

**Pilon, Janet**

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**Subject:** Urban Forest Strategy Final Staff Report Comments and RecommendationsFrom: **Giuliana Casimirri** <[director@greenventure.ca](mailto:director@greenventure.ca)>

Date: Wed, Jun 14, 2023 at 1:55 PM

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Re: Hamilton Urban Forest Strategy Final Report (PED20173(a))

Dear Mayor and Councillors,

I am writing this letter on behalf of Green Venture regarding the Hamilton Urban Forest Strategy Final Report. Green Venture is a community-based, non-profit organization committed to helping make Hamilton a climate champion.

Increasing our urban forest coverage with community restoration plantings and improving approaches to street tree, park, and private property tree planting and stewardship is one of our key targets to achieve our strategic goal of reducing climate vulnerability and impacts on our community.

Green Venture has been a key partner supporting and implementing urban forest tree planting and stewardship activities in Hamilton. Since 2020, Green Venture has planted over 1900 trees in Hamilton, engaged over 500 community members in hands-on urban forest action and inventoried 1594 trees at City Housing Hamilton properties. These tree plantings, stewardship events and inventory projects have been incredibly successful working with a number of local elementary and secondary schools, and community partners like City Housing Hamilton, Trees for Hamilton, Mohawk College, Network for Nature (formerly CanPlant), Green Communities Canada, Vineland Research and Innovation Centre, and several businesses and corporate groups.

Our team has reviewed the Urban Forest Strategy Final Staff Report and applaud the progress to date and tangible action items in the report. We are offering several suggestions based on our knowledge of urban forest policy, tree planting best practices, and our experience with community engagement.

To reach the City's target of 40% tree canopy coverage for the urban area by 2050, our team recommends the following quick win actions be implemented immediately:

1. The City of Hamilton should take the lead on collaborative external funding applications to support urban forestry activities, such as the 2 Billion Trees Program, which helps support new tree planting projects.
2. Develop a GIS layer of pre-approved community planting locations which local organizations or community groups can access to identify pre-approved sites to host their community tree planting events. The current system of having organizations submit their potential planting locations often requires 1 year or more for approval and this impedes community groups planting.
3. Monitor & track outcomes of past community planting sites. The City currently has no record or inventory of previous community planting locations. By monitoring and tracking past community plantings, the City can have data on the survivability and growth of these trees which can also help them determine if different planting methods are needed (i.e. implementing the MiniForest Reforestation method of planting instead of a traditional tree planting practice).

4. Fund watering at all tree planting sites. After trees are planted, they don't receive sufficient water to help with the transplant shock and would need to rely on the rain to receive water. With our unpredictable climate, we can go weeks without rain in the forecast giving our newly-planted trees further stress. Supporting volunteers to help with watering or the City ensuring all these sites are watered by contractors can help reduce the stress on trees and ensure they thrive.
5. Identify locations and develop planting plans to plant & water trees on City Housing Hamilton (CHH) or school board properties. Our Tree Equity project report ([here](#)) demonstrated that many trees on CHH properties are facing health and maintenance challenges, very low diversity among the tree species present, and many nonnative species on CHH properties. Furthermore, there is a lack of CHH resources available for trees, lack of overall strategic planning, and lack of resident engagement in tree care. CHH properties have plenty of room for trees but do not have the budget to plant or care for them afterwards. CHH manages over 1,200 properties, including apartments, townhomes, semi-detached and detached dwellings, housing over 13,000 tenants therefore there is a big opportunity and potential for impact from supporting tree planting at CHH properties. HWDSB and HWCDSB properties are also under-explored areas where tree planting and aftercare conducted by the City of Hamilton, could increase canopy cover and tree benefits in urban core areas.
6. Develop urban woodlot stewardship & restoration plans. Although the UFSP mentions forest health monitoring and implementing an invasive alien species strategy plan, it does not mention the resources that are required to undertake woodland stewardship to improve forest health. Since 2021, Green Venture has hosted stewardship events with volunteers from the local community at previous tree planting sites and at local woodlots to remove invasive species, assess tree conditions, and mulch as needed.
7. Free tree giveaways are a buckshot approach to enhancing our urban forest cover on private land. There is no way to ensure that the 'right tree' is planted in the 'right location' and no way to monitor the trees afterwards. Without proper education and follow-up, the City has no way of knowing the trees that are handed out end up in the ground and survive the transplant. Therefore, increasing the giveaway from 3000 to 5000 trees without any data that supports the sustainability of the project is not recommended. To add, the giveaway strategy is not inclusive; in previous years only residents with cars could access the trees since the saplings were handed out in suburban areas with long drive-in line ups. Instead we suggest partnering with local groups, neighbourhood planning teams and prioritizing equitable access to trees with good education provided to recipients. Other municipalities are supporting subsidized backyard tree planting programs, which can track tree survival, provide free arborist advice and education to residents, and ensure 'right tree, right location'.

Sincerely, Guiliana Casimirri

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Executive Director

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