forest Strategy (UFS):

17.5 Develop and implement a comprehensive communication strategy. Ensure that the strategy is coordinated by Corporate Communications and all City departments participate in its development so that initiatives are coordinated and can be rolled out smoothly in the appropriate season (e.g., green-waste recycling in the fall, water conservation during the summer months, tree cutting permit to avoid the bird nesting season, etc.).

The TFAC Education & Outreach Sub-Committee has been leading the TFAC effort to contribute to education and outreach activities under the UFS. At our committee’s July meeting, we hope to gain a better understanding of the current state of the Communications Strategy, the process for its development, and how TFAC can best contribute to that process.

To that end, the sub-committee has prepared the following questions in advance for the presenters:

1. General Questions

- 1.1 What staff/how many are going to be working on the Communications Plan for the Urban Forest Strategy, and from which departments?
- 1.2 What budget has been allocated to the Communications Plan, so that our recommendations are at the right scale?
- 1.3 What is the project timeline?
- 1.4 How does info move from “content” to “design”? (Does Forestry provide the info and then Communications turn into a communications piece?)

2. TFAC Participation in the Communications Plan Development Process

2.1 As TFAC, how can we be most useful in contributing to the Communications Strategy development process? Are there specific sections Communications would like to see TFAC contribute towards?

The Education & Outreach Sub-Committee so far has on our radar:

- Scan of successful communication and marketing strategies being used for urban forestry in other communities
- Developing ideas for messaging
- Developing a list of proposed promotional pieces
- Proposing partnership, event, and other opportunities specific to London

2.2 What is the message and graphic design development process like at the City? Is there a way for TFAC to be involved in that?

WEBSITE FEEDBACK

In the same vein, the TFAC Education & Outreach Sub-Committee have been providing detailed but piecemeal feedback on the Trees section of the City website on a monthly basis for the last couple of months. This has been done in support of strategic action 17.6:

“Make the City website and staff directory more accessible/navigable to make it easier for the public to contact staff with questions or concerns about the urban forest.”

As members of the broader public, we see TFAC as having much to offer as a fresh set of eyes reviewing the website content. However, we would like to ask staff:

1. Is there a better way to do this? Is there someone specific our feedback should be directed to?

Noting that we’ve found so far that we value having ability to provide a mix of detailed, “big picture”, and technical feedback, which may go to different people or departments depending.

Thus far, some of our overarching / “big picture” feedback includes:

1) Context is needed

Many sections of the website seem to provide information without context, which makes it much harder for the general public to understand. A good example is the “Private Trees” page:

<https://london.ca/living-london/water-environment/trees/privately-owned-trees>

The first paragraph of that page reads:

The City of London Municipal Council approved the new **City of London Tree Protection By-law C.P.-1555-252** at its November 24, 2020 meeting with it going into effect March 1, 2021. Residents, industry experts, prior users of the permitting system and the Trees & Forests Advisory Committee were consulted as part of the crafting of the by-law.

It provides no overview for Londoners before getting into the by-law, even a simple statement like “Many privately owned trees in London are protected under the new City of London Tree Protection By-Law”.

Text on the website tends to go straight into technical detail without context. Our sub-committee would recommend that copy on the website should be written with the general public in mind, and recognize that they may not have as much technical expertise as the City or as much starting familiarity with these topics. Generally speaking, a lot of the City’s website language is more reminiscent of staff reports submitted to council or the standing committees than copy that has been written specifically *for* the general public.

2) Pictures are needed

The combination of a lack of pictures and technical language makes the City of London website very cold and unfriendly looking. Is there a reason for this? It is particularly surprising to us in light of the lens used for the creation of the London Plan, which was very much focused on being “general public” friendly.

3) Lack of cross-linking makes information hard to find

Many people might ask a question about a topic coming from two different directions. For example, some people wanting to get a memorial tree planted in a park might first think of them in terms of “trees”, while others might think of them in terms of “parks”.

Currently, memorial trees on the City website are located under “Parks” instead of “Trees”. This makes it hard for folks looking under “Trees” to find them.

More importantly, when a person sees that there is no information on the topic they care about on the section of the website they think it should be, they might just give up. The impulse is to assume that if what they are looking for was something the City had content on, it would be mentioned. So things like memorial trees (called commemorative trees on the website) should really be linked from both listing pages (“Parks” and “Trees”).

See:

Trees Listing Page (no commemorative trees mentioned): <https://london.ca/living-london/water-environment/trees>

Parks & Facilities Listing Page (commemorative trees mentioned): <https://london.ca/living-london/parks-facilities>

Tree-based funding programs are another good example of this. The City has a section of its website for funding programs, and a section for Trees. Which one should it appear under? People might look for it under either. If we look at the community funding program page and do not see funding programs for trees (e.g. TreeMe) listed, we may not think the program exists at all. That’s a missed opportunity to promote it.

But if your house is under the funding page alone, folks visiting the “Trees” section of the website – those who are probably most likely to have a tree-related project in mind – will never hear about it! (And more importantly – be likely to assume it simply does not exist).

So it really needs to be mentioned under both.

See:

Trees Listing Page (TreeMe mentioned): <https://london.ca/living-london/water-environment/trees>

Community Funding Listing Page (no mention of funding programs for trees): <https://london.ca/living-london/community-services/community-funding>