

Subject: Tree Planting Strategy Update

File Number: ACS2025-SI-CCR-0008

Report to Environment and Climate Change Committee on 16 September 2025

and Council 24 September 2025

Submitted on September 5, 2025 by Nichole Hoover-Bienasz, Director, Climate Change and Resiliency, Strategic Initiatives Department and

Allyson Downs, Director, Parks Maintenance and Forestry Services, Public Works Department

Contact Person: Martha Copestake, Senior Planning Forester, Strategic Initiatives Department

613-580-2424 ext. 17922, martha.copestake@ottawa.ca

Ward: Citywide

Objet : Bilan sur la Stratégie de plantation d'arbres

Numéro de dossier : ACS2025-SI-CCR-0008

Rapport présenté au Comité de l'environnement du changement climatique

Rapport soumis le 16 septembre 2025

et au Conseil le 24 septembre 2025

Soumis le 2025-09-05 par Nichole Hoover-Bienasz, directrice, Services des changements climatiques et de la résilience, Direction générale des initiatives stratégiques

Allyson Downs, directrice, Services de l'entretien des parcs et des forêts, Direction générale des travaux publics

Personne ressource: Martha Copestake, experte-forestière principale, Direction générale des initiatives stratégiques

613-580-2424 ext. 17922, martha.copestake@ottawa.ca

Quartier : À l'échelle de la ville

REPORT RECOMMENDATION(S)

That the Environment and Climate Change Committee recommend that Council receive the Tree Planting Strategy Update Report for information.

RECOMMANDATION(S) DU RAPPORT

Que le Comité de l'environnement et du changement climatique recommande au Conseil de prendre connaissance du Bilan sur la Stratégie de plantation d'arbres.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides an update to members of the Environment and Climate Change Committee and Council on the City of Ottawa's Tree Planting Strategy. The report outlines the work completed since the approval of the early action items in June 2024 and the work plan to the end of 2026.

The Tree Planting Strategy is the feature project for this Term of Council under the [Urban Forest Management Plan \(UFMP\)](#) and it is focused on how Ottawa will achieve its urban canopy cover target of 40 per cent over time. The Tree Planting Strategy project and the associated key principles were approved by Council through the [UFMP Update Report](#) in June 2023.

[Early actions](#) under the strategy were approved by Council in June 2024, along with a methodology to conduct a [Tree Equity Analysis](#) using the new tree canopy cover data. Over the last year, staff have been working on the implementation of the early action items and the data analysis which will be used to guide tree planting in the City.

The highlights of the work completed between Q3 2024 and Q3 2025 include:

- **Data Analysis:** Completion of the five-year canopy cover update, which was then used, along with socio-economic and health data to conduct the tree equity analysis identifying priority areas of the City for tree planting.
- **Early Action Items:** Implementation of the approved early action items including the new Tree Dedication Program, the Plant Your Place! tree planting program, and a proactive approach to replacing trees that have been removed in the city owned right-of-way.
- **Funding:** Successful application to the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) Growing Canada's Community Canopies grant program to plant 3,750 trees over two years through the Plant your Place! program; a cost shared grant providing the City with \$300,000.

The work plan for Q4 2025 to the end of Q4 2026 includes:

- **Tree Planting in Priority Areas:** Engagement, consultation, analysis, and tree planting in the priority areas identified through the Tree Equity Analysis.
- **Public Engagement:** Focused public engagement session with local community groups/organizations and other stakeholders with the goal of identifying partnership opportunities, information gaps, joint goals and priorities, etc.
- **Funding:** Investigation into funding opportunities for tree planting in Ottawa to contribute to increasing canopy cover.
- **Continued implementation of early actions:** Scale up the Plant Your Place! program to provide more trees to residents in 2026. Continued proactive replacement of right-of-way trees removed.
- **Tiny Forest Review:** Investigate the opportunities and challenges of the Miyawaki method of planting Tiny Forests on City lands to contribute to growing Ottawa's tree canopy cover.

The data analysis done over the last year on canopy cover and tree equity provides an evidence-based framework to guide and help prioritize the work moving forward under the Tree Planting Strategy. It will be the basis for continued monitoring and data analysis over time on the City's progress towards the 40 per cent canopy cover target and on the increase in levels of tree planting in the identified priority areas.

Next steps include staff implementing the work plan items outlined above from Q4 2025 to the end of Q4 2026. Staff will report back on the Tree Planting Strategy in early 2027, in conjunction with the next UFMP update report.

RÉSUMÉ

Ce rapport fait le point sur la Stratégie de plantation d'arbres de la Ville d'Ottawa et s'adresse aux membres du Comité de l'environnement et du changement climatique. Il décrit les travaux réalisés depuis l'approbation des mesures initiales en juin 2024 et du plan de travail qui couvre la période allant jusqu'à la fin de 2026.

La Stratégie de plantation d'arbres est le projet phare du [Plan de gestion de la forêt urbaine \(PGFU\)](#) pour le présent mandat du Conseil et est axée sur la façon dont la Ville d'Ottawa atteindra sa cible de 40 % en matière de couvert forestier urbain au fil du temps. La Stratégie de plantation d'arbres et ses grands principes ont été approuvés par le Conseil dans le cadre de la [Mise à jour du PGFU](#) en juin 2023.

Les [mesures initiales](#) prévues par la Stratégie ont été approuvées par le Conseil en juin 2024, parallèlement à la méthodologie pour réaliser une [analyse de l'équité en matière d'arbres](#) à l'aide des nouvelles données sur le couvert forestier. Au cours de la dernière année, le personnel a travaillé sur la mise en œuvre des mesures initiales et sur l'analyse des données, deux initiatives qui seront utilisées pour orienter les activités de plantation d'arbres dans la ville.

Voici quelques-uns des faits saillants des travaux réalisés entre le T3 2024 et le T3 2025 :

- **Analyse de données** : Achèvement de la mise à jour quinquennale du couvert forestier, qui a ensuite été utilisée parallèlement aux données socio-économiques et sanitaires pour réaliser une analyse de l'équité en matière d'arbres en vue de cerner les secteurs prioritaires pour la plantation d'arbres à Ottawa.
- **Mesures initiales** : Mise en œuvre des mesures initiales approuvées, y compris le nouveau Programme d'arbres hommages, le programme de plantation d'arbres Un arbre chez vous! et une approche proactive pour remplacer les arbres qui ont été abattus dans l'emprise de la Ville.
- **Financement** : Obtention d'une subvention de participation aux frais dans le cadre du programme Croissance de la canopée des collectivités canadiennes de la Fédération canadienne des municipalités (FCM). La Ville disposera ainsi de 300 000 \$ pour planter 3 750 arbres sur deux ans par l'entremise du programme Un arbre chez vous!.

Le plan de travail qui couvre la période allant du T4 2025 à la fin du T4 2026 comprend ce qui suit :

- **Plantation d'arbres dans les secteurs prioritaires** : Mobilisation, consultation, analyse et plantation d'arbres dans les secteurs prioritaires cernés dans le cadre de l'analyse de l'équité en matière d'arbres.
- **Consultation du public** : Séance de consultation publique ciblée auprès de groupes et d'organismes communautaires et d'autres parties prenantes afin de cerner les possibilités de partenariats, les lacunes en matière d'information, les priorités et les objectifs partagés, etc.
- **Financement** : Examiner les possibilités de financement pour la plantation d'arbres à Ottawa pour contribuer à l'augmentation du couvert forestier.

- **Mise en œuvre continue des mesures initiales** : Expansion du programme Un arbre chez vous! pour fournir plus d'arbres aux résidents en 2026. Poursuite du remplacement proactif des arbres abattus dans les emprises.
- **Examen des petites forêts** : Examiner les occasions et les défis liés à l'aménagement de petites forêts selon la méthode Miyawaki sur les terrains de la Ville pour faire croître le couvert forestier à Ottawa.

L'analyse de données sur le couvert forestier et l'équité en matière d'arbres réalisée au cours de la dernière année fournit un cadre fondé sur des données probantes pour orienter les travaux à venir de la Stratégie de plantation d'arbres et aider à en établir l'ordre de priorité. Elle constituera la base des activités de surveillance continue et d'analyse des données pour aider la Ville à atteindre sa cible de 40 % en matière de couvert forestier et à accroître le nombre d'arbres plantés dans les secteurs prioritaires cernés.

Les membres du personnel commenceront bientôt à mettre en œuvre les éléments du plan de travail prévus entre le T4 2025 et la fin du T4 2026. Le personnel fera rapport sur la Stratégie de plantation d'arbres au début de 2027, lors de la prochaine mise à jour sur le PGFU.

BACKGROUND

The Tree Planting Strategy is the feature project for this Term of Council under the [Urban Forest Management Plan \(UFMP\)](#) and it is focused on how Ottawa will achieve its urban canopy cover target of 40 per cent over time. The key principles of the Tree Planting Strategy are:

- To take an action-oriented approach by shifting from reactive to proactive tree planting
- To increase the tree species diversity of Ottawa's urban forest
- To use the City's canopy cover data, at a neighbourhood level, to prioritize tree planting in areas of Ottawa that need trees the most and
- To take an equity approach by considering socio-economic factors and public health data to prioritize tree planting efforts

The Tree Planting Strategy and the associated key principles were approved by Council through the [UFMP Update Report](#) in June 2023 which laid out the UFMP work plan, and identified the Tree Planting Strategy as the feature project, for this Term of Council.

The actions under the Tree Planting Strategy align with the City's Strategic Plan, specifically the strategic objective to plant, grow, and preserve the urban tree canopy with a focus on areas of low tree cover. Both the Official Plan and the UFMP support proactive and equity informed tree planting while growing Ottawa's tree canopy towards the 40 per cent canopy cover target over time. In addition, the strategy supports Climate Ready Ottawa which has highlighted the importance of tree canopy cover to increase shade as the City gets warmer, among other benefits.

The Strategy is being rolled out incrementally, allowing for faster implementation of new and revised programs, with the goal of getting more trees planted quickly in areas of the city where trees are most needed. On average, Forestry Services plants 88,000 trees each year through a variety of planting programs. The Tree Planting Strategy will enhance these efforts by setting the groundwork to scale up tree planting. Through strengthened collaborations with residents, community groups, and other organizations, the actions under the Strategy will foster ongoing growth of tree planting across the City.

[Early actions](#) under the strategy were approved by Council in June 2024, along with a methodology to conduct a [Tree Equity Analysis](#) using the new tree canopy cover data. Over the last year, staff have been working on the implementation of the early action items and the data analysis which will be used to guide tree planting in the City.

This information report provides an update on the status of the Tree Planting Strategy by outlining the implementation and work completed to date and the work plan for the upcoming year.

DISCUSSION

Tree Planting Strategy Accomplishments – Q3 2024 to Q3 2025

The work completed under the Tree Planting Strategy from June 2024 to September 2025 was focused on the tree canopy cover data analysis to guide the strategy moving forward, and the implementation of four early action items; namely, a tree equity analysis, the review of the Commemorative Tree program, a new proactive approach to right-of-way tree replacements, and the development of a new private land tree planting program. In addition to these early actions, staff have undertaken several other projects under the Strategy which are described below.

Update to Ottawa's Tree Canopy Mapping

Canopy cover data enables staff to monitor the impact of tree protection and tree planting efforts, as well as impacts to Ottawa's urban and rural forests from weather

events, construction and development projects, pests and diseases, other forest health issues, and natural ageing over time. Staff have committed to complete a canopy cover assessment every five years. Comparing canopy cover over time allows for the tracking of Ottawa's progress towards the City's 40 per cent canopy cover target. It also helps staff make more informed decisions regarding the management of Ottawa's urban and rural forests.

A tree canopy cover assessment was completed for the full National Capital Region in 2019, based on 2017 data. This provided a baseline data set for Ottawa to use for future comparisons over time. The canopy cover data was broken down by urban and rural areas, transects, wards, and neighbourhoods.

This year, a re-assessment of Ottawa's canopy cover was completed based on 2022 aerial photography and Light Detection and Ranging (LIDAR) data¹.

This allowed staff to conduct a change analysis over the five years between 2017 and 2022. The five-year update to the City's canopy cover shows overall stability, with encouraging signs of growth. Overall, city-wide canopy cover increased from 34 per cent to 36 per cent, mainly due to growth in rural areas. This is a positive outcome given the significant challenges over this period, including the impacts of the 2022 derecho and other major storm events (2018 tornado), ongoing climate-related stressors, and increasing development pressure from intensification to meet Ottawa's housing and growth targets. A [memo](#) outlining the five-year canopy cover update and change analysis was provided to the Mayor and members of Council, and more detail will be available on Ottawa.ca.

The updated canopy cover data and change analysis will be used to guide action and efforts under the Tree Planting Strategy. Specifically, the canopy cover data was used to conduct a tree equity analysis for Ottawa.

Tree Equity Analysis

Staff have completed a tree equity analysis of Ottawa using the American Forests' Tree Equity Score methodology. This method uses the City's new tree canopy cover data in conjunction with socio-economic and health measures of inequity to produce a score that identifies neighbourhood-level gaps in the urban forest. The results of the analysis

¹ Aerial LIDAR (light detection and ranging) surveys provide a 3D model of the height of objects, like trees, above the ground.

will facilitate more equitable access to the urban forest canopy by identifying and targeting priority areas for tree planting across the City.

The tree equity analysis will guide the implementation of the Tree Planting Strategy. Staff have identified priority areas of the City for tree planting using this method with local census and health data, and the new canopy cover data. The top priority areas have been identified within each transect, and four areas were selected for near-term action in 2026 and 2027. Focusing resources in targeted areas will allow for more coordinated and cost-effective implementation. A [memo](#) outlining the tree equity analysis was provided to the Mayor and members of Council, and more detail will be available on [Ottawa.ca](https://ottawa.ca).

Tree Dedication Program

The Tree Planting Strategy early actions included a review of the former Commemorative Tree program as the eligibility and costs for that program had not significantly changed since amalgamation. Through public and Councillor consultations, staff learned that there was a desire to broaden the nature of commemorations. The review also provided an opportunity to streamline the administrative processes and determine ways to make the program more efficient while fully recovering hard costs for the program.

A rebranded Tree Dedication program was approved in June 2024 and launched in January 2025. The program has expanded eligibility to more types of dedications such as birthdays, anniversaries, and other milestones. There are now two streams of dedications: *Personal* for personally significant individuals, milestones or events, and *Community* for dedications that are significant to the public at large.

The new online application form, interactive map for site and species selection, and improved payment solutions are working well, and projects are moving more efficiently from application through to planting. Staff are also seeing the benefits of reduced staff time to administer the program. To date, twenty-four (24) Personal tree dedications and one (1) Community tree dedication have been planted this spring. There are approximately seventeen (17) tree dedications in process for the fall 2025 planting season.

Proactive Right-of-Way Tree Replacements

Street trees play an important role in the urban forest and provide valuable benefits to the community and the environment. The former approach to replacing trees on the

right-of-way was primarily reactive, meaning that the adjacent resident was required to request the replacement tree or “opt-in” to a replacement through the [Trees in Trust](#) program. Adopting a proactive approach to replacement trees ensures that lost canopy cover is replaced when a tree is removed by Forestry Services. With this new approach, when a City tree is removed on the right-of-way by Forestry Services, the site is inspected for replacement and, where space and conditions permit, a replacement tree is scheduled to be planted in the next available planting season. The species is selected by Forestry staff with species diversity in mind. As communication with homeowners is key to the success of this approach, the resident is informed of the species selection, timeline, and the approximate planting location which is marked with a small lawn sign ahead of planting.

In the June 2024 [Tree Program Review Early Actions](#) report, it was estimated that full implementation of the proactive approach to right-of-way tree replacements would require scaling up of caliper tree planting operations by approximately two thousand (2000) trees per year. This volume was based on staff’s initial estimate that approximately 10 per cent of locations where a tree is removed on the right-of-way may not be suitable for an immediate replacement or there may not be space for a replacement tree (“non-replaceable” trees). The scaling up of replacement tree planting was proposed to happen in a phased approach beginning with five hundred (500) trees in 2025. Following the first phase of site identification and inspections in Q1 of 2025, data shows that the percentage of non-replaceable trees is much higher at fifty to sixty percent (50-60 per cent). These are locations where there is limited space, utility conflicts, construction, or other conflicts. Given this, a full scale up of proactive right-of-way replacements is now estimated to be in the range of one thousand (1,000) trees annually.

For the first phase of implementation, funding was secured for the supply and installation of 500 trees in 2025 through Climate Change and Resiliency Services capital fund and a new FTE for a Forestry Inspector was approved through the 2025 budget cycle to support additional field work and communications with residents. These trees will be planted as part of the fall 2025 planting season beginning in October and will be an increase of 500 trees to Forestry Services’ annual caliper tree planting operations.

Plant your Place! program

Given that 40 per cent of the urban area in Ottawa is private land, the introduction of a private property tree planting program presented a significant opportunity to enhance

the urban forest and to plant more trees while also enhancing public education and awareness among residents on urban forest stewardship. Following consultation, research, and a municipal scan, a new private land tree planting program was approved by Council in June 2024. The new [Plant Your Place!](#) program was developed and is being implemented on behalf of the City by EnviroCentre, a local not-for-profit organization.

The program focuses on high-quality planting and education providing guidance to participants on best practices for site and species selections as well as after care. There are two streams under the program that are offered at no charge: city-wide tree distributions and full-service tree planting in neighbourhoods with low canopy cover.

Registration for the tree distributions launched in late March 2025 with a goal to distribute 1200 trees (50 trees per ward) to residents through four distribution events. Between March 31st and June 27th, the *Plant Your Place!* website saw more than 23,000 views with over 800 tree orders placed on launched day alone. EnviroCentre successfully held four distribution events this spring with an added fifth event to distribute remaining trees to those residents that were on a waiting list. In total 1213 trees were distributed and over 40 volunteers were engaged to assist on event days. A post event survey to participants indicated over ninety-five percent 'Excellent' ratings for event organization, experience with staff and volunteers, and pick-up convenience.

The full-service planting stream aims to further reduce barriers to tree planting by planting fifty (50) trees on social housing properties this fall in neighbourhoods with low canopy cover. This stream includes an on-site visit with an urban forestry professional to assess the site conditions and tree species options, make planting recommendations, and schedule professional tree planting services.

Combined, the full-service and tree distribution streams will see an increase of 1263 trees planted across the City through the *Plant Your Place!* program.

Funding from the Growing Canada's Community Canopies Initiative

In July 2024, staff made an application to the Federation of Canadian Municipalities' (FCM) [Growing Canada's Community Canopies](#) initiative to support the *Plant Your Place!* program. This is a cost shared grant which helps communities plant the right trees in the right places to grow tree canopies in communities across Canada. FCM recently [announced](#) that the City of Ottawa's successful application will provide \$300,000 to accomplish 3,750 trees planted over two years, through the Plant Your Place! program.

Tree Planting Guidelines and Tree Species List

The development of consolidated tree planting guidelines for Ottawa was one of the recommendations of the UFMP and is being completed under the Tree Planting Strategy. Staff have engaged a Landscape Architecture firm through the City's standing offer list to develop new tree planting guidelines for Ottawa and a list of tree species, with associated relevant information and details, that are appropriate for planting in Ottawa. Both the guidelines and the tree species list will be used as reference materials internally by City staff and externally by residents, consultants, developers, contractors, etc.

Draft tree planting guidelines and a draft tree species list have been completed and are currently being reviewed by City staff. Both will be finalized this fall and will be available by the end of 2025 on Ottawa.ca.

Assumption of Trees

This year staff worked internally to formalize the processes to incorporate trees that are planted in the city-owned right-of-way through new developments, into the City's tree inventory. This will ensure newly planted trees are brought into the City's watering and tree maintenance programs in a timelier manner. It will also help to ensure that the City's tree inventory is up to date. This action aims to better set these urban street trees up for success as they mature. Having more accurate tree inventory data is also critical to forecasting maintenance resources required due to growth of the urban forest. The formalized process will be implemented in Q4 2025.

Tree Planting Strategy Work Plan – Q4 2025 to Q4 2026

Where the focus of the past year has been on data analysis and early actions, the work plan for the remainder of 2025 and 2026 will be focused on tree planting in priority areas, public engagement, exploring funding opportunities for tree planting, research, tree planting guidance, and continued implementation of the early action programs. The work plan items address the new canopy cover data and change analysis, as well as the tree equity score analysis.

Tree Planting in Priority Areas

Using the updated canopy cover data, staff conducted a tree equity analysis which has identified priority areas for tree planting in Ottawa. Tree planting in the priority areas will start in 2026. The first step will be to assess each priority area to determine the opportunities and challenges related to canopy cover, plantable space, and tree

planting. The next step will be to engage and consult with the communities in the priority areas. The purpose of this engagement will be to understand the goals and needs of local residents with respect to tree canopy cover in their neighbourhoods. Staff will work with the ward Councillor, colleagues in Community and Social Services and their partners, and local community groups, on the engagement element.

The goal is to increase canopy cover in the priority areas. Staff will determine what existing tree planting programs are appropriate for the priority areas and consider new or different approaches to delivering tree planting that could meet unique challenges in the priority areas. The intention is to implement existing programming in the priority areas starting in 2026, which could include the full-service stream of the Plant Your Place! program, promotion of the Trees in Trust program, and prioritizing the site assessments and planting in the right-of-way and in parks.

The canopy cover in the priority areas will be monitored and reported on, over time, through ongoing canopy cover analyses. In addition, the volume of tree planting by the City will be monitored in the priority areas, annually.

Public Engagement

In Ottawa, there are many community and environmental organizations, groups, and individual residents with a keen interest, passion, and knowledge about the urban forest. Many are actively engaged in urban forest stewardship and education, tree planting projects, invasive species removal, etc. As a part of the Tree Planting Strategy, staff is looking to improve engagement and communication with local groups and stakeholders.

Within the next 6 months, staff will organize a focused engagement session with local tree and urban forest related community groups and organizations with the goal of identifying partnership opportunities, information gaps, funding gaps, joint goals and priorities, and other items of interest. It will also include sharing data, and other information, and collecting feedback on future directions under the Tree Planting Strategy. Bringing local stakeholders together to connect and discuss challenges and opportunities regarding tree planting and other urban forestry activities is a starting point towards building better partnerships and improving integration between the very keen Ottawa public and the City.

Funding Opportunities for Tree Planting

To implement new programs and scale up tree planting to increase forest cover, resources will be required for planting operations. Staff are actively exploring internal and external opportunities and options to fund tree planting outside of the City budget process. These may include partnerships with external organizations, opportunities for sponsorship and/or donations for tree planting and determining projects that may be appropriate for external grants such as future applications to FCM's Growing Canada's Community Canopies initiative. The goal is to have secured one or two alternative funding sources within the next year to help bolster the City's tree planting and the associated budget.

Tiny Forest Review

Tiny Forests are planted using the Miyawaki method of planting which is a technique for rapidly creating dense forested areas by planting a variety of native species close together in urban areas. Currently, there is broad interest in the use of tiny forests to plant trees and increase canopy cover in cities. There are several groups in Ottawa who are delivering tiny forest planting projects on private property. However, staff has not yet used or approved this model for tree planting on City property as it does not align with standard forestry best practices for establishing new forested areas. This research project will investigate the opportunities and challenges of the Miyawaki method of planting tiny forests on City lands to contribute to growing Ottawa's tree canopy cover. Staff will engage with local groups that have experience in planning, planting, and maintaining tiny forests, and with other municipalities who may have employed this method.

Through this research project, staff will determine if it would be reasonable to undertake a pilot tiny forest project on City land.

Tree Planting Guidance

To support the new Tree Planting Guidelines, and other tree related guidance documents such as the Landscape Plan Terms of Reference for development projects, there are outstanding supporting documents to be completed.

Over the next year, staff will look to complete the following guidance documents:

- Tree Lighting Guidelines to provide guidance to BIAs and other organizations who wish to install decorative or seasonal lighting in City trees
- Specifications and standards for tree planting in hardscapes

- Full review of the City's standard tree planting specifications
- Guidance on how to project future canopy cover for new developments
- Guidance on how to represent soil volume on landscape plans for new developments

When complete, these guidance documents will be available on the Ottawa.ca with the Tree Planting Guidelines.

Continued Implementation of Early Actions

The new planting programs approved through the Tree Program Review Early Actions report will continue into 2026. The *Plant Your Place!* program, supported by funding from the FCM grant, will be scaled up to provide more trees to residents in 2026. City-wide tree distributions and the full-service stream will double in 2026 to 2,400 and 100 trees, respectively. Registration for spring 2026 tree distributions and fall 2026 full-service planting will open in late Q1 2026. The roll out of the proactive right-of-way tree replacements will continue with a goal to plant another 500 replacement trees next year, pending funding through the 2026 budget process. The Tree Dedication program will continue to receive ongoing applications and promotion of the program will take place in advance of spring 2026 tree planting with an aim to increase uptake in the program next year.

Next Steps

The work completed to date represents a starting point towards meeting the key principles of the Tree Planting Strategy. The early actions have the City moving to proactive tree planting in the City-owned right-of-way. The proactive approach will continue and expand over the next year through the prioritization of tree planting in equity deserving communities with low tree canopy cover.

The work plan through to the end of 2026 will also see important engagement and consultation with local community groups and organizations. The goal of which is to improve partnerships, data sharing, and integration between trees and forest stakeholders and the City. Staff will also continue to explore new funding opportunities for tree planting in Ottawa.

The data analysis done over the last year on canopy cover and tree equity will guide all the work moving forward under the Tree Planting Strategy. It will be the basis for continued monitoring and data analysis over time on the City's progress towards the 40

per cent canopy cover target and on the increase in levels of tree planting in the identified priority areas.

The next steps include staff implementing the work plan items outlined above from Q4 2025 to the end of Q4 2026. Staff will report back on the Tree Planting Strategy in early 2027, in conjunction with the next UFMP update report.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Resources required to support the Tree Planting Strategy will be brought forward through the annual budget process, subject to funding. Upon execution of an agreement with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, the budget authority will be established for the associated revenue and expenditures.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal impediments to receiving the information in this report.

COMMENTS BY THE WARD COUNCILLOR(S)

This is a city-wide report.

CONSULTATION

An Engage Ottawa site for the Tree Planting Strategy was launched in March 2024. It included a survey for residents of Ottawa to gather public feedback on existing tree planting programs and ideas for future programming, with detailed questions on the Commemorative Tree Program as an early action item under the strategy. The survey was open to the public for three weeks and warranted 1,284 responses.

Staff hosted small group consultation sessions with members of Council in April 2024 to seek their feedback on existing tree planting programs and ideas for future programming. Twenty offices were represented through these sessions either by Councillor's or members of their staff.

Taking an equity-based approach to tree planting is informed by many policies, plans, and projects. The feedback from the consultation and public notification of these fundamental guiding documents has been integrated into and shaped the direction of the tree equity analysis. Such documents include:

- The broad consultation on Official Plan policies related to urban forest and its equitable distribution.

- Council support for the Term of Council Priorities detailed in the City of Ottawa Strategic Plan 2023-2026.
- The public and stakeholder consultation completed when developing the Urban Forest Management Plan and its recommendations.
- The opportunity for public delegation through the Urban Forest Management Plan Update report in June 2023. This report provided a plan for how the Tree Planting Strategy would use equity as a guiding principle.
- The ongoing public consultation through the Tree Planting Strategy's Engage Ottawa website and survey. Feedback received through the website will help implement planting in priority areas identified by the tree equity analysis.

In addition to the consultation used to inform this project, targeted resident consultation and engagement work will be done in the priority areas identified by the tree equity analysis. Staff will work interdepartmentally to develop consultation plans, engage with residents, and integrate feedback into future Tree Planting Strategy work.

ACCESSIBILITY IMPACTS

All actions that arise from the Tree Planting Strategy will adhere to accessibility legislative framework that includes the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA) and the City of Ottawa Accessibility Design Standards (ADS) to the greatest extent possible. Through its Accessibility Policy, the City of Ottawa is committed to providing equal treatment to people with disabilities with respect to the use and benefit of City services, programs and goods in a manner that respects their dignity and that is equitable in relation to the broader public. The City recognizes its obligations under the Ontario Human Rights Code, the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005, and City Policy, and is committed to exploring strategies that mitigate accessibility barriers.

Overall, the Tree Planting Strategy has various positive accessibility-related benefits to people with disabilities. Research has linked exposure to trees to benefit both physical and mental health, and exposure to urban forests generally reduces mental and physical stress, anxiety, and depression, and that they improve moods. However, staff must also ensure that any newly planted trees don't create any physical barriers to Ottawa's residents with disabilities. The City's ADS state that, where possible, the City shall provide a clear width of 2,000 mm for exterior paths of travel, 25 with a minimum clear width of 1,800 mm. Any newly planted tree locations will ensure these minimum

clear widths are met

ASSET MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

The recommendations documented in this report are consistent with the City's Comprehensive Asset Management (CAM) Program objectives. The implementation of the Comprehensive Asset Management program enables the City to effectively manage existing and new infrastructure to maximize benefits, reduce risk, and provide safe and reliable levels of service to community users. This is done in a socially, culturally, environmentally, and economically conscious manner.

When the City commits to the addition of new assets, including living assets such as trees, consideration must also be given to the City's commitment to fund future operations, maintenance, and replacement costs. Any new trees planted under the Tree Planting Strategy would be reflected in the inventory of assets and financial forecasts included under the Greenspace & Forest Services Asset Management Plan.

CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

Tree planting initiatives under the Urban Forest Management Plan are key instruments to implement the ecosystem services goals of the Climate Change Master Plan.

The Climate Change and Vulnerability Risk Assessment (2022) identified several risks requiring immediate attention related to the urban tree canopy. These include risks to community health and well-being from increased heat, including less outdoor recreation and active transportation, and increased demand for shaded areas to offset heat. They also include risks to tree health from extreme heat and drought, wildfire, invasive species and pests, additional road salts, and extreme weather such as freezing rain and extreme winds. These negative effects of climate change on the existing and future tree canopy are likely to have a greater impact on equity deserving groups.

Several key actions of the draft [Climate Resiliency Strategy](#) (Climate Ready Ottawa 2024) link directly to tree planting efforts under the Tree Planting Strategy. In particular, under the pillar of Resilient Natural Environment and Parklands, a key action is to enhance tree canopy, increase shade in parklands, and to raise awareness about trees through public education and stewardship.

The tree equity analysis focuses on increasing tree planting in identified priority areas, enhancing climate change resiliency for low canopy and equity deserving neighbourhoods. One way this project will enhance climate change resiliency is through

increased shade, reducing of public health risks related to urban heat island effects. Another way is through improved stormwater infiltration and reduction of flood risk.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

The urban forest is a vital part of the City of Ottawa's green infrastructure, and it provides numerous benefits and services to residents. Such benefits and services include shade, mitigation of urban heat island effects, reduced urban run-off, and many physical and mental health benefits. The benefits and services provided by the urban canopy are often inequitably distributed throughout the city. The Tree Planting Strategy and the work plan outlined in this report works to address the inequitable distribution of the benefits of trees by increasing tree planting for residents in identified priority areas and by growing and replacing canopy city wide

INDIGENOUS, GENDER AND EQUITY IMPLICATIONS

Equity is a guiding principle for the Official Plan's tree canopy cover target and the Tree Planting Strategy.

To ensure equity is a key component of the Tree Planting Strategy, staff have leveraged the Council approved tree equity analysis using American Forests' Tree Equity Score to identify priority areas for tree planting. The proposed method is rooted in equity considerations; the theory, rationale, and methodology all support the goal of equitable access and distribution of tree canopy cover. In practical applications, the use of this method aims to lessen disparities by incorporating demographic information into tree planting prioritization.

The Tree Equity Score uses a combined index to of socioeconomic factors to identify communities at the greatest risk of not receiving urban forest benefits. These factors include race, age, income, employment, and health. By using the index in this method, staff are ensuring that socioeconomic dimensions of equity will be considered when implementing the Tree Planting Strategy.

RURAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no rural implications associated with the recommendations of this report. Although the tree equity analysis only focuses on urban areas, programs and planting initiatives under the Tree Planting Strategy will be applied the rural areas.

TERM OF COUNCIL PRIORITIES

This project addresses the following Term of Council Priorities:

- A city that is green and resilient.

This project will impact Strategic Objective 18 of the City of Ottawa Strategic Plan 2023-2026: “Plant, grow and preserve the urban tree canopy in parks and along roadways, with a focus on neighbourhoods with low tree canopy cover”.

The results of the tree equity analysis will be used by staff to identify priority areas for tree planting under the Tree Planting Strategy. These areas will be targeted for increased tree planting and expedited tree planting program launches, improving the program service for areas that are often underserved.

DISPOSITION

Once this information report is received by the members of the Environment and Climate Change Committee and Council, staff will implement the work plan outlined in the report from Q4 2025 to Q4 2026.