



UFMP Delegation to Community Services Committee, Wed. Nov. 14, 2012

RE: Staff report RPM 16-12, CSC Agenda Item 5

(MB to begin) As noted in the staff report BurlingtonGreen indeed took part in the 2010 UFMP stakeholder meetings, and also presented to the Mayor and members of Council at the Community Services Committee meeting on June 23, 2010. BG continues to support our statement at that delegation, *“BurlingtonGreen believes that support for and investment in Burlington’s “green infrastructure” to be essential. We appreciate and support the UFMP document...”* At that delegation we expressed concern over the 5 year wait before investing staff resources towards evaluation of a private tree by-law for Burlington. Since that time BurlingtonGreen members have been dismayed that the staffing resources outlined in the 2010 UFMP that was passed by Council was not subsequently supported in either of the 2011 and 2012 budgets. The Urban Forestry department has been striving to the limit of their resources in these years, and again has come to this committee to approve the addition of a 3 year contract position to supplement their team in 2013 to more effectively execute the UFMP recommendations. BurlingtonGreen obviously supports this staff request recognizing the value of Burlington’s natural capital from social, economic and environmental aspects. This position was similarly recently agreed to by all groups supporting the Stop the Escarpment Highway Coalition.

Focusing first on the first item suggested for 2013 initiatives, *“to evaluate the effectiveness of a private tree by-law for Burlington”* it is notable that staff have suggested this with or without additional FTE funding, and have moved up this item in direct response to increasing public concern expressed in the media and to City Councillors. To this point we thank you for listening and responding in this manner. I would like to now introduce my colleague Colin Brock who will speak particularly to this point:

(CB to begin) My name is Colin Brock, I live on Woodland Ave and I am delegating today on behalf of BurlingtonGreen. I suggest we don’t get mired down in a debate on whether by-laws pertaining to private property, violate land owner’s liberties. Because the fact is, that debate was settled many, many years ago when our city enacted its first private property by-law. Burlington has many by-laws in place that restrict actions on private property in order to protect the community against environmental degradation and/or financial harm.

So the issue really boils down to this...

Is environmental damage currently occurring?

Is property value damage currently occurring ?

And, would an effective by-law protect against both occurrences?

The answer is yes to all parts.

I can state from personal observation that mature trees are coming down at an alarming rate in the down town core.

The environmental value of these neighbourhood trees is extremely significant. They produce oxygen, they clean the soil, help control noise pollution, they slow storm water runoff, they serve as carbon sinks, they cleanse the air, they offer shade and cool temperatures, they fight soil erosion, provide habitat, act as windbreaks and more.

We think these reasons alone justify protection; however the economic benefit of creating this by-law would also be substantial. Studies out of the US have shown that a single mature tree can add \$5000 to \$7000 to a home's property value. (by the Forest Service and co-authored with the National Institute of Standards and Technologies). Statistics also show that neighbourhoods with mature trees garner higher selling prices. Have you ever noticed that artist renditions of pre-construction homes in new neighbourhoods always show the home surrounded by lush trees even though in reality they will only be surrounded by other homes? This is not a coincidence, but eludes to the aesthetic value that home buyers pay a premium to acquire. One homeowner cutting down a large tree can have a direct adverse financial impact on 6 or more neighbouring homes, not to mention the over appeal of the neighbourhood.

Privacy is another feature that increases real estate values. Large trees can provide 60% more privacy compared to a fence alone. Once again, one homeowner can reduce the privacy of up to 6 or more neighbouring homes by removing trees.

Other financial benefits to home owners include reduced hydro bills in the summer due to the shading. Reduced energy bills in the winter as they provide screen from wind. Also reduced water bills as shaded lawns require up to 50% less water to maintain health. There are respected calculators available that illustrate the cost benefits achieved for the entire city which would be accomplished by protecting trees.

Speaking from personal experience, this summer alone, 3 homes on my street had new owners come in and remove very large trees. In all 3 cases the trees were healthy and not causing any issues to the house. When I asked my backyard neighbour why he was cutting, his response was "because trees are messy looking". Now, instead of seeing greenery from my family room and kitchen like we did last year, we are staring at our neighbours' white siding house and bright lights at night. We have lost privacy, and aesthetics. There is no doubt that his actions have lowered my neighbour's and my property value.

People in neighbourhoods are transient, moving in and moving out as their personal situations change. When they eventually leave that piece of land (and everyone will leave someday) should they be able to leave it devoid of trees? That is what is really up for debate. We feel the trees should remain as owners come and go. We believe we are stewards of mature trees... no one truly owns them, for they really belong to the community and our future generations.

We argue that if effective tree protection is enacted by Council, it will be one of the most significant by-laws we have; offering protection for the environmental and for property values.

(MB to con't) BG has full confidence in the integrity of the Urban Forestry department and the UFMP and agrees that with additional staff resources as requested the plans will benefit the health of the City of Burlington.

Other items of note:

UFMP Item 3 Could staff comment on the effectiveness to date of the Site Plan Approval process which documents and tracks #s of trees planted, protected and removed as part of the Site Plan Approval process. What are the results? Is the process effectively maintaining a vibrant urban canopy equivalent to pre-redevelopment?

UFMP Item 10 The link to the inventory of public trees on the Urban Forestry webpage required some direction from staff to identify how to show this information on the Interactive Mapping tool. A more direct identification tool or way to show this information would be very helpful for residents to help identify the kind of tree they have or whether a tree is indeed considered public or private especially if they witness a tree being taken down and would like to report this. In general any public education and awareness initiative that promotes public and private tree stewardship is supported.

UFMP Item 30 Develop a program to identify and increase resources to plant more trees in city parks and vacant locations should include the planting of fruit trees for public consumption. A request made by BurlingtonGreen in 2011 to plant fruit trees (supplied at no cost to the city) adjacent to Central Park's community garden was denied by RPM specifically because they were fruit trees. This attitude does not support the creation of edible public landscapes in the urban area. Who doesn't love coming across a fruit tree and being able to pick fresh fruit in a public space? The City should support the creation of natural food in public spaces for the free enjoyment of its Citizens.

Anticipating committee discussion on the impact to 2013 budget to support the staff recommendation for a 3yr contracted FTE position, may I suggest that this would be perceived as a minimum and prudent investment given the environmental payback of our urban trees to our community*. The Urban Forestry department requires and has repeatedly asked for adequate staffing to implement the UFMP, and BG believes Citizens will support this expenditure to preserve Burlington's green infrastructure for the greater public good.

Thank you,

Michelle Bennett & Colin Brock

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*By my calculations (from public records), urban property owners pay \$383 in city taxes /\$100K assessment value. So a well valued mature treed property, say at \$450K would pay \$1723.50 in COB taxes. By dividing that figure by the # of city employees (as confirmed by the HR dept 1121 866FTE + 255PTE) = \$1.53/yr roughly to finance a staff position by tax payers. This is most likely an overstated figure as of course only a portion of \$383 is dedicated to HR expense.