



Hamilton

INFORMATION REPORT

TO:	Chair and Members Public Works Committee
COMMITTEE DATE:	April 2, 2024
SUBJECT/REPORT NO:	Street Tree Planting Program Improvements (PW24022) (City Wide)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
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SUBMITTED BY:	Cynthia Graham Director, Environmental Services Public Works Department
SIGNATURE:	

COUNCIL DIRECTION

In June 2023, Council approved Report PED20173(a), Hamilton Urban Forest Strategy Final Report, which details the conditions of the urban forest and recommends actions to inspire, act, protect, grow, and adapt over the next two decades. The Urban Forest Strategy intends to ensure that Hamilton’s urban forest provides benefits to both the environment and the community.

Included in the recommended actions were new goals for tree planting and urban tree canopy coverage. The annual tree planting goal for the entirety of the City of Hamilton was set at 50,000 trees, with the City’s planting commitment increasing from 12,000 to 20,000.

Increasing tree planting will play a significant role in growing Hamilton’s urban area tree canopy coverage, as defined in the Urban Hamilton Official Plan, to 40% by the year 2050. The estimated canopy coverage in the urban area was reported in Appendix “E” to Report PED20173(a) as 17.8 – 20%. The assessment was based on Laser Imaging Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) data gathered in 2022 and provided to the City by the Provincial and Federal governments. The data was collected too early in the year for an accurate assessment of canopy coverage because it was captured at a time when Hamilton’s trees were not in full leaf, and therefore, the actual percentage is expected to be higher than reported. Through recommendation (ii) of Report PED20173(a), the purchase of Laser Imaging Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) data showing trees in full

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leaf to ensure an accurate percentage is reported in 2025, was approved through the 2024 budget process.

INFORMATION

Report PW24022 provides information on how staff have begun to strategically meet the required targets by increasing tree planting activities beginning in the 2024 planting season.

Forestry and Horticulture almost exclusively offer the City of Hamilton’s tree planting programs, except for some capital projects which involve tree planting.

Forestry and Horticulture tree planting initiatives include:

- Free Tree Giveaways – saplings provided for free to residents of Hamilton to plant on their privately owned land.
- Street Tree Planting Program – trees planted by City contractors and staff by request from residents within the public right-of-way adjacent to their property.
- Park and Cemetery Tree Planting – trees planted by City contractors and staff within City parks and cemeteries.
- Subdivision Tree Planting – trees planted by City contractors within new subdivisions.
- Community Tree Planting – saplings planted by community volunteers within City parks and the public right-of-way in partnership with Forestry and Horticulture.
- Naturalization Plantings – saplings and larger trees planted by City contractors and staff within City parks and cemeteries and the public right-of-way.

The above programs are funded through the capital budget and revenues generated through public tree removal permits. In addition to these programs, tree planting is also supported through councillor motions funded through ward-specific discretionary funds.

To meet the Urban Forest Strategy tree planting target, staff have increased goals for 2024 as outlined in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Program/Initiative	2023 Goal	2024 Goal
Community Tree Planting	2925	4700
Naturalization Plantings	2800	3800
Free Tree Giveaways	2000	5000
Street Tree Planting Program	4200	6500

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Staff deliberately prioritized the planting program to avoid the requirement of an increase to the capital budget for 2024 and 2025. This was made feasible by issuing strategic tenders which included a large number of younger trees, which require less aftercare to establish successfully, and costs less to purchase and install. In addition to the cost savings, young trees were selected based on their ability to adapt quickly to the stress caused by planting, and thus in many circumstances will grow faster than when a larger tree is planted.

Tree planting programs are partially funded through revenues generated by public tree removal permits, in addition to the block funding of capital project Tree Planting Program 4450053001. Should revenues not be sufficient to fund the increased tree planting targets in 2026 and beyond, an increase to the capital Tree Planting Program 4450053001 may be requested through the capital budget process.

Using Geographic Information Systems (GIS), staff completed an analysis to identify open space within the public right-of-way, parks, and cemeteries that could be suitable for tree planting. The analysis was initiated due to a deficit in requests received for trees through the Street Tree Planting program. Staff have historically been responsible for finding locations to plant new trees, a process that requires driving the city. The Geographic Information Systems (GIS) analysis increases efficiency by providing staff with available locations that they can visit to assess the suitability for tree planting.

The annual street tree planting request deficit is detailed in Table 2 below. The significant increase to the goals in 2020 and 2021 was due to the need to replace ash trees through the Emerald Ash Borer Management Plan.

Table 2

Planting Season	Goal	Requests Received	Deficit
2020	6691	927	5764
2021	7668	1502	6166
2022	4780	1283	3497
2023	4200	900	3300

Although all locations need to be verified with site visits, the analysis identified an estimated 56,081 potential locations within the right-of-way that could be suitable for a new tree to be planted.

Historically, street trees have only been planned in locations adjacent to residential properties when an existing street tree was removed and a replacement tree was possible, or when a request was received through the Street Tree Planting Program. In these cases, staff review the locations in person, and communicate to the adjacent property owner(s) by knocking on the door and leaving a postcard to advise the property owner:

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- Whether the location was suitable for planting;
- If suitable, the number, location, and species planned;
- Information about how to care for the new tree(s); and
- Provide details on how to connect with staff should they have any questions.

The City of Hamilton Street Tree Planting Policy explains that tree planting may be initiated by property owner request or by staff and will comply with the Design and Layout requirements. It does not provide residents with the ability to deny a tree from being installed if the requirements within the policy have been met. However, historically denials were accepted, and trees were not planted if a property owner provided any reason why they did not want a street tree planted in the right-of-way adjacent to their property.

The only exception to this process is when trees are planted in new subdivisions; one tree is planted in front of every lot, and three trees are planted on corner lots. This is standard practice, and the only exceptions are due to infrastructure that would obstruct a tree, such as a streetlight or traffic sign. Property owners are not given the option to deny a tree from being planted within the right-of-way.

This inconsistency provides an opportunity to clean-up a process and ensure all areas of the City are contributing to and benefitting from the urban tree canopy.

To provide perspective, the annual tree planting requests denied by the adjacent property owner are detailed in Table 3 below. The number of street trees planted in new subdivisions has been excluded from the totals. The estimation for 2024 is noted in brackets, the values are based on the projected number of trees planted and the mean annual number of denied tree planting proposals.

Table 3

Planting Season	Number of Street Trees Planted	Number of Street Tree Plantings Denied	Percentage of Denied Street Trees
2020	2100	260	12.4%
2021	2100	348	16.6%
2022	3181	339	10.7%
2023	4427	135	3.1%
2024	(6500)*	(271)*	(4.2%)*
5-Year Total	18308	1353	9.4%

Denials are received from both the direct and adjacent property owners. Staff have not tracked the reasons for denials, but noted common reasons are related to the following:

- Had a mature tree and do not want a new one;

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- Concerns related to leaf and yard clean up;
- Concerns associated with potential root impacts; and
- Concern for impacts to gardens and/or grass.

Current practice, as summarized in the above table, has resulted in wasted resources to visit, plan, and subsequently cancel work orders; and more importantly, reduced the City’s efforts to increase the number of street trees in the right-of-way.

To reduce waste, align with the process for subdivisions, and meet new tree planting goals, staff have improved the process related to planting street trees to maximize the use of the plantable spaces analysis by strategically planning to plant in all available locations within the right-of-way. Additionally, residents will no longer be able to deny the planting of street trees in the right-of-way. Beginning in Spring of 2024, staff will prioritize areas with fewer street trees and lower tree canopy coverage. Table 4 details urban tree canopy cover for each ward in 2022, as outlined in Appendix “E” to Report PED20173(a).

Although the tree canopy target cannot be met by planting exclusively on City-owned lands, planting in the right-of-way and increasing the tree canopy on City-owned lands that are below the target of 40%, presents a valuable opportunity to maximize opportunities for increasing tree canopy coverage.

Table 4

Canopy Coverage by Land Type			
Ward	Right of Way	Private Land	City-Owned Land
1	26.7%	32.1%	45.4%
2	18.9%	16.6%	19.9%
3	16.4%	10.5%	43.4%
4	14.8%	10.8%	39.8%
5	13.9%	16.7%	41.0%
6	13.9%	12.8%	24.3%
7	14.5%	14.6%	10.7%
8	15.7%	16.9%	24.5%
9	12.9%	11.4%	19.5%
10	11.4%	12.8%	27.8%
11	8.7%	11.0%	13.0%
12	17.4%	24.5%	34.7%
13	28.3%	44.6%	46.7%

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14	17.6%	24.8%	22.4%
15	10.2%	17.5%	25.5%

As staff work through completing an equity study in 2024, the data gathered will be integrated into decisions where strategic tree planting needs to be prioritized.

To ensure that customer service levels are maintained, staff are developing a communication strategy to inform property owners about the Urban Forest Strategy. Information will be provided with advance notice that a tree will be planted in the right-of-way adjacent to all residential properties. Aftercare for newly planted trees will not change: wood chip mulch will be installed, and the tree will be watered for two seasons. Property owners who would like to help by watering the new tree may opt out of the watering service and will be provided with information on best practices for watering.

In addition to improving the existing processes for street tree planting, the plantable spaces analysis will be used to define planting areas outside of the areas Forestry and Horticulture currently manages. Areas will include all City-owned lands, such as stormwater management ponds, landfills, golf courses, and other City facilities. The results of the analysis will be shared upon completion through a future update.

To date, Forestry has not provided planting services in these locations, except upon request. However, many of these areas provide opportunities for enhancing the urban tree canopy, and if these opportunities are not leveraged, it will limit the success of the goal to increase the tree canopy to 40% by the year 2050 as defined in the Urban Hamilton Official Plan. Staff have already begun to engage with the asset owners to discuss potential future tree planting activities.

Report PW24022, provides information intending to gain further support in reaching the goals of the Urban Forest Strategy, in addition to the ongoing support for Forestry's existing programs.

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

N/A