



London
CANADA

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MEMORANDUM

To: Chair and Members Trees and Forests Advisory Committee

Through: Scott Stafford, Director Parks and Forestry

From: Sara Rowland R.P.F., Urban Forestry Planner
Jill-Anne Spence, Manager Urban Forestry

Date: November 24, 2021

Subject: Existing Tree Planting Strategy 2017-2021 Implementation Review Draft

Introduction

This report offers an opportunity to reflect on the successes and challenges of the implementation of the Tree Planting Strategy 2017-2021 (Attachment #1). Specifically, it allows to consider preliminarily technical and statistical information; changing environmental conditions, the Climate Emergency and net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 goal, and other factors that will affect how, where, and by when we need to plant tree and how many.

This report is intended to be used as a starting point to facilitate ideas and guide discussions with the Trees and Forests Advisory Committee for the development of the next iteration Tree Planting Strategy. The content of this report does not necessarily represent what actions the eventual Tree Planting Strategy will include.

Background

In 2014 Municipal Council approved London's first Urban Forest Strategy that described new initiatives and enhancements to existing programs to achieve new canopy cover goals. Municipal Council recognized that the trees that form our urban forest provide numerous benefits that help keep our city livable and healthy, defining neighborhoods with a sense of place, and contribute to the mental, social and physical well-being of our communities. The creation of a Tree Planting Strategy was an Action Item under the Urban Forest Strategy. It will describe and support further actions necessary to achieve its tree canopy cover goals of 28% by 2035, and 34% by 2065.

Adopted in November 2017, the Tree Planting Strategy 2017-2021 provided the initial framework for the City of London to achieve Municipal Council's tree canopy cover goal. It included specific Action Items describing how the plan will be implemented. As a living document it is planned to be reviewed and updated every 5 years until 2065, with the next iteration due for 2022-2026. However, staff is recommending it is matched to the next iteration with the 4-year budget timelines.

The Tree Planting Strategy is supported by the Strategic Plan: Strengthening Our Community and Building a Sustainable City. Specific strategies that may be helped directly or indirectly include:

- Research and respond to emerging planning trends and issues.
- Strengthen engagement opportunities for all Londoners to participate in their neighbourhoods.

- Promote and invest in urban agriculture initiatives.
- Plant more trees to increase the city's tree canopy cover.
- Maintain existing tree cover

This enables the city to be responsive to customer needs, and enables all Londoners, across all sectors in our society are engaged in the process and have a sense of belonging in the community.

Summary Review of Tree Planting Strategy 2017 – 2021 Action Items (Attachment #2)

The Tree Planting Strategy 2017-2021 was intended as an urgent call to action for our entire community, to better engage everyone in the need to plant many more trees. The accomplishments of the past five years, with two years impacted by a pandemic, may be celebrated but there is still work to be done. Attachment #1 provides a summary of the four (4) Actions Items, results and recommendations.

Summary of Successes

The overarching goal of the Urban Forest Strategy is to reaffirm London as The Forest City. Since its adoption by Municipal Council in 2014, along with the Tree Planting Strategy in 2017, a number of “Plant More” initiatives have been implemented. These successes included the following:

1. Exceeded city tree planting 2017-2021 goal where 27,000 trees were required to be planted and actual number planted was 27,596.
2. Enhanced watering program for newly planted street trees.
3. Initiated “Tree Blitz” where a sector of the city each year was targeted for tree planting in any available spaces on streets, in Parks and other city lands to maximize the impact of new trees
4. Created a new TreeMe grant for planting trees on private lands, increasing from \$30,000 per annum to \$250,000 per annum.
5. Expansion of the number and species of potted native-species and fruit trees given away on National Tree Day, from 600 to 2,000 trees annually. Supported the delivery and planting services by volunteers for persons with disabilities.
6. Support a feasibility study led by ReForest London to determine if the Wellington County Green Legacy tree growing program was an appropriate model for the city to ensure the supply of appropriate numbers and species of trees in the future.
7. An estimated 35,000 trees per year that were planted on private lands.

The best available estimate of the private sector achievements from 2017 to 2021 were compiled from Reforest London and the Million Tree Challenge. Note that the number of trees planted on private lands reported to the Million Tree Challenge includes all lands across the city, not just those inside the Urban Growth Boundary. That means some large-number tree planting projects on arable and marginal lands outside the Urban Growth Boundary may be counted in this total. The private sector target of 44,000 trees per annum (2017–2021) was only intended for inside the Urban Growth Boundary. This means there may be a shortfall in every year, estimated at around 14,000 trees or roughly 30% of the target.

In 2019, a LiDAR (Light Detecting and Ranging) survey of the city measured tree canopy cover within the Urban Growth Boundary. This showed tree canopy cover growth was positive, being 26.56% inside the Urban Growth Boundary a 2.9% increase from 23.7% in 2015 when the previous canopy cover survey was completed, despite the loss of almost all ash trees due to Emerald Ash Borer. The canopy cover increased by 1.9% over the 2008 canopy cover of 24.7%.

All things considered, the achievements are worthy of celebration. But it means more trees must be planted in future years to make up the difference in order to stay on track, unless tree establishment success and tree longevity both improve drastically.

Key Issues and Challenges

Public Land

1. Loss of Plantable Space Due to Competing Interests

Despite the significant time and resources that go into city negotiations through the process of development plans, construction projects, development of strategies, execution of planting contracts and all other efforts to increase the quality and amount of plantable space for trees on City lands, around half of potentially-plantable tree locations will not get planted in a timely way, if at all.

Although the London Plan and its many policies require high-level coordination in plan development, things can and do often change between plan approval and the implementation of tree planting. The interval between a tree planting plan being approved and implemented exceeds one year for about 90% of all sub-divisions. Most commonly, house designs may be discovered to be flipped over (mirror imaged) and driveways widened, with additional parking, and side-paths to the front door added. This feature is encouraged by continuous or near continuous dropped curbs along the entire lot frontage. Utilities would, in most instances be installed where the driveway was expected to go. As a result, moving the driveway to the other side of the lot, and/or widening it, can leave no room for a large-growing or any street tree along that lot frontage. More rarely, street lighting or other infrastructure may have been moved, effectively removing a tree planting location.

The result is that planned tree numbers are diminished by an average 10% in all sub-divisions from the plan to the actual built-out form. In addition, potential canopy cover is reduced, as it is not uncommon for ornamental, smaller tree types instead of larger growing shade trees to be selected and planted. The 2022 planting season will be limited to replacement of existing trees and new sub-divisions as they build out and are assumed. Due to the challenge of competing uses for our open spaces, the City will revisit the opportunity to plant more trees in many of its parks.

2. On-going Loss of Street Tree Planting Spaces

The city is running out of vacant sites for trees on existing streets. Street trees are very important as they define community character. In addition to all their environmental benefits, street trees provide shade to pedestrians and can extend the lifespan of the asphalt roads. The city has planted most of the planting spaces identified through a recently completed tree inventory. In the process of creating annual planting plans, the city notifies residents via letter of the upcoming tree planting. Residents have the option to “opt out” and reject a street tree outside their home, even if one was there before. Over the past few years, this trend is increasing to as much as a 20% of the total tree planting numbers annually and has a cumulative impact.

Private Land

Approximately, 90% of tree planting opportunities are located on private lands. Encouraging tree planting on private land has the greatest impact to affect tree canopy cover goals.

1. Tree Grant Programs

The city’s long-established TreeMe Community Grant Program has potential to further boost the planting of more new trees on private lands, and the 2021 pilot Veteran Tree Incentive Program, if continued, could help retain existing tree canopy for longer. Public comments on both these programs indicate to staff that many prospective applicants were deterred by the application process and potential lack of success in receiving grant funding. There is a public hesitation in applying to the city, or any agencies, for assistance in tree planting

2. Tree Give Aways

The City of London holds an annual tree give away event in celebration of National Tree Day. The city also supports these types of events through the TreeME Community Grant Program. Although these events are extremely popular, it is challenging to know how much they contribute towards long term tree canopy cover. A short non-scientific survey was provided to residents while standing in line at the National Tree Day event in 2017. Results noted that approximately 80% of those picking up a tree had previously attended the event with 87% of them saying that trees from previous years were still alive. .

Measuring Tree Canopy Cover Goals

Consideration should be given to expanding our urban forest analysis City wide and no longer be restricted by the Urban Growth Boundary. Targets would be adjusted with an approach that would focus on expanding natural heritage outside the Urban Growth Boundary across both City and private lands.

COVID-19 Pandemic Impacts

The Tree Planting Strategy experienced some setback due to the pandemic, so not all opportunities within existing or new city programs were able to be implemented during 2020 and 2021. City tree give away events were halted where a total of 6,000 trees were anticipated to be distributed. Fortunately, 1,000 trees were able to be distributed for the annual National Tree Give Away event this past fall. In addition, the funding for TreeME Community Grant Program, an estimated \$250,000, was reallocated to cover budget shortfalls that resulted due to the pandemic.

Emerging Topics to Consider

1. Climate Emergency and Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP)

On November 26, 2019 Municipal Council declared a Climate Emergency and resolved that the City of London would achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050. In early 2020 a Corporate Climate Emergency Action Team was convened by staff across all City Divisions. The creation of a Climate Emergency Action Plan is ongoing as a priority, with completion anticipated by the end of 2021. The next iteration of the Tree Planting Strategy must conform or respond to the CEAP, so it is expected that the Tree Planting Strategy will be finalized in the second quarter of 2022.

Several actions within the future CEAP are likely to affect the Tree Planting Strategy, with the goal of achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2050 – some fifteen years before our 2065 tree canopy cover target of 34%. The role of trees in (1) carbon sequestration and (2) reducing energy consumption is expected to inform the goals and actions of the Tree Planting Strategy.

2. The London Plan (Official Plan) and corresponding Tree Protection By-law

For the first time, The London Plan (Official Plan) 2016 contained a chapter of urban forestry policies. Amongst these was policy 399, 4(b) requiring that trees removed through land development processes, measuring at least 10cm diameter individually, must be replaced by one tree per 10cm of tree diameter removed. Further, policy 399,5 requires that the City replace trees on its own lands but not necessarily in the same or nearby place, for those removed for new infrastructure and construction projects. Policy 399,6 limits tree replacement for maintenance (e.g. street tree removals for public safety reasons) to one tree per tree removed.

The Official Plan (London Plan) policy direction of Municipal Council (2016) was taken into consideration by the Hearings Officer in their deliberations at appeal hearings from 2016 through to 2021 in hearings of the City's denial of permits under the then Tree Protection By-law C.P.- 1515-228; this was while The London Plan was still, in large part, itself under appeal. The current Tree Protection By-law C.P.-1555.252 which came into effect March 1, 2021, requires multiple

replacement trees to be planted (or otherwise receiving a fee if there is insufficient space available) where a Distinctive Tree is removed under permit.

Preliminary Recommendations for Consideration

For the next Tree Planting Strategy, and pending the outcome of the CEAP, the following should be considered:

1. Prioritise tree planting in this order:
 - a) Residential
 - b) Condominiums, subject to legal review of the Condominiums Act (as, by law, condominium boards must collect and manage sufficient budgets for their expected needs - but tree planting is not usually a consideration)
 - c) Streets, and rural roads outside the Urban Growth Boundary (if applicable)
 - d) Other City lands (Parks, Boards/ Commissions)
 - e) Institutional – schools are already completed but could be revisited in a few years; focus instead on other institutions including their surface parking lots
 - f) Industrial, including surface parking lots
 - g) Commercial, including surface parking lots.
2. Change how canopy cover is measured to include both canopy inside the Urban Growth Boundary (UGB) as well as outside the UGB. Currently, everything is measured based on the 2008 Urban Growth Boundary. The tree canopy cover city-wide is lower (approximately 21% instead of 26%) due to the impact of agriculture outside the UGB. 2035 and 2065 targets may be lowered, but the potential land available for tree planting may be greatly enhanced for example bringing in W12A, rural streets, and agricultural lands that may be diversified by planting to orchards, or to productive and protective woodlands, shelterbelts and hedgerows.
3. Consider developing a policy and/or easement agreement to plant and maintain city trees on private lands, subject to landowner consent, with a focus on trees adjacent to streets.
4. Consider developing a policy where “opting out” of replacement city trees is not subject to adjacent resident consent.
5. As guided by the Approved Species List (Chapter 12, Design Specification and Requirements Manual), implement a trial of salt-tolerant species on an appropriate width of boulevard in a heavily road-salted street to determine their salt tolerance, establishment, habit, growth rate, issues and maintenance requirements.
6. Develop a “one stop shop” for a new City of London Tree Incentive Program. The goal of this new program would be to overcome barriers so that any resident with a desire to plant trees needs to do and spend very little, only confirm their willingness to participate. This may include creating and distributing user-friendly literature to inspire and encourage landowners. It would be operated year-round, full-time, with project planning in Winter and Summer, implementation in Fall and Spring.
7. Investigate the implementation of a community tree nursery by way of a Request for Information (RFI) from interested organisations.
8. Facilitate and showcase projects inspired by the London Environmental Network (LEN) under their “De-pave Paradise” program to retrofit a surface parking lot with raingarden and other sustainable design including mid-long term tree planting for sustainable canopy cover.
9. Seek opportunities to apply “De-pave Paradise”, or its modified principles as described, to new boulevard licences where the goal is creating a functional parking space. Apply these principles to reclaim or restore unauthorised encroachments of the boulevard (including where a license has expired) with the goal of creating plantable space that receives shade trees. In the Downtown core and similar areas this may be modified to allow ornamental trees where appropriate.
10. Identify candidate sites and support the planting of an urban orchard of nut and fruit trees; to be implemented when and where feasible, on private or city lands. This has low potential for

increasing overall canopy cover, but it helps address other strategic commitments to urban agriculture, food security etc

11. Create a Shade Policy to drive up tree planting.

Financial Implications

In 2012, Municipal Council embarked on its first multi-year budget which approved an additional \$1.8 million for tree planting through 2016-2019. Funding for the Tree Planting Strategy was accommodated within the 10-year capital budget which includes \$1.2 million dedicated to planting, increasing to \$1.4 million in 2021 and \$1.6 million/year thereafter (all figures subject to annual budget approval). This funding was deemed adequate in the short term when the Tree Planting Strategy was adopted however, it will be revisited during the development of the new strategy.

Conclusion

Given the opportunity to reflect, the current approach to tree planting may not be sustainable. Through the direct and indirect influences of development and the need to further educate the public to better understand the importance of the role they play in tree planting, the number and mature size of trees that can be planted to meet our annual targets will continue to be exposed to attrition. It is expected that fewer opportunities for additional tree planting will be available as the city builds inward and upward.

To keep on target for tree planting and increasing tree canopy cover, for the next iteration of the Tree Planting Strategy the tree planting numbers in the private sector will need to be ramped up, and existing trees retained for as long as possible. The Tree Planting Strategy aims to deliver improvements on past tree planting efforts across both the public and private sectors. It is a long term, proactive approach to achieving goals and targets in a timely, cost-effective and feasible manner while adapting to change.

Recommendations arising in this summary subject to further review to accord with the CEAP, with the goal of finalising the Tree Planting Strategy 2022 – 2026 in the second quarter of 2022. The recent reorganisation of City Divisions and the long-term political commitment around Climate Emergency should assist in delivering the actions of the next Tree Planting Strategy.

Acknowledgements

This report was compiled in consultation with City staff within Environment & Infrastructure and Planning Services and Amber Cantell of Reforest London (a member of the Trees and Forests Advisory Committee) and Skylar Franke of the London Environmental Network.

Attachments:

1. Tree Planting Strategy 2017-2021
2. Summary Review of Tree Planting Strategy 2017 – 2021 Action Items