

## **BURLINGTONGREEN Delegation on Roseland Pilot Private Property Tree By-Law:**

**June 4, 2018**

“I think that I shall never see, a poem lovely as a tree.” These words resonate with us today just as strongly as they did with readers when they were penned by poet Joyce Kilmer in 1913. Good evening, Chair Lancaster, Mayor Goldring, Members of Council, City Staff and Burlington citizens: My name is Jane Jenner. Thank you for the opportunity to delegate today on behalf of BurlingtonGreen in response to the staff report on a Proposed Pilot of a Roseland Community Tree By-law. I’d like to begin by emphasizing that the views I am about to express, while representing the position of BURLINGTONGREEN on this issue, are also my own views as a citizen, taxpayer, voter and resident of Burlington for almost 60 years, and the questions I’ll be raising are my own, as well as BURLINGTONGREEN’s.

You will recall that I delegated on this issue in March of 2016, and that BURLINGTONGREEN has delegated on the benefits of a city-wide private property tree by-law on a number of other occasions, bringing representatives from other municipalities that have tree by-laws and providing expert opinions on the value of trees and the need for their preservation. I won’t waste our time today rehashing these

points, but should anyone here wish to review these past delegations they can be found on our website at [www.burlingtongreen.org](http://www.burlingtongreen.org) or I will gladly forward copies as requested.

The only thing I would add to what has been said before is to cite a Special Report issued in 2014 by TD Economics entitled *“The Value of Urban Forests in Cities across Canada”*. We know that a tree is a very modest investment in a community and it is the ONLY asset in the entire city infrastructure that increases in value as it grows and this report shows why. Beyond noting trees’ role in improving air quality, sequestering carbon, mitigating global warming and flood damage, lowering buildings’ energy costs, improving property values and providing esthetic, recreational and mental health benefits, the report quantifies the value of tree canopy benefits to make a compelling economic argument for protecting and increasing canopy. By analyzing key Canadian cities, including Toronto, Montreal, Halifax and Greater Vancouver, the report demonstrates that for every dollar invested in an urban forest, the economic benefit of that investment ranges from \$1.35 up to an impressive \$12.70 at the top end – if only our financial portfolios could do as well! And the report shows that the higher the tree canopy coverage, the greater the return. I would be happy to link you to this report if you are interested in more details.

With that as a context, let’s turn to the staff report. It is no exaggeration to say that BURLINGTONGREEN was unequivocally shocked and disappointed by it. In meetings

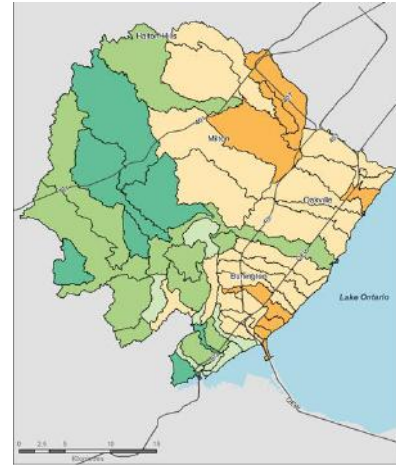
with Urban Forestry staff, we formed a confident impression that the City would be supporting the proposed Roseland private property tree by-law pilot. Not only has this turned out not to be the case, but the report has been labelled “receive and file”. What does this mean? It is not clear to us, but leaves the impression that Council is not being asked to debate or vote on the report’s recommendations. We hope that is not the case. At this point, however, I am going to set aside the report, and turn to some bigger issues and questions.

Let’s start with a quick review of Burlington’s existing urban tree canopy. For a healthy community and adequate protection of biodiversity, Environment Canada recommends a canopy cover of between 30-50% of total land area. In Conservation Halton’s 2018 Watershed Report Card, the vast majority of urban Burlington’s forest cover earned grades of D to F, with the majority of urban Burlington categorized as poor to very poor, at about a 17% canopy according to the City’s own estimates – well below Environment Canada’s recommended minimum. Unsurprisingly, the report gave concomitant poor results for ground water quality and impervious cover.

But wait, things only get worse from here. No thanks to the emerald ash borer and a projected loss of over 10,000 public trees, the impending Meridian quarry expansion— a loss of multiple thousands more trees, and several proposed large scale developments

around town that will likely cost us many thousands more, the picture just gets grimmer.

So let's talk about solutions. Where is Burlington's Urban Forest Management Plan? Since the 2010 Plan, there appears to have been little progress. We still have no accurate baseline data to tell us how many and what types of trees we have; in fact, this has been



cited to us by City staff as a reason NOT to set a tree canopy target for Burlington yet, despite the fact than other cities, such as our near neighbour Toronto, have done so. And despite BURLINGTONGREEN's recommendation that an updated Urban Forest Management Plan is urgently needed to address the rapidly growing climate change threat and should have been part of the new Official Plan, or at least that it should be completed within a year of the OP's approval by council, we don't yet know when work on this plan is to begin or be completed.

Let's go back to a private property tree by-law for a minute: wouldn't this be one reliable tool for collecting data on tree removals – rather than depending on ad hoc information from arborists as the staff report has been required to? And why, as we see

in the draft by-law offered up in the report, should developers be exempt when the largest-scale losses are attributable to them, not individual private citizens?

Even if we turn to the City's new Sustainable Building and Development Guidelines, we find to our disappointment that most tree preservation measures are voluntary. In Section 3 of the Guidelines: Natural Environment, we find that of the ten guidelines related to maintaining biodiversity and conserving or augmenting the quality of the ecosystem, including trees, eight of these guidelines are classified as voluntary, with limited exceptions on only three of these relating to development adjacent to the Natural Heritage System, the Lake Ontario shoreline, and a vague reference to urban forestry policies in the OP. The only incentive offered to developers by the City to take steps to conserve or enhance the natural environment in their designs is a Sustainable Building Award. Are we simply trusting to developers to do the right thing? Can we?

So, Councillors and fellow citizens of Burlington, what does all this say about our City? Does it reflect a city that has committed to be a Blue Dot community? Whose Strategic Plan embraces the goal of being a healthy and greener city? Let's face it, worthy though it is, the annual Green Up partnership between BURLINGTONGREEN and the City of Burlington to plant several hundred trees is not going to get us there in the face of the kinds of tree losses I've mentioned tonight.

Let me close by asking Council this question: **Without** a by-law that protects trees on ALL private property, including development sites, and **until** we have an updated Urban Forest Management Plan that enables us to accurately **assess** our urban forest, **set** canopy targets that at minimum meet Environment Canada recommendations, and **implement** policies and practices that get our failing grade urban canopy to one that truly reflects our strategic plan, **what** is this City planning to do **in the meantime** to protect our disappearing tree canopy, at a time when the window to hold climate change to a manageable 1.5 or even 2 degrees can be measured in **years**, not decades? What kind of Burlington will we pass on to future Burlingtonians: a healthy and greener City, or one where we have, to quote our beloved fellow Canadian Joni Mitchell “paved Paradise, and put up a parking lot”?