

From: Office of the Mayor <Officeofthe.Mayor@hamilton.ca>
Sent: February 26, 2024 3:58 PM
To: clerk@hamilton.ca
Subject: FW: Current Parks policy limiting tree plantings

From: Lee Fairbanks
Sent: January 16, 2024 1:09 PM
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Subject: Current Parks policy limiting tree plantings

Dear Councillors

Key reading: [How cities can achieve their forestry goals.](#)

Based on discussions I've had with Parks, Forestry, Landscape Services and Public Works personnel, it has become obvious to me that the Parks Department's policy regarding tree planting is not aligned with Council's approval of the City's Urban Forest Strategy. We will not significantly increase our city's urban canopy unless Council forces a change in Parks policy. The current policy is in direct opposition to the City's Climate Change mandate.

The current Parks policy essentially restricts the planting of trees to the periphery of our parks and along walkways. There are massive under-utilized green spaces throughout the city where trees are not permitted because Parks prefers open space. You can see the result of this in almost every park in Hamilton. I will include a few photos below as examples.

In addition, their extended planning process putting trees last causes a delay of 5-10 years to get trees planted, because Parks insists on completing playgrounds and playing fields first. In my discussions with staff, I was told that ***"trees are the last thing we would put in a park"***.

Council must change this policy. In the words of the Parks Dept: ***"Park policy has not changed"*** to reflect the Climate Lens and Climate Change Initiatives.

My recommendation is that Forestry be given priority in management of our parks. The Parks Dept. should continue to plan, build and maintain playgrounds and playing fields. They have done a great job there. The rest of the park should be given to Forestry, with the mandate to plant as many trees as possible while providing access and enjoyment for all.

In addition, this division of land should take place immediately so that trees can be planted right away. It should not wait for the development of the play areas. Tree planting is much simpler to plan and complete than playgrounds and playing fields.

And finally, Forestry must be given clear instructions going forward. Currently the prevailing attitude is that Council can pass any motions they like, but staff make the decisions as to whether these motions are acted on. This does not reflect the mandate given by voters to Council.

The 3,500 acres of parks are essentially an urban Greenbelt, and we know how much Hamiltonians value the Greenbelt and nature, but our Parks department prefers playgrounds, playing fields and open space which they can mow. They disguise this policy by saying that trees will “inhibit our ability to add features later.”

This suggests that one day our parks will be filled with recreational centres, dirt bike tracks and swimming pools, which is no one’s plan. Every resident survey about City planning prioritizes trees.

I discovered the shortfalls of the current policy in 2021-23 while working as a Committee member with local residents to plan the development of a new part of Vincent Massey Park in Ward 7. After a series of public meetings with staff from Parks, Landscape Services, Forestry and Councillor Pauls, including several emails with preliminary designs and a schedule to begin, we agreed on a plan to create a passive walking park with as many trees as possible.

However when planting was to begin in Spring 2023, Parks cancelled the whole thing and said it was all in error and they would revisit the concept in 2025, starting with new public meetings. When Parks realized we were going to plant several hundred trees in this space, they reneged on everything. What could have been done in 2-3 years is now in a 5-10 year loop with the intent to duplicate the “open space” concept favoured by Parks Dept.

As you know, planting more trees is an essential step in mitigating climate change. It also provides well-researched benefits in mental health. [Miyawaki plantings](#) mature in 20 years, rather than the 100 or more currently achieved in traditional (i.e. widely spaced) municipal plantings. The City has planted two small Miyawaki forests in remote locations, but there is little or no support from staff for this to expand.

Here is Forestry's statement: "At this time, there isn't a whole lot of evidence in saying that these are a good option for the future, but we're willing to try them just in case they turn out to be."

In reality, as you will see in the attached article, Miyakawi forests have a 40-year history and Miyakawi himself has planted 40 million trees in 15 countries.

To double the Urban Canopy from 20 to 40% will require an additional 5,000,000 trees. City could start by planting 500,000 new trees in the 3,500 acres of our parks, as well as other city-owned properties. This will only happen if Council makes changes to policy and gives specific instructions that can't be ignored by staff.





Lee Fairbanks