

Urban Forestry and Pest Management Capital Reserve Amendments

ISSUE

Administration is requesting City Council approval to amend the Capital Reserve Bylaw No. 6774, by expanding the purpose of the Urban Forestry and Pest Management Capital Reserve to include financing other emerging pressures facing the Urban Forest, and the development and implementation of Urban Forest and Pest Management strategic plans.

RECOMMENDATION

The Standing Policy Committee on Environment, Utilities and Corporate Services recommend to City Council that:

1. The purpose of the Urban Forest and Pest Management Capital Reserve be expanded to allow the Reserve to finance the cost of other emerging Urban Forest pressures; and
2. That City Solicitors be requested to amend Capital Reserve Bylaw No. 6774, to appropriately reflect the amended purpose of the Urban Forestry and Pest Management Capital Reserve.

BACKGROUND

The Urban Forestry and Pest Management Capital Reserve (Reserve) currently permits capital expenditures required to respond to insect and disease infestations that threaten the City's Urban Forest, and to control pests affecting the quality of life of citizens of Saskatoon. The Reserve is funded annually from an authorized provision in the City's Operating Budget; the current balance is at approximately \$600,000 with an annual contribution of \$350,000.

In October 2022, the Pathway to a Sustainable Urban Forest: Implementation of the Urban Forest Management Plan 2022-2031 was approved in principle. The implementation plan identifies 18 actions that the City and community can take to create a sustainable Urban Forest that fall under four main areas of focus:

- 1) Planning for trees;
- 2) Growing the Urban Forest;
- 3) Maintaining the Urban Forest; and
- 4) Protecting the Urban Forest.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

It is proposed that the purpose of this Reserve be amended to further improve the overall health of the Urban Forest by financing the capital cost of additional proactive and reactive forestry activities, including future Strategic Plan development and

implementation and responding to trees that have succumbed to environmental pressures. The current purpose is too restrictive to allow these types of initiatives to be funded from the Reserve.

On average, there are approximately 575 in-house and contract removals per year, with this number increasing over the last three years due to increasing environmental stressors from drought and extreme weather conditions. Drought and extreme weather compounded with other common stressors on urban trees is contributing to increased rates of mortality.

Historically, most of the City's tree removal requirements are funded by a forestry operating provision for cyclical pruning and maintenance cycles of one in seven years for boulevard trees and one in 13 years for park and shelterbelt trees. Operational funding can not support the increased annual tree removal requirements currently being experienced. Leaving standing dead trees in parks and boulevards for too long a period is not a good option as it increases the risks associated with resident safety, pest and disease spread and is an aesthetic concern for the community.

The development and implementation of strategic plans will be a necessary proactive approach to maintaining the health and resiliency of the Urban Forest. For example, as outlined in the Pathway to a Sustainable Urban Forest: Implementation of the Urban Forest Management Plan 2022-2031, priority activities include the development of improved tree maintenance and planting plans that will help to proactively mitigate forestry pressures associated with more extreme environmental conditions, which include an increasing number of pests and diseases. Continued strategic plan development and implementation that support the Urban Forest will be critical if canopy cover targets identified within the Urban Forest Management Plan (UFMP) are to be achieved.

Amended Urban Forest and Pest Management Capital Reserve

The purpose of the amended Urban Forest and Pest Management Capital reserve, source of funds, and application of funds, are as follows:

- **Original Purpose:** The purpose of the Urban Forestry and Pest Management Capital Reserve is to finance the cost of responding to insect and disease infestations that threaten the City's urban forest and to control pests affecting the quality of life of citizens of Saskatoon.
- **Amended Purpose:** The purpose of the Urban Forestry and Pest Management Capital Reserve is to finance the capital cost of urgent urban forest priorities, strategic plan development and implementation, and to control pests and diseases affecting the urban forest.
- **Source of Funds:** This Reserve shall be funded annually from an authorized provision in the City's Operating Budget.
- **Application of Funds:** Funds in this Reserve shall be used only for capital expenditures for the purposes listed in subsection (1).

Examples of capital projects to be funded by this amendment include:

- Tree removals due to climate change and associated impacts. There has been increasing tree mortality in certain parks and green spaces, and removal of these in a timely manner is important for aesthetic, public safety and canopy health. This amendment will assist greatly in these instances; for example, President Murray, Meewasin and Kinsmen Park standing dead tree removals – see Appendix 1.
- Pest Management Plan development and implementation. This plan will outline the best methods and approaches to manage existing and future invasive species in Saskatoon, including wildlife, weeds and insects of concern.
- Priority initiatives as outlined in the Urban Forest Master Plan, such as the creation of a tree bylaw, increasing canopy cover, and increased public awareness and education on the Urban Forest.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

A capital project (Urban Forest Management Plan Implementation) requesting \$130,000 in 2024 and \$130,000 in 2025 is identified in the 2024-2025 Capital Business Plan Capital Options for consideration at the 2024/2025 Business Plan and Budget meeting in November 2023. Upon approval of identified recommendations, the Urban Forest and Pest Management Capital Reserve would be identified as the project's funding source and the request for Reserve for Capital Expenditures funding through the 2024-2025 Business Plan and Budget process would not be required.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

For an overview of additional implications, please see Appendix 2.

NEXT STEPS

If approved, the Capital Reserve Bylaw No. 6774 will require amendments as recommended in this report. Administration will continue to address ongoing urban forest response priorities and provide communication and reporting as necessary.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Standing Dead Tree Removals

Appendix 2 – Additional Implications

Report Approval

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