

Staff Report



Development Services Department

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REPORT TO: Climate Change and Environment Committee

DATE OF MEETING: April 16, 2026

SUBMITTED BY: Natalie Goss, Manager Policy & Research, 519-783-8933

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WARD(S) INVOLVED: All Wards

DATE OF REPORT: March 31, 2026

REPORT NO.: DSD-2026-146

SUBJECT: Tree Conservation and Management – Trees on Private Property

RECOMMENDATION:

For discussion.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS:

- The purpose of this report is to share the results of consultation with the community and the consulting tree industry regarding the regulation and management of trees on private property and to seek input from this advisory committee.
- Community engagement included a survey (www.engagewr.ca/PrivateTrees) which ran from February 16 to March 27, 2026 and a roundtable discussion with consulting tree industry on March 27, 2026.
- 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:

On January 10, 2022 staff presented report [INS-2022-002 Tree Canopy Target for Kitchener](#) to Council recommending approval of 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. For their consideration

Those targets were approved by Council and Council further directed staff to initiate a review of existing tree conservation processes in the City with an intention to improve tree conservation measures. In response, staff report [DTS-2023-161 Tree Conservation Processes Review](#) was prepared including a review of the tree conservation processes in Kitchener and other select municipalities. On February 16, 2023 and March 23, 2023 staff presented this information to Kitchener's Climate Change and Environment Committee (CCEC) with an opportunity for CCEC to review the findings and provide feedback to staff. On March 23, 2023 CCEC passed the following resolution:

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

That the Climate Change and Environment Committee support staff taking a report to the April 24th Committee of Council outlining existing tree conservation processes that conserve, manage and/or regulate public and private trees in Kitchener as well as in other relevant municipalities; and,

That the Climate Change and Environment Committee support initiating a second phase of the Tree Conservation Processes Review that includes consideration of specific enhancement opportunities to existing tools and processes.

Since that time staff in the City's Forestry (public trees) and Planning (private trees) groups have undertaken:

- a review of the existing bylaws and processes regulating **trees on City property**, namely the [Kitchener Public Tree Bylaw](#) (✓ **Completed June/July 2025**, staff report [INS-2025 190 Updates to the Public Tree Bylaw](#));
- a review of the existing bylaw and processes regulating **trees on private property**, namely the [Kitchener Tree Conservation Bylaw](#); and
- a review of the [Tree Management Policy](#) which sets out a process to assess **trees on land undergoing an approval process** under the Ontario *Planning Act* (i.e. **development**).

REPORT:

The current facts on tree canopy and framework for protecting trees and canopy on **private property** in Kitchener are:

Kitchener's tree canopy

- Kitchener's overall tree canopy has been determined to be:
 - 2015 = 26%
 - 2019 = 27%
 - 2025 = 26%
- **72% of Kitchener's existing tree canopy is collectively protected or regulated** through one or more of the following:
 - the Natural Heritage Conservation land use designation in the Official Plan,
 - the Natural Conservation (NHC-1) zone in Zoning By-law 2019-051,
 - the Region of Waterloo's Woodland Conservation By-law (woodlands 1 hectare in size or greater),
 - the Kitchener Tree By-law (trees on City property),
 - the Kitchener Tree Conservation By-law (trees on private properties 1 acre in size or greater).
- **28% of Kitchener's Tree Canopy is not protected or regulated.**

Current approach to protecting trees on private property

- Protective land use in the Kitchener Official Plan and Zoning Bylaw for Significant Woodlands (see above)
- *Tree Management Policy* (Council-adopted, 2002) to guide the development of treed properties
- Tree Conservation Bylaw - applicable to trees 10cm DBH (Diameter at Breast Height) or greater AND located on a property 1 acre in size or greater

Who we have talked to

- The community - through a survey (www.engagewr.ca/PrivateTrees) which ran from February 16 to March 27, 2026. The survey focussed on residents' thoughts on municipal regulation of tree removals through the current Tree Conservation Bylaw, and possible amendments such as application to smaller, and therefore more numerous, properties.
- Consulting tree professionals – These are the primary users of the City's Council-adopted Tree Management Policy which sets out the requirements for planning and designing new or re-development (under the Ontario *Planning Act*) on properties that have any trees >10cm DBH. A roundtable discussion was held in the afternoon of March 27, 2026 to discuss: which aspects of the policy are working; which can be improved; how to include and implement specific details for smaller (re-)developments in existing neighbourhoods; and how to more formally compensate for the loss of both trees and canopy cover.

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 – This report is For Discussion and has no impact on the Capital Budget.

Operating Budget – This report is For Discussion. Subsequent report(s) to Standing Committee may have an impact on the Operating Budget (staff resourcing).

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 included a survey (www.engagewr.ca/PrivateTrees) which ran from February 16 to March 27, 2026 and a roundtable discussion with consulting tree professionals on March 27, 2026.

PREVIOUS REPORTS / AUTHORITIES:

- [INS-19-008 Approval of Sustainable Urban Forest Strategy \(2019 – 2028\) & Implementation Plan](#)
- [INS-20-017 – Kitchener Urban Forest Canopy - Update](#)
- [INS-2022-002 Tree Canopy Target for Kitchener](#)
- [DTS-2023-161 Tree Conservation Processes Review](#)
- [INS-2024-477 Update on Urban Forestry Program](#)
- [INS-2025 190 Updates to the Public Tree Bylaw](#)
- *Municipal Act, 2001*
- *Planning Act*