

Staff Report

Presented By: Kristen Sears, Planning Policy Coordinator

Meeting Date: October 15, 2024

Subject: Urban Tree Canopy Plan Discussion Paper

Attachment(s): Urban Tree Canopy Plan Discussion Paper
Urban Tree Canopy Plan Discussion Paper Presentation

Recommendation

That Council receive the Urban Tree Canopy Plan Discussion Paper report for information.

Report Summary

As outlined in the 2024 Business Plan, the Town has prepared an Urban Tree Canopy Plan Discussion Paper. The Town has worked with Williams and Associates in preparing the Draft Plan. This report is seeking Council feedback on the Discussion Paper prior to it being circulated and posted for a commenting period. A Final Urban Tree Canopy Plan will be brought forward to Council for consideration at a future meeting.

Background/Analysis

The goal of the Urban Tree Canopy Plan (UTCP) is to provide the Town of Saugeen Shores with an tree canopy management strategy that will reflect the Town's vision, values, and corporate priorities. The UTCP is to become an important document in guiding the Town and residents in providing a healthy tree population that provides aesthetic, environmental, ecological and economic benefits to the Town of Saugeen Shores.

History of the Initiative:

Development of an Urban Tree Canopy Plan was one of the recommendations of the 2022 Environmental Stewardship Ad-Hoc Advisory Committee (ESAC). In March 2022, the Striking Committee advanced, and Council approved, a number of Recommendations from the ESAC Report. The recommendation that served as a base for this initiative is excerpted below:

"Resolved that the Committee recommends that Council directs staff to take the following actions:

8. Prepare recommendations for the 2023 draft budget to investigate the recommendations for an Urban Tree Canopy Plan for the Town of Saugeen Shores.”

In the fall of 2023, Terms of Reference for the Urban Tree Canopy were developed and a Request for Proposal process resulted in retaining Williams and Associates Forestry Consulting in January 2024. The Urban Tree Canopy Plan is a 2023 carryforward Divisional Highlight for the Planning and Development team in the 2024 Business Plan.

Project Steps to-date:

The following steps were taken in the development of the Urban Tree Canopy Plan project as follows:

1. Background

To develop an Urban Tree Canopy Plan it is important to understand the current quantity, quality and the general health of the canopy, and maintenance practices for trees in Saugeen Shores. Williams and Associates conducted a Tree Canopy Assessment, assessing the general health and maintenance of Town-owned Trees and the existing tree inventory of the Town’s public tree population. The consultants noted the following as important findings from these assessments:

- i. The Town has a good level of Canopy Cover for the entire urban settlement area at approximately 39.6%.
- ii. The Town continues to update the inventory of Town-owned trees in the Urban Settlement Area; however, it appears that tree inventory updating has not been continuous.
- iii. The Town takes good care of its municipal trees, with a full-time Arborist and is supported by staff and appropriate equipment/infrastructure.
- iv. The age distribution of Saugeen Shores’ municipal trees is unbalanced in that the Town has significant number of medium-sized and larger trees; there is a shortage of young trees.

With a greater understanding of the existing canopy and general tree health in Saugeen Shores, a vision for the Plan was cultivated and shared amongst residents for input. The vision for this plan states:

“The Town of Saugeen Shores recognizes and values the environmental, social, cultural, and economic contribution of the urban tree canopy to our community. The Town will, in partnership with its residents, and businesses work to conserve and, where sensible, increase urban tree canopy coverage that is diverse, healthy and a sustained asset for future generations.”

2. Engagement and Communication

A key component of this Plan was to engage and communicate with the community and with Indigenous people. Community engagement and consultation was provided through the following notices and consultation methods:

- April 2024 – Newspaper Notice published and circulated to external agencies.
- April 2024 – Alternative consultation provided to community groups and organizations.

- April – May 2024 – Online Engagement Survey published through Social Pinpoint platform.
- May 2024 – Public Meeting.

The goals of community engagement and communication were to:

- Articulate the status of Saugeen Shores's urban canopy and its management.
- Generate ideas about how to manage this canopy going forward.
- Use those ideas to help choose a vision and strategies to improve the urban tree canopy as Saugeen Shores continues to grow.

3. Policy Review

The policy review identified that trees and tree canopy are considered in most policy documents including but not limited to the Town's Official Plan and Tree Canopy Policy however, stronger policies are encouraged. Recommendations to strengthen such policies include, but are not limited to:

- i. Update relevant Town policies regarding planting trees in new developments.
- ii. The Town should develop an objective to maintain Urban Tree Canopy Cover in its Official Plan, Section 2.6 Environmental Features.
- iii. The Town amend its Official Plan to recognize the public tree as green infrastructure and inclusion in the Asset Management Policy as non-core, biologic assets.

4. By-law Review

There are two tree by-laws currently in force and effect. This includes the Town's existing Parks By-law which prohibits the cutting of trees on park lands and the County's Forest Conservation By-law that prohibits or regulates the destruction or injuring of trees in woodlands. There is no current Private Tree By-law or tool in place to prevent arbitrary tree removals to further conserve and protect the existing urban tree canopy. Thus, it is recommended that a Urban Tree Conservation By-law be developed and adopted to limit the removal of significant trees and large numbers of smaller trees.

In July, 2024, Council received a staff report and presentation regarding the development of the Urban Tree Conservation By-law. The report outlined several key elements that may be considered in the development of the Urban Tree Conservation By-law and staff were directed to return to Council when Council received the Draft Urban Tree Canopy Plan.

5. Tree Planting Assessment

The report recommends that Saugeen Shores resource and implement a municipal tree planting program on road allowances and maintained areas of parks and facilities with increased planting over time. Additional communications about the value of tree planting and Tree Canopy to the community and supporting landowners with technical and material support or supplying trees will encourage some landowners to plant and maintain more trees.

6. Recommendations

A comprehensive set of recommendations are provided which, taken as a whole, will achieve the Town's vision and achieve the goals and objectives of the UTCP. Peter Williams will present the key recommendations.

Time frame to achieve recommendation	Recommendation	Priority
Short-term	Update relevant Town policies regarding planting trees in new developments.	High
	Develop an objective in the Official Plan to maintain Urban Tree Canopy Cover, Section 2.6 Environmental Features.	Moderate
	Strengthen policies to ensure tree cover is maintained through the development process, particularly the woodlands/heavily treed areas along the shores of Lake Huron and Saugeen River, shown in Figure 5.3.	High
	Specifications for compensation requirements for tree removals should be included in planning documents. The ratio of planted trees to removed trees should increase with tree diameter as shown in Table 6.2.	High
	Amend Official Plan to recognize the public tree as green infrastructure and inclusion in the Asset Management Policy as non-core, biologic assets.	Moderate
	The Town consider amending the Property Standards By-law (or Clean Yards By-law) to include hazardous trees in Treed Areas that may be threatening adjacent properties.	High
	Update the required qualifications for professionals who author or approve Tree Protection Plans, Tree Retention Plans and Hazard Tree Assessment reports.	High
	Diversify the tree age and size profile of the Annual Tree Planting, should add 20 to 40 litres (5 to 10 gallon) potted trees to the list of available trees.	Moderate
	As per the Towns Annual Tree Sale program, trees available for purchase shall be limited to native trees and selected non-invasive exotic species. Trees shall be planted according to specifications as indicated in Appendix C.	Moderate
Mid-term	Update the Public Tree inventory to provide a database that can be updated in live time to support tree management and inclusion of trees as green infrastructure in the Town Asset Management Plan.	High
	Develop and implement a plan to reforest the closed landfill in Port Elgin could be developed to contribute to a more substantial increase in canopy cover. Small high-density patches (i.e. Miyawaki or micro forests) of trees in municipal parks and facilities.	Moderate
	Develop an Interdepartmental Urban Forest Management Committee that includes representatives from all administrative units that affect the Urban Tree Canopy to help harmonize planning for trees in developments/construction, planting, tending, protecting, replacing and benefitting from trees.	Moderate

	Update tree management practices to guide tree establishment, maintenance and removal. ANSI A300 Standards developed by the Tree Care Industry Association are standard and accepted industry standards for tree care practice.	Moderate
Long-term	Diversify the urban forest by planting less common species of trees including oaks, sycamore, and hackberry.	Moderate
	Perform corrective pruning on younger trees in Saugeen Shores, particularly in removing codominant stems on younger trees.	High
	Along the Saugeen Rail Trail and in natural areas and on other Town-owned land, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Control invasive plants such as buckthorn, garlic mustard and Manitoba maple - Plant additional trees and shrubs to occupy the open areas created by invasive species control and to replace the ash trees killed by the Ash Borer. - Shade tolerant trees should be planted in the understory of areas dominated by poplar to diversify the future forest. 	Moderate
	Remove Town-owned Manitoba maple and ash trees and replaced with native species.	Moderate
	The Town should continue to develop plans to plant trees on municipal properties, such as road allowances, parks, and facilities.	High
	Engage with and support private and commercial landowners to plant trees on their properties through communications campaigns, logistical/technical support and access to funding	Moderate
	Designate staff person as the Town Urban Forest Manager to review and coordinate urban forest management, Chair community and interdepartmental committees that foster communications among departments, the community and Council.	Moderate
	Establish an Urban Forest Management Committee to guide Town tree establishment, removal, and management procedures.	Moderate

7. Guidelines

The Discussion Paper also includes Guidelines as appendices, including:

- Tree Protection and Planting Guidelines
- Protection of Existing Trees
- Planting Specifications
- Planting Material Specifications
- Tree Planting List and Species Preferences
- Tree Planting List
- Invasive Species List

Guidelines are targeted towards those familiar or knowledgeable in the field of tree and/or forest management to encourage appropriate and consistent tree management practices that are particular to the Town and in achieving the goals and objectives of the UTCP.

Next Steps

Further to the Discussion Paper presented to Council at this meeting, the following next steps will take place:

- Review and consider comments received from Council.
- Review and consider comments received from the Environmental Ad Hoc Committee.
- Post a draft Urban Tree Canopy Plan on Engage Saugeen Shores for public comments.
- Bring the Urban Tree Canopy Plan and Draft Urban Tree Conservation By-law to Council for consideration.

Linkages

- Strategic Plan Alignment: Pillar 4: Fostering a Vibrant Place to Live and Visit
- Business Plan Alignment: Development Services Division Highlight

Financial Impacts/Source of Funding

No costs or revenue is associated with this report.

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