

## MEMO / NOTE DE SERVICE

To / Destinataire Mayor and Members of Council File/N° de fichier:

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Climate Change and Resiliency  
Services

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Services

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Subject / Objet Tree Equity Score Analysis and Results Date: September 4, 2025

The purpose of this memo is to share Ottawa’s tree equity score analysis, including the methods used, key results, and next steps. It is intended as a supplement to the memo on the results of the 2022 Tree Canopy Analysis.

### Background

Tree equity means ensuring all neighbourhoods have enough trees so residents can share in the health, climate, and economic benefits of canopy cover. The City’s Official Plan, 2023-2026 Strategic Plan, and Urban Forest Management Plan, all provide legislative support for conducting tree planting with equity as a guiding principle. In June 2024 through Council’s approval of the Tree Planting Strategy early actions ([ACS2024-SI-CCR-0002](#)), Council reinforced this priority by directing staff to use American Forests’ Tree Equity Score to guide and prioritize planting under the Tree Planting Strategy.

Research shows tree canopy is often tied to socio-economic factors, with lower-income neighbourhoods tending to have less canopy and fewer associated benefits like shade, cooler temperatures, cleaner air, and better health outcomes. For example, the 2017 Tree Canopy Assessment found that every \$10,000 drop in neighbourhood median income correlated with a 4 per cent decline in tree cover.

The Tree Equity Score methodology, developed by American Forests in 2021, has since been applied across the U.S., U.K., and Toronto. Building on Council’s direction, staff have now calculated tree equity scores for all urban census tracts in Ottawa. These results will help prioritize planting in areas of Ottawa with the greatest need, while citywide programs like *Trees in Trust* will continue to provide residents with access to tree planting opportunities across the entire city.

## Methodology

The Tree Equity Score evaluates neighbourhood-level need for trees by calculating a score for each residential census tract within Ottawa's urban boundary. It combines socioeconomic, demographic, and health data from Statistics Canada with urban heat data derived from satellite imagery and canopy cover data from the 2022 Canopy Cover Assessment. Non-residential areas were excluded, since residents benefit most directly from nearby trees.

The Tree Equity Score is calculated by urban transect, setting canopy goals adjusted for building density, within each of Ottawa's four urban transects, then comparing the goal to existing canopy cover to identify the Tree Canopy Gap, or plantable space. This is combined with a Priority Index of seven socio-economic, demographic, health, and urban heat indicators to reflect community vulnerability. The final score, ranging from 0 to 100, shows whether neighbourhoods have sufficient tree cover to meet residents' needs, with lower scores indicating greater need. Staff then reviewed the 20 lowest-scoring census tracts in each transect to identify priority areas for action, ensuring results translate into meaningful decision-making.

Taking a transect based approach to the calculation ensured that the canopy goals accurately reflected Ottawa's unique urban form, and avoided unfair comparisons between neighbourhoods of different ages, land uses, and densities.

## Key Findings

The Tree Equity Score was calculated for 201 neighbourhoods across Ottawa's urban area. Only three, Rockcliffe Park, Wateridge Village at Rockcliffe, and Rothwell Heights, achieved a perfect score of 100.

Neighbourhoods with high scores were typically close to forests or waterways, had older, more mature trees, and larger lots with more room for planting. Lower scoring areas were often newer subdivisions with young trees, denser housing with limited planting space, or areas dominated by hard surfaces such as commercial and industrial zones. Suburban areas generally scored lower because the trees and the neighbourhoods are still establishing, while the downtown core and ByWard Market scored low due to widespread hardscaping and limited planting opportunities.

The analysis identified eight priority areas across the city's four urban transects, as outlined below in Table 1. The areas include:

- 2 in the Downtown Core
- 3 in the Inner Urban area
- 2 in the Outer Urban area
- 1 in the Suburban area

Six of these areas also align with areas flagged by the City's Neighbourhood Equity Index, underscoring the connection between tree cover and social equity. Of the eight areas, one from each transect with the lowest Tree Equity Scores was selected as a short-term action area for

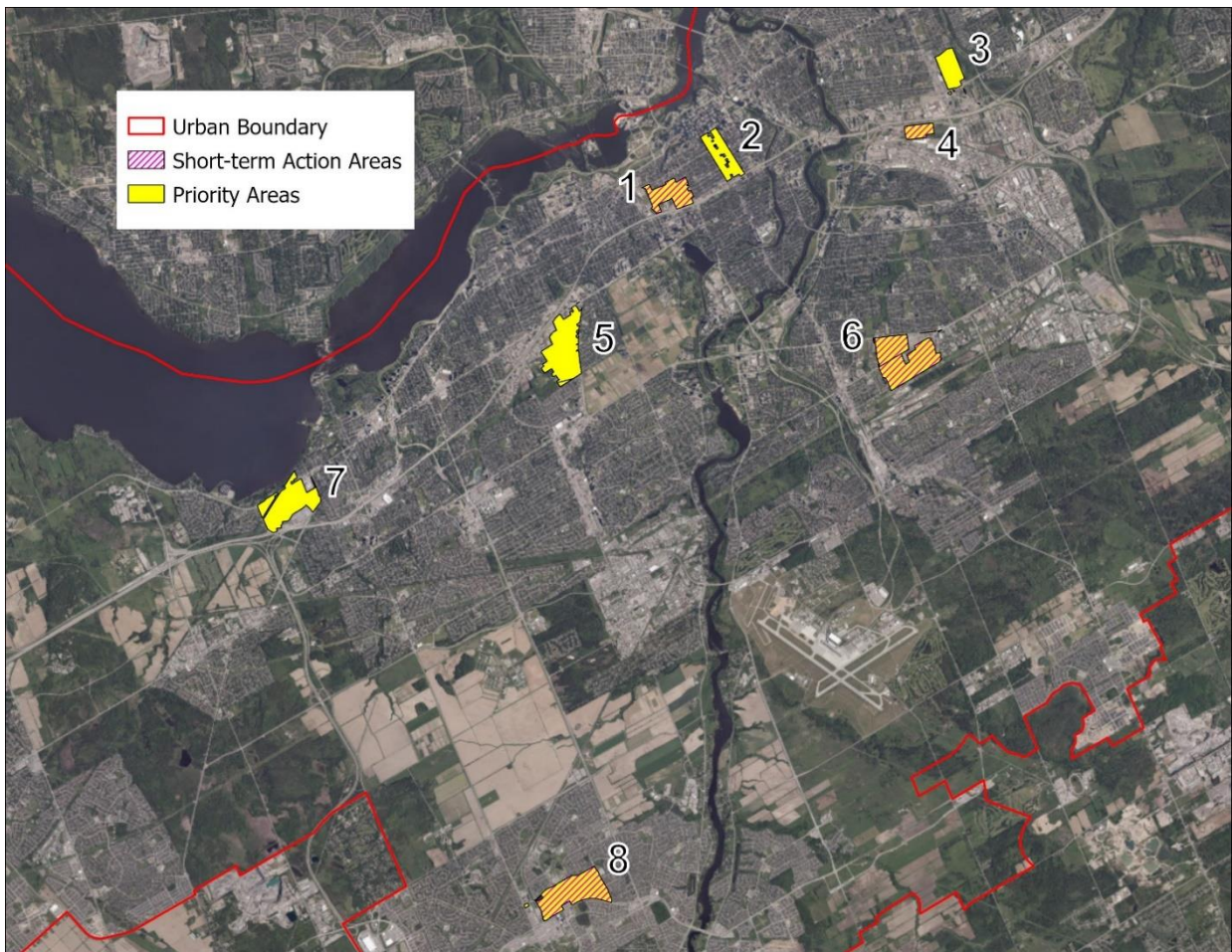
targeted tree planting in 2026–2027 so that trees are planted where they are most needed and wanted.

The results of the Tree Equity Score analysis will soon be available publicly on geoOttawa and the Open Data portal.

**Table 1.** Priority and short-term action areas and their Tree Equity Scores

ID	Transect	Census #	Census Tract Name	Tree Equity Score	Ward	Action
1	Downtown	0042.00	Dalhousie – Rochester Heights	63	14	Short-term Action Area
2	Downtown	0038.00	Centretown-Bank St	64	14	Priority Area
4	Inner urban	0011.01	East Industrial-Sheffield Glen-Russell Heights	59	18	Short-term Action Area
3	Inner urban	0122.01	Cummings-Cyrville	60	11	Priority Area
5	Inner urban	0023.02 & 0022.00	Carlington-Belleview-Lepage-Caldwell	67 & 68	16	Priority Area
6	Outer urban	0007.02 & 0001.09	Heron Gate & Heatherington	38 & 47	10 & 18	Short-term Action Area
7	Outer urban	0138.00	Bayshore	48	7	Priority Area
8	Suburban	0141.11	Old Barrhaven East – Rodeo Drive	58	24	Short-term Action Area

\* Short-term action areas highlighted in yellow.



**Figure 1.** Map of eight identified priority areas shown in yellow. The four short term action areas shown in pink hatching.

### Next Steps

Staff will create detailed plans to roll out tree planting in the short-term action areas during 2026 and 2027. Each neighbourhood will be reviewed to understand its specific challenges and opportunities, with input from ward Councillors, community groups, social services, and residents. This consultation will ensure trees are planted where they are most needed and wanted. The feedback will shape how existing programs like Trees in Trust, Plant Your Place!, and proactive replacements are delivered, and may also lead to new, tailored planting programs designed to fit each neighbourhood's needs.

Staff will provide an update on the implementation of the Tree Planting Strategy, including next steps, to the Environment and Climate Change Committee and Council on September 16 and 24 respectively. A series of detailed briefing sessions for Members of Council and their offices are taking place between September 8 and 12. Ottawa.ca will be updated with summaries of both the Tree Canopy Study and the Tree Equity Analysis. The full canopy data and tree equity results will also be uploaded to the City's Open Data Portal and GeoOttawa.

For any questions or additional details, please reach out to Nick Stow, Program Manager, Natural Systems at [Nick.Stow@ottawa.ca](mailto:Nick.Stow@ottawa.ca) or Martha Copestake, Senior Planning Forester at [Martha.Copestake@ottawa.ca](mailto:Martha.Copestake@ottawa.ca).

Sincerely,

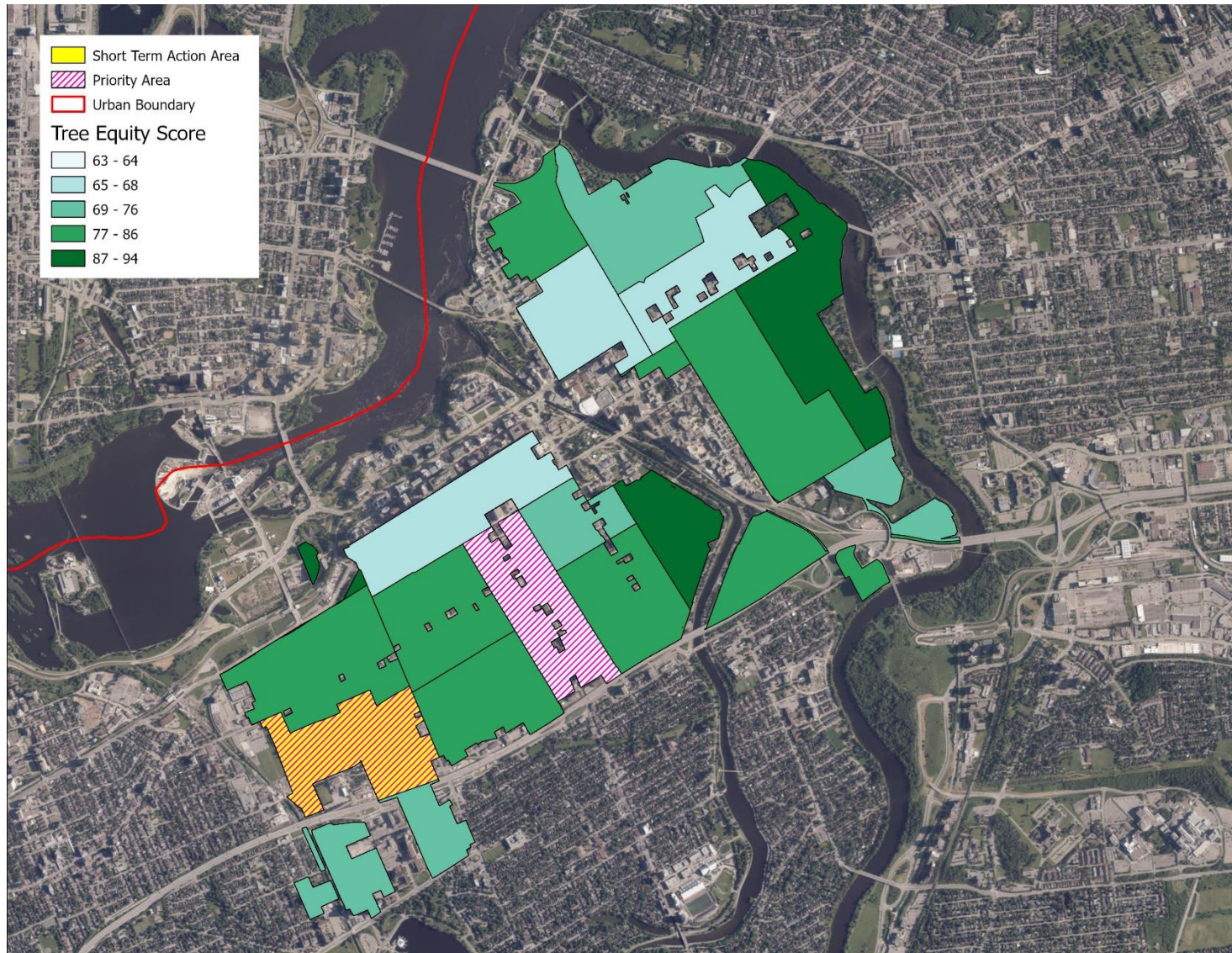
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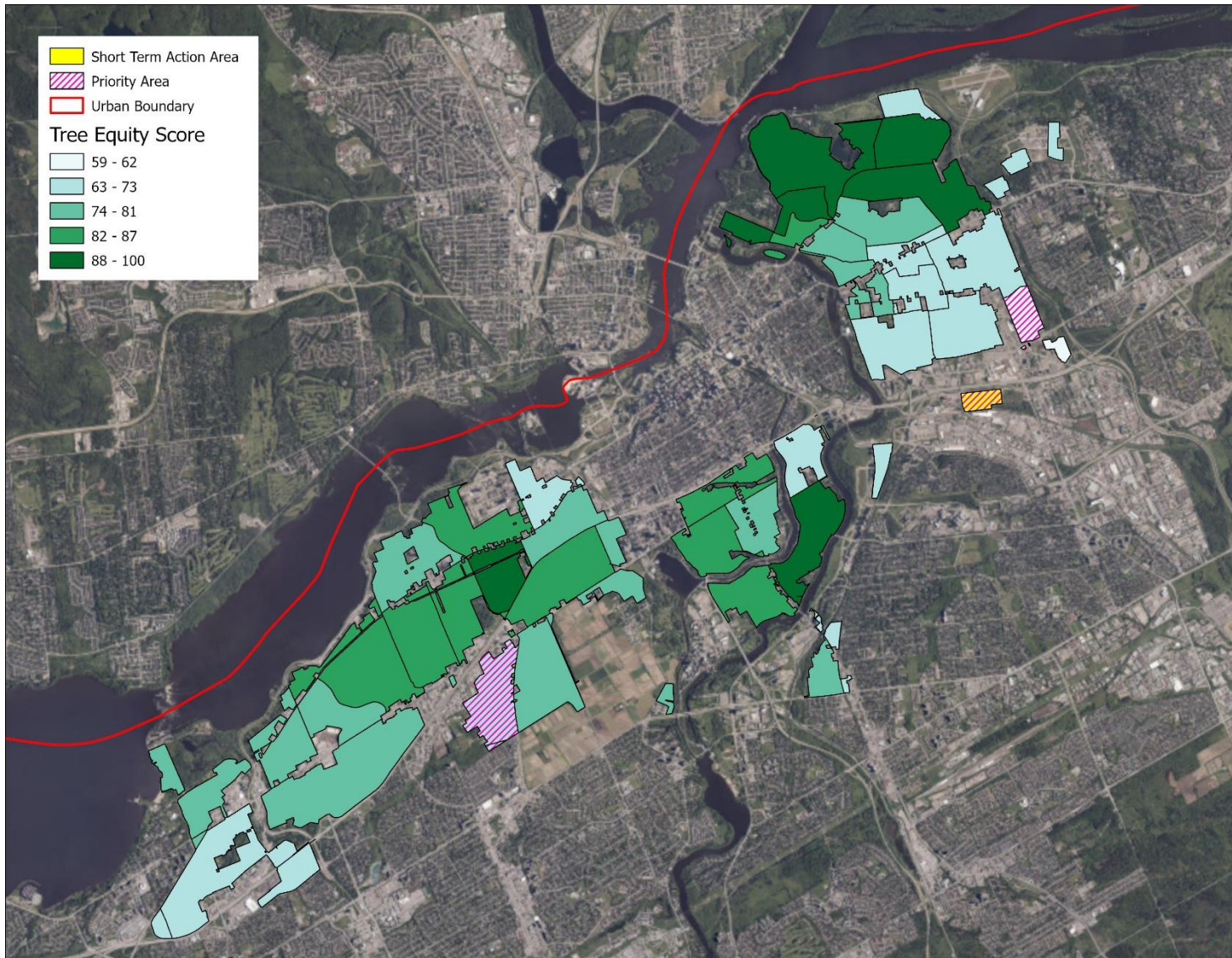
CC: Wendy Stephanson, City Manager  
Debbie Stewart, General Manager, Strategic Initiatives  
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Senior Leadership Team  
Jocelyne Turner, Public Information and Media Relations

1. Appendix A: Tree Equity Scores maps for each Official Plan Transect: Downtown Core, Inner Urban, Outer Urban, Suburban.

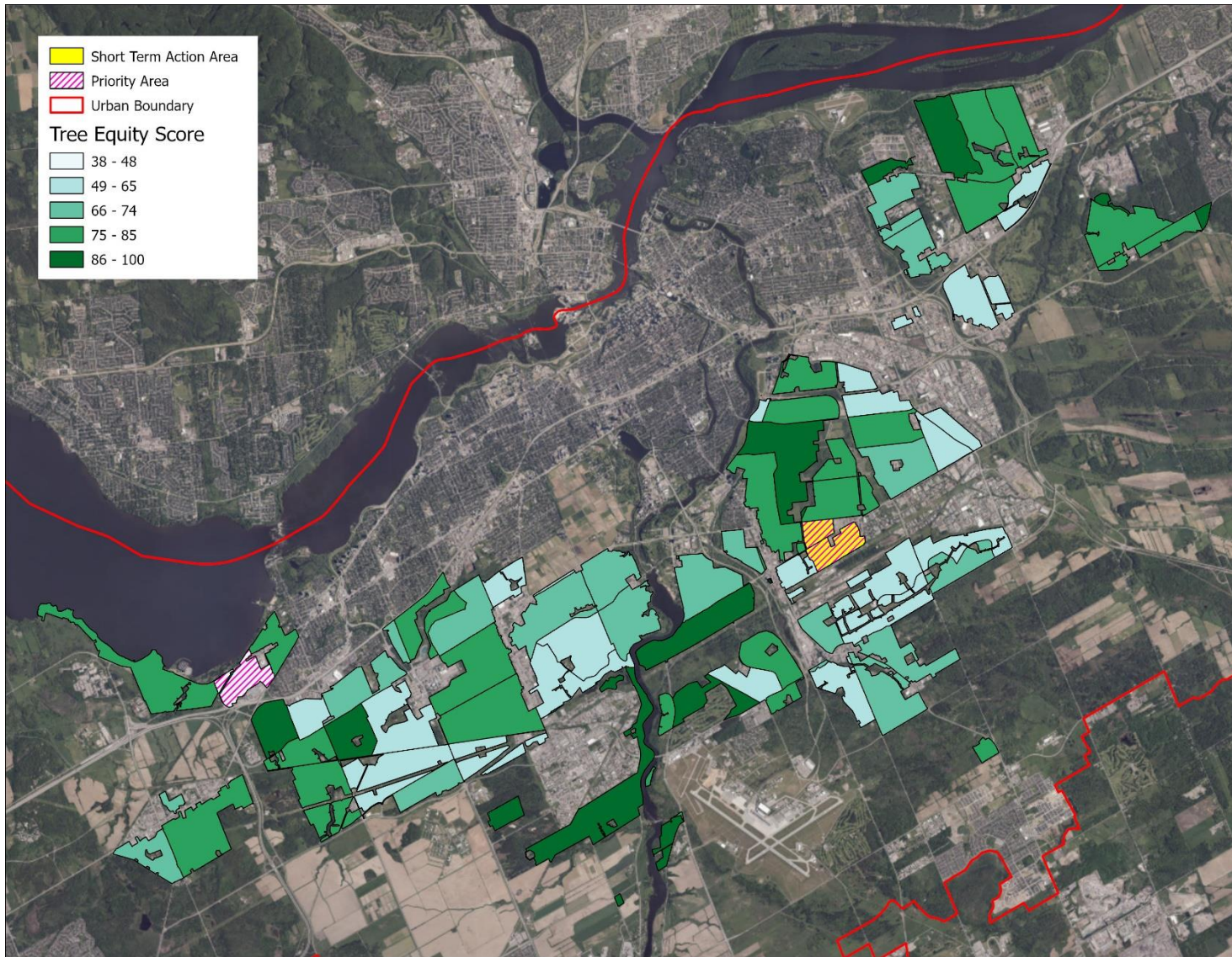
## APPENDIX A: Tree Equity Scores maps for each Official Plan Transect



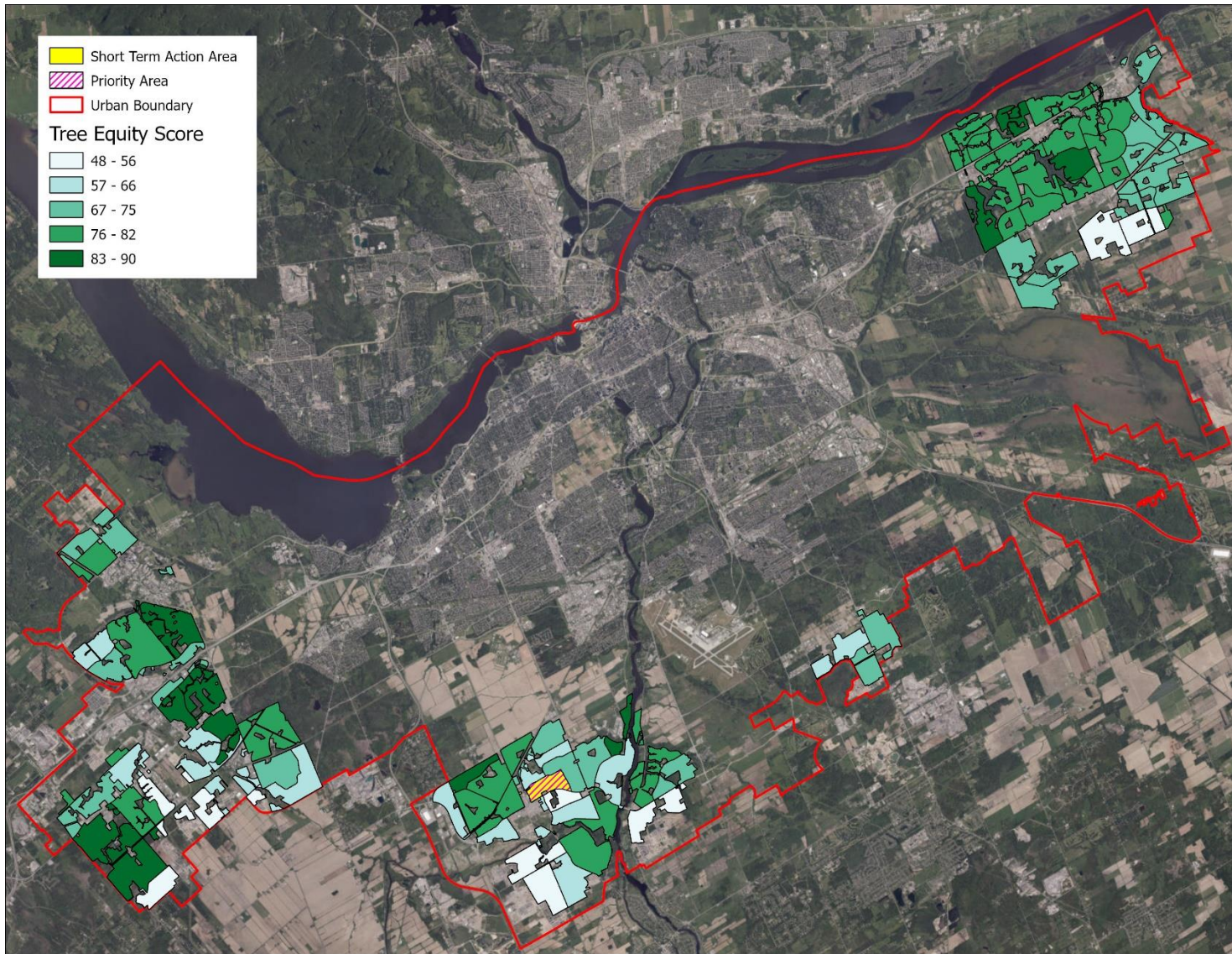
**Figure 2.** Map of Tree Equity Scores calculated for census tracts in the Downtown Core Transect.



**Figure 3.** Map of Tree Equity Scores calculated for census tracts in the Inner Urban Transect.



**Figure 4.** Map of Tree Equity Scores calculated for census tracts in the Outer Urban Transect.



**Figure 5.** Map of Tree Equity Scores calculated for census tracts in the Suburban Tract.