
REPORT TITLE: **Peel Region Urban Forest Best Practice Guides**

FROM: Kealy Dedman, Commissioner of Public Works

RECOMMENDATION

That the Peel Region Urban Forest Best Practice Guides One to Five (“the Guides”), including the ten-recommended key strategic directions, be endorsed;

And further, that staff be directed to develop an implementation plan to put into practice the recommendations of the Guides for Regionally owned urban forest assets;

And further, that staff be directed to incorporate Regionally owned urban forest assets into Regional asset management plans, as well as future Capital and Operating program budgets;

And further, that staff continue to collaborate with partners to support target setting and the implementation of urban forest policy and best practices in Peel Region;

And further, that the Guides be circulated to members of the Peel Urban Forest Working Group and Peel Climate Change Partnership for their implementation.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- Region of Peel owns urban forest assets along Regional roads and on various other Regionally owned properties.
 - The *Municipal Act, 2001* enables municipalities to regulate the destruction or injuring of trees and requires municipalities to enact policy pertaining to the protection and enhancement of urban forest assets. Provincial regulations also direct municipalities to include green infrastructure into asset management plans by 2024.
 - Staff, in partnership with local municipalities and conservation authorities, developed the Peel Region Urban Forest Best Practice Guides to support the objectives of the Peel Urban Forest Strategy and Peel Climate Change Strategy.
 - Implementation of the 10 key strategic directions of the Guides will build resilience in a changing climate and enhance social and environmental outcomes in Peel Region.
 - Subject to Council’s approval, staff will develop a Peel Urban Forest Best Practice Guide Implementation Plan to help inform Regional programs, asset management plans and future budgets.
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Peel Region Urban Forest Best Practice Guides

DISCUSSION

1. Background

a) Peel Region's Urban Forest

The urban forest in Peel Region consists of trees on public and private land within the Cities of Mississauga and Brampton and the rural settlement areas of the Town of Caledon (see Appendix I). The Region of Peel owns urban forest assets on Regional roads and other Regionally owned properties.

Climate change and urbanization has increased the need for healthy, mature trees in urban spaces and has made it more difficult for trees to survive in these already harsh settings. Urban forests contribute directly to community health and well-being such as supporting active transportation by improving air quality and cooling urban environments and through carbon sequestration.

In 2015, a regional tree canopy (RTC) assessment was completed, which indicated that Peel Region had a tree canopy cover of 34 percent, with 20 percent in urban areas. In 2017, monitoring indicated that canopy cover was increasing, however, not sufficiently to realize the intent of the urban forest policies to maintain and enhance the urban forest canopy as outlined in the Regional Official Plan. New and improved official plan policies and programs to strengthen and enhance the urban forest were recommended.

b) Urban Forest Policy Framework

The *Municipal Act, 2001* requires municipalities to enact policy pertaining to “the manner in which the municipality will protect and enhance the tree canopy and natural vegetation in the municipality.” The 2020 Provincial Policy Statement directs planning authorities to promote green infrastructure, which includes the urban forest. Ontario’s Asset Management regulation (O.Reg. 588/17) directs municipalities to include green infrastructure into asset management plans by 2024.

These Provincial policies have informed the policies of the Regional Official Plan, which provide direction for the Region to work jointly with the conservation authorities and local municipalities to support programs that maintain and enhance the urban forest canopy and mitigate or adapt to climate change. These policies also underpin the Peel Region Urban Forest Strategy, which outlines guiding principles to realize the vision for a healthy and resilient urban forest in Peel. Finally, the Peel Climate Change Strategy directs partners to undertake specific initiatives, such as implementing best practices related to urban forestry.

Most recently, as a step towards implementing the policies above, the Peel Urban Forest Working Group and the Peel Climate Change Partnership including Peel Region, local municipalities and conservation authorities developed “The Peel Urban Forest Best Practices Guides” (the “Guides”).

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c) Peel Urban Forest Best Practice Guides

The Guides are a collection of five documents that provide guidance and best practices to sustain and expand tree cover in Peel Region's urban areas, to provide benefits to the greatest number of people, while also mitigating and adapting to the effects of climate change.

Extensive consultation together with inter-agency workshops were held to share information and draw on expertise to inform the development of the Guides. The five Guides include:

- Guide 1: Best Practices Guide for Urban Forest Planning in Peel provides policy and planning tools at the Federal, Provincial, and local municipal levels.
- Guide 2: Urban Forest Management Best Practices Guide for Peel provides management practices such as tree stock procurement, soil management and urban forest monitoring.
- Guide 3: Guide for Tree and Shrub Standards and Specifications for Regional Roads in Peel provides recommended standards and specifications for street trees and shrubs.
- Guide 4: Potential Street and Park Tree Species for Peel in a Climate Change Context provides a Vulnerability Assessment of 88 species now growing in or south of Peel Region within Southern Ontario.
- Guide 5: Working with Trees: Best Practices for a Resilient Future provides a framework for selecting trees and shrubs adapted to Peel's current and anticipated future climate.

Copies of the Peel Urban Forest Best Practice Guides are available from the Office of the Regional Clerk.

2. Proposed Direction and Next Steps

a) Implement the Ten Urban Forest Strategic Directions

The implementation of the following 10 strategic directions, compiled from the Guides, will build resilience in a changing climate, and leverage the urban forest's ability to enhance social and environmental outcomes in Peel Region:

1. Value the Urban Forest as an Asset - Incorporate the urban forest into municipal asset management plans.
2. Invest Strategically - Prioritize investments in actions that build resilience of the urban forest to current and anticipated stressors.
3. Have a Strategic Plan - Develop a strategic Urban Forest Management Plan and integrate it with other jurisdiction-wide plans.
4. Enhance Tree and Urban Forest Diversity - Incorporate structural, species, and genetic diversity into the urban forest system.
5. Plan with Equity in Mind - Improve the equitable distribution, availability, and quality of public greenspaces and tree cover across the jurisdiction.
6. Take an Integrated Approach to Planning - Align other municipal strategic plans with urban forest goals and embed urban forest goals in all levels of planning.
7. Take an Integrated Approach to Design - Develop an integrated approach at the site-level to ensure implementation of a tree-friendly design.

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8. Seek Climate-Positive Outcomes - Actively seek opportunities to moderate the urban heat island effect where it is felt by the most vulnerable people.
9. Foster a Tree-Friendly Culture - Develop partnerships with private sector landowners to create opportunities for protecting and expanding Peel Region's privately-owned tree canopy.
10. Be Proactive and Be Prepared - Invest in proactive urban forest management to reduce the negative impacts of stressors (e.g., ice storm) and have a plan in place for emergencies.

Region of Peel staff will develop an Implementation Plan to operationalize the strategic directions described above for Region-owned urban forest assets. The Plan will identify quick wins, prioritize actions, outline roles and responsibilities and feed into program and resource planning. The guides present an opportunity to improve upon the current management of Regionally owned urban forest assets by shifting from a reactive to a proactive approach.

In parallel with the policy framework and actions described above, O. Reg. 588/17 directs municipalities to include green infrastructure into asset management plans by 2024. As a result, an inventory, condition assessment and asset management plan are being completed for trees, shrubs, and natural areas owned by the Region of Peel. The results of the condition assessments, combined with recommendations from the Guides will:

- Establish Level of Service, including targeted tree planting and maintenance;
- Update processes and procedures for capital projects and maintenance programs;
- Create asset classes for urban forest assets with a reinvestment strategy;
- Develop performance measures to report progress on increasing and maintaining trees; and
- Provide a long-term financial outlook.

b) Continue to Collaborate with Peel Climate Change Partnership and Peel Urban Forest Working Group

Staff will continue to collaborate with partners through the Peel Climate Change Partnership and Peel Urban Forest Working Group to support the implementation of urban forest policy and best practices in Peel Region. The Working Group will update the canopy assessment last completed in 2015 (underway), review and update the Peel Urban Forest Strategy (planned for 2022/23) and complete the Peel Climate Change Partnership's Green Natural Infrastructure Strategy tree planting initiative in priority neighbourhoods (2022/23).

RISK CONSIDERATIONS

Climate change has introduced uncertain weather patterns such as extreme heat, winds, and drought. These changes are already impacting our communities, and impacts are expected to increase over time. Trees can help communities adapt to climate change by providing a range of benefits, but they are also vulnerable to environmental impacts, many of which are exacerbated by climate change. Without proper investment, these impacts will continue to lead to a loss of tree canopy, which would diminish the community benefits that urban forests provide.

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Trees, unlike other assets, grow in value as they age. Investing in the protection and growth of urban forest assets is one of the most cost-effective actions to help communities mitigate and adapt to climate change. Implementing the key strategic directions from the Guides will ensure our initial investment is protected and that trees live long enough to reach their full potential to improve quality of life for Peel's residents.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Staff will develop an Implementation Plan to operationalize the 10 key strategic directions within Peel Urban Forest Best Practice Guides. This Implementation Plan will help inform Regional programs, asset management plans and future budgets. It is anticipated that resources will be required in future to advance a coordinated inter-departmental program for the management of Regionally owned urban forest assets.

In addition, there is opportunity to coordinate with conservation authorities to leverage urban forestry skills, resources, and capacity, and align multiple priorities through existing and future budget planning and approval processes.

CONCLUSION

Urban forests contribute directly to community health and well-being such as supporting active transportation, improving air quality, carbon sequestration, cooling urban environments, soaking up rainwater, and improving physical and mental health.

Provincial legislation enables municipalities to regulate the destruction or injuring of trees, requires municipalities to enact policy pertaining to the protection and enhancement of urban forest assets, and directs municipalities to include green infrastructure into asset management plans by 2024.

Staff, in partnership with local municipalities and conservation authorities, developed the Peel Region Urban Forest Best Practice Guides. Implementation of the ten (10) key strategic directions of the Guides will build resilience in a changing climate and enhance social and environmental outcomes in Peel. Subject to approval, staff will develop an Implementation Plan to help inform future Regional capital and operating programs and budgets, as well as asset management plans to comply with O. Reg. 588/17.

APPENDICES

Appendix I - 2015 Urban Forest Canopy Cover in Peel Region

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