



REPORT

TO: Mayor Bonnette and Members of Council

FROM: Jennifer Spence, Climate Change Outreach Coordinator

DATE: December 16, 2021

REPORT NO.: ADMIN-2022-0003

SUBJECT: Privately-Owned Tree Management Strategy

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT Report No. ADMIN-2022-0003, dated December 16, 2021, regarding the Privately-Owned Tree Management Strategy, be received

AND FURTHER THAT the Privately-Owned Tree Management Strategy as appended to this report, be approved;

AND FURTHER THAT Council direct staff to proceed with implementation of the education and incentive programs as recommended in the Strategy document, subject to on-going affordability and sustainability as outlined in the Town's Long Range Financial Plan;

AND FURTHER THAT Council direct staff to consider establishing a Town Forestry Program to support the Strategy implementation and as part of a town-wide tree canopy management program, subject to on-going affordability and sustainability as outlined in the Town's Long Range Financial Plan;

AND FURTHER THAT Council direct staff to evaluate the Strategy implementation and report back to Council with a status update in 2022;

AND FURTHER THAT all programs associated with the Privately-Owned Tree Management Strategy, be reviewed and considered each year at Budget Committee for corporate prioritization and on-going affordability within the constraints of the Town's Long Range Financial Plan.

KEY POINTS:

The following are key points for consideration with respect to this report:

- There are four components of the Privately-Owned Tree Management Strategy (Strategy) as appended to this report:
 - The Strategy document
 - Appendix A – Explore Background Report
 - Appendix B - Engage Background Report
 - Appendix C – example of a private tree bylaw framework.
- Current legislation, regulations and policies have influenced and provided direction in developing the Strategy
- Mapping developed through this Strategy has established a baseline of the tree canopy cover in Halton Hills
- Extensive community and council engagement throughout the development of the Strategy has provided an understanding of community values and needs, ideas, to develop a made-in-Halton Hills strategy to managing trees on privately-owned land
- The resources and administrative implications associated with preferred Privately-Owned Tree Canopy Management Tools are identified in the Strategy.
- The Strategy will be implemented with support from the Town's Tree Canopy Management Program and its subcommittee

BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION:

Town Council has a long-standing commitment to supporting a healthy environment in Halton Hills. In the current Town of Halton Hills Strategic Plan, one of the key priorities remains the commitment to climate change and the environment.

In 2019, in response to provincial legislation, Town Council adopted a Tree Canopy and Natural Vegetation Policy, through Council Report PLS-2019-0008. This policy included developing a strategy to manage privately-owned trees to support preserving, protecting, and enhancing the tree canopy of Halton Hills. In that same year Town Council declared a climate emergency and committed to the goal of becoming a net-zero community by 2030.

The Privately-Owned Tree Management Strategy directly contributes to the implementation of climate change and asset management initiatives. This includes the town-wide Tree Canopy Management Program that was provided at the Town Council meeting on Nov 15, 2021, through MEM- ADMIN-0017. The Strategy will complement the Town's work on preserving, protecting, and enhancing the tree canopy of Halton Hills.

Tree canopies of all shapes and sizes in various communities are constantly under a variety of threats throughout the year and Halton Hills is no different. Examples of threats include:

- Impacts of climate change that increases environmental stress on trees including precipitation, temperature, and intensity of weather events
- Invasive plant species increase competition and reduce biodiversity
- Invasive pests, such as Emerald Ash Borer and Lymantria dispar dispar (LDD) Moth, that weaken and potentially cause large scale loss of trees
- Increase in development density and infrastructure requirements reducing growing space for trees

There are many benefits of trees and a healthy tree canopy in a community. In addition to the well-being benefits for humans and animals, trees play a key role in addressing climate change. A few examples include:

- Cleaning the air that we breathe, providing shade to cool urban areas, helping us adapt to rising temperatures and increased heat waves
- Absorbing and storing carbon dioxide
- Contributing to stormwater management by reducing runoff, helping adapt to increased rainfall and heavy rain events, and preventing flooding and soil erosion

The development of the Strategy builds upon the positive actions that the Town is already taking on Town-owned property regarding trees such as planning, planting, maintaining, and removing trees when necessary due to risk and death. The Strategy is simply an overall tree management tool derived from the influences of applicable legislation that shape the range of the Strategy's practical actions to protect, maintain and enhance the Town's natural asset of trees and the overall tree canopy for residents of Halton Hills.

Over the past two years the development of the Privately-Owned Tree Management Strategy has proceeded through the project workplan. The primary areas that have influenced the development of the Strategy are attached to this report as Background Reports: Appendix A – Explore, Appendix B – Engage, and Appendix C – Draft of a Private Tree Bylaw Framework.

While developing the Strategy, LIDAR mapping was used to determine a baseline of the tree canopy cover in Halton Hills. This advanced mapping tool has led to the results of Halton Hills' tree canopy cover as follows:

- 83% on privately-owned land
- 12% on other agencies publicly owned land
- 5% on Town-owned land

The above statistics show that most of the trees in Halton Hills are on private property therefore owners of these lands have a key role in contributing to the Town's efforts in preserving, protecting, and enhancing the tree canopy in Halton Hills. The established baseline of the tree canopy will guide the Town's efforts in a collective direction of implementing the Strategy with the community.

A collaborated approach between Town staff efforts and residents is necessary for our community to take actions on preserving, protecting, and enhancing the tree canopy of Halton Hills through the Strategy. The Strategy outlines a clear path using three management tools: Education, Incentive, and Regulation. Implementation of the Strategy will begin in 2022 with the Education and Incentive management tools, while the Regulation tool of a by-law will be considered after further consultation and consideration.

The Strategy identifies a range of options, estimated costs and potential partnerships for the Town to consider on maintaining a healthy tree canopy in Halton Hills. These options will assist the Town in making decisions on determining which Education and Incentive tree management tools to implement depending on the Town's financial and staff resources. The range of low to high-cost initiatives include:

- an educational campaign on the benefits of trees,
- hosting a second annual tree sale at the Robert Austin Operations Centre,
- offering tree discount coupons for residents to purchase a tree through a local grower,
- partnering with local agencies, and
- developing a tree nursery and educational centre.

A detailed list of the management tools recommended initiatives can be found in the attached Strategy; however a short summary of the initiatives is listed below.

Education:

- Develop an educational campaign on the importance of trees and natural assets
- Develop a Best Management Practices Tool
- Develop performance standards based relating to trees by considering the tree maintenance life cycle of planning, planting, and caring for trees
- Develop workshops, and meet with local tree professionals
- Increase knowledge sharing of trees based on the tree type and size, calculating ecosystem benefits including dollar value and ability to sequester carbon emissions

Incentive:

- Consider a second annual discounted tree sales or offer a discount coupon with a local grower to encourage tree planting
- Consider a Town subsidy to plant large trees on private land
- Consider offering potential turnkey consultation/planting services

Regulation:

- To review and modify current procedures associated with development approval and permitting processes and create a best management practices document that establishes how trees are best managed in Halton Hills

- To use the 2013 framework recommendations from the Ontario Woodlot Association Lower Tier Municipality Tree By-Law Advisory Group as shown Appendix C to allow for consistency and strengthening of a private tree bylaw in Halton Hills
- To consider in the future a bylaw “made in Halton Hills” based on the framework example shown in Appendix C. A private tree by-law tree management tool is recommended to be considered in the medium-to-long-term timeline (3-5 years) following additional community and Council consultation. In the interim staff will be monitoring the effectiveness of the Education and Incentives management tools

The Strategy is a practical, proactive, and flexible approach to supporting a healthy tree canopy in Halton Hills. The Strategy recognizes the importance of collaborating with residents, organizations, and agencies to protect and preserve a robust tree canopy in Halton Hills and assisting the Town in its goal of achieving a net-zero community by 2030.

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:

This report aligns with the Town’s Strategic plan recognizing the value to preserve, protect and enhance our natural environment for the health benefits and enjoyment it provides to present and future generations.

This report identifies climate change and the environment as one of the Town’s Strategic priorities as it contributes to climate mitigation through increased tree planting, reducing our carbon footprint, and climate adaptation by making the landscape more climate resilient and beautiful through a lush tree canopy.

RELATIONSHIP TO CLIMATE CHANGE:

This report also impacts and/or helps address climate change and the Town’s net-zero target through adaptation and mitigation actions including tree canopy protection, reduction of our carbon footprint, and making the Town's landscape more climate resilient and improving air quality.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT:

Public Engagement has been conducted as follows: outreach opportunities at the local farmer’s markets in Acton and Georgetown, online surveys, and public/Town workshops.

INTERNAL CONSULTATION:

Internal consultation included: Transportation & Public Works, Planning & Development, Recreation & Parks staff, Building Services, Information Services (Geomatics), Town staff participating in the open house/workshop, Council workshop, Senior Management workshop, the Tree Canopy Management Program Subcommittee, and the Climate Change and Asset Management division.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

This report has the potential to require funding in a future budget year and therefore needs to be referred to budget committee for tracking purposes.

For implementation of the recommended Education and Incentive management tools for 2022, existing staffing level and previously approved Climate Change Adaptation Strategy Implementation capital budget funds are adequate.

Therefore, there are no immediate financial implications associated with this report.

For implementation of the recommended management tools for 2023 and beyond, any future additional resource needs will be identified and submitted for approval through the annual Budget process. It is recognized that all funding requests beyond the 2022 budget year are subject to on-going affordability and sustainability of the Town's Long Range Financial Plan.

Reviewed and approved by,

Dharmen Dhaliah, Senior Manager Climate Change & Asset Management

Richard Cockfield, Director of Strategic Initiatives

Chris Mills, Chief Administrative Officer