

# Administration Response - Forestry Audit

## Recommendation

That the September 18, 2020, City Operations report CR\_8097, be received for information.

## Executive Summary

Administration worked with the City Auditor during its audit of Forestry Services. The scope of the audit included the documentation, controls, processes, and procedures related to the City's Corporate Tree Management Policy and procedure. The audit contained three objectives:

1. Determine whether the City is effective in maintaining and monitoring their tree inventory.
2. Determine whether the City is efficient in using resources to support a healthy and growing urban forest.
3. Determine whether guiding documents provide clear direction in managing the City's urban forest.

The City Auditor identified areas for improvement across all three objectives and provided Administration with six recommendations to improve the effectiveness, efficiency and guiding documents for maintaining the City's urban forest. Administration accepts and is addressing all recommendations. Work is already underway to complete the Urban Forest Asset Management Plan, update the Corporate Tree Management Policy and update the Guidelines for Evaluation of Trees.

Four of the six actions will be implemented by November 2021, and the remaining actions will conclude by November 2022. The following is a summary of Administration's current and planned activities.

## Report

In 2020, the Office of the City Auditor carried out an audit of forestry services focused on the effectiveness and efficiency of forestry operations and provided recommendations to improve these operations. The recommendations align with areas of improvement already identified by Administration, and work already underway.

The Office of the City Auditor made six recommendations to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of maintaining the City's urban forest as well as improvements to the guiding documents:

1. Review pruning service levels and budgeted workload to ensure performance targets can be met within the current budget.
2. Ensure inspections are properly documented and invoices are verified for tree maintenance.
3. Conduct a periodic review of the tree inventory to ensure data is complete and accurate.
4. Review the equipment utilization and identify and implement opportunities to use the forestry equipment more efficiently.
5. Review and update the guiding documents relating to forestry services to improve their clarity, accuracy and consistency.
6. Review Forestry's publicly reported performance measures to ensure they are understandable, accurate, reasonable and comparable.

### **Response From Administration**

Administration is addressing each recommendation as outlined below.

#### ***Recommendation 1: Review pruning service levels and budgeted workload to ensure performance targets can be met within the current budget.***

Administration accepts this recommendation and has started developing the Urban Forest Asset Management Plan (UFAMP) that will clearly define goals, timelines, budgetary and staffing requirements and measurement and monitoring techniques. The UFAMP will enable Administration to set pruning service levels and meet performance targets. This work will be completed by November 2021.

#### ***Recommendation 2: Ensure inspections are properly documented and invoices are verified for tree maintenance.***

Administration accepts this recommendation. Building on recent improvements to existing processes and the hiring of dedicated inspectors, the following actions will be taken to refine and formalize the inspection process in order to ensure consistency:

- Create a transparent inspection process with documentation for tracking contractors and internal achievements, including payment approvals.
- Ensure capacity is available for inspections.
- Digitize inspection processes using mapping technology.

Administration will complete the implementation of these actions by November 2021.

***Recommendation 3: Conduct a periodic review of the tree inventory to ensure data is complete and accurate.***

Administration accepts this recommendation. This work is currently ongoing through the UFAMP, which is under development and will identify gaps in the existing inventory and the resources required to improve inventory data. This includes:

- A refined methodology to more accurately calculate the number of City-owned trees.
- A process to ensure that mandatory fields are streamlined and completed.

Administration will finalize a plan to migrate from paper inputting to digital inputting of inventory data to improve sustainability and timeliness of data entry. This work will be completed by November 2021.

***Recommendation 4: Review the equipment utilization and identify and implement opportunities to use the forestry equipment more efficiently.***

Administration accepts this recommendation. Building on the fleet utilization work currently underway, Administration will complete a review of forestry equipment utilization by November 2021. The review of equipment utilization will focus on the following:

- Examine lifecycle management of Forestry equipment.
- Establishment of efficiency targets and review of opportunities to improve utilization.
- Creation of a methodology to report equipment utilization.

***Recommendation 5: Review and update the guiding documents relating to forestry services to improve their clarity, accuracy and consistency.***

Administration accepts this recommendation and will review the guiding documents in place to improve clarity, accuracy and consistency. Work is underway to update the Corporate Tree Management Policy and the Guidelines for Evaluation of Trees. Administration anticipates presenting the updated policy to Urban Planning Committee in the fall of 2020. The remaining guiding documents are anticipated to be reviewed and updated by November 2022.

***Recommendation 6: Review Forestry's publicly reported performance measures to ensure they are understandable, accurate, reasonable and comparable.***

Administration accepts this recommendation. The UFAMP will define the methodology and set measurable targets. Administration will ensure publically reported performance measures are understandable, accurate, reasonable, comparable and aligned with the UFMP and the City Plan. These actions will be completed by May 30, 2022.

### **Additional Information**

The City's urban forest includes trees on all City-owned boulevards, in open spaces such as parks, and in natural areas on City owned land, such as in the river valley. Edmonton's urban canopy provides environmental, ecological, economic and social benefits to the city and surrounding communities. Effective management of the City's urban forest contributes to the City of Edmonton's strategic objectives of climate resilience by protecting Edmonton's natural environment, minimizing environmental impact and lowering its carbon footprint.

The Corporate Tree Management Policy C456B delineates the roles and responsibilities for managing the City's urban forest. The policy's purpose is to ensure the growth, sustainability, acquisition, maintenance, protection and preservation of trees in the City's urban forest. Administration is currently developing an Urban Forest Asset Management Plan (UFAMP) that will be presented to City Council in 2021. The UFAMP will be Administration's tactical plan to achieve the short and long term objectives set out in the Urban Forest Management Plan, which was approved by Council in 2012.

Since 2018, Administration has improved the stewardship of City's urban forest in the following areas:

#### 1. Process Improvements

Between 2018 and 2020, lean assessments were conducted on three key areas within Forestry Services: tree replacement, pruning, and inventory and assessment. These reviews resulted in the following improvements:

- Streamlined tree replacement program workflow through the identification and elimination of non-value added activities resulting in efficiencies in number of site visits, time and resources;
- Updated processes and standard operating procedures for equipment and vehicle routing and stump grinding;
- Improved processes for the collection and accurate recording of tree pruning data;
- Reallocated resources to ensure completion of pruning assessments and annual work plan; and
- Established standard operating procedures and increased regular pruning inspections.

These improvements are still in effect. Administration continues to look for efficiencies and improvements within the operations.

#### 2. Technology Improvements

Administration intends to continue leveraging technology to improve the inspection and mapping of the tree inventory. In 2019, Administration completed a city-wide canopy cover analysis using fly-over Lidar Technology. The assessment was performed to align with the UFAMP’s directive to measure and expand the urban canopy. Edmonton’s urban canopy is currently estimated to cover 13.8 percent of land within the city limits.

Since 2019, Administration has been trialing digital handheld devices to improve real-time tracking of forestry data collection in the field. This improvement has resulted in better and more accurate data collection of completed work plans, and reduced the number of visits to the field.

**3. Policy and Guideline Updates**

Administration presented an updated Corporate Tree Management Policy (C456B) to Urban Planning Committee through April 23, 2019, City Operations report CR\_6694, along with an updated Tree Reserve Procedure. These two updates better clarify roles and responsibilities of the City.

In the fall of 2019 and winter of 2020, Administration conducted engagement with stakeholders and citizens about the Corporate Tree Management Policy, the proposed tree bylaw and the UFAMP. The focus of the engagement was on understanding public perception of how Edmonton’s urban forest is managed, preserved, and protected, and asked citizens how they would like to see it managed.

**Next Steps**

Administration will continue to implement the action plans indicated in the responses to the City Auditor’s recommendations and ensure they are completed within the specified time frame.

**Corporate Outcomes and Performance Management**

<b>Corporate Outcome(s): Condition of Success</b>			
<b>Outcome(s)</b>	<b>Measure(s)</b>	<b>Result(s)</b>	<b>Target</b>
Effective and efficient service delivery.	Completed action plans as per audit recommendations.	TBD	Recommendations will be implemented by Q4 2022 (ongoing).

### Others Reviewing This Report

- M. Persson, Chief Financial Officer and Deputy City Manager, Financial and Corporate Services
- C. Owen, Deputy City Manager, Communications and Engagement
- J. Meliefste, Acting Deputy City Manager, Integrated Infrastructure Services
- K. Armstrong, Deputy City Manager, Employee Services
- R. Smyth, Deputy City Manager, Citizen Services
- S. McCabe, Deputy City Manager, Urban Form and Corporate Strategic Development
- B. Andriachuk, City Solicitor