

ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITTEE - JUNE 30, 2009

FIVE YEAR PLAN TO INCREASE THE PLANTINGS OF TREES IN THE CITY OF VAUGHAN GREENING VAUGHAN – URBAN FOREST PROJECT

Recommendation

The Commissioner of Community Services and the Director of Parks and Forestry Operations recommends:

1. That this report be received; and,
2. The Five Year Strategy to Expand the Urban Forest and Tree Canopy be approved.

Contribution to Sustainability

This report is consistent with the priorities previously set by Council in the Green Directions Vaughan, Community Sustainability Environmental Master Plan, Goal 2, Objective 2.2:

- To develop Vaughan as a City of maximum green space and an urban forum that supports our expected population growth.

Economic Impact

Funding in the amount of \$35,000 will be included for consideration in the 2010 Operating Budget to commence the research associated with the strategy of this Five Year Plan. The Region of York and the TRCA will also be contributing equally towards this initiative. Funding in the amount of \$400K to continue our current tree planting program will be included in the 2010 Capital Budget for consideration. Staff will also explore other funding options which include: Trees Canada, Green Streets Program and LEAF Backyard Yard Planting Program.

Communications Plan

A communications strategy will be developed in consultation with Corporate Communications that will include a tree website, promotion of activities and events, brochures and media publications.

Information will also be available at the appropriate City events and community events to communicate to the residents and businesses the strategy that is being utilized to increase the number of trees in Vaughan.

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with a strategy for increasing the plantings of trees on public and private lands.

Background - Analysis and Options

Council at its meeting of June 23, 2008, approved Item 47; Report No. 36 of the Committee of the Whole resolved that the following be referred to the Environmental Committee:

1. That staff prepare a Five Year Plan to incrementally increase the quantity of trees planted on both public and private property in the City.
2. That funds be budgeted for 2009 fiscal year to begin this process of increasing the number of trees planted.
3. That the tree planting plan focus on planting native trees.

4. That the Five Year Plan include ways to involve both residents and the private sectors in this initiative.
5. That community groups and individual residents be given the opportunity to suggest locations where trees should be planted.

Trees become an increasingly important component of the urban and natural environment as municipalities throughout southern Ontario continue to grow and develop. Trees add beauty and value to our communities, attracting visitors and businesses and encouraging a sense of civic pride. Trees improve air quality by absorbing gaseous pollutants such as ozone and carbon dioxide as well as provide habitat for many species of birds and small mammals. The social and health benefits of trees include a deeper appreciation of the natural environment, promotion of community identity and pride.

The Parks & Forestry planting programs focus on the replacement of trees being removed from city streets, parks and open spaces with funding from requests made through the capital budget process. Although this planting program attempts to replace trees each year in our community that are cut down because of pests, disease, storm damage and natural tree mortality, it does not provide for additional trees that would increase the overall number of trees being planted. In fact, often we are unable to replace the trees taken down because of insufficient funds available.

In addition, with the loss of trees from the ALHB and the potential loss of even more trees from the recently confirmed EAB, Vaughan's urban forest canopy will continue to decline. By taking a pro-active approach with additional tree planting now, Vaughan will reduce the impact of such losses.

The objective of the Five Year Plan is to promote the City of Vaughan as a leader in tree environmental stewardship and a advocate for the expansion of the urban forest. The proposed strategy includes 13 recommendations for increasing the number of trees planted and increasing the tree canopy in Vaughan. The thirteen recommendations are:

1. Undertake Urban Forest Effects (UFORE) Study
2. Review and Revise the Current Tree Planting Policy
3. Re-Brand the Current Tree –Planting Programs
4. Enhance Civic Engagement
5. Implement and Outreach Program
6. Appoint a Tree Advocate
7. Promote the Local Enhancement and Appreciation of Forests (LEAF) Program in Vaughan
8. Promote the Earth Rangers Program
9. Review Current Planning Policies to Increase Topsoil Depth and the Total Number of Trees Planted
10. Revise the Current Private Tree Bylaw to Include Cash-In Lieu Options for Trees Removed
11. Establish a Reserve Account
12. Review Street Tree Planting Guidelines
13. Implement New Techniques of Watering Newly Planted Trees.

The recommendations also include provisions for increasing tree planting on private lands as well as initiatives to expand the awareness of our Tree Dedication program and initiate a LEAF pilot project. These two programs offer incentives to the public to participate in increasing the urban tree canopy. The recommendations also highlight two key areas which are the UFORE study and the current tree planting policies.

Parks and Forestry Operations has partnered with York Region and the TRCA in a shared Urban Forest Effects Model, referred to as UFORE. This model will provide a benchmark of our current urban forest canopy; provide a diversity model and analysis on the overall health of the trees in Vaughan. Results of the assessment will identify the areas where there is insufficient coverage

and make recommendations for additional plantings. Typically the Parks and Forestry Department requests between \$450,000 to \$500,000 annually for tree replacements. In some years only half of this requested amount has been approved. The reduction in funds required the department to prioritize tree plantings based on removal dates and area. Replacement trees are prioritized based on homeowner's properties and residential areas, followed by industrial areas then parks. This has resulted in a deficiency of trees in the industrial areas and in parks and open spaces. In 2009, \$350,000 was approved in the capital replacement trees. This strategy, if approved, will allow for 100 additional trees to be planted each year providing that the \$400K is approved annually in the Capital budget. Once the outstanding trees have been replaced, it is anticipated that \$100K from the \$400K can be designated for planting additional trees.

Relationship to Vaughan Vision 2020/Strategic Plan

In consideration of the strategic priorities related to Vaughan Vision 2020, the report will provide:

- STRATEGIC GOAL:
Service Excellence – Providing service excellence to our citizens
- STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES:
Lead and Promote Environmental Sustainability

This report is consistent with the priorities previously set by Council and the necessary resources have been allocated and approved.

Regional Implications

The City of Vaughan's partnership with York Region for the UFORE study will collectively provide a data base and provide cost sharing between both organizations.

Conclusion

Trees provide environmental, social, health and economic benefits to communities and businesses, and ultimately lead to an improved quality of life.

The Five Year Plan will allow the whole community opportunities to participate in increasing the tree canopy in Vaughan. The strategy will provide the City with a practical approach to expanding the urban forest while incorporating unique and innovative methods to increase the tree canopy.

Attachment

1. Report: Five Year Plan to Expand the Urban Forest
(Under separate cover available in the Clerks Department)

Report prepared by:

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Respectfully submitted,

Marlon Kallideen
Commissioner of Community Services