



June 23, 2010 BurlingtonGreen comments re: City of Burlington's Urban Forest Management Plan to the Community Services Committee

Dear Chair, Mayor Jackson, Members of Committee, staff and citizens of Burlington. BurlingtonGreen appreciates this opportunity to comment on the very important issue of the proposed Urban Forest Management Plan.

We were pleased to participate in the engagement process by attending the two stakeholder sessions and submitting input to the consultant as well as via the website survey. We recently reviewed the final document and were happy to see that a number of our recommendations were included – more specifically, as some of you may know, since our inception, BurlingtonGreen has been advocating that the city and this Council adopt a triple bottom line approach (balanced consideration of social, economical and environmental implications/benefits) in all issue research, reporting and decision making. Thus the inclusion of this approach in the plan's core vision is welcomed and we hope will be adopted in all other planning and operations as well.

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

BurlingtonGreen believes that support for and investment in Burlington's "green infrastructure" to be essential. We appreciate and support the UFMP document but do have some outstanding questions and additional recommendations we would like to offer to you and to staff today for your thoughtful consideration.

For example, we are uncertain if the funding(tree planting reserve) referenced in the staff report recommendations as not necessary would remain the case if the city was to decide to adopt a forest canopy cover % objective as other municipalities have? (Oakville 40%)

Also, we are unclear of the rationale to support the recommendation to wait 5 years to assess the appropriateness of a private tree by-law. We would argue that as Burlington nears build out and intensification pressures climb, that leaving this important issue until later could result in many of our city's trees being lost forever to development. Why can't this topic be addressed in the upcoming year?

Additionally, when BurlingtonGreen spoke to the proposed Parks and Rec Master Plan, we encouraged the City to explore the establishment of a greenspace masterplan and that this be linked to the larger Halton Natural Heritage System process. We believe the UFMP should be integrated into these as well – just like an ecosystem approach where everything is connected – we need to ensure these plans support each other and in no way compromise each other's core objectives.

I would like to pass the presentation over to Dianne Watkins who has extensive experience in this field and serves as BurlingtonGreen's restoration project co-ordinator. She has a number of other points for your consideration:

p.3 Adaptive Management

"This plan must adopt an adaptive management approach which allows for changes in response to new information or new circumstances."

An adaptive management approach is key, however in view of the Biodiversity Outcomes Framework for Canada, an Ecosystem Approach (triple bottom line) is also key. BurlingtonGreen feels that as a Countdown 2010 partner, the City of Burlington may wish to highlight native biodiversity considerations in the Urban Forest Management Plan by incorporating both foundational HOW elements of the Canadian Biodiversity Outcomes Framework:

*"HOW We Will Get There: Using an Ecosystem and Adaptive Management Approach to Achieve Shared Outcomes
In an ecosystem approach, ecological goals are considered at the same time as economic and social goals. It places the trade-offs front and centre when decisions are being made.*

Adaptive management is a cyclical process of taking stock, planning and decision-making, followed by implementation and tracking to see whether management responses to problems improve over time based on new knowledge and better information."

p.6 Canopy Cover

"Current analysis estimates an average canopy cover of approximately 23%, comprised of 17% in the urban area and 28% in the rural area."

Science based studies suggest that 30% forest cover is the minimum target to maintain the health of watersheds. BurlingtonGreen believes that given the potential impacts of climate change, including invasive species, that a factor of safety be applied to this minimum target. BurlingtonGreen supports an average 40% cover target to allow for foreseen and unforeseen future impacts to forest health in Burlington. For just one example, ash trees, currently under threat from emerald ash borer, represent 13% of our urban forest.

p.39 Species Diversity Targets

"On public lands, the following targets should be adopted:

- No species should make up more than 10% of the inventory;***
- No genus should account for more than 20%, and;***
- No family should make up more than 30% on any given street, park or new neighbourhood."***

BurlingtonGreen is supportive of the species diversity targets in the draft plan. It would be useful to specify in the text that the reason for the targets is ecosystem resilience to impacts including, for example, disease.

p.40 Species Selection

"Burlington's urban forest enhancement and replenishment program can become a key instrument in achieving urban forest sustainability and promoting species diversity across the city. For example, the inventory shows that some older neighbourhoods are heavily populated by large, old silver maples. These neighbourhoods should be targeted for increased infill planting with a diversity of native species before these large trees are removed to maintain some continuity in canopy coverage. The inventory also suggests that newer communities are heavily over-populated with Norway maple and ash trees; a wider range of species should be planted in these and newly developing communities."

BurlingtonGreen supports increased infill planting where large trees must be removed, but wishes to clarify whether they are slated for removal due to safety concerns? BurlingtonGreen is also highly supportive of increasing native tree diversity in newer communities and phasing out the invasive Norway maple populations.

p.46 Tree Habitat

"The city's street tree inventory identified over 700 vacant plantable spaces along city streets. Many of these vacant spaces ... do not support the growth of future large-stature trees."

BurlingtonGreen supports investigating the feasibility of planting of smaller stature species including locally appropriate native shrubs and perennials in these 700 vacant spaces.

The 2009 net operating budget for direct urban forestry maintenance was \$1.2 million. Additional funding for urban forestry activities such as tree planting and protection are within the Engineering and Parks and Recreation budgets.

The city also maintains a “Future Services – Trees” reserve fund to support tree planting. This fund, valued at nearly \$200,000 in 2010, is supported by development charges and is directed to the establishment of new trees. The city is currently formalizing the process to draw on these funds.”

BurlingtonGreen would like to know whether tree planting funds might also be applied to expanded areas of service including invasive removal and monitoring.

p.48 "Plant Health Care and Integrated Pest Management

“Burlington’s current plant health care and pest control activities are implemented as part of daily urban forest management, however there is no overarching policy to recognize the holistic and integrative approach of either PHC or IPM. Formalizing these approaches through implementation of this plan will support the city’s commitment to urban forest sustainability and environmental stewardship. It will also provide a basis for the expansion of services to include increased mulching and watering of trees, monitoring and control of invasive plant and insect species, and selection and establishment of suitable trees, shrubs and groundcovers in appropriate locations.”

BurlingtonGreen thoroughly supports the expansion of services to include monitoring, control, forest plant selection (native wherever possible), and establishment. The University of Waterloo has compiled a useful documenting assessing the appropriateness of various native trees for urban (campus) plantings. This document link is provided in the supporting documents

Additional considerations based on the Convention on Biological Diversity Programme of Work on Forest Biodiversity:

“Mitigate effects of the loss of natural disturbances necessary to maintain biodiversity in regions where these no longer occur.”

“Ensure adequate and effective protected forest area networks.”

BurlingtonGreen would support additional information in the Plan to address loss of natural disturbance, and the importance of a connected green infrastructure network.

Supporting documents and information links:

Biodiversity Outcome Framework for Canada

<http://www.cbin.ec.gc.ca/cadre-framework/default.cfm?lang=eng>

Conservation Halton Viewpoint: Forest Cover

<http://www.conservationhalton.com/Uploads/FCS.pdf>

Benchmarking Biodiversity & Planning Future Forests in Urban Impacted Areas

<http://www.isaontario.com/treefund/pdf/grantarticles/ACERMarch07.pdf>

CBD Programme of Work on Forest Biodiversity

<http://www.cbd.int/forest/pow.shtml>

Recommended List of Trees and Shrubs for University of Waterloo Plantings

<http://www.watgreen.uwaterloo.ca/pdfs/NativeSpecies.pdf>

Compendium of Best Management Practices for Canadian Urban Forests

http://www.treecanada.ca/programs/urbanforestry/cufn/resources_bmp.html

Preliminary Input regarding City of Burlington’s Urban Forest Management Plan – Submitted January 24, 2010

General Vision:

Recognizing the significant environmental, social and economic benefits an urban forest provides, BurlingtonGreen supports a vision that includes a healthy, forest cover managed with sustainable practices that strives to exceed the minimum 30% standard of the MOE.

Some Recommendations:

- Establish a healthy, sustainable target for Burlington's urban canopy cover (MOE – 30%, Town of Oakville target- 40%)
- Establish a supporting UFMP based on sustainable development foundation with native species selections, invasive removals, corridor connection opportunities, identify and combat threats (including pests, climate change, development etc) and more.
- UFMP must have measureable targets, ongoing monitoring program, necessary, consistent financial support, results oriented reporting
- Conduct a tree inventory - What do we have now – qty and quality?
- Rare, endangered or threatened tree species that are situated on public or privately owned land should be given greater priority than other trees in order to help protect their populations.
- Native species should be favoured for future plantings over introduced species in order to help lessen the stresses of environmental degradation for wildlife. Introduced species that have been proven to have invasive qualities should be eliminated entirely.
- Protect what we have – enact a tree bylaw that ensures protection of trees on both public & private property
- Have the UFMP be part of a larger NHS(Natural Heritage System)/Greenspace Masterplan for all of Burlington (urban & Rural) integrated with the Region of Halton's NHS.
- Establish a tree planting program including a seed collection program – include citizen/community group participation to support stewardship opportunities
- Ensure the UFMP liaises/works in concert with other relevant city and community orgs (Sustainable Development committee, Field & Stream, Waterfront Access and Protection Advisory Committee etc)
- Integrate key relevant municipal operations/implications such as planning department permits to support more “tree friendly” requirements (sufficient top soil amendments, sufficient space requirements to support mature tree development, include commercial, industrial developments as well)
- Establish a supporting ongoing public awareness program for the urban forest plan – tours, opps for participation, heritage tree hunts, appreciation of individual, developer, commercial efforts
- Ensure the UFMP is integrated into the City's Strategic Plan

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