

# Staff Report



Development Services Department

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**REPORT TO:** Community and Infrastructure Services Committee

**DATE OF MEETING:** December 2, 2024

**SUBMITTED BY:** Jeffery Silcox-Childs, Director, Parks & Cemeteries, 519-783-8877  
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**WARD(S) INVOLVED:** All

**DATE OF REPORT:** November 4, 2024

**REPORT NO.:** INS-2024-477

**SUBJECT:** Update on Urban Forestry Program

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**RECOMMENDATION:**  
For Information.

## REPORT HIGHLIGHTS:

- The purpose of this report is to update Council on the ways through which we have improved and expanded our forestry program, and how we are working towards further enhancing Kitchener's urban tree canopy cover.
- There are no financial implications arising from this report.
- This report supports **Cultivating a Green City Together: Focuses a sustainable path to a greener, healthier city; enhancing & protecting parks & natural environment while transitioning to a low-carbon future; supporting businesses & residents to make climate-positive choices.**

## BACKGROUND:

The City of Kitchener adopted the Sustainable Urban Forest Strategy (SUFS) in 2019 which articulated and affirmed the City's commitment to supporting a diverse, well maintained and sustainably managed urban forest for the community and residents in the city. The SUFS presents a vision and goal for a sustainable urban forest identifying 15 actions intended to guide future decisions and priorities.

In 2022, Council endorsed a tree canopy target of 30 percent for each ward by 2050 and an overall City-wide tree canopy target of 33 percent by 2070. In 2023, staff reviewed the existing tree conservation processes and identified specific enhancement opportunities to current tree conservation tools and processes. The intent of the review was to extend and strengthen the tree conservation measures that support the tree canopy target.

\*\*\* This information is available in accessible formats upon request. \*\*\*  
Please call 519-741-2345 or TTY 1-866-969-9994 for assistance.

This report updates Council on ways through which we have improved and expanded Kitchener's urban forestry program, and the ways through which we continue to enhance the City's urban tree canopy cover to support the tree canopy target.

## **REPORT:**

Forestry and Planning Staff have initiated several projects with the objective of improving and expanding Kitchener's Urban Forestry Program and enhancing Kitchener's tree canopy cover. The projects are:

### **1. Tree Planting Planner**

**About:** A new tree planting planner tool was developed to integrate and visualize multiple data sets, including the existing tree inventory, tree canopy cover from the 2019 LiDAR, utilities and transportation projects, land surface temperature, census data, and tree equity analysis. The tool's primary objective is to help Staff confidently identify priority areas for tree planting, particularly in locations with significant canopy gaps, ensuring a targeted and equitable approach to increasing canopy coverage.

**Next Steps:** Staff are using the tool to plan spring and fall tree planting.

### **2. Future Tree Assets**

**About:** In support of the Asset Management Plan, staff have projected that the City will assume responsibility for an additional 6,895 street trees in approximately the next five years, with a variance of +/- 439.

This projection will help the City prepare for a growing tree inventory, currently standing at 73,974 trees.

**Next Steps:** Staff are working with the Asset Management team to ensure the value of these living assets is correctly captured in our Asset Management Plans.

### **3. Community Canopy Pilot – Chandler Mowat**

**About:** In the spring of 2024, the Community Canopy project was launched in partnership with Reep Green Solutions, a local non-profit organization, with partial funding from Green Communities Canada (GCC)'s Living Cities Fund. The initiative aimed to increase tree canopy coverage in the Chandler Mowat neighbourhood by engaging residents and enhancing both public and private green spaces.

Residents were offered the opportunity to plant trees on their properties at little to no cost, while City Staff focused on planting additional trees on City-owned land. To ensure community input, feedback was gathered through the City's Engage platform, where participants suggested tree planting locations on an interactive map and voted on priority areas for planting.

The project successfully planted 100 large-caliper trees on public land and 30 mature trees on private property, contributing to the greening of the neighbourhood.

**Next Steps:** The Community Canopy program will become an annual initiative, targeting areas with low tree canopy coverage. To reach the City's canopy targets, we will require tree planting on both public and private lands. Therefore, each year, the program aims to plant at least 100 large-caliper trees on public land and over 30 trees on private properties, with minimal to no cost to participating residents. To guide future planting efforts, staff are developing an Engage page to gather community input on prioritizing tree planting in communities with low tree equity scores.

#### 4. Block Pruning Program

**About:** To address the backlog of pruning requests and perform needed tree maintenance, staff have developed a block pruning dashboard and block pruning program. City's street trees were divided by Planning Communities and grouped into 10 manageable areas, or blocks, each containing just under 6,000 trees. This structure supports a 10-year pruning cycle, which was initiated in the spring of 2024. By adhering to this block pruning schedule, staff can provide equitable, routine tree maintenance across the City, rather than responding only to individual complaints and requests. While the industry standard for an optimal block pruning program is typically 7 years, the goal, currently based on available budget is to meet targets within the 10-year cycle. Staff will continuously look to improve the program to increase the frequency of pruning, in hopes of moving towards a 7-year schedule.

**Next Steps:** Continue implementing the pruning schedule. Determine if current budget will be sufficient for achieving a 10-year pruning cycle of all City-owned trees.

#### 5. Field Maps for Contractors and Internal Crews

**About:** To enhance workflow and oversight of both internal crews and external contractors, staff developed an interactive live map, integrated with City Works, the City's work order management software, to display tree-related work orders. This Field Maps GIS application provides easy access to real time work order data. Staff create a work order and attach the associated tree assets for that work and the following day all asset points automatically appear on the map.

The result has been a significant improvement in workflow assignment, real-time tracking of completed tasks, enhanced communication between crews and staff, and greater overall efficiency and accuracy in tracking work.

**Next Steps:** Continue to enhance the tool and productivity monitoring.

#### 6. Urban Forest Map

**About:** To help enhance and improve communication with residents, staff redesigned the Urban Forest Map, an interactive dashboard that provides detailed data on the City of Kitchener's tree inventory and related urban forestry initiatives. There are three maps:

- **Trees in Your Neighbourhood:** Users can see city trees in their neighbourhood, search for their address, and get tree specific information including details about tree planting, stump removals and work programs.
- **Tree Canopy Coverage:** Summarizes the tree canopy coverage (based on most up to date LiDAR data) in each census dissemination area. This helps highlight places where we need to focus on tree planting.
- **Planned Tree Pruning:** Overview of the 10-year city tree block pruning cycle. Search, pan or zoom to an address and find out which year the trees in that neighborhood will be pruned and the proposed timeline.

The URL to access the map is: [Kitchener.ca/urbanforestmap](https://kitchener.ca/urbanforestmap)

This map, along with several other tools like “Tree Stories” where residents can share stories about the trees important to them, are available to residents on the urban forestry’s open data page:

<https://open-kitchenergis.opendata.arcgis.com/pages/forestry-gallery>

**Next Steps:** Continue enhancing the information that can be communicated through this mapping tool to help better inform residents and reduce call volume to the corporate contact center. This will help empower residents to find answers on demand.

## 7. Public Tree Bylaw

**About:** Staff conducted a review of City-owned tree bylaws from several municipalities to identify potential enhancements to Kitchener’s public Tree bylaw. In October, a survey was posted on Engage to gather public feedback on key bylaw areas for improvement. Residents were invited to share their views on topics such as increased compensation fees for damaged or removed City trees, size-based fee variations, and protections for City trees and soil habitats during construction. In just three weeks, nearly 200 responses showed strong support for these initiatives.

For more details, visit: <https://www.engagewr.ca/cityownedtrees>.

**Next Steps:** Staff are reviewing the public feedback from the survey, assessing resource requirements for proposed city-owned tree bylaw changes, and are on target to present a draft bylaw to Council for their consideration in Q1 of 2025.

## 8. Tree Protection Standards

**About:** Staff have reviewed and assessed industry standards around tree care protection standards and are working to update the guidelines for working around trees. This improved standards and guidelines will accompany the updated public tree bylaw to help improve our tree retention while working towards our canopy goals.

**Next Steps:** Create drawings of updated tree protection standards and circulate internally for feedback.

## 9. LiDAR Survey

**About:** Kitchener has completed two LiDAR surveys since 2014 to determine the total tree canopy cover in the City. This imagery is the most accurate way to calculate canopy cover. Staff are preparing a project to be able to fly the next LiDAR survey in 2025. This will provide an up-to-date calculation of our current canopy cover and identify any gains and losses since it was last measured in 2019 at 27%.

**Next Steps:** The LiDAR survey will provide new tree canopy data for 2025. This data will be used to monitor tree canopy changes in Kitchener on private and public property and inform updates to other projects.

## **10. Tree Management Policy**

**About:** The Tree Management Policy (TMP) has been successful in ensuring consistent and effective assessment of tree management plans as part of development applications. The TMP is being further evaluated for improvements including clarity on when the Policy applies or does not apply in relation to Committee of Adjustment applications and tree compensation process.

**Next Steps:** Prepare draft amendments to the Tree Management Policy followed by internal circulation and targeted engagement with the development industry for feedback and further refinement. An updated draft Tree Management Policy is anticipated to be presented to Council for their consideration in Q3 of 2025.

## **11. Tree Conservation Bylaw**

**About:** Opportunities to enhance the Tree Conservation Bylaw that applies to privately owned properties in Kitchener are being further evaluated. Staff are developing a detailed work plan for the evaluation of the Tree Conservation Bylaw. Key focus areas include determining where the bylaw should apply, establishing standards for as-of-right development and formalizing the tree compensation process.

**Next Steps:** Procurement of an engagement consultant to lead public engagement in Q1 and Q2 of 2025. An updated draft Tree Conservation Bylaw applicable on privately owned properties is anticipated to be presented to Council for their consideration in Q3 of 2025.

## **12. Licensing of tree care professionals**

**About:** Staff are exploring a business licensing program for tree care professionals that are working within the City. The licensing bylaw includes a definition of “contractor” that mentions landscaping without explicitly including “tree care professionals and arborist work.” The licensing process verifies that contractors are insured. An administrative update to the licensing bylaw can clarify who requires a business license and the contractor qualifications specific to tree care, raising the standards for those who work with trees in our community.

**Next Steps:** Continue to work with Legislative Services to explore administrative revisions to the existing business licensing program.

### 13. Communication program

**About:** Staff continue to develop and improve communications strategies and tactics around tree conservation and tree management in Kitchener.

Staff have revised website content to now have two dedicated web pages: ‘*Tree bylaws and management*’ and ‘*Tree planting and maintenance*’. These updates improve the organization, navigation and accessibility of current tree care information and include new features like a public request form for new tree planting.

Further, in collaboration with Communications, staff have implemented routine educational posts on forestry topics. This includes a five-video series, “Ask a Forester”, that responded to resident-submitted questions. These videos highlight important topics, featuring staff and showcasing the City’s natural spaces. The Instagram videos can be seen here: [Video 1](#), [Video 2](#), [Video 3](#), [Video 4](#), and [Video 5](#).

To support clear communication on tree-related bylaws and best practices, staff are developing *A Guide to Tree Protection*, a comprehensive, accessible resource for all tree-related information. This guide will serve as a valuable tool for residents, contractors, and staff, to understand and apply tree care guidelines consistently.

**Next Steps:** Create ‘A Guide to Tree Protection’ and explore other avenues for targeted communication including social media and email posts, drop-in sessions, and webinars with different community partners.

### 14. Incentive Program

**About:** To improve tree retention on private property, staff are exploring ways to support residents in maintaining their trees, particularly mature trees that contribute significantly to the urban canopy and serve the greatest socioeconomic and environmental benefit. The goal is to empower property owners to invest in long-term tree health, thereby enhancing the overall canopy, supporting canopy retention and contributing to the overall community benefits that trees provide.

**Next Steps:** Engage residents to determine what incentive programs would support their needs in mature tree retention on private properties.

## STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:

This report supports **Cultivating a Green City Together: Focuses a sustainable path to a greener, healthier city; enhancing & protecting parks & natural environment while**

**transitioning to a low-carbon future; supporting businesses & residents to make climate-positive choices.**

**FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:**

Capital Budget – The recommendation has no impact on the Capital Budget.

Operating Budget – The recommendation has no impact on the Operating Budget.

**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:**

INFORM – This report has been posted to the City’s website with the agenda in advance of the council / committee meeting.

CONSULT – Community engagement includes a City-owned Tree Conservation and Management engagement page on Engage Kitchener launched in October 2024. Additional engagement will occur throughout 2025.

**PREVIOUS REPORTS/AUTHORITIES:**

- [DSD-2023-161 Tree Conservation Processes Review](#)
- [INS-2022-002 Tree Canopy Target for Kitchener](#)
- [INS-20-017 – Kitchener Urban Forest Canopy - Update](#)
- [INS-19-008 – Approval of Sustainable Urban Forest Strategy \(2019 – 2028\) & Implementation Plan](#)

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