



**PORT COLBORNE**

**Subject: Urban Forest Management Plan**

**To: Council**

**From: Public Works Department**

Report Number: 2024-144

Meeting Date: July 23, 2024

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**Recommendation:**

That Public Works Department Report 2024-144 be received; and

That the Urban Forest Management Plan in Appendix A of Public Works Report 204-144 be approved.

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**Purpose:**

The City's first Urban Forest Management Plan (UFMP) was developed by a consulting team with direct input from City staff across multiple divisions. The UFMP reviewed the status of the urban forest within Port Colborne, undertook a tree inventory and provided recommendations for the City. The recommendations outline an approach to improve operational efficiency and effectiveness, improve tree health and diversity, reduce the risk to the public, and increase the wide-ranging benefits provided by a healthy and sustainable urban forest.

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**Background:**

Urban forest management involves the strategic management of trees and green spaces within urban settings. Some of the benefits of an effective urban forest include improving air quality, climate change mitigation, and improving the overall aesthetic and recreational value of a city.

Over the last decade, Port Colborne's urban forest has been affected by several factors ranging from tree loss due to the Emerald Ash Borer, changes in legislation, increased development pressures, and climate change. As a result, the City pursued a strategic framework to proactively manage and guide the growth of the urban forest. Williams &

Associates Forestry Consulting Ltd. and McNeil Urban Forestry, in collaboration with City staff, developed the City's first Urban Forest Management Plan.

This UFMP provides a road map of strategic priorities for the next 5 years and beyond to meet the City's strategic goals and was developed in alignment with the City's Asset Management Plan for natural assets. The plan outlines long term direction for the City, reflecting community values, operational needs and priorities, and financial considerations. It highlights the current state of the urban forest, areas for improvement, and demonstrates how planting initiatives can support the City's vision of a vibrant, healthy, and connected community.

The UFMP set out with the following goals:

1. To protect existing public trees and encourage the retention of private trees.
2. To increase the canopy cover over 10 years, to help mitigate climate change, through tree protection, planting, and maintenance.
3. To increase tree planting with native species to enhance biodiversity and connectivity.
4. To ensure the creation of beautiful treed and healthy places for people to enjoy.
5. To enable the urban forest to help increase the education and awareness opportunities.
6. To use more trees to improve economic opportunities and tourism through greater canopy.
7. To manage the risk that trees pose to an acceptable level for residents and visitors.

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## **Discussion:**

The UFMP evaluated several specific tasks as part of the project scope. The tasks were completed to investigate the many aspects of Port Colborne's Urban Forest, the infrastructure and policies supporting its management, and the opinions of the various communities that have an interest in it. Highlights of the findings and recommendations are summarized below.

## **Tree Inventory**

An inventory of 5,683 of Port Colborne's municipal trees was completed. The assessment included estimates of tree size, vigour, structure, and hazard potential. Port Colborne was divided into six forestry zones. Zones 1-4 included the urban forestry zones, Zone 5 included settlement areas with rural residential areas and hamlets outside of the urban City and zone 6 was entirely rural. Trees greater than 10 centimeters diameter at breast height on municipal road allowances and City properties, and any tree that was clearly planted by the City were inventoried.

Of the inventoried trees, there were 105 species in 50 genera identified, although most species had only a few individuals. Maples were the dominant genus (42%), and specifically, Norway maple was the dominant tree species inventoried. Of the trees that were inventoried, 86% were in good condition, 10% in fair and 4% were identified to be in poor condition or dead. It was also found that the diameter distribution of Port Colborne's municipal trees has fewer small and large trees, with more mid-sized trees.

### **Tree Canopy Cover and Plantable Space Assessment**

A canopy cover assessment was conducted within the entire municipal boundary, including all rural zones. The results estimate that the total canopy cover in the municipal boundary is 37%. The second stage of the canopy coverage assessment included the urban forestry zones only. The urban forest tree canopy coverage was estimated to be at 31.8%.

A plantable space assessment in the urban area was also completed and identified that 22.5% of the urban area is estimated to be plantable space. This indicates there is opportunity to increase and expand the urban forest. The study recommends focusing efforts on replanting road allowances and using parks and City facilities to plant new trees, which will increase canopy cover.

### **Operating Plan and Project Recommendations**

The UFMP includes a recommendation of implementing a new planting program to reverse the trend of decreasing tree coverage. Significant investments in tree maintenance and planting of new municipal trees is required to meet the strategic plan objective to increase the urban forest canopy. The UFMP recommended a 5-year operating plan (Table A.1 in Attachment A) to increase the tree canopy back to 2006 levels, which was before notable drops were observed. As part of the 2024 operating budget, \$200,000 was approved for tree planting.

The other project recommendations are summarized in Appendix B of the UFMP (Attachment A). The recommendations are intended to ensure the tree canopy improves in health, increasing the benefits to the community and environment.

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### **Internal Consultations:**

Staff within the Public Works department were consulted while developing the UFMP. Staff from Environmental Services and Road and Park Operations are working in conjunction to implement the recommended tree planting program, and to meet the Strategic Plan goal to increase the canopy cover to 40% by 2040. As part of the recommendations and review conducted and documented within the UFMP, Operations staff are working on modernizing the tree by-law and tree installation policy to better reflect the City's approach to urban forest management.

### **Financial Implications:**

As part of the 2024 budget, funding of \$200,000 was approved to improve the City's tree canopy. Based on the UFMP recommendations of actionable tasks, the operating budget pertaining to Tree Maintenance and Planting is adequately funded to meet Council goals. Staff will review the planting programs and their impact on the urban forest annually to determine if alterations to the funding programs are required. The City will also draw on any funding opportunities for tree planting where possible and appropriate to continue to grow the urban forest canopy

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### **Public Engagement:**

In late 2022, a public engagement survey was launched to ask participants on whether they agree with various statements about the urban forest. There was a total of 179 respondents to the survey. Results are summarized in Section 9.3 of the UFMP, but notable observations are included below.

- Respondents believe trees should be an essential feature in Port Colborne (96% agree or strongly agree)
- Majority of respondents also agree that tree-lined streets are essential in creating aesthetically pleasing and welcoming neighbourhoods (94% agree or strongly agree)
- Respondents were also generally in favour of increasing the tree planting budget (79% agree or strongly agree) and increasing the tree maintenance budget (84% agree or strongly agree) to support the urban forest.

At the Environmental Advisory Committee meeting held on May 8, 2024, the committee passed the resolution that they support the Urban Forest Management Plan, 2024, in principle. The committee was circulated the UFMP and has offered recommendations regarding public initiatives around tree planting programs and types of species that should be eligible for tree planting grants. The committee will continue to be updated on the UFMP implementation.

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### **Strategic Plan Alignment:**

The initiative contained within this report supports the following pillar of the strategic plan:

- Environment and Climate Change
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## **Conclusion:**

The UFMP outlines a strategic plan to managing the urban forest in port Colborne and recommends specific strategies for a 5-year operational plan. Staff have already begun implementing many of the recommendations to increase the urban forest in Port Colborne.

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## **Appendices:**

- a. Appendix A – Urban Forest Management Plan
- b. Appendix B – Urban Forest Management Plan Presentation

Respectfully submitted,

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## **Report Approval:**

All reports reviewed and approved by the Department Director and also the City Treasurer when relevant. Final review and approval by the Chief Administrative Officer.