UFS Questions and Answers – February 9, 2021

A question and answer session was held during the Virtual Public Meeting. Here is a list of questions submitted before and during the meeting. Responses are provided by staff on the project team.

1. **Given the benefits of trees and Hamilton's air quality, why isn't the canopy cover target set higher? Could our goal be at least 40%?**

   Canopy cover is a key indicator of the health of the urban forest and for the UFS, we reviewed canopy cover targets in other municipalities. There was a lot of discussion about this during the 2019 workshops. Some felt that we need an ambitious target (35-40%), while others felt that 30% is more realistic given the existing 21% canopy cover and the extensive planting that would be needed to reach this target. For the draft UFS, it was decided to go with the 30% target. As we make progress, the target can always be increased in the future. Toronto and Oakville did this in their strategies.

   However, based on input on the draft, staff will consider raising the canopy cover target in the final report.

2. **Please tell us about after-care for public trees planted. Beyond after-care, can you talk about training for Public Works and parks maintenance staff about avoiding damage to trees through mowing.**

   All new trees planted in parks, cemeteries and in locations not adjacent to resident properties are on an in-season watering program for 3 years post planting. Staff attach a watering bag to each tree and water the ground and fill the bag weekly. To minimize stress on trees, watering is scaled up or down, based on the weather. Forestry staff ask residents to water trees planted through the Free Street Tree program. Trees planted in natural regeneration areas (whips) are smaller, planted densely, and not watered weekly.

   Yes, to avoid damage to trees, Forestry works with Parks and Cemeteries to train full time and seasonal staff. There is an annual training session, to show the correct mulching and mowing techniques. Staff also install grey plastic tree guards for trees less than 6 inches in diameter. Finally, there is a process to report damage and staff will follow up, to ensure that all staff are properly trained.

3. **With almost 60% of our Urban Forest canopy on private property, why does the City not have a Private Tree By-law?**

   In 2004, after amalgamation, Council directed staff to prepare a revised private tree cutting by-law so there would be consistent and improved protection for trees in urban and rural areas.

After extensive public consultation and revisions, this by-law was presented to Council in 2009, but was not adopted. Instead, Council directed staff to prepare Tree Protection Guidelines for development sites, which were approved in 2010. After some woodlands in the urban area were cut between 2011 and 2013, Council directed staff to prepare a by-law regulating urban woodlands, but not individual trees. This by-law was approved by Council in 2014. At this time, Council directed staff to prepare the Urban Forest Strategy.

The UFS discusses the need for a new by-law for private trees. In the future, Council will have to determine if it wishes to direct staff to re-visit a new by-law.

4. **Please can you speak about the fight against Emerald Ash Borer (EAB), how much canopy was lost, and what types of trees are being planted instead?**

   2021 is year 9 of the management plan approved by Council for Emerald Ash Borer. In urban and rural areas, the City has removed approximately 23,000 ash trees. The City is replacing ash trees at a ratio of 1:1. Now the City is removing less and replacing more; we are on target to meet the 1:1 replacement. A lot of trees removed were mature and provided canopy. To ensure a robust urban forest, the City is replanting with a diverse variety of species.

5. **I notice that London Ontario has introduced staggered three-row urban forest plan in some of the developing industrial lands. Are there any plans for this wider planting of urban forest along major corridors?**

   For Hamilton's iTree canopy analysis, the results showed a lack of canopy in commercial and industrial land uses. Public Works staff work together during road redevelopment to find suitable planting areas. Also, there are variety of planning projects, such as the Bayfront Industrial Area Strategy, which look at improving environmental conditions and enhancing the urban forest, especially in areas with low canopy cover.

6. **How can the City encourage private plantings in new subdivisions?**

   In new developments, the City takes cash in lieu from developers. The City is responsible for planting the trees in the road allowance. There are currently no municipal programs to encourage landowners to plant on private property, but the UFS recognizes that this is an important action. There is a recommendation to hire a full-time outreach coordinator to work with community partners to deliver private tree planting programs.

7. **The federal government has a stated plan to plant 2 billion trees in the next few years. Is Hamilton tapping into federal funds to help pay for tree planting?**

   Yes, Forestry staff actively monitor federal and provincial grants for planting.

8. **Do you know of any other cities or municipalities that have offered a tax incentive to plant a tree, to inspire private planting?**

   No, we are not aware of tax incentive programs for tree planting on private property. Staff agree that this type of program would be beneficial in Hamilton. Some Conservation Authorities, through the Hamilton-Halton Landowner Stewardship Program, provide grants and resources for restoration of habitat. Also, in Wards 3 and 5, Forestry has worked with residents and Councillors to plant trees.

9. **There is a handy map that calculates canopy coverage by ward. Is there data available regarding existing and potential tree canopy coverage at neighbourhood levels? If no, is that something that is being explored? If yes, can we access that?**

   The UFS provides a map showing canopy cover by ward, but this is estimated using random sample plots in a program called iTree Canopy. Unfortunately, at this time, we don't have the statistical validity at the neighbourhood level. For example, some neighbourhoods may no have plots and some may have a few. Further canopy analysis and inventory is required to provide this data. Forestry has some capital funding for inventory approved for 2021 so we are in the process of creating specifications for this work.

10. **When is the city hoping to reach the 30% target?**

    The UFS is a 20-year strategy so that would be the timeframe to reach the canopy cover target.

11. **A lot of the canopy is along the escarpment. How were these areas factored into the overall calculated canopy of 21%?**

    iTree Canopy results show 212 random sample locations scattered across the city. Canopy cover results include natural areas as well as all other land uses. The analysis included all land uses within the urban area, including open space, residential, commercial, institutional, and industrial. Plot locations were random to avoid any bias.

12. **With increasing extreme weather events expected, shouldn't we be ambitious in the next 5 years in establishing as many trees as possible?**

    Forestry staff respond to extreme weather events. In some cases, City arborists may just remove a limb. Or, a whole tree may be removed if it is hazardous. When a whole tree is removed, the City replaces it. The City tries to plant in same location, but if they can't, a tree is planted nearby. We are seeing more extreme weather events, but they are highly isolated. A higher level of maintenance makes the urban forest is more resilient. Forestry has an ambitious tree planting and maintenance program because it recognizes that diseases, pests, and extreme weather will impact the urban forest.

13. **Where can one find a current list of offered trees through the Free Tree program in Hamilton?**

The City reviews and updates the species list annually. When the list is being reviewed, it is temporarily removed from the web site. The updated annual species list will be posted soon on hamilton.ca/trees.

14. **Why are native trees not given full and foremost consideration for planting?**

    When ordering trees for planting, Forestry uses a variety of tree family, genus and species across the city. EAB taught us that we need diverse canopy in city for a robust urban forest. Native species make up about 50% of the trees that Forestry plants. To provide diversity and resistance against pests and diseases, a wide range of species, native and non-native, are required. Native trees work well in some areas, such as in naturalized areas in parks. However, native species are not that viable at difficult sites, such as downtown.

    Also, when Planning staff review landscape plans submitted with development proposals, only native species can be planted adjacent to Core Areas and Linkages in the Natural Heritage System.

15. **Could you add roof top forests to your plan, like the rooftop greenery required now in Toronto? Also, are we trying to increase planting in parking lots?**

    Yes. Hamilton's site plan guidelines are currently being updated and will include ways to increase green spaces. The guidelines shape new development by providing specifications for planting and landscaping so that they meet the requirements of the Official Plan, Secondary Plans, and Zoning By-laws. For example, through the site plan guidelines, the City can control minimum soil volumes, species to be planted, and the width of landscape strips.

    The City is using other methods, such as the new commercial mixed use zoning, which requires more planting islands and bonus incentives for green roofs. Every year we are looking at ways to supplement and enhance landscaping. The City is currently developing a Green Development Standard and a Biodiversity Action Plan.

16. **If Council approves the strategy, does that mean a commitment by the City to budget for and implement?**

    When the final UFS goes to Council for approval, the staff report will include timeline, who is responsible to implement the action, and resources required (staff and financial) for each action. In this way, Council will have information on what is required to implement the actions. The actual financial commitment will be made as each action is brought forward.

17. **Has the Indigenous community been consulted, included, and has the cultural significance of trees been considered?**

Yes, staff consulted with the Hamilton Aboriginal Advisory Committee early in the project (June 2018). Notification of this public meeting and draft report were sent through Urban Indigenous Strategy staff. Staff will commit to following up. The cultural value of trees has been considered in the UFS through the recognition of the value of trees. Staff agree we could articulate this better in the final UFS.

18. What can citizens do to best support the efforts of the UFS?

The Free Street Tree Program is a fantastic program where residents can ask to have a tree planted in the municipal road allowance. You can take part in the program, and also tell your neighbours about it. Also, through our partners, Forestry runs community tree planting events and is looking to expand these in the future. We encourage you to get involved in these events. Keep an eye out for private tree programs – environmental groups often give away trees. You can also get involved in citizen science, by participating in a tree count in your neighbourhood.

19. As public education is pivotal, what are your public outreach strategies?

Since 60% of the urban forest is on private property, public outreach is critical to success of the UFS. There are some ongoing public outreach programs now, such as the Forestry Section's program where an arborist will go to a school to talk about the importance of trees and promote the Free Street Tree Program. However, we know that there is much more that can be done. In the UFS, a communications strategy and a full-time staff person to coordinate it are recommended actions. Communications could include educational materials and videos, web page, public events, and open data on the urban forest.