



Staff Report for Council Meeting

Date of Meeting: June 10, 2020

Report Number: SRCS.20.19

Department: Community Services
Division: Public Works Operation

Subject: **SRCS.20.19 - Richmond Hill Urban Forest Management Plan**

Purpose:

To present Richmond Hill's Urban Forest Management Plan for Council's consideration.

Recommendation(s):

- a) That the Urban Forest Management Plan be approved.
- b) That SRCS.20.19 be received for information.

Contact Person:

Grant Taylor, Director of Public Works Operations
Ann Marie Farrugia, Manager of Natural Environment
Jeff Stewart, Manager of Park Operations

Report Approval:

Submitted by: Darlene Joslin, Commissioner of Community Services (Acting)

Approved by: Mary-Anne Dempster, Interim City Manager

All reports are electronically reviewed and/or approved by the Division Director, Treasurer (as required), City Solicitor (as required), Commissioner and City Manager. Details of the reports approval are attached.

Page 2

Background:

Trees and woodlands throughout our community are an essential component of our urban infrastructure contributing to a high quality of life in Richmond Hill. All trees and woodlands, whether on public or private land, represent the **urban forest**. Collectively they help make our community healthy and resilient in countless ways including cleaning the air and water, reducing flood risk, conserving energy, counteracting urban heat stress, increasing property values, and building stronger and healthier communities. Trees and woodlands significantly contribute to our “green infrastructure” providing many of the same services that traditional built (or “grey”) infrastructure provide, however typically less intrusively and at a lower cost. Trees are also the only municipal asset that increase in value and provide greater service to the community as they age.

Richmond Hill has a strong foundation of urban forest management

Richmond Hill’s Urban Forest Management Plan was developed with the recognition that Richmond Hill has a strong foundation of urban forest management. Many approaches, policies and practices necessary to reach desired outcomes have already been put into place. The City has also forged valuable partnerships with the community, businesses, agencies, non-profit organizations, and other levels of government. Some of these foundational practices include:

- A Council approved block pruning and inspection program which helps to ensure the long-term health and performance of City trees
- The award-winning Community Stewardship Program and the Healthy Yards Program, which leverage community effort and partner expertise/funding to grow and maintain trees on public and private lands
- Several by-laws that protect large and/or historically significant trees that offer a benefit to the broader community
- The Emerald Ash Borer Management Program, which aims to minimize impact to urban trees caused by the emerald ash borer and mitigate risk to the community
- The incorporation of urban trees and woodlands into corporate asset management planning which allows the City to make fiscally responsible decisions about City trees

What will an urban forest management plan do?

The Urban Forest Management Plan builds on our existing processes and defines an overarching vision and comprehensive approach for managing our urban forest. It assists the City in prioritizing our efforts and identifies opportunities for improvement through such things as streamlining workflows, leveraging technology and innovation and optimizing current people, resources and effort. Recognizing that management of the urban forest is a shared responsibility by all property owners (the City owns approximately 20% of Richmond Hill’s tree cover; the majority of the remaining is owned by private owners, the Conservation Authority and the province), the Plan also identifies

Page 3

where we can establish and grow partnerships and build community engagement so that we can collectively meet the City's overall urban forest objectives.

Over the next two decades, the City will experience unprecedented growth and urbanization; at the same time, we are forecasted to experience more extreme weather and changes in climate. It is for this reason that a comprehensive Urban Forest Management Plan will prepare us and strengthen our ability to manage and maintain a healthy urban forest that our community can benefit from over the long-term.

Developing the Urban Forest Management Plan, as identified in the City's Environment Strategy (2014), ensures we are in compliance with broader urban forest policies outlined in the City's Strategic Plan (2009) and the Official Plan (2010). The Plan also outlines how the City will implement recommendations from York Region's Urban Forest Management Plan (2016) as well as policies from York Region's Official Plan and Municipal Act (2001).

Richmond Hill's plan

Richmond Hill's urban forest management plan is founded on a vision for 2040:

“Richmond Hill and its urban forest grow and thrive together, each contributing to the health and vitality of the other.”

This vision acknowledges the services that trees provide to Richmond Hill and the importance of public and private stewardship of our trees as the City continues to grow. The plan sets out four major goals to achieve this vision:

- **Build** knowledge to make wise decisions
- **Plan** and protect to preserve canopy cover
- **Strengthen** the urban forest to increase resilience
- **Grow** partnerships to strengthen stewardship

These goals, which are supported by objectives and 41 actions (detailed in Appendix 1 – Richmond Hill's Urban Forest Management Plan), respond to the changes the City will face over the next two decades. Results and key performance indicators, such as maintenance of the City's overall canopy cover and improved distribution, will be monitored and measured over time allowing the City to periodically adjust its actions and approaches as necessary.

Financial/Staffing/Other Implications:

The Plan identifies how Richmond Hill can strengthen its approach for managing the urban forest by prioritizing efforts and identifying opportunities where we can optimize practices and maximize current resources.

Overall, 75% of the actions identified in the plan will be implemented using existing funding and people. The remaining 25% of actions will be completed by leveraging

Page 4

partnerships and grants, or by using dedicated reserve funds (e.g. Terrestrial Natural Area Reserve Fund) requested through the annual budget process.

Relationship to the Strategic Plan:

Richmond Hill's Urban Forest Management Plan will assist the City in managing resources wisely. It outlines an action plan that aligns existing practices, finds efficiencies in our business processes, and guides the focus of our investments and effort in areas where we can maximize benefits and services to the community.

The Urban Forest Management Plan will help the City build a more vibrant Richmond Hill. It will guide how the City protects and incorporate trees into the urban fabric, which is integral in creating healthy and attractive communities that provide residents with a sense of identity and place.

Conclusion:

Trees provide valuable services to our community that in most cases are more cost-effective compared to traditional built infrastructure. They clean the air and water, reduce flood risk, conserve energy, counteract urban heat stress, increase property values, and build stronger and healthier communities. Richmond Hill's Urban Forest Management Plan is vital to protect and maintain the level of service our urban forest provides and will ensure we are prepared as the City grows and changes over the coming decades. A comprehensive plan that provides an overall approach will strengthen the City and ensure we are effectively managing our trees and maximizing our investments. The plan sets out an over-arching 20-year vision for the City, supported by four goals and 41 actions that will help us maintain a healthy and vibrant urban forest for our community.

Attachments:

The following attached documents may include scanned images of appendixes, maps and photographs. If you require an alternative format please call the contact person listed in this document.

- Attachment 1 - Richmond Hill Urban Forest Management Plan

Page 5

Report Approval Details

Document Title:	SRCS.20.15 Urban Forest Managment Plan .docx
Attachments:	- Attachment 1 - Urban Forest Management Plan.pdf
Final Approval Date:	May 19, 2020

This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:

Grant Taylor - May 15, 2020 - 12:53 PM

Darlene Joslin - May 18, 2020 - 1:30 PM

MaryAnne Dempster - May 19, 2020 - 10:52 AM