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Engagement Report – Proposing a New Tree Protection Bylaw
December 8, 2022



Engagement Summary

The City of Saskatoon (City) is developing a [Tree Protection Bylaw](#) to provide clarity on the protection, growth and preservation of public trees as well as improving the City's ability to protect them. As Saskatoon grows, greater environmental and developmental pressures are placed on our urban forest. Currently, the [existing City policies and processes](#) have not been sufficient in preventing damage to and the loss of City trees, primarily due to the lack of an effective form of recourse or enforcement. To protect their urban forests, many cities across Canada have enacted bylaws to regulate the protection of public trees. These measures and bylaws have helped to ensure public trees within urban environments are protected for the enjoyment of future generations.

From February to March 2022, City Administration engaged the community in the development of a Tree Protection Bylaw. Based on what we heard from stakeholders, in addition to best practise research and internal considerations, City Administration will seek approval to develop the bylaw through a report which will be presented to City Council in Fall 2022.

The City engaged the community through two phases:

Phase 1: Options Identification

- Identify options that may work in Saskatoon
- Identify program elements to enhance opportunities and mitigate barriers

Phase 2: Close the Loop

- Further identify new program elements that enhance opportunities and mitigate barriers
- Share relevant components of the report to close the loop

This engagement summary includes the activities and results that informed the engagement goals for the project. A total of 766 participants took part in the engagement activities, including various meetings, workshops and surveys. Engagement goals, intended audiences, activities, dates, participation rates and detailed engagement results are provided in the Final Engagement Report that follows this summary. Engagement results from all activities that informed each goal are summarized below.

Importance of Protecting Public Trees

Respondents were asked how important it is to protect trees in public spaces and Saskatoon's urban forest, to which they provided an average response of five out of a total of five, indicating protecting trees is of great importance to the community. Specifically, 77% of respondents strongly support and 15% support the creation of a bylaw to protect public trees. This high level of support is rare when compared to other similar City initiatives. When asked to select their top five reasons for why protecting trees is important from the choices provided, respondents provided the following ranking:



1. Moderating temperatures and providing shade (71%)
2. Improving air quality (68%)
3. Providing habitat for wildlife (66%)
4. Adding character to our surroundings (62%)
5. Improving our quality of life and reducing stress (61%)

When asked which types of trees should be given a greater level of protection from the provided suggestions, respondents provided the following ranking:



1. The tree is located within an environmentally sensitive area, habitat restoration area or protected area (64%)
2. The tree is rare (i.e., age, size, species, distinctive features, etc.) or its location is of special significance (63%)
3. The tree species is classified as endangered, threatened or at-risk or the tree is an active habitat site for a species classified as endangered, threatened or at-risk (61%)
4. The tree is healthy and in good condition (60%)
5. The tree is located in an under-treed area or neighbourhood with less than 15% canopy cover (58%)
6. All options listed (56%)

Numerous other suggestions were provided by respondents, including female trees to reduce asthma and allergic reactions to pollen, native trees, and trees in low-income neighbourhoods to counteract inequitable tree cover within the city.

Current City Approaches

When asked whether they were aware of the current tree protection policy ([Council Policy C09-011 Trees on City Property](#)), 61% of respondents were not aware of this policy until now while 39% were aware. Additionally, most respondents (60%) were unaware that the City requires reimbursement to the Parks Department for cutting down and/or damaging trees on City property.

When asked whether the community supports the City's current approach in not removing public trees for reasons surrounding aesthetics or nuisance, most respondents supported this approach (71%). Within the comments, many respondents called on the City to not punish trees for growing and functioning as they are intended to. Many respondents encouraged the City to prioritize tree protection rather than allowing trees to be removed based on a few complaints. However, there were conflicting views on natural fall from trees as most respondents commented that excessive fruit and leaf fall should not be a consideration for the removal of a tree, while some suggested it should be.

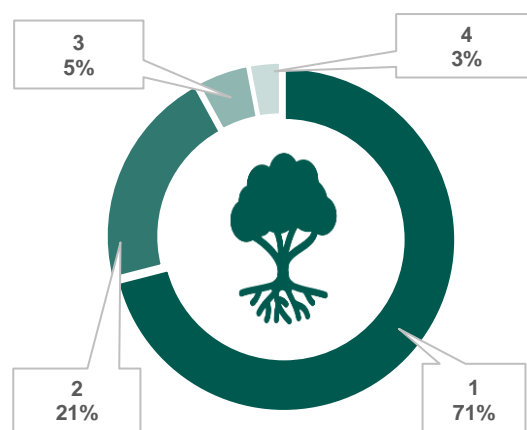


Figure 1: Support for the City's current approach in not removing public trees for complaints surrounding aesthetics or nuisance trees.

Community Consultation

Subject Matter Experts strongly support community consultation, especially in situations where an individual homeowner or developer calls for a tree to be removed; however, the development community strongly did not support community consultation, especially if it was required for every tree. Many respondents within the community (42%) believed consultation should occur every time a City tree is considered for removal. However, some respondents expressed their concern for the increased costs as well as the time associated with community consultation. Respondents suggested that if community consultation is not required, at minimum the City should notify the neighbours/Community Association of the tree removal and locations of future replacement trees.

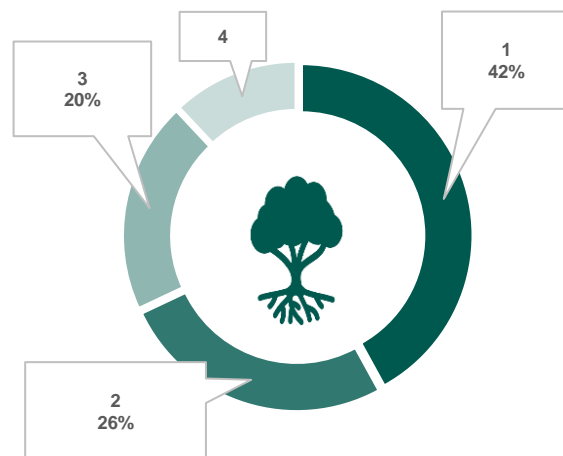


Figure 2: Support for the consulting neighbouring property owners for the removal of a City tree

When the Tree Protection Bylaw Should be Applied


When asked whether the City should change its scope to take responsibility and ownership of any tree that has any part of its trunk growing on public property, most respondents believed the City should (57%), followed by those who were uncertain (29%). Comments provided by respondents for consideration were summarized into the following themes:

Better maintenance and protection: some respondents supported the City taking responsibility of these trees since it would result in greater protection and better maintenance; some respondents felt that most homeowners may not possess the knowledge or equipment to properly maintain these trees

Engagement with owner needed: it was suggested that the City needs to engage with, consult or inform the homeowner if more aggressive maintenance measures or the removal of a tree is required to ensure relationships with residents are maintained

Greater costs: if the number of trees the City maintains increases then so too will the associated costs to the taxpayers, which respondents did and did not support; many respondents believe that the City does not currently have adequate resources to take on these additional responsibilities

When asked which of the following areas the Tree Protection Bylaw should apply to, respondents provided the following ranking:

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1. In natural areas and natural riverfront areas (87%)
 2. On City-owned property that is planned for new neighbourhood development (85%)
 3. On City-owned infill property or vacant lots that are zoned for redevelopment (78%)
 4. In afforestation areas (71%)
 5. On buffers/expressway corridors (66%)

Development and Utility Considerations

Subject Matter Experts expressed their concern over the potential for development to take precedence over tree protection. It was suggested that the future bylaw needs to be tied into the

building permit process to ensure, at the onset of a project, homeowners or developers are aware of the importance of protecting trees and the consequences in not doing so.

Many home builders stressed the importance of protecting trees and Saskatoon's urban forest to the development community; however, some participants felt that the current system pits developers against Parks staff through a lack of communication, confusion surrounding tree protection requirements, and the need for timely responses. Participants felt that the City needs to create a better balance between encouraging infill development and creating unneeded administrative hurdles (i.e., red tape) for developers. Participants called on the City to collaborate with developers to meet common goals, such as growing infill development in the community, rather than implementing policies that hinder development in Saskatoon. Suggestions by home builders included:

Allow for consultation: participants called for a form of consultation or negotiation process with Parks to discuss situations where tree removal is needed

Education and awareness: developers and utility companies need to be aware of why certain trees are being protected and what requirements need to be met; participants strongly encouraged the City to provide more information (i.e., GIS maps or tree inventory maps) at the time of the permitting process so that all contractors are aware of the trees within the area and their requirements

Streamlined process: participants called for a streamlined process that does not cause separate processes to be stacked on each other and add further confusion to an already confusing process

Education and Awareness

Throughout the engagement process, many respondents commented on the importance of educating the community on the Tree Protection Bylaw, which trees apply, and the importance of Saskatoon's urban forest. Participants suggested that the City take a proactive rather than a reactive approach to generate long-term adherence to the bylaw. Further education and awareness campaigns will limit violations caused by individuals being unaware of the bylaw and the associated consequences.

Support and Final Comments

Respondents were asked how supportive they are of a Tree Protection Bylaw for trees on public property, to which they provided an average response of five out of a total of five, indicating strong support. Overall, 92% of participants indicating they supported the development of the bylaw.

When asked to identify any final concerns they have about a Tree Protection Bylaw for trees on public property, respondents provided the following comments:

Communication: the community needs to be aware of why trees are being removed in advance of their removal; specific circumstances for tree removals that are not as clear should be open for public input; Parks should provide easy ways for residents to contact them to have their questions answered

Development: many respondents stressed that tree protection should be of equal, if not more, value as development within Saskatoon; all development should be required to protect public trees/green infrastructure that is existing and incorporate new public trees/green infrastructure into their designs

Enforcement: there needs to be continual, long-term monitoring of the full health of a tree following the completion of a project; the bylaw needs to be enforceable with substantial financial penalties for non-compliance; it was suggested that those who can pay the financial penalties will continue to do things their way, therefore enforcement should include accountability measures alongside financial penalties; healthy trees have been removed in the past without proper consultation and due process

Flexibility: participants identified the importance for the bylaw to be flexible enough to include and adapt to the variety of differing circumstances, public spaces and special circumstances that Parks will encounter

Simple: respondents stressed that the bylaw needs to be simple to understand and to communicate to the community; the definition of what is a protected tree needs to be clear

Consideration of Results:

Results from all engagement activities, alongside internal considerations and best practice research, will be considered to inform the development of the Tree Protection Bylaw. Results will also be considered in future implementation. Specific examples of how the results shaped the report and recommended options include:

Education and Awareness

We heard that there is confusion for what is a public tree and what are the requirements under the Tree Protection Bylaw. An education and awareness campaign will be implemented following the development and approval of the bylaw by City Council to ensure the community is aware of and understands the new bylaw.

Implementation

Participants provided numerous suggestions on how the bylaw could be implemented to improve awareness, accessibility, and uptake in the community. This feedback will be used in the future development and implementation of the bylaw if approved by City Council.

Lead By Example

We heard that the City should adhere to the same requirements expected of property owners; some residents suggested it can appear that the City does not follow their own standards on City development projects. Additional education and awareness opportunities will be provided to applicable City staff to ensure adherence to the bylaw.

Support for the Bylaw

Overall, the community strongly supported the creation of a Tree Protection Bylaw to protect public trees and Saskatoon's urban forest. The results of public engagement and final report will be presented to City Council in 2022.

For more information on the public engagement that was conducted and what we heard, please see the Tree Protection Bylaw Final Engagement Report.