

Corporate Tree Management Policy - Additional Public Consultation

Recommendation

That Urban Planning Committee recommend to City Council:

That revised Corporate Tree Management Policy C456C, as set out in Attachment 1 of the September 29, 2020, City Operations report CR_7220, be approved.

Previous Council/Committee Action

At the April 30/May 1, 2019, City Council meeting, the following motion was passed:

That Administration conduct additional public consultation on the Corporate Tree Management Policy, including a special provision for Natural Areas and return to Committee.

Executive Summary

The City of Edmonton's Urban Forest is an important City asset that provides environmental, ecological, economic and social benefits to Edmontonians. It also supports ConnectEdmonton's strategic goals of Healthy City and Climate Resilience as well as the draft City Plan's commitment to be Greener As We Grow. It is critical that these valuable assets are responsibly managed, preserved and protected.

In April 2019, the Corporate Tree Management Policy (C456B) was updated to provide more clarity and transparency to the public and stakeholders about how the City manages the urban forest. With that update, Council directed Administration to conduct further public engagement on the Policy, with a focus on natural areas.

This report outlines the findings from the additional public and stakeholder engagement conducted in Fall 2019, and the resulting changes that are being recommended to the Corporate Tree Management Policy and the Corporate Tree Management and Tree Reserve Procedure.

Report

The City of Edmonton's Urban Forest (CoE Urban Forest) plays an essential role in environmental quality and biodiversity and contributes to the livability and enjoyment of

the city's neighbourhoods. The CoE Urban Forest includes all City owned trees in Edmonton. The purpose of the City of Edmonton Corporate Tree Management Policy (C456B) is to ensure growth, sustainability, acquisition, maintenance, protection and preservation of the CoE Urban Forest.

The Corporate Tree Management Policy was created in 1989 and was first updated in 2010 (Policy C456A). In 2017, Urban Planning Committee directed Administration to make amendments to Policy C456A to provide more clarity to the terminology used in the Policy and better define the Tree Reserve. In April 2019, the updated Policy C456B was approved by Council with a motion that Administration conduct public engagement on the Policy in 2019, review the Policy in the context of special provisions for Natural Areas and report back to Council in March of 2020. Council indicated an interest to find out from the public how they would like to see the CoE Urban Forest protected, preserved or enhanced and how the public would like to be involved through volunteering and funding CoE Urban Forest enhancements.

Policy Changes

Administration evaluated the results from public and stakeholder engagement and recommends that the Corporate Tree Management Policy as well as the Corporate Tree Management and Tree Reserve Procedure be updated. The revised Policy (C456C) has been presented in Attachment 1 and requires Council approval; the revised Procedure, provided in Attachment 2, is included for information.

The key Policy changes include:

- Adding “stewardship” to the Policy statement and purpose to incorporate public and stakeholder feedback that emphasizes the importance of responsible care for Edmonton’s natural stands.
- Adding “public education and engagement opportunities” to the Policy statement and purpose. Across all engagement platforms, participants expressed the importance of education and engagement for the public and communities to better manage, grow, preserve and protect our Urban Forests.
- Replacing “Ornamental Trees” with “Boulevard and Open Space Trees” to better define all City trees that exist outside of natural stands. Engagement highlighted that many participants did not understand the term “ornamental trees”, and that it includes trees on boulevards and open spaces.

Based on the changes to the Policy, the Procedure has been updated to include:

- New definitions for Corporate Tree Management, Growth, Sustainability and Stewardship.
- Updated definitions for Acquisition, Boulevard and Open Space Trees, City Trees and Tree Preservation.

The specific changes to the Policy and Procedure with the justification are detailed in Attachment 3.

Administration also updated the Guidelines for Evaluation of Trees, Natural Stand Valuation Guidelines and Tree Preservation Guidelines to align with the proposed policy changes and recommendations from the Forestry Services Audit (19463). The guidelines provide details on how the City preserves, protects and evaluates compensation for boulevard and open space trees, and natural stands. The updated guidelines are available on the City website. Administration will continue to make adjustments to these guidelines and its internal operational work plans to reflect the engagement feedback and new work being undertaken on the proposed Public Tree Bylaw and Urban Forest Asset Management Plan.

Next Steps

The City currently has several programs and initiatives that directly involve the public, such as the Request to Plant, Tree Donation, Commemorative Tree and Partners in Parks programs. Planning is underway to determine how to expand these existing programs to promote stewardship, public education and engagement opportunities for Edmontonians given the COVID-19 situation.

Administration is developing a Public Tree Bylaw for protection and preservation of City owned trees as well as the Urban Forest Asset Management Plan. Engagement with industry, utility companies, environmental and community groups is underway for these projects. Administration will return to Council in Q4 of 2020 with the proposed bylaw and toward the end of 2021 with the asset management plan.

Budget / Financial Implications

Until further work outlined under next steps is completed and the proposed Tree Bylaw and Urban Forest Asset Management Plan are brought forward for Council's consideration, financial implications are unknown.

Public Engagement

In Fall 2019, the City conducted public and stakeholder engagement on the Corporate Tree Management Policy C456B. The focus of the engagement was to invite feedback on the current Policy, suggest updates to the Policy Statement and Purpose and understand whether the Policy achieves the desired principles of growth, protection, preservation and acquisition of natural areas.

The engagement invited Edmontonians to provide input through multiple channels including:

- An electronic survey available to the Edmonton Insight Community panel, to all public through a link on the project website and to an independent panel made up of Edmontonians who have agreed to respond to surveys conducted by an external consultant (total 3,343 participants);
- Three public drop-in sessions in north, central and south of the city targeting infill and newly developed neighbourhoods (total 143 participants); and
- A stakeholder workshop for environmental and not-for-profit groups (total 13 participants).

Summary of Engagement Findings:

The results of the engagement indicate that Edmontonians appreciate the aesthetic appeal and environmental benefits of Edmonton's Urban Forest and want the trees to be managed, preserved and protected.

- Across all platforms, there was strong support for the updated Corporate Tree Management Policy (C456B). Participants wanted the City to plant more trees, increase species diversity, and monitor the protection of trees.
- There was an increased desire from all Edmontonians for opportunities for community involvement and education, including volunteer planting and school programs.
- Participants at the drop-in sessions indicated that management and protection of natural areas must balance preservation and risks attributed to pests, disease, wildfire, and public safety.
- Respondents from the electronic survey wanted the City to focus on protection from damage caused by humans and to plan for improved climate resilience, with prioritization of river valley, ravines, natural areas and naturalized sites.
- Participants at the stakeholder workshop encouraged the City to steward and grow the Urban Forest, ensuring the ecological integrity of natural areas. They also recommended planting native species in naturalized and natural areas.

The full What We Heard report is included in Attachment 4. All timelines mentioned in the What We Heard report were estimated before the COVID-19 pandemic and have changed substantially.

Corporate Outcomes and Performance Management

Corporate Outcome(s): Edmonton is an environmentally sustainable and resilient city.			
Outcome(s)	Measure(s)	Result(s)	Target(s)
Increase in canopy coverage across the city	Tree Canopy Coverage (measured using Multispectral remote sensing technologies)	2019: 13.8%	20% tree canopy coverage (as per the 2012-2022 Urban Forest Management Plan)

Sustainable tree inventory	Percentage of total boulevard and open space tree inventory removed due to mortality annually	2019: 1.1% (out of boulevard and open space tree inventory of 384,673)	Less than 10% annual mortality rate of boulevard and open space trees
Conservation of existing CoE Urban Forest boulevard and open space tree inventory	Annual tree mortality and tree replacement	2019: 72% of dead trees were replaced (Net loss of 1,174 trees - 4141 tree removed, 2,967 tree replaced)	100% replacement of dead trees annually
Increase in Naturalized Sites	Naturalization planting done by Roots for Trees volunteers and operational crews	2019: 90.6% (95,142 trees, shrubs and wildflowers)	105,000 (for 2019)

Risk Assessment

Risk Element	Risk Description	Likelihood	Impact	Risk Score (with current mitigations)	Current Mitigations	Potential Future Mitigations
Customers /Citizens	By promoting stewardship of natural stands, citizens may desire an increased level of service that does not align with the City's policy.	3 - Possible	1 - Minor	3 - Low	Website content and responses to 311 inquiries will clarify scope of policy changes.	Public education through community oriented workshops and programs.
Public Perception	The public may perceive that by explicitly stating we are stewarding natural stands, which includes tree maintenance, the intention is to use this as the only guiding principle for all natural area issues or needs.	3 -Possible	2- Moderate	6 - Low	Website content and responses to 311 inquiries will clarify scope of policy. Regular communications with stewardship groups.	Public education through community oriented workshops and programs. Regular communications with stewardship groups.

Attachments

1. Corporate Tree Management Policy C456C
2. Corporate Tree Management and Tree Reserve Procedure
3. Changes to Policy and Justification
4. What We Heard Urban Forestry - Corporate Tree Management Policy

Others Reviewing this Report

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- C. Owen, Deputy City Manager, Communications and Engagement

- J. Meliefste, Deputy City Manager, Integrated Infrastructure Services
- K. Armstrong, Deputy City Manager, Employee Services
- R. Smyth, Deputy City Manager, Citizen Services
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- B. Andriachuk, City Solicitor