



**CITY OF HAMILTON**  
**PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT**  
**Planning Division**

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| <b>TO:</b>                | Chair and Members<br>Planning Committee   |
| <b>COMMITTEE DATE:</b>    | December 8, 2020  |
| <b>SUBJECT/REPORT NO:</b> | City of Hamilton Draft Urban Forest Strategy (PED20173)<br>(City Wide)                                  |
| <b>WARD(S) AFFECTED:</b>  | City Wide   |
| <b>PREPARED BY:</b>       | Catherine Plosz (905) 546-2424 Ext. 1231  |
| <b>SUBMITTED BY:</b>      | Steve Robichaud<br>Director, Planning and Chief Planner<br>Planning and Economic Development Department |
| <b>SIGNATURE:</b>         |   |

**RECOMMENDATION**

- (a) That the “City of Hamilton Draft Urban Forest Strategy – October 2020”, attached as Appendix “A” and “City of Hamilton Urban Forest Strategy Technical Report”, attached as Appendix “C” to Report PED20173 be received;
- (b) That staff be directed to undertake public and stakeholder engagement on the draft Urban Forest Strategy in Q1, 2021;
- (c) That staff report back to Planning Committee, summarizing public input together with the final Urban Forest Strategy in 2021.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The urban forest includes all trees and woodlands on public and private lands within the urban area, as defined in the Urban Hamilton Official Plan. This includes individual trees growing on private residential, institutional, commercial, and industrial lands, in public parks and along streets. Natural areas such as the Niagara Escarpment, Cootes Paradise, Environmentally Significant Areas, small woodlands, and groups of trees are also part of the urban forest.

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The Hamilton Urban Forest Strategy (UFS) will be a community-developed vision and plan that outlines the necessary steps that must be taken to protect, enhance, maintain, and monitor the trees and forests in the urban area of Hamilton over the next 20 years.

In February, 2017, Council approved the work plan for the UFS (Report PD02229(g)). Through a Request for Proposals (RFP) process, an RFP was issued and a consultant team was subsequently hired in February, 2018 to begin work on the UFS. Two rounds of public consultation were completed. The first, in the spring to fall of 2018, introduced the project and gathered opinions on the vision for the urban forest and why the urban forest is valued. The second round, in the spring of 2019, provided the community with the opportunity to comment on a draft vision, themes, and actions for the Urban Forest Strategy. An information report, PD02229(h) went to Planning Committee in June, 2019 to provide an update on the project.

Based on the feedback provided, the vision, themes and actions were revised and are included in the two draft reports.

The draft UFS report attached as Appendix “A” to Report PED20173 provides summary data on the existing condition of Hamilton’s urban forest, a vision of the desired future state of the urban forest, recommended actions to better manage tree planting, maintenance, protection, public education and awareness, and monitoring.

A draft Technical Report, attached as Appendix “C” to Report PED20173 has also been prepared which includes more detailed information, including study methods, results of data collection and public engagement, and a baseline rating of the current condition of the urban forest based on 28 monitoring criteria.

Prior to finalization of the UFS, Staff are seeking input on the draft reports. Staff are proposing that public and stakeholder consultation take place in Q1 of 2021 to collect input on the draft “City of Hamilton Urban Forest Strategy”, attached as Appendix “A” and the draft “City of Hamilton Urban Forest Strategy – Technical Report” attached as Appendix “C” to Report PED20173.

**Alternatives for Consideration – See Page 10**

**FINANCIAL – STAFFING – LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

Financial: This report seeks approval to consult on the draft UFS. There are no financial implications associated with the adoption of this report. The draft UFS includes proposed actions which would, if ultimately approved by Council, have financial implications. These proposed actions include a new staff position for outreach, data collection and analysis, and increasing the budget for planting trees and managing woodlands. The detailed financial commitments will be identified when staff report back on the final UFS in

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2021 and will be subject to approval through the normal capital and operating budget process.

Staffing: This report seeks approval to consult on the draft UFS. There are no staffing implications associated with the adoption of this report. The draft UFS includes proposed actions which would, if ultimately approved by Council, have staffing implications. These will be identified when staff report back on the final UFS in 2021 and will be subject to approval through the normal capital and operating budget process.

Legal: N/A

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

### What is an Urban Forest?

The urban forest includes all trees and woodlands on public and private property within the City of Hamilton's Urban Area boundaries. It is a shared resource that benefits the entire community.

### What is an Urban Forest Strategy?

An UFS is a community-developed vision and plan that outlines the necessary steps to protect, enhance, and monitor the trees and forests in the Urban Area of Hamilton over the next 20 years.

The UFS will provide the strategic direction for long-term planning, planting, protection, and maintenance of the urban forest. It will provide a comprehensive list of actions to improve the management of Hamilton's trees and forests so that Hamilton achieves its long-term vision. The UFS will identify the resources required to implement the recommendations and monitor progress. Targets and performance indicators (e.g. canopy cover, species and age distribution, and general public awareness of trees) will be identified to measure whether implementation is successfully meeting the vision.

When the Urban Hamilton Woodland Conservation By-law was approved in August 2014 (PD02229(g)), Council directed staff to prepare a Woodland Protection Strategy for Hamilton. While the Conservation By-law provides the regulatory tools to preserve existing trees in woodlands 0.2 hectares or greater in size within the urban area, it was recognized that other non-regulatory methods were needed to preserve and increase the City's tree cover.

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| <b>UFS Milestones</b> |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| August 2014           | New Urban Woodland Conservation By-law approved by Council. Report PD02229(d) recommended preparing an Urban Forest Strategy.  |
| December 2016         | Council approved a capital budget of \$150,000 for the UFS.  |
| February 2017         | Work plan was approved by Council (Report PD02229(g)).   |
| February 2018         | Consultant team (Bioforest, KBM Resources Group and Dillon Consulting) retained through an RFP process. Background information and data review begins.   |
| May 2018              | First round of public engagement to introduce project and gather background information (online survey, stakeholder workshops, public information centre, meetings with stakeholders). Engagement conducted through to November, 2018. |
| April 2019            | Second round of public engagement begins to review the draft vision, themes and actions (five workshops and various stakeholder meetings, presentation at forum, seniors tree walk).   |
| June 2019             | Information report (PD02229(h)) and presentation to Planning Committee to provide an update on the UFS. Draft vision, themes and actions were presented to Planning Committee in advance of public engagement.                         |

## **POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND LEGISLATED REQUIREMENTS**

### **Provincial Policy Statement (2020):**

The Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) contains the following policies which support tree and forest protection for the values they provide to all:

- Planning authorities should promote green infrastructure to complement infrastructure (Policy 1.6.2);
- Long-term economic prosperity should be supported by minimizing negative impacts from a changing climate and considering the ecological benefits provided by nature (Policy 1.7.1 (k));

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- Planning authorities shall support energy conservation and efficiency, improved air quality, reduced greenhouse gas emissions, and preparing for the impacts of a changing climate through land use and development patterns which promote design and orientation which maximizes efficiency and conservation, and considers the mitigating effects of vegetation and green infrastructure. (Policy 1.8.1(f));
- The diversity and connectivity of natural features in an area, and the long-term ecological function and biodiversity of natural heritage systems, should be maintained, restored, or, where possible, improved, recognizing linkages between and among natural heritage features and areas, surface water features, and ground water features (Policy 2.1.2); and,
- Planning authorities shall consider the potential impacts of climate change that may increase the risk associated with natural hazards (Policy 3.1.3).

### **A Place To Grow Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (2020)**

The following policies in A Place to Grow Growth Plan support forest health in urban areas:

- Proposals for large-scale development proceeding by way of a secondary plan, plan of subdivision, vacant land plan of condominium or site plan will be supported by a stormwater management plan or equivalent, that establishes planning, design, and construction practices to minimize vegetation removal, grading, and soil compaction, sediment erosion, and impervious surfaces (Policy 3.2.7.2(f)); and,
- The water resource systems, Natural Heritage System for the Growth Plan, and Agricultural System for the GGH also play an important role in addressing climate change and building resilience. Greenhouse gas emissions can be offset by natural areas that act as carbon sinks. Municipalities play a crucial role in managing and reducing Ontario's greenhouse gas emissions and supporting adaptation to the changing climate. The Province will work with municipalities to develop approaches to inventory, reduce, and offset greenhouse gas emissions in support of provincial targets as we move towards environmentally sustainable communities (Policy 4.1).

### **Hamilton Climate Change Action Plan:**

In December, 2019, the Corporate Goals and Areas of Focus for Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation was presented to General Issues Committee (Report CMO19008/HSC19073). Under Goal 6, "Protect and Restore the Natural Environment", there were a number of focus areas (including adopting the UFS) which would contribute to increasing carbon sinks.

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**Urban and Rural Hamilton Official Plans:**

The Urban (UHOP) and Rural (RHOP) Hamilton Official Plans contain policies (C.2.11 in UHOP and C.2.10.4 in RHOP) on Tree and Woodland Protection. These policies state that:

“A Woodland Protection Strategy to protect tree cover on new development sites within urban and rural settlement areas and provides technical direction and practices to protect trees and other vegetation during construction shall be prepared to minimize the impacts on trees and woodlands to be retained.”

The UFS implements the Provincial Policy Statement, A Place to Grow Growth Plan, the Hamilton Climate Change Action Plan, and Rural and Urban Hamilton Official Plan policies.

**RELEVANT CONSULTATION**

| <b>City Staff</b>   | <b>Roles</b>   |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning and Economic Development Department (Community Planning, Development Planning, Heritage and Design);</li> <li>• Public Works (Forestry and Horticulture, Parks and Cemeteries Operations, Landscape Architectural Services);</li> <li>• Public Health (Heathy and Safe Communities – Climate Change);</li> <li>• Public Health; and,</li> <li>• Risk Management.</li> </ul>   | <p>Staff Project Team provided guidance to consultant team and reviewed draft reports.</p> <p>Participated in two staff workshops. Information was also available on the project web page.</p> |
| <b>Stakeholders</b>   | <b>Roles</b>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Environmental agencies and non-government organizations;</li> <li>• Business Improvement Associations;</li> <li>• Development industry (Development Industry Liaison Group, planning consultants, landscape architects, arborists);</li> <li>• City advisory committees (e.g. Keep Hamilton Clean and Green Committee, Hamilton Aboriginal Advisory Committee, Clean Air Hamilton); and,</li> <li>• Representatives from youth, seniors, public health, and industry.</li> </ul> | <p>Participated in two workshops, meetings, an online survey and forum. Information was also available on the project web page.</p>  |

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| <b>Public Consultation</b> |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| Public                     | Participated in one Public Information Centre, an online survey, three workshops, one forum and a tree walk. Information was also available on the project web page. |

### **Public Consultation**

The first round of public engagement occurred from May, 2018 to November, 2018. The purpose was to inform the public about the project, gather input on what people value about the urban forest, their vision for the future, and what staff should consider when preparing the UFS. A variety of engagement methods were used, including an online survey, staff and stakeholder workshops, public information centre, stakeholder meetings, presentation, and a forum. The input was used to draft the vision, goals, and themes for the UFS.

From April, 2019 to November, 2019, a second round of public engagement occurred. The purpose was to get input on the draft vision, goals and actions. Workshops were held for staff (1), stakeholders (1), and the public (3). Public workshops were well-received. Also, staff met with stakeholders individually, and participated in a tree walk with seniors and a forum with Environment Hamilton.

### **ANALYSIS AND RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION**

#### What is the Existing Condition of Hamilton’s Urban Forest?

Based on existing data and sample data gathered in 2018, a baseline picture of Hamilton’s urban forest emerged. A summary of the main characteristics of the urban forest has been provided below:

- There are 5.2 million trees in Hamilton’s urban area, with 97 species documented;
- Canopy cover is currently 21.2% based on 2017-2018 data;
- Canopy cover was 22.1% in 2006-2007;
- Over ten years, canopy cover has not significantly decreased or increased;
- Open space areas (54%) have the highest canopy cover; industrial areas have the lowest canopy cover, at 2.3%;
- 67% of the leaf area of the urban forest is native species and 29% is invasive species;

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- The average diameter at breast height (dbh) of all trees is 12.3 cm; mature trees are not well-represented;
- There are an estimated 168,610 street trees, which have a replacement value of \$500 million;
- Street trees have an average dbh of 25.1 cm; and,
- Hamilton’s urban forest provides \$8.2 million in ecosystem services annually, including:
  - Avoided stormwater runoff - \$1.9 million annually; and,
  - Energy savings - \$3.63 million annually.

Highlights from Public and Staff Engagement

The responses received during workshops and events are documented in Appendix “E” of the draft Technical Report (Appendix “C” to Report PED20173). In reviewing feedback, recurring themes emerged, which are presented below:

- When asked about what they value about the urban forest, respondents noted beauty, air and water quality improvement, climate change mitigation, providing wildlife habitat/biodiversity, and mental and physical health benefits.
- Residents felt that better private tree protection, planting more trees, better protection and compensation for trees on development sites, planting more native species, and education and awareness programs were the most important actions to enhance the urban forest.
- Many people noted that the role of the urban forest for climate change mitigation and green infrastructure should be more prominent in the UFS report.
- “Just do it”. Many respondents wanted the City to begin immediate implementation of the actions in the UFS due to the climate change emergency. Actions that recommended more study and planning did not receive the same degree of support.
- Residents and stakeholders were concerned about the uneven distribution of canopy cover across the City. They felt that the benefits of the urban forest should be equally available to all.
- Education and awareness were considered important. Many people wanted the City to develop on-line resources and data; they also wanted to contribute their own data (“citizen science”). They advised that negative attitudes towards trees (e.g. root damage, nuisance) present a challenge to preserving and planting on private property.
- Better protection of private trees, especially during development, was considered very important. Many people felt a private tree by-law to regulate individual trees, as well as incentives to protect trees, was essential. They also wanted better implementation of tree protection measures during development and better compensation when trees are removed.
- Residents indicated that planting native species was important, and that invasive plants were a growing problem that needed to be immediately addressed.



- The following priority areas for planting were identified:
  - industrial areas, areas with low canopy cover;
  - redeveloping areas;
  - storm water management structures;
  - areas with good soil and adequate space;
  - along highways; and,
  - adjacent to natural areas.
- Residents advised the City to embrace new technologies such as silva cells, which provide a minimum soil volume to ensure room to grow. This is particularly important in downtown and commercial areas, where there is limited space and soil volume to support medium to large-canopy trees.
- Many non-profit groups in Hamilton advised of their desire to increase partnerships with the City, to gather data, plant and maintain trees, increase awareness, and participate in invasive plant control.

The input gathered was used to refine the vision, goals, and actions for the draft UFS report, which is attached as Appendix “A” and the draft UFS Technical report, Appendix “C” to Report PED20173.

#### Draft Urban Forest Strategy and Implementation

The UFS report is a high-level, comprehensive document which summarizes the necessary actions for a healthy urban forest. Two reports have been prepared: the Hamilton Urban Forest Strategy (UFS report) and a Technical Report.

The reports include:

- A vision for the desired future state of the urban forest: Hamilton’s urban forest is resilient, contributes to the well-being of all neighbourhoods and is valued as a shared asset;
- A baseline assessment of the existing urban forest and city policies and a monitoring approach to track progress;
- A canopy cover target of 30% (the existing canopy cover is 21.2%);
- A description of the current state of Hamilton’s urban forest;
- Identification of challenges and opportunities; and,
- Actions to implement the UFS vision, including programs, policies and implementation tools to better manage tree planting, maintenance and protection.

The Technical Report provides more detailed information, including the methods and results of data collection, public engagement, comparison of Hamilton to five other municipalities’ urban forest programs, and a baseline assessment of Hamilton’s urban forest using the “Sustainable Urban Forest Guide: A Step-by-Step Approach” (2016), which will be used to monitor our progress in implementing the UFS.

The draft UFS report identifies 25 actions for a sustainable urban forest, grouped into five different themes. The themes are: inspire, act, protect, grow, and adapt. The draft actions include education and awareness, partnerships and collaboration, data collection, analysis and management, improvements to policies, by-laws and processes, and monitoring progress. Short, medium, and long-term actions have been identified, and will involve staff from across the City including Forestry and Horticulture, Development Planning, Heritage and Design, Parks Planning and Operations, and Transportation Planning. Some of the actions are simple and low-cost, while others will require additional capital funds, operating funds and staff (refer to Appendix “B”).

These actions represent a list of projects and tasks that will need to be completed to implement the UFS in the coming years. When the final UFS reports are presented to Planning Committee in 2021, preliminary budget and staff requirements will be outlined.

### **Next Steps**

Public consultation will be initiated in Q1 2021. The consultation strategy will focus on awareness, education, and engaging the public and stakeholders, with a report back to Council in 2021. Recognizing that physical distancing and limitations of the number of people permitted for indoor group gatherings for organized public events will likely continue for some time, traditional in-person public engagement meetings and events are no longer feasible.

As a result of COVID, the consultation strategy will rely on virtual consultation, engagement activities through web-based engagement and surveying platforms, media releases, print mail, social media or other forms of on-line engagement, ensuring that those that may have technological limitations can participate.

The final report, including the input collected from the public and stakeholder engagement, and any associated budget and staffing implications, will be presented to Planning Committee in 2021.

### **ALTERNATIVES FOR CONSIDERATION**

Council could direct staff not to proceed with the public consultation prior to finalizing the Urban Forest Strategy and either defer consideration of the matter or, alternatively, adopt the UFS. These options are not recommended because it will not allow the public, stakeholders and staff the opportunity to provide input into the final strategy.

### **ALIGNMENT TO THE 2016 – 2025 STRATEGIC PLAN**

#### **Community Engagement & Participation**

*Hamilton* has an open, transparent and accessible approach to City government that engages with and empowers all citizens to be involved in their community.

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**Healthy and Safe Communities**

*Hamilton is a safe and supportive city where people are active, healthy, and have a high quality of life.*

**Clean and Green**

*Hamilton is environmentally sustainable with a healthy balance of natural and urban spaces.*

**APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED**

Appendix “A” – Draft City of Hamilton Urban Forest Strategy

Appendix “B” – Urban Forest Strategy Draft Themes and Actions

Appendix “C” – Draft City of Hamilton Urban Forest Strategy Technical Report

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