

Urban Forest Strategic Management Plan (UFSMP)

Defining the UFSMP

The UFSMP is a plan that reviews the status of urban forest management, assesses the progress since the first urban forest management plan delivered in 2008, and provides strategic direction and recommendations to enhance canopy cover to 40% by 2057 and to achieve a sustainable urban forest.

The UFSMP combines and updates two forestry management plans for North and South Oakville into one consolidated plan. The UFSMP contains 24 recommendations to address 24 main priorities and challenges noted in the plan.

Key Findings

- The Town wide canopy cover is presently 31.2 % which is an increase from 26.5% since 2005.
- Comparing the ten most important indicators affecting canopy cover and sustainability of urban forest, collected in 2005 and 2015, demonstrates the Town's canopy cover has improved in all but one indicator, "invasive species". This has increased in presence and abundance since 2005.
- The integration of trees in the planning and development review process, policy and legislation to preserve the urban forest at the provincial, regional and municipal levels, the town's enhanced tree planting program, and strong Council support have been leading contributors to the Town's success in protecting and growing its tree canopy.
- As a result of active management, the total number of trees and the percentage of native species have been increased and the average tree condition has improved since 2005.
- Implementing canopy cover targets for residential land uses north of Dundas Street, as planned in 2012 and updated in 2014, meets the 20% objective, for this land use in North Oakville, by 2057.
- The Natural Heritage System in North Oakville Secondary Plans that makes up 30% of total land area in north of Dundas Street is critical to achieve 40% tree canopy north of Dundas Street.

- Limited town owned lands for tree planting opportunities south of Dundas Street requires the Town to shift its focus to private properties and other public lands (i.e. school boards, MTO lands, hospital lands) and promote strategic partnerships with other landowners and community groups.
- In support of Oakville's canopy cover, biodiversity and climate resilience goals, the plan highly recommends to develop strategic partnerships with the public, private sector, non-profits to promote the Town's urban forestry and environmental stewardship goals.
- To achieve the 40% canopy cover objective by 2057 and achieve a sustainable urban forest, the Town should expand its woodland regeneration program and plant trees in woodlands heavily infested by invasive buckthorn and other invasive species.

Future Priorities

Considering the progress and achievement, challenges and strengths in urban forest management, six (6) priority areas have been identified.

1. Forest Protection

Protecting existing healthy trees is one of the premier ways to maintain and grow Oakville's urban forest tree removal and/or damage to healthy trees have been reduced through continued application of municipal tree by-law, private tree by-law and tree protection policies. The Town should continue to apply the Town's Tree Protection and Tree Canopy Preservation Policy and Tree Protection during Construction Procedure consistently to all development activities that affect trees in Oakville.

The Town is not able to achieve its urban forest canopy cover target without factoring the retention of mature trees and the protection of existing tree canopy.

2. Forest Health and Resilience

Oakville's urban forest is under pressure from pests, disease, climate change, and invasive species. Forest health monitoring and active management in urban areas and woodlands help maintain a healthy and resilient urban forest. At present, the Town's approach to manage and control invasive species is reactive. Forestry budgets annual capital funds to implement its reactive responses to highly infested areas by invasive insects and plant species.

Studies indicate that early detection and rapid response intervention to new invasions are the most effective ways to manage invasive species. The more established a species becomes, the more complex the treatments are to manage or control it. Early

treatments of invasive species are more cost-effective, as there is a lower density and smaller average size of invasive plants to manage on site.

The need to develop an invasive species management plan and implement interim management are identified in this plan. This plan should address high priority and early response actions.

3. Tree Planting and Establishment

Oakville's tree planting programs has helped maintain and increase tree cover across the Town. Appropriate species, site selection and early tree maintenance make the urban forest more resilient and maximize the benefits of investment in tree planting.

The UFSMP includes a series of maps that identified priority planting areas based on existing level of tree cover and potential planting area. These will be useful for operational planning to assist staff in identifying and prioritizing areas on Town lands where additional trees can be strategically planted.

There is a finite amount of space available for increasing tree cover on municipal lands. Many areas have been afforested through past planting programs. Competing space for other uses in parks and open areas can also limit the area available for tree planting. Parks and open spaces are needed to meet other social needs, including recreation, sports fields, gathering places and open, sunny areas for residents to enjoy. However, there are still some opportunities to increase and maximize tree canopy on public lands, particularly in the open space and parkway land use category

4. Risk Management

Climate change, pests and disease as well as ongoing development will continue to put pressure on the urban forest. The Town's Climate Change Strategy identified an increase in the severity and frequency of extreme weather. As the number of extreme weather events increases and new forest health threats emerge, early detection, robust emergency response systems as well as regular tree maintenance and forest health monitoring will help mitigate risk to residents, properties and the urban forest. The need for continual improvements in emergency response and business recovery procedures are identified in the plan.

5. Collaboration and Partnership

Approximately 58% of the land south of Dundas Street are not owned by the town, having 47% of tree canopy, south Oakville. Studies have identified opportunities to grow the urban forest on private land, where residents and businesses have an important role to play in meeting the Town's goal of 40% canopy cover by 2057. It is highlighted in the

UFSMP the Town should shift focus to private properties and other public agency lands (i.e. school boards, MTO lands, and hospital lands) and promote strategic partnerships with other landowners and community groups. The Town has already reached out to Conservation Halton and MTO and collaborated with Oakvillegreen and other non-governmental organizations to enhance tree planting on non-town lands and town lands (i.e. backyard tree planting, 50 million trees program). Expanding the urban forest canopy in Oakville requires continuation of the ongoing collaboration between town departments, external partners and community-based organizations.

6. Adaptive Management

Urban forest management should be adaptable to a dynamic, changing environment. Factors like urban intensification and climate change alter available growing space and tree habitat, as well invasive species, pests and disease exert ongoing pressure on the urban forest. Forest managers use a variety of tools to respond to change in management priorities. Continued monitoring of forest condition and threats will help keep the Town's forestry program on track.