
Requests for Removal of City Trees Adjacent to Residential Property

Recommendation

That the report of the General Manager, Community Services Department, dated October 9, 2018 be forwarded to City Council for information.

Topic and Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide information on a newly developed Expedited Tree Removal option associated with cottony ash psyllid (CAP) pest response activities and how the Urban Forestry Management Plan will influence the development of future urban forestry policy.

Report Highlights

1. CAP has caused rapid decline in over 7,000 susceptible trees. An Expedited Tree Removal service has been developed as an option for residents who desire tree removal prior to timelines associated with the City of Saskatoon's (City) service levels.
2. Council Policy No. C09-011, Trees on City Property, identifies conditions when City tree removal is permitted.
3. The Urban Forestry Management Plan will provide a prioritized action plan to guide future policy development.

Strategic Goals

This report supports the City of Saskatoon's Strategic Goal of Continuous Improvement by providing residents with additional removal options for dead and dying trees. Additionally, the goal of Environmental Leadership is supported as an Urban Forestry Management Plan to provide both short- and long-term recommendations supporting a community vision of a healthy urban forest condition for the future.

Background

At its June 25, 2018 meeting, City Council resolved:

“that Administration report on best practices for urban forestry, and the possibility of a policy change that would allow residents to replace dead, diseased or nuisance city trees in their front or back yard.”

Urban Forestry manages an inventory of 110,000 street and park trees using international Arboriculture best practice standards to guide its operations and decisions. Ongoing operations include cyclical pruning, planting programs, responding to weather events, nursery tree production, and responding to internal or citizen service requests.

The City's urban forest provides many benefits that contribute to the quality of life for the citizens of Saskatoon. As trees age over time increasing their foliage, the value of these benefits increase exponentially. Unlike grey or hard infrastructure, this makes the urban forest one of the only municipal infrastructure assets that actually increases in value as it ages.

Report

Option for Expedited Tree Removal

Urban Forestry has been responding to approximately 200 inquiries per month during the 2018 growing season regarding CAP response activities. As more CAP infested trees become identified for removal, some residents are expressing the desire to expedite tree removal adjacent to their property prior to timelines associated with the City's funded service levels.

Urban Forestry has developed a phone-in option for homeowners who request to expedite the removal of a tree that meets current removal criteria. The cost for an expedited tree removal will be covered by the citizen making the request. The cost is based on a cost-recovery price depending on the diameter of the tree. A request form and payment will be mandatory for citizens in order to schedule an expedited removal. This cost-recovered service will ensure that tree removals (including disposal) can occur in a safe, coordinated way. Service providers will be trained professional arborists fully insured to minimize associated risks, including property damage and personal injury.

Removal of City Trees

Requests are regularly received for trees to be removed for various reasons. Generally, removal requests fall into three categories including:

- 1) tree disease/health;
- 2) development/construction activity; and
- 3) nuisance issue.

Urban Forestry's practices align with Council Policy No. C09-011, Trees on City Property, by prioritizing preservation efforts so that the benefits associated with a healthy urban forest can be enjoyed by current and future generations. The policy identifies that City trees are permitted only to be removed in conditions of public hazard, interference with utility lines, and disease. In accordance with the Policy, Urban Forestry does not approve removal requests due to nuisance issues including:

- leaf, fruit, seed, sap and needle drop;
- root growth;
- shade;
- lack of view;
- insect and bird activity; and
- unattractive growth habits.

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While these issues can be perceived as being a nuisance for a particular homeowner, it is important for City trees to be protected as valuable City assets that add benefit to the entire community. Direct and indirect benefits associated with a healthy urban forest include:

- health and social benefits, such as physical, mental, and community strength;
- economic benefits, such as increasing property values, increasing economic activity, reducing energy demand, and reducing health care costs; and
- environmental benefits, such as improving air and water quality, cooling the air, buffering from winds, reducing flooding, providing wildlife habitat, and ecosystem connectivity.

Future Urban Forestry Policy Development

City Council has affirmed that trees on City property are “living” assets. However, Saskatoon’s urban forest is changing due to urban growth, redevelopment in established areas, impacts from invasive pests, diseases, weather events, and aging trees. In order to adapt to the changes and successfully manage the City’s future investments, Urban Forestry is starting the development of an Urban Forestry Management Plan.

The development of this plan will include educating and engaging various stakeholders including the broader community about the City’s urban forest. A prioritized action plan will be developed as a result of engagement and extensive review of strategies, plans, and policies from other municipalities. This action plan will address pressures related to protection and tree removal with resulting recommendations for policy development or change.

Communication Plan

The Expedited Tree Removal Service will be communicated on the City’s website and in future correspondence with homeowners.

Policy Implications

The Expedited Tree Removal option fits with current Council Policy No. C09-011, Trees on City Property.

Financial Implications

The Expedited Tree Removal Service is intended to be a cost-recovered service. A review will be completed to ensure all costs are being recovered.

Environmental Implications

There will be reduced ecological benefits in the short term reflecting the loss of trees.

Due Date for Follow-up

A follow-up report summarizing the Urban Forestry Management Plan is expected to be presented in 2019.

Attachment

1. Letter of Intent for Cottony Ash Psyllid Tree Removal

Report Approval

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Reviewed by: Darren Crilly, Director of Parks

Approved by: Randy Grauer, General Manager of Community Services

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