



STAFF REPORT

To: Council
From: Deputy Chief Administrative Officer
Subject: Urban Forest Strategy drafted for adoption

File No.: 4530-01
Date: July 15, 2019

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this report is to present the Urban Forest Strategy to Council for consideration.

DEPUTY CAO RECOMMENDATIONS:

That based on the July 15th, 2019 staff report “Urban Forest Strategy drafted for adoption”, Council support OPTION 1 and adopt the Urban Forest Strategy as presented (Attachment No. 3) and direct staff to pursue the Immediate Actions listed in Section 5 of this report.

Respectfully submitted,

John Ward, CMC
Deputy Chief Administrative Officer

BACKGROUND:

Council directed staff to undertake an Urban Forest Strategy (UFS) at the July 4, 2017 Council meeting following the adoption of an updated Tree Bylaw (No. 2850) earlier that year.

In March 2018 the City retained Diamond Head Consulting Ltd. to assist in the creation of an Urban Forest Strategy (UFS). The goals of the UFS are to:

- outline the extent and general condition/composition of Courtenay’s tree resources on private and public lands including attention to and recommendations for the rare variant of Coastal Douglas Fir;
- identify target locations for replanting;
- provide information on the value of the urban forest, including economic and green infrastructure value;
- identify areas of wildfire risk and fire smart guidelines;
- provide guidance on corporate policies to support the urban forest on public lands, including a street tree inventory;
- provide guidance on the City’s development related policies, guidelines and other regulations for incorporating trees as part of civil infrastructure; and
- endeavour to engage the public and partner organizations in each contributing to the success of the urban forest.

DISCUSSION:

The attached Urban Forest Strategy (**Attachment 3**) is the first comprehensive evaluation of urban forest values growing over the range of land uses within Courtenay. As such, the strategy provides a baseline understanding of a number of urban forest characteristics and values, documents trends, and makes recommendations on how to manage these values in light of public input, City resources and best management practices.

The strategy delivers on the original goals identified above with the exception of identifying areas of wildfire risk and fire smart guidelines for development. During the UFS planning process, staff learned that the Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD) and K'ómoks First Nation (KFN) had initiated a Community Wildfire Protection Plan process. The findings from that plan will soon be shared with the respective Board and Chief and Council at which time staff can identify opportunities for implementation collaboration. Staff have identified that a UBCM granting stream is currently available to support municipal Fire Smart planning. This is discussed further in the "immediate actions" section of the report.

Highlighted findings, including consultation results, and recommendations from the UFS are presented below.

UFS Key Findings

The strategy presents information on a wide range of topics including: local policy context and community planning trends; urban forest benefits; community input; history; status and trends on a range of parameters that define the urban forest today; regional context, and assessment of the City's performance on a range of urban forest industry standard indicators. A summary of key findings is provided here:

1. The current canopy cover is 33% of Courtenay's total land area of 3,370ha, as of 2018. Canopy cover is a common metric to describe the extent of a community's urban forest as viewed from above.
2. Rural zoned lands just within the City's boundaries support a disproportionate amount of the urban forest. Excluding these lands from the canopy cover analysis yields an urban canopy cover of 25%.
3. 5% of the total canopy cover is on public municipal land.
4. If all properties with the city were to remove trees down to the City's Tree Bylaw tree density target of 50 stems per hectare, the community wide canopy cover would drop to 15%. This statement would assume that even nature parks, heavily treed public lands and protected environmentally sensitive areas on private land would be reduced to 50 stems per hectare, which is not likely to occur.
5. The urban forest has been declining over time, as is expected in a municipality experiencing growth, but has been accelerating in recent years in step with increased development. A similar amount of removal has occurring within the past four years as in the preceding 20 years.
6. All naturally occurring forested ecosystems in Courtenay are considered at risk in BC and/or globally, according to the BC Conservation Data Centre.
7. Public consultation indicates that respondents have been able to detect that the canopy has been declining over time and are supportive of setting a target to increase canopy cover.
8. The downtown, large commercial centres and new residential developments have the lowest canopy cover. Some regeneration will occur in new residential developments, but this is less likely in the downtown and large commercial centres where large paved surfaces make replanting more difficult.

9. Glen Urquhart Creek and the portion of Brooklyn Creek within the City's boundaries, both located on the east side of Courtenay, have the lowest canopy covers and highest percentage of impervious surfaces, two factors that are negatively correlated with stream health.
10. There are an estimated 5,200 planting opportunities on public land and 40,000 planting opportunities on private land.
11. Respondents indicate a strong support for street trees across all land uses particularly in new residential developments. No respondents indicated that they prefer few or no street trees.
12. When asked the same question in two separate surveys, only 8% of respondents (in each survey) indicated they would not be willing to support an increase in tax to support more urban forest initiatives. The most commonly selected tax increase was \$25 per household per year in the first survey (N=269) and \$100 in the second survey (N=184).

UFS Consultation

Given the volume of feedback from the two phases of consultation, two separate surveys and opportunity for written input, only a summary of key findings are presented in this report, in **Attachment 1 – Consultation Summary**. The public consultation in both Phases 1 and 2 of the project timeline overall indicated strong support for urban forest management work, including strong support for a higher canopy target than the current canopy. The following organizations provided letter responses of the drafted plan which are included in **Attachment 2**:

- Island Health
- Comox Valley Conservation Partnership
- Comox Valley Development & Construction Association

UFS Recommendations

The Strategy contains numerous recommended actions to improve urban forest management over public and private land, targeted at many sectors of the community including: the City; the development, consulting and arborist communities; nurseries and landscapers; supportive non-profit organizations; and the public and businesses at large. To summarize the significant Strategy recommendations, a number of plan components are included here (Vision Statement; The 34-40% canopy target; Goal framework and recommended supportive actions; Implementation framework; and Immediate actions):

1. Vision Statement

A Vision Statement is meant to capture the desired state of the value in question. It should be a relatively short and concise statement used as an aspirational guide to help the community make decisions about the urban forest as the strategy is implemented. The Vision Statement has been informed by the Phase 1 consultation findings, using the survey findings, including open ended responses, from the community. The Vision Statement below was presented in the Phase 2 consultation to which 87% of survey respondents indicated support. In the consultation, the specific target was left blank and respondents were asked to identify their preferred canopy target.

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| Courtenay 2050 Urban Forest Strategy Vision Statement |
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| <i>Courtenay residents envision a future urban forest that is more extensive than today, is connected and accessible, maintains mature trees and ecosystem services, consists of a sustainable mix of ages and locally adapted species, and is used as a design treatment to reduce the prevalence of</i> |
|---|

pavement in commercial areas, create neighbourhood distinction and canopy streets on key routes.

A canopy cover target of 34-40% distributed throughout Courtenay will inform the refinement of policies and actions to achieve this Vision, as the urban forest changes to accommodate development, climate change and through the natural life span of trees.

2. The 34-40% canopy target

a. Industry standard canopy targets

Tree canopy is a common aggregate metric used to describe the extent of a community's urban forest. It is the total coverage of all tree leaves, branches and stems that cover the ground when viewed from above. Courtenay's tree canopy is composed of natural forests and planted trees across all land uses.

A canopy cover target is a valuable part of the plan that sets a high level performance target, and is a component of most Urban Forest Strategies. An industry standard does not exist for municipal canopy targets as the industry recommendation is to set a target based on geographical and climatic considerations (can forests be supported and are they a dominant part of native ecosystems), development densities and land use patterns (is there room to support tree growth), and community values. While 40% was a supported industry standard of urban forest canopy targets put forward by American Forests¹ in 1997, more recently the same organization has observed that technology has improved to better link canopy cover to specific ecosystem services (e.g. heat island cooling, reduction in stormwater, carbon sequestration) and that a wider variety of factors should be considered when setting a target. As such, some communities are using ecosystem service targets (e.g. the achievement of specified performances of the ecosystem services stated above) to inform canopy cover targets. Should Council direct that specific ecosystem service goals be used to inform the Canopy Target, a future Urban Forest Strategy update (recommended for every 10 years) would be an opportunity to collect this information, and work with relevant master plans (e.g. Integrated Rainwater Management Plan) to inform the target as these data were not available for this baseline Strategy.

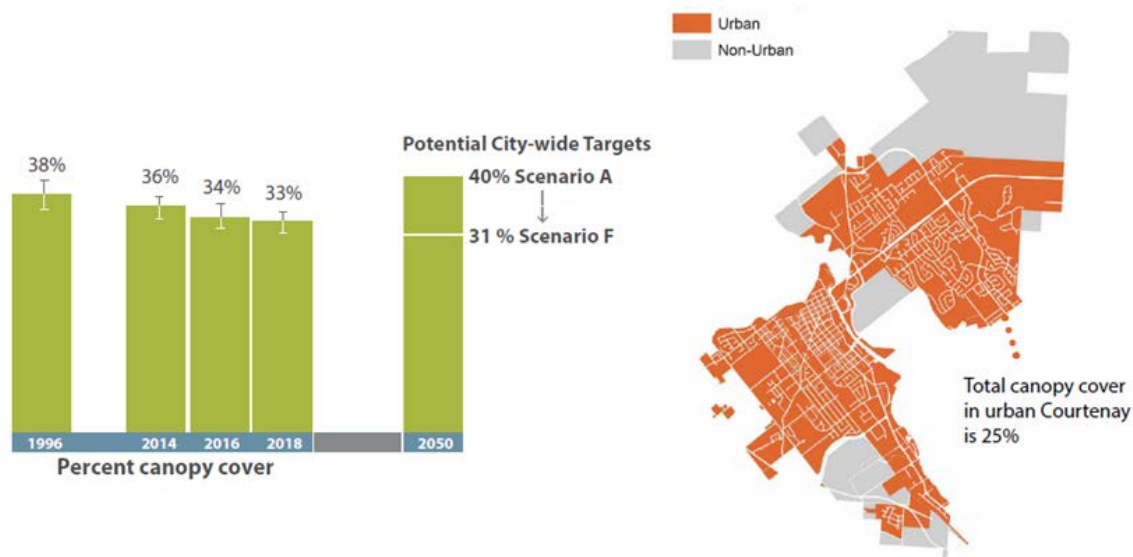
b. Courtenay's canopy trends

Courtenay's canopy in 2018 was approximately 33% across the entire City, and 25% within the urban areas (shown in image below). The difference in the city-wide and urban tree canopy is a result of the non-urban areas having a much higher tree canopy and therefore boosting the City's overall average. City-wide, the canopy cover has been declining over time, with accelerating loss in the past four years. Canopy change was measured using Courtenay's current City boundary, therefore some of this change would have occurred prior to those lands joining the City. The trend of accelerated decline within the last four years, however, did occur within the City's boundaries as the last boundary extension occurred in 2013. The last four years has also been a period of increased development activity.

¹ American Forests is the oldest national non-profit conservation organization in the United States. Their mission is to protect and restore threatened forest ecosystems, promote and expand urban forests and increase understanding of the importance of forests. www.americanforests.org

In discussing canopy trends, it's important to understand how size of a tree factors into the equation. Young trees today will generally contribute a higher canopy cover in the future assuming they thrive. Older trees will also die and trees will be removed, reducing canopy cover. Because of this interplay of growth and decline, it is acceptable urban forest planning practice to use a static target even though the canopy cover in reality will naturally fluctuate from year to year. Important considerations in light of this is the relationship between tree density and canopy cover as the future canopy cover will be influenced by the number of young trees retained and planted today. The relationship between tree density and canopy is discussed in a section below.

The bar graph below shows the canopy cover trend for years that aerial photography (and Lidar Data) are available, and shows the range of possible targets based on six different scenarios described further below. The map graphic shows the area of land within the City considered 'urban' and 'non-urban'.



c. Exploring canopy target options

The public was asked about their preferred canopy target at both phases of the consultation and in both phases demonstrated strong support for increasing the canopy from current conditions. In Phase 1 consultation, 67% of both all respondents (N=304) and Courtenay respondents (N=231) indicated they thought the City's canopy was declining over the years and 85% of all respondents (N=273) and 84% of Courtenay respondents (N=215) thought the City should set a target to increase the tree canopy cover above what we have now. Just 1% of respondents thought the City should set a target to allow canopy to decrease from what we have now.

In Phase 2 consultation, six specific tree canopy scenarios (A-F) were presented and participants were asked to indicate their order of priority. Three different policy lever categories were varied to distinguish the scenarios from each other:

- o tree bylaw regulation: varying the Tree Density Target from 50 stems per hectare (current) to 75 or 100;
- o private planting: varying the number of private trees to be planted during the 2050 timeframe (scenarios included none, moderate or high increments of 0, 8,500 or 17,000 respectively); and
- o municipal property planting: for the scenarios the assumption of strong municipal planting of 5,000 in the 2050 timeframe (at 300/year for 18 years) was a consistent variable.

The target scenarios are described as a range of what might be reasonably achieved between the city-wide target (maximum) and the urban area target (minimum). **Representing the target as a range is recommended because the rate of community growth and forest change cannot be predicted at this time for large undeveloped portions of the urban forest which support a disproportionate amount of the community’s tree canopy.** The target minimums for each scenario are included to establish that as the large undeveloped portions of the urban forest are developed, they would be required to meet the minimum city-wide targets similar to the rest of the community.

Canopy Cover Target Scenarios

Each scenario assumes 5,000 new trees are planted on public land and a 15% canopy target over commercial and industrial aggregate zones.

| Scenario* | City-Wide Canopy Target (max) | Urban Area Canopy Target | Tree Bylaw Density Target (sph ¹) | New Trees Planted on Private Land (voluntarily) | Canopy Target Over Aggregated Residential, Multi-Use and High Density Zones | Canopy Target Over Aggregated Rural-Residential Zones | Actions | | |
|-----------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|---|---|---|---|------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| | | | | | | | Regulation | Voluntary Planting | Public planting |
| A | 40% | 34% | 100 | 17,000 | 40% | 50% | Highest | High | High |
| B | 37% | 29% | 75 | 17,000 | 30% | 40% | High | High | High |
| C | 36% | 27% | 75 | 8,500 | 27% | 38% | High | Moderate | High |
| D | 34% | 24% | 50 | 17,000 | 20% | 35% | Current | High | High |
| E | 33% | 23% | 50 | 8,500 | 18% | 30% | Current | Moderate | High |
| F | 31% | 21% | 50 | 0 | 15% | 28% | Current | None | High |

¹ Stems per hectare

d. Recommended target & implementation strategies

The most common order of preference for all respondents (87%) and Courtenay respondents (85%) was from highest canopy target to lowest. **Based on these findings, staff is recommending that the highest canopy target scenario of 34-40% be adopted within the Strategy. This target range represents an increase from the current canopy cover (2018 data) of between 1% (minimum) and 7% (maximum).**

The City must assume that loss of forest patches will continue to occur because municipal areas have been identified in the Comox Valley Regional Growth Strategy as the most appropriate urban, serviceable locations for our region’s growth. Therefore, to achieve the recommended ambitious canopy target, **redistributing canopy to under-canopied areas is a critical initial and on-going action** required in order to prepare for this anticipated loss. The plan identifies that a target of 17,000 trees to be planted on private property and 5,000 on public property at a rate of 850/year and 300/year respectively for 20 years. As noted this target is ambitious and may require

adjustments to the time frame depending on the pace of development, uptake of private planting and the City's ability to increase annual planting target to 300 trees per year. The City's canopy cover will be monitored over time to assess what adjustments may be required.

Adopting this canopy target range would also set an expectation that the **designs for new developments on lands outside the urban areas require the minimum target of 34%** be achieved. This figure corresponds to an average of 110 trees per hectare. This canopy target could be achieved through a variety of means including retaining environmentally sensitive areas (if they exist, and as is already required through the Environmental Development Permit guidelines and senior government requirements), retaining existing trees outside of environmentally sensitive areas (which is already required at a Tree Density Target of 50 stems per hectare in the Tree Bylaw), and planting trees to make up any canopy/tree density shortfalls should any exist. By counting new trees towards the canopy target, it is acknowledged that the canopy target would not be immediately achieved, as it would take decades to grow, similar to newly planted trees within the urban areas. Staff observe that the majority of heavily forested lands that fall outside the urban areas are large parcels, allowing for more design flexibility than urban properties, and subject to rezoning, allowing for Council discretion to negotiate community amenities, such as urban forests.

e. Relationship between Tree Bylaw and canopy target

The Urban Forest Strategy identifies the relationship between the Tree Bylaw Tree Density Target (TDT) and canopy cover through a regression analysis between number of trees identified on an aerial photograph and its corresponding canopy cover within blocks of properties. The identified relationship is Courtenay specific, is within 95% confidence limits and allows for an estimation between number of trees (including young) and future canopy to be projected.

Target scenarios A, B and C include the option of increasing the TDT. However, increasing the TDT in the Tree Bylaw at this time is not recommended. It is however a valuable strategy to identify for future consideration following canopy monitoring and more detailed neighbourhood planning that will occur through the OCP review process (discussed further in the Implementation Strategy section below). The TDT and canopy target relationship provides for useful quantification tools when working with development applicants to achieve stated urban forest goals such as within the forested lands outside of urban Courtenay.

f. Canopy cover target options

Should Council wish to adopt a different target, the Urban Forest Strategy as presented may be adopted with an amending motion to adjust only the target numbers associated with the plan including the city-wide canopy target, the block specific canopy target and the number of trees to plant per year on each municipal and private lands.

3. Goal framework and recommended supportive actions

The recommendations within the plan are organized around five themes: planning; managing; protecting; growing; and partnering. Examples of actions corresponding to each goal-theme are described below. The goal framework and supportive actions was presented in the Phase 2 consultation to which 87% of survey respondents indicated support.

- a. **Plan strategically** to inform and monitor land use patterns and integrate the urban forest into civic asset management. Planning actions include consultation activities with individual neighbourhoods, conducting forest fire management planning, adopting policies regarding public trees, and maintaining spatial data on changes to canopy cover.
- b. **Manage pro-actively** to enhance urban forest health, safety and resilience. Management actions pertain to public land and include continuing to develop management responses to risk factors such as climate change, storm, pests and drought, investing more in the early years of tree establishment, and developing clear operating procedures based on level of service expectations.
- c. **Protect prudently** to maintain the quality and connectedness of the urban forest. Protection actions include pursuing options to enhance the protection of significant forest stands and biodiversity corridors, understanding how changes to hydrology and soil through development affect the urban forest, monitoring the Tree Bylaw to ensure it is effectively protecting applicable trees, and making changes when it is not.
- d. **Grow the urban forest intentionally** to provide urban forest benefits when and where they are needed. Growing actions include more planting on public and private land, distributing the canopy cover to areas that need it, enhancing the quality of new planting conditions, and promoting building energy efficiency through strategic planting locations.
- e. **Partner effectively** to share stewardship and promote appreciation of the urban forest. Partnering actions include collaborating with a variety of sectors on stewardship opportunities including the arboriculture community, landscape industry, nurseries, third-party utilities, non-profit societies and students conducting research, investing in public education and communications.

In addition to recommendations, the plan also includes indicators for each goal-theme. The indicators provide a snapshot of which goal areas need improvement most. Staff do not recommend adopting specific indicator rankings for this baseline UFS, but note that actions within any one goal-theme will improve its indicator performance. Setting indicator rankings could be achieved in a future UFS revision and be used to assist in monitoring the plan.

4. Implementation framework

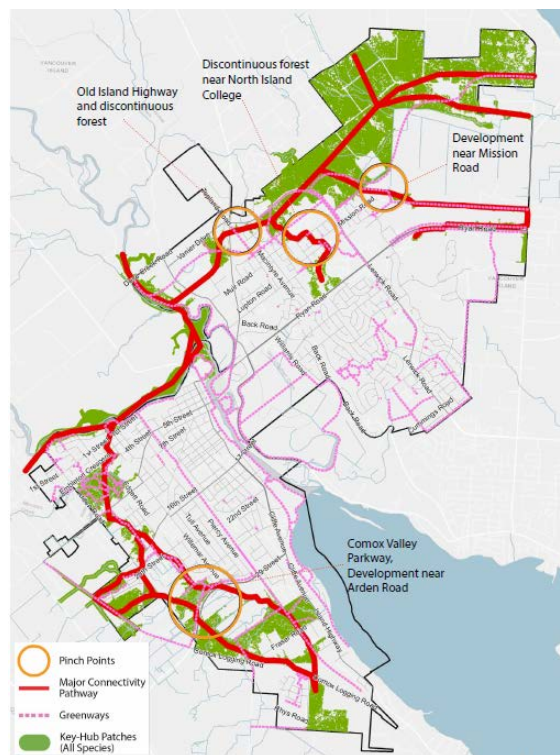
The following implementation framework is identified to state the integration of approaches required to achieve the Vision and Goals identified.

a. **Set a canopy cover target and monitor over time**

As discussed in the canopy target section above, a target of 34-40% is recommended. Coupled with this strategy is the recommendation to collect LiDAR data to conduct high accuracy canopy cover analysis at 5 year intervals in order to monitor canopy changes and re-evaluate which policy interventions to prioritize. LiDAR data is estimated to cost \$25,000 and will have other City applications. Lower accuracy canopy cover analysis is also available using aerial photography. The City already intends to obtain leaf-on aerial photography every six years and leaf-off aerial photography every two years. Leaf-on is required for canopy cover analysis.

b. Protect a network of the critical remaining urban forest

Planning for a series of connected urban forest patches is a recommended best management practice to preserve and represent native forest ecosystems, support forest and watershed health, and provide for habitat and movement by native species. To determine the most valuable urban forest patches to preserve and/or restore, a connectivity analysis was conducted using the habitat requirements of three local indicator species. The resulting analysis indicates that within the City's boundaries, the key opportunity for forest connectivity is along the Millard Piercy and Morrison creeks, Puntledge and Tsolum rivers, along Vanier Rd., Mission hill, and into both Block 71 and the Crown Isle north lands as shown in the adjacent map. How development and conservation goals can exist within and adjacent these areas, such as by designating the lands as an Environmental Development Permit Area, will be explored in more detail in the upcoming OCP review.



Determining environmental protection goals for this corridor also can contribute to the OCP policy of “retaining threatened Coastal Douglas Fir.” This policy was included in the OCP amendments on Climate Change to recognize that the Coastal Douglas-fir (CDF) Biogeoclimatic Zone^[1] is the smallest, most altered by humans and is the Biogeoclimatic Zone most at risk in BC. It is therefore subject to conservation consideration within the City's boundaries. The Province established a Coastal Douglas-fir Conservation Strategy, and the Coastal Douglas-fir and Associated Ecosystems Conservation Partnership program (CDFCP) in 2012, to continue to raise public awareness and promote improved stewardship within this Zone. Courtenay falls within the CDFCP boundaries and as such has been identified by the Partnership as a potential member.

Through UFS data gathering, it was confirmed that Courtenay falls entirely within the neighbouring and slightly wetter Coastal Western Hemlock, very dry maritime variant (CWHxm) Zone, which is however also a part of the Coastal Douglas-fir and Associated Ecosystems boundary. The CWHxm Zone is included within the Coastal Douglas-fir conservation framework “because of the transitional area between the two biogeoclimatic units, the anticipated changes in boundaries due

^[1] In BC, the Biogeoclimatic Ecosystem Classification (BEC) delineates ecological zones (biogeoclimatic units) by vegetation, soils and climate. It also classifies ecological communities, within the ecological zones, based on the potential of the site at climax or mature successional stages. Ecological communities within any one ecological zone may be quite diverse, and are not necessarily dominated by the species named within the BEC classification title. From the provincial forest services webpage: <https://www.for.gov.bc.ca/hre/becweb/system/how/index.html#relationship>

to the effects of climate change, and in many areas, similar levels of loss and fragmentation to that of the CDF.”^[2] **Staff include this information above in order to clarify that the OCP policy should be amended to recognize that it is the CWHxm Zone, and not individual Coastal Douglas-fir variant trees (*Pseudotsuga menziesii* var. *Menziesii*) that is subject to conservation consideration within the City’s boundaries.**

To add an additional layer of complexity, the forests found within the CWHxm Zone may be typified by tree species other than Western Hemlock. For example, ecological communities within Courtenay’s Coastal Western Hemlock Zone may be dominated by Sitka Spruce, Western Redcedar, Garry Oak or even co-dominating Coastal Douglas-fir. The BC Conservation Data Centre identifies all naturally occurring forested ecosystems in Courtenay’s CWHxm zone to be at risk in BC and/or globally.

In light of this background and the findings from the UFS, the greatest opportunities for protecting at risk ecological communities within the CWHxm Zone are to prioritize all Garry Oak ecosystems, all remaining forested stands that are greater than 60 years old and that are either greater than 200ha and/or adjacent to an existing protected area. The forest connectivity opportunities identified in the preceding map correspond with CWHxm Zone protection priorities and opportunities.

c. Encourage neighbourhoods to determine their urban forest goals

Urban forest character, tree preservation and planting opportunities will be unique to each neighbourhood. Through the OCP review process, neighbourhood planning units will be established across the city, allowing for more focused planning at the neighbourhood scale. During this process, urban forest goals will be included as one of the planning factors, to be integrated and considered alongside other neighbourhood goals. This could include identifying further areas for protection, planting, or removal.

d. Support a dynamic urban forest on infill properties outside of identified protection areas

Tree removal on infill properties (under one acre, approximately 4000m², in size), outside of identified protection areas will continue to be administered through the Tree Bylaw which allows for maximum tree management flexibility while requiring that a minimum number of trees be ultimately provided either as a retained tree, newly planted tree, or by cash-in-lieu into the City’s Replanting Reserve Fund. The plan recognizes that within these areas the urban forest should be managed to be dynamic and diverse, as mature trees are removed and new ones established whether they be in service of rain water management, wind abatement, shade provision or of sunlight, food, neighbourhood character, privacy and screening or the appreciation for beauty, form and colour.

e. Continue to integrate City trees & forests into asset management planning

The City has made significant advancements and investments in city tree and forest management in the past five years. A dedicated arborist position was created in 2014 and a second staff member specific to arboriculture added in 2017. To support more focus to this work, Arboriculture Services,

^[2] Coastal Douglas-fir and Associated Ecosystems Conservation Partnership webpage:
<http://www.cdfcp.ca/index.php/about-the-cdfcp/faq>

previously part of Horticultural Services, became a separate team under the Parks Manager. The budget for contracted tree services (assessments, pruning and removal) and replanting has however not increased, despite more trees being assumed under the care of the City as the community grows and trees are replanted. A separate Tree Care budget line item is recommended to target, and more transparently track, funds for municipal tree care management. Continued improvements are also recommended to further tree asset management planning, including developing specifications of how to integrate along other infrastructure needs, developing policy for private requests regarding public trees. and data collection to better understand resourcing implications of municipal urban forest management.

f. Demonstrate leadership & build partnership

The urban forest is unique among City assets because it is living infrastructure in both the public and private realm that the community can directly help grow, steward and protect. Because the City has limited resources, the achievement of the Urban Forest Strategy Vision will depend on how well individuals take initiative and responsibility to play a vital part. The City has an opportunity to demonstrate leadership by maintaining good arboricultural practices on municipal lands, providing information to the public, monitoring the urban forest over time, and nurturing and responding to partnership opportunities.

5. Immediate actions: 2019 – 2020 timeframe

A number of actions have been identified for immediate implementation opportunity and are listed below in approximate order of increasing effort. The full set of recommendations is contained within Section 6 of the plan and a 10-year implementation plan is contained within Section 7.

Staff recommend that the status of the identified actions would be reported upon every two years and new actions identified.

| | Action | Applicable goal (numbers correspond to Plan recommendations) | Resources required | Department lead |
|---|---|--|--------------------|----------------------|
| 1 | Maintain the City of Courtenay Urban Forest Strategy dedicated webpage as a source of information, including the plan, story map and crowd source photo submission functionality. | Partner (No.21) | Staff time | Development Services |
| 2 | Consider joining the Coastal Douglas Fir and Associated Ecosystems Community Partnership by signing the Statement of Cooperation to increase opportunities for communication and collaboration amongst relevant stakeholders. | Partner (No.20) | Staff time | Development Services |
| 3 | Share the climate adapted species list with the public, landscaping companies and local nurseries to encourage planting and local availability of climate adapted tree species. | Partner (No.23) | Staff time | Development Services |
| 4 | Equip City of Courtenay seasonal neighbourhood Ambassadors with business cards directing to the Tree Bylaw and Urban Forest Strategy | Partner (No.21) | Staff time | Public Works |

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|--|--|------------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|
| | websites should residents inquire into tree management. | | | |
| 5 | Provide guidance on Terms of Reference for arborist report submissions in relation to Tree Bylaw requirements. | Protect (No. 13) | Staff time | Development Services |
| 6 | Develop a council-approved City Tree Asset Management Policy to guide City tree protection, removal, replacement and level of service expectations and decisions. Include a dedicated City Tree Care budget line item reflective of UFS targets to increase municipal investment in the public urban forest. | Plan (No.1) | Staff time. To be completed prior to budget 2021 in order to collect level of service data. | Public Works (Parks) |
| 7 | Continue to regularly collect information to populate the city tree asset management system. | Manage (No.8) | Staff time, ongoing. Essential to achieve Action 6 above. | Public Works (Parks) |
| 8 | Establish regular forums for interdepartmental, interjurisdictional and interagency communication to continuously improve tree management protocols and clarify expectations across public and private land. | Manage (No.9) and Partner (No.23) | Staff time | Development Services |
| 9 | Explore community orchard suitability during McPhee Meadows master parks planning. | Grow (No.19) | Existing parks master planning budget | Recreation and Cultural Services |
| 10 | Consider exploring how to maintain hydrological pathways to retained forest patches. | Protect (No. 12) | Potential through existing Integrated Rainwater Management Plan budget | Engineering Services |
| 11 | Budget for 300 trees to be planted on public land in 2021 (this action will be recommended to be repeated for each year until 2040). Note – 100 are budgeted already for 2019. | Grow (No. 17) | Budget dollars to be determined, informed by outcomes of Actions 6 & 7. | Public Works (Parks) |
| 12 | Explore partnerships for planting of 850 trees for on private land in each 2020 and 2021 (this action will be recommended to be repeated for each year until 2040). | Grow (No. 17) and Partner (No. 20) | Staff time to explore partnership. Budget would be presented separately. | Development Services |
| Include the following urban forest management considerations as part of upcoming OCP review: | | | | |
| 13 | Ensure urban forest goals are discussed alongside other community planning goals using a standardized framework as presented in the | Plan (No.2) | Existing OCP budget | Development Services |

| | | | | |
|----|---|------------------|---|----------------------|
| | UFS, particularly at the neighbourhood scale. | | | |
| 14 | Purchase a canopy cover tracking tool to support canopy monitoring at the neighbourhood scale. | Plan (No.4) | Existing planning contract budget (\$4,500) | Development Services |
| 15 | Examine Environmental Development Permit application, or other options, for managing and protecting the identified Significant Stands and Corridors. | Protect (No.11) | Existing OCP budget | Development Services |
| 16 | Examine opportunities to implement the CVRD and KFN Community Wildfire Protection Plan, including applying for UBCM funding for developing Wildfire Development Permit Areas, or other land use controls. | Plan (No. 3) | Additional funding opportunity available until October 2019 | Development Services |
| 17 | Explore development incentives to promote enhanced tree and forest protection outcomes, such as density bonuses and clear amenity contribution policy. | Protect (No. 11) | Existing OCP and Zoning Bylaw budget | Development Services |

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

Funds (\$75,000) for this project were assigned from the 2017 Development Services Department contracting planning Council budget. The City also received approval of a \$10,000 Infrastructure Planning grant from the provincial government which will be dispersed upon project completion. Staff will seek receipt of these immediately following adoption of the plan. Throughout the course of the project timeline, an additional \$15,000 was assigned to the project to conduct additional analyses, notably the biodiversity connectivity analysis, for a total estimated project cost of \$100,000.

Staff also note the Tree Planting and Replacement Reserve, Bylaw 2884 balance is currently \$8,200.94. This reserve fund has been established since April 2016 and provides opportunity for applicants of tree cutting permits to pay cash-in-lieu instead of replanting trees, where replacement is a condition of a tree cutting permit. As the fund grows, it will be used “for the planting of trees on public lands or on private lands in accordance with a program created by the City of Courtenay to provide tree planting incentives to private land owners” (Bylaw excerpt).

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS:

Approximately 4 months of staff time in total (from a range of staff) have been dedicated to supporting the UFS project, including public consultation preparation, staffing and analyses, stakeholder liaising, internal review and document revisions. A number of immediate actions are recommended in this report which will require additional staff time, or will be part of ongoing or scheduled staff tasks. The overall monitoring of the UFS will occur through the Community Planning and Sustainability division.

ASSET MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS:

There is no immediate asset management implications associated with the creation of an Urban Forest Strategy. However, subsequent action plan items will contain asset management implications, especially as they relate to trees being planted on public land, or changes in level of service to public trees. Details are unknown at this point.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES REFERENCE:

Effective tree management and protection is consistent with Council's Strategic Priority theme "We proactively plan and invest in our Natural and built environment".

We proactively plan and invest in our natural and built environment

- Focus on asset management for sustainable service delivery
- ▲■ Support actions to address Climate Change mitigation and adaptation
- Make progress on the objectives of the BC Climate Action Charter
- ▲ Advocate, collaborate and act to reduce air quality contaminants
- ▲ Support social, economic and environmental sustainability solutions

● **AREA OF CONTROL:** The policy, works and programming matters that fall within Council's jurisdictional authority to act

▲ **AREA OF INFLUENCE:** Matters that fall within shared or agreed jurisdiction between Council and another government or party

■ **AREA OF CONCERN:** Matters of interest that are outside Council's jurisdictional authority to act

OFFICIAL COMMUNITY PLAN REFERENCE:

The OCP contains numerous references to the objective of preserving trees and ensuring tree replanting as a mechanism of beautification, parks and boulevard development and environmental restoration. The following policies are included:

- *Plan to maintain and protect existing wildlife corridors to preserve habitat within the City, including working with community groups to achieve this aim (Pg. 13)*
- *Utilize landscaping to create environments that generate civic pride, facilitate enjoyable recreational experiences and improve the quality of life within the community (Pg. 13)*
- *Adopt measures to reduce the creation of impermeable ground surfaces (Pg. 13)*
- *Develop design guidelines that would yield walkable neighbourhoods in new developments with the inclusion, among other things, of heavily planted streets (Pg. 14)*
- *Continue boulevard tree planting in existing areas to re-establish and reinforce green space in urban residential areas and require new developments to include street trees (Pg. 44)*
- *Require environmental and tree inventories on large scale developments and any property containing or adjacent to environmentally sensitive areas (Pg. 53)*
- *Identify existing native vegetation retention as a guideline for all properties requiring a Development Permit (Pg. 80)*
- *Utilize landscaping to achieve building energy efficiency goals (Pg. 142)*
- *Ensure the Tree Bylaw is reviewed and updated to continue to protect environmentally important features including wildlife habitat, trees in riparian zones and threatened Coastal Douglas-fir as well as improve the retention of Courtenay's urban forest in general (Pg. 53, and Pg. 145)*
- *Increase the absorption opportunities for carbon throughout the municipality through the conservation and restoration of forested areas and stands of trees and other urban ecological systems throughout the municipality (Pg. 145).*

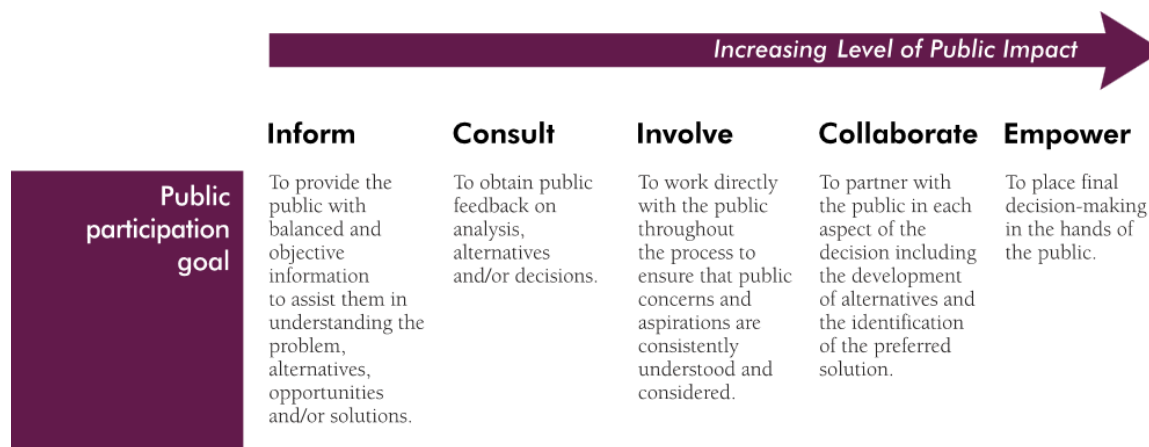
REGIONAL GROWTH STRATEGY REFERENCE:

The Regional Growth Strategy (RGS) also contains numerous references to the objective of preserving trees and ensuring tree replanting. For example:

Objective 2-B: *“Frame environmental protection and policies around the principles of precaution, connectivity and restoration where cost effective, consider the restoration or creation of natural systems to provide sustainable environmental services (e.g. stormwater ponds for improving water quality; tree cover for capturing carbon and reducing GHG emission)”* (page 36: RGS).

CITIZEN/PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT:

The consultation strategy for this project was comprised of a number of engagement elements that classify as **“involve”** for the initial phases of the plan development and as **“consult”** for the final plan.



OPTIONS:

OPTION 1: That based on the July 15th, 2019 staff report “Urban Forest Strategy drafted for adoption”, Council support OPTION 1 and adopt the Urban Forest Strategy as presented (Attachment No. 3) and direct staff to pursue the Immediate Actions listed in Section 5 of this report.

OPTION 2: That Council adopt the Urban Forest Strategy with amended canopy targets determined by Council.

OPTION 3: That Council postpone adoption of the Urban Forest Strategy with a request for more information, including direction to staff on how to proceed.

Prepared by:

Nancy Gothard, MCIP, RPP
Policy Planner

Reviewed by:

Ian Buck, MCIP, RPP
Director of Development Services

Attachments:

1. *Consultation summary*
2. *Stakeholder letters*
3. *City of Courtenay 2019 Urban Forest Strategy*

Consultation methods

The public and stakeholder consultation approach was organized around two critical phases of the project:

- Phase 1: At the beginning of the research and planning stage, to include the community's interest, ideas and vision for the project as well as identified stakeholder organizations specific interests and concerns. The three identified stakeholders included: K'ómoks First Nation (KFN), the Comox Valley Conservation Partnership (CVCP) and the Comox Valley Development and Construction Association (CVDCA).

In Phase 1, participants were encouraged to discuss their vision and goals for Courtenay's urban forest broadly, with open house and survey questions prompting discussion and feedback on the following diverse topics: importance of services that the urban forest provides; satisfaction with trees on residential street and local parks; opinion of how mature trees should be managed in existing and new developments; canopy cover targets above, below or maintain status of current; priority locations for tree planting; priority land uses for street trees; actions the City should take; willingness to pay for urban forest strategy initiatives; incentives, including information, to plant and maintain trees on private property; open ended questions on what is valued most and least about the urban forest, vision for 2050, and opportunity for open ended responses in general.

- Phase 2: Once the plan was drafted, to present findings and solicit feedback on recommendations from the public and identified stakeholders.

In Phase 2, participants were asked specific questions about the draft plan to test support for identified policy options. Open house and survey questions focused on the following topics: support for the vision statement and goal framework; ranking of different canopy cover scenarios; ranking of types of policy interventions and opportunity for open ended response. Questions on willingness to pay for urban forest strategy initiatives and incentives to plant and maintain trees on private property were asked again in Phase 2 to determine if public perception changed following the drafting of the full plan.

A summary of the findings from both phases of consultation is presented below. More detailed results from the consultation are available on the project webpage: www.courtenay.ca/urbanforest

Phase 1 consultation consisted of the following methods:

1. Two public workshops
 - a. Monday June 25 2018, 7-9pm at the Lower Native Sons Hall
 - b. Tuesday June 26 2018, 1-3pm at the Lower Native Sons Hall
 - c. The workshops consisted of display panels available throughout the session, a half hour presentation by Diamond Head Consultants, followed by Q&A and workshop exercises which solicited the following information in small-group exercises:
 - i. Visioning: what's special about Courtenay and its urban forest?
 - ii. Mapping: opportunities and priorities for improvement
 - iii. Priority actions: sharing ideas amongst the groups
 - d. A copy of the presentation slides and display panels are available on the project webpage: www.courtenay.ca/urbanforest

2. Two separate dedicated stakeholder meetings with each the CVDCA including including professional arborists and land development consultants, and the CVCP. KFN indicated they would like to learn of the project as it progressed.
3. Internal staff workshop.
4. A survey questionnaire, available in hard copy and on-line formats between the dates of June 26 and September 30, 2018 (96 days).
5. The on-line survey included interactive 'story-map' functionality which was available between June 26 and September 30, 2018 (96 days). Between August 13 and September 30, 2018 (48 days) a competition was also advertised for photo submissions to be included on the cover of the final plan.
6. Staff was available to receive questions and ideas about the project via front counter, phone, emails and through the mail.

Phase 2 consultation consisted of the following methods:

1. A public open house
 - a. Thursday May 2, 2019, 5:30-7:30pm at the Florence Filberg Centre Evergreen Lounge.
 - b. The public meeting consisted of display panels of key findings, the draft plan, a 30 minute staff presentation and an hour town hall Q&A.
 - c. A copy of the presentation slides and display panels are available on the project webpage.
2. Invitation for stakeholder meetings with the three identified stakeholders. CVDCA meets regularly with senior staff and used those meetings to discuss the UFS.
3. Referral to all City departments, regional local governments, School District 71, Island Health and Ministry of Environment.
4. A survey questionnaire, available in hard copy and on-line formats between the dates of April 22 and May 23, 2019 (32 days). Interactive 'story-map' functionality and cover photo competition was also available.
5. Staff was available to receive questions and ideas about the project via front counter, phone, emails and through the mail.

Advertisement across both phases included paid advertising and press releases in local press, City facility close-circuit TV advertising, social media ads and Facebook events, a radio interview, distribution of over 800 project business cards, presentation to local teachers, booth presence at Downtown Courtenay Market Days, and sharing through staff networks including targeting key sectors such as the development, construction, arborist and conservation communities. Advertisement specifics are included in the more detailed consultation summaries provided on the project webpage.

Consultation results

Summaries are also provided in the UFS document, and a full account of the consultation findings is available on the project webpage.

Phase 1 consultation highlights:

- 306 individuals conducted the survey, 77% (232) of which own property and/or live within the City. Sample size for each question varies as some respondents elected to skip certain questions;
- Survey participants represented all neighbourhoods across the City, were primarily homeowners of middle age or seniors, and have lived in the City for a number of years;
- Whether people lived and/or owned property in Courtenay or did not, the summary responses (e.g. graphs) are generally the same;

- 54 people attended two public meetings;
- 865 unique views of the Urban Forest Strategy webpage during the Phase 1 consultation period;
- 112 photos submitted on the Story Map;
- When asked to rank their urban forest values from a list, respondents rate maintaining the environmental quality and beauty of the city highly. Lower ratings were selected for contribution to property values and reflecting Courtenay's cultural heritage;
- When asked to provide in their own words what is valued most about Courtenay's urban forest, the most common responses were beauty, habitat for wildlife and shade (cooling). Air quality, access to nature and locations for quiet reflection were also common values;
- When asked to provide in their own words what is valued least, responses were much more varied and specific. Top dislikes included that there is 'not enough' urban forest, that it is being lost, and specifically that clear cutting is permitted in order to accommodate development. Tree debris maintenance as well as a dislike for unkept or poorly maintained trees were also commonly cited;
- Most respondents think that canopy has been lost over time and are supportive of setting a target to increase canopy cover;
- Most respondents want to see mature trees protected, particularly when it comes to development, but are less supportive of having regulation on their own trees. (This is consistent with the Tree Bylaw findings);
- There is stronger support for increased planting on public lands (parks, natural areas, school lands and streets), than on private lands whether commercial, industrial or residential;
- Respondents indicate strong support for street trees across all land uses particularly in new residential developments (both sides of the street). No respondents indicated that they prefer few or no street trees;
- Respondents indicate there is room to improve Courtenay's streetscapes, with the most preferred outcomes being: a) mixed native tree planting; and b) regularly spaced medium or large trees. This indicates an opportunity for different street characters for different neighbourhoods and street cross sections;
- Most respondents want to make a meaningful contribution to planting trees on their land and don't need free trees to do it. Instead residents would be motivated more by understanding of what trees are needed where (and why);
- Most respondents would pay more tax to support urban forest initiatives citing \$25 per household per year as the most commonly selected response. Only 8% of respondents said they would not be willing to pay any amount;
- Most popular initiatives include building more green infrastructure, encouraging people to plant trees on private land and planting more trees on public property. There is very limited support for subsidizing trees for private tree planting, which is a popular initiative in many communities;
- Respondents indicated support for more education regarding tree management with naturoscaping, pruning and managing pests being the most popular topics;
- 92 % of respondents strongly disagree with the statement "Trees are not important to me".

Phase 2 consultation highlights:

- 246 individuals conducted the survey, however only 173 indicated whether they own property and/or live within the City, of which 70% (121) indicated they did. In general more respondents skipped Phase 2 survey questions than in Phase 1;
- Similar to in Phase 1, survey participants represented neighbourhoods across the City;

- Whether people lived and/or owned property in Courtenay or did not, the summary responses (e.g. graphs) are the same, with the exception of the question inquiring into what one's street trees most resemble;
- 37 attended the public meeting;
- 910 unique views of the Urban Forest Strategy webpage during the Phase 2 consultation period (more than in the first phase);
- 87% of survey respondents support the Vision Statement and 87% support the goals identified in the plan;
- Survey participants were asked to rank their preferred Canopy Cover Scenarios in order of preference from six scenarios. The results show ranking of targets in order of highest canopy (most preference) to lowest (least preference);
- When rating what types of strategies the City should focus on, using the tree bylaw to regulate tree removal was more highly rated than planting on either public or private land;
- Asked another way using the 5-goal framework of Plan, Manage, Protect, Grow and Partner, respondents ranked protection actions highest followed by growing, with planning and managing similar, finished with partnering;
- Consistent with the first phase survey results, most respondents want to make a meaningful contribution to planting trees on their land and don't need free trees to do it. Instead residents would be motivated more by understanding what trees are needed where (and why), naturoscaping and energy efficiency considerations;
- Most respondents would be willing to pay more tax to support urban forest initiatives citing \$100 per household per year as the most commonly selected response, a much higher willingness to pay than indicated in the first round of consultation, although a smaller sample size. Similar to Phase 1 responses on this question, only 8% of respondents said they would not be willing to pay any amount.



May 27, 2019

Nancy Gothard
Policy Planner
City of Courtenay
830 Cliffe Avenue
Courtenay, BC V9N 2J7

Dear Ms. Gothard:

Re: Letter for Support of the Interim Draft of the City of Courtenay (2019) Urban Forest Strategy

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the City of Courtenay's Urban Forest Strategy (UFS). We would like to offer our full support to the UFS, as stated on page 13, the recognition of "mental, physiological and physical health benefits of a personal connection to nature" puts health (and its connections to the natural environment) front and centre in the Plan. Today, chronic diseases are on the rise and "alarming trends in declining mental health are [indeed] the leading public health concern in Canada." In fact, over half of British Columbians have at least one chronic condition and chronic diseases are responsible for the majority of deaths in the province¹.

The Strategy is clear in its efforts to promote sustainability, buffer climatic changes, and showcase its health promoting synergies with environmental protection and stewardship. Consider, for instance, the capacity of a park to cool and filter the air in a dense neighbourhood, or the ability of a greenway to inspire active transport and access to nature. Such interventions foster more livable surroundings that encourage physical activity, promote mental health, and bring diverse communities together². The health promoting rationale is woven throughout the UFS, illustrated in public feedback all the way to Actions.

Studies have shown that access to green space can significantly affect how you travel and your physical activity, and exposure to air pollution, traffic safety, and noise³. Trees can encourage health promoting behaviours, for instance, research is showing a strong association between street trees and an increase in walking and perceptions of safety. Even a brief interaction with nature, such as a ten-minute walk or a view of green space, can have restorative effects².

Some of the many elements we would like to support in the Strategy are as follows, however, this is by no means a fully comprehensive list and more so teases out a few highlights):

- Section 2 (on page 18) – the overarching *Value of the Urban Forest* and its *Benefits* states "urban trees and forests provide services that improve human health and well-being." This value is accurate and admirable. There is strong evidence that the experience of being in and viewing nature has significant physical and mental benefits, including increased social well-being and reduced stress. Research also supports a strong relationship between biodiversity and measures of ecosystem functioning, such as water quality, soil health and pollination.

Gateway Office

210 - 771 Vernon Avenue | Victoria, BC V8X 5A7

Tel: 250-519-3401 | Fax: 250-519-3402

Excellent care, for everyone, everywhere, every time.

Urban Forest Strategy
May 27, 2019

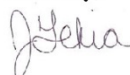
Page 2 of 2

- **Section 5** (page 6) – under *Climate Change* there are “anticipated impacts of climate change for Courtenay that include sea level rise and more extreme rainfall events, higher storm surges, flooding and waterlogged soils outside the summer months. Warmer temperatures will increase evaporation and vegetation water demand. Overall, water supply is expected to be reduced while water demand is likely to grow, increasing the possibility of drought.” Climate change is clearly observable and many people are already feeling its effects. It is affecting individuals and the communities in which people live, work and play. Expanding the use of vegetation and natural elements across the built environment, e.g. using the cooling effect of vegetation in parks and increasing the number of trees, mitigates air pollution and the urban heat island effect.
- **Section 6** (page 10, 76 & 87) – *Food Security* is a term peppered throughout the Strategy and we would like to echo its support for inclusion. Public fruit trees and fruit gleaning projects can support healthy eating habits. Healthy eating habits can in turn significantly reduce the risk of chronic disease, e.g. high blood pressure, osteoporosis and cancer—which increases quality of life and reduces health care costs. While there are different ideas of what makes a healthy diet, all generally prioritize consumption of whole foods, such as fruits, vegetables and grains².

The above are only a few of the many objectives and actions in the Strategy where Island Health may offer its support to this Plan. We would like to leave you with this recent finding: in the literature review by Fong et al. (2018), there is mounting evidence demonstrating associations between greenness and health. They found consistent and strong evidence that higher levels of greenness are associated with higher birth weights, higher levels of physical activity, and lower mortality rates⁴. They further point to how policies and interventions to increase neighborhood levels of greenness are relatively straightforward and may have many co-benefits, i.e. for climate mitigation and stormwater runoff control⁴. The UFS is an intervention to achieve a myriad of goals, such as improvement to a healthier built environment for all.

If you have any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,



Jade Yehia, CPHI(C)
Regional Built Environment Consultant

JY/cmd

cc: Charmaine Enns, MD, MHSc, FRCPC, Medical Health Officer, Island Health

¹ BC Centre for Disease Control (2018). The Economic Burden of Risk Factors in BC, 2015. Excess Weight, Tobacco Smoking, Alcohol Use, Physical Inactivity and Low Fruit and Vegetable Consumption. Retrieved May 24, 2019 at http://www.bccdc.ca/pop-public-health/Documents/economic_burden_five_risk_factors_BC_2015.pdf.

² BC Centre for Disease Control (2018). *Healthy Built Environment Linkages Toolkit: making the links between design, planning and health*. Retrieved May 21, 2019 from: http://www.bccdc.ca/pop-public-health/Documents/HBE_linkages_toolkit_2018.pdf

³ Partnership between University of BC Health & Community Design Lab and Vancouver Coastal Health (2019). *Where Matters: the Health & Economic Impacts of Where We Live*. Retrieved May 21, 2019 from: <https://health-design.spph.ubc.ca/where-matters-health-economic-impacts-of-where-we-live-2/>

⁴ Fong, K.C., Hart, J.E. & James, P. (2018). *A Review of Epidemiologic Studies on Greenness and Health: Updated Literature Through 2017*. Current Environmental Health Reports 5: 77. Retrieved on May 24, 2019 at: <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/10.1007/s40572-018-0179-y>



Erin Nowak
Program Coordinator
(250) 203-5644
Email: erin@cvlandtrust.ca

Mailing Address
P.O. Box 3462
Courtenay, BC V9N 5N5

Office:
2356a Rosewall Crescent
Courtenay, BC, V9N 8R9

Partner Organizations

Comox Valley Land Trust
Project Watershed
Millard-Piercy Watershed Stewards
Morrison Creek Streamkeepers
Beaufort Watershed Stewards
Comox Valley Nature
Comox Valley Water Watch Coalition
Brooklyn Creek Watershed Society
Perseverance Creek Streamkeepers
Cumberland Community Forest Society
Mack Laing Heritage Society

Support Organizations

CV Sustainability Project
CV Council of Canadians
Friends of Comox Lazo Forest Society
Forbidden Plateau Road Residents Association
Black Creek Streamkeepers
Saratoga and Miracle Beach Residents Association
Arden Area Residents Association
Friends of Strathcona Park
Merville Area Resident's & Ratepayers Association
VI Whitewater Paddling Association
Mountaineer Avian Rescue Society
Macdonald Wood Park Society
Tsolum River Restoration Society

Funding Partners

Real Estate Foundation of B.C.
Community Gaming Grant
RBC Blue Water Fund
Comox Valley Regional District
City of Courtenay
Village of Cumberland

www.cvlandtrust.ca/cvcp/

Date: June 26th, 2019

Re: Letter of Support, City of Courtenay's Urban Forest Strategy

To: Ian Buck, Director of Development Services and Nancy Gothard, Policy Planner

The Comox Valley Conservation Partnership (CVCP) Steering Committee would like to provide this letter of support to congratulate the City on the recent Urban Forest Strategy and public consultation process. The information is comprehensive, timely and presented in an informative and engaging format.

The CVCP has been advocating for an Urban Forest Strategy since 2016 when the City was considering significant changes to the Tree Bylaw. We congratulate Mayor and Council, staff, consultants, stakeholders and the many members of the public who participated to create this valuable piece of work.

There are a number of aspects of the UFS that CVCP specifically would like to commend:

- **Inclusion of an ambitious City-wide Tree Canopy Target.** CVCP understands that the public consultation indicated strong support for increasing the overall Canopy Cover of the city from the current 33% City-wide (25% in urban areas) to 40% City-wide (and minimum of 34% in urban areas). 40% Canopy Cover is a target that CVCP requested during the Tree Bylaw work, citing the numerous benefits of a significant and well distributed canopy.
- **Commitment to partnerships.** CVCP is a partnership based organization with a core belief in the power of collaborative approaches. We would like to offer support in implementing the UFS through developing and disseminating educational materials in partnership with the City, partnering in community initiatives such as tree planting programs/neighbourhood tree hunts.
- **Commitment to monitoring the canopy cover over time.** As a living system, CVCP recognizes that the urban forest is dynamic and will change over time. Significant unknowns include climate change and the rate of development. As such monitoring the canopy in order to make informed decisions is critical to practicing evidence-based decision making. CVCP notes the monitoring cycles are projected for every 6 years and requests that more frequent intervals be considered to more proactively respond to urban forest changes.
- **Incorporating UFS information into the OCP review.** For example the biodiversity connectivity analysis is an asset and should be used as a green network land use foundation in the City's climate friendly OCP. Protecting patches and corridors of native ecosystems is consistent with climate friendly community planning and affords many other benefits to biodiversity, rainwater management and high resident quality of life.
- **Integrating UFS information with the ongoing Integrated Rainwater Management Plan (IRMP).** The relationship between water quality and

quantity and land use and coverage is well established, and CVCP is pleased to see a holistic and return to ecological principles being espoused in the IRMP. We look forward to continuing to work with the City on the IRMP initiative, and are pleased to see that the important role of trees and forests will be explored in that work.

- **More detailed neighbourhood planning.** The CVCP also supports that more detailed consideration of Urban Forest values should be examined at the neighbourhood scale with local residents, as is recommended in the UFS. The CVCP acknowledges that some lands will be better suited to tree retention and protection, while on other land replanting is a more suitable urban forest option, but that a healthy balance of retention and replacement must be considered in all neighbourhoods to sustain a resilient urban forest.

The CVCP Steering Committee appreciated being a part of the collaborative process and look forward to taking the next steps in partnership to assist in implementing this innovative Strategy.

Sincerely,



Erin Nowak
Program Coordinator
Comox Valley Conservation Partnership



2019-06-28

City of Courtenay
Development Services
planning@courtenay.ca

RECEIVED
JUN 28 2019
CITY OF COURTENAY

RE: Urban Forest Strategy, City of Courtenay, 2019, Interim Draft April 2019 -Diamond Head Consulting and City of Courtenay

Thank you for the opportunity to review the Interim Draft Urban Forest Strategy as posted on the city website and dated 2019-04-26. There is also a reference to a Final Draft on the website, so we would appreciate confirmation that we are indeed reviewing an Interim Draft and not a Final Draft document, and that a Final Draft will be forthcoming for review by the public following this round of inputs.

The Comox Valley Development and Construction Association represent local builders and land and property development corporations, the building industry and consultants. As we are sure that Council and staff appreciate this is a seasonal business and this is the busiest time of year for most of our members. Our comments today will therefore be reflective of our need to stay focused on employing our workers effectively and creating the products and services we rely on to maintain our businesses and employment. While our comments are therefore necessarily brief, this does not reflect our opinion of the importance of this initiative, either to our business viability or to our community. We look forward to contributing to this dialogue for years to come.

We applaud the City for this initiative and the Interim Draft report contains a wealth of helpful data, comparative research and guidelines. We share with the citizens of Courtenay the importance of trees in our community and the goal of maintaining or increasing tree canopy from current levels. The study has explicitly and thoroughly laid out the importance and benefits of trees. It is a dense but excellent resource in this respect.

We agree with the observation that majority of tree canopy is and will remain on private land, and that stewardship partnership will be the way forward on any urban forest strategy. We agree that both public and private lands will require a strategy for the community goals to be achieved. If we understand the data on Land Cover Distribution correctly (p. 32) the urban residential land categories in aggregate have more tree canopy cover, measured in hectares, as the entire public land category. We believe this has been achieved simply because people want trees – not because they have been ordered to keep them.

Murray Presley · chairman · 951 Fitzgerald Ave, Courtenay, BC, V9N 2R6 · (250) 338-1394

The associations goal is to provide a single unified voice for developers and builders and professionals on matters that relate to development in the Comox Valley.



Philosophically, we believe that education and carrots will get more than sticks in a goal of long-term tree conservation for the Courtenay community. We believe that was also reflected in survey results, for example, that people are more interested in knowing what trees should be planted than in having the city provide them with trees for free, and that city tax expenditures on tree matters be in the order of \$300,000 (\$25 per household) annually.

We are in agreement that compact development (compact single family, ground-oriented housing, mixed-use or high density) is conducive to a healthy community.

We would like to work with city staff and its consultants to test out the Scenarios A-F on p. 58 for residential tree canopy targets, in particular to examine how the interplay of City servicing, environmental protection and tree-related policies can achieve desired targets over the longer term. Our sense is that there should be more focus on the end goals of tree canopy post-development, particularly in regard to improving the long-term diversity of species in the urban setting, rather than on what we have experienced under the current Tree Bylaw as a challenging approach to retention of existing trees. We believe a workshop approach is practical and would help bridge gaps in understanding for both the public and private sector and result in more informed stewardship on the critical private sector side of implementing the urban forest strategy. It could for example move forward on the identified Action 12 a 'explore how to maintain hydrological pathways to retained forest patches...', and the implications of 12 b 'require that calculations for stormwater management plans for new development utilize runoff coefficients that incorporate the historical land cover value for up to 25 years.' With the City's stormwater management bylaw under review, our recommendation would be to delete this action here, in favour or considering appropriate standards in the appropriate bylaw. If it is left in the Urban Forest Strategy, the criteria should be clearer. Further, we would appreciate some comparables and rationale for incremental benefits of such a standard. If we understand it correctly, it appears that this standard is significantly more onerous than elsewhere.

As part of that workshop approach, we would appreciate seeing some comparables to other jurisdictions on the continent and some insight into differential impacts of the range of tree canopy targets being considered in the Interim Draft. Is there evidence of significant health related benefits of a community with a 40% tree canopy target, compared to one with 37% or 33%, for example.

We would also like to explore what design or policy options are contemplated within the urban core related to the 'key hub patches', 'major connectivity pathway' and 'pinch points' illustrated on an unnamed figure on p. 46. The only actions we could find was 11 b (p. 84) which states 'Consider options, such as land acquisition or regulation, to enhance protection of Significant Stands and Corridors', and 'Consider density bonusing options to protect Significant Stands and Corridors in the next Zoning Bylaw

Murray Presley · chairman · 951 Fitzgerald Ave, Courtenay, BC, V9N 2R6 · (250) 338-1394

The associations goal is to provide a single unified voice for developers and builders and professionals on matters that relate to development in the Comox Valley.



review.' These could potentially be significant tax expenditure items, whether in acquisition or maintenance, and we are unclear at this point of the regulatory mandate contemplated by the authors.

A workshop approach to the Scenarios, at least for residential development, we believe will lead to a more informed conclusion on how achievable the various targets are in today's compact development world, and if there are unintended trade-offs that are relevant to other policy initiatives such as affordable housing that council will want to consider.

We agree that there are important opportunities to achieve city-wide goals as commercial and industrial areas develop and redevelop, and through adjacent city initiatives of streetscape improvements.

Under Action 11a, adding a >60cm DBH threshold to the definition of 'Protected Tree' will reduce flexibility and options to develop land with larger trees. If a size threshold is to be considered, then consider what standard should apply to which species. This again would be a helpful topic for a workshop.

We would appreciate some clarity on what is envisaged under recommendation for action 11c for soil preservation guidelines and storage before providing meaningful comments.

Action 13a states 'on greenfield properties where forest cluster of corridor configurations may be possible but are not proposed, require a design rationale for why such configurations are not possible'. Please clarify if this means forest clusters proposed for within public park designations, or something beyond that.

Action 13d contemplates three visits, one comfort letter, and two memos by an arborist for tree protection zones. Is all this added cost for consulting value added to the city or the buyers?

Under Action 13i, there should be an appeal opportunity to Council if there is a disagreement between an applicant and the opinion of the Director, and some guidelines to applicants on what constitutes 'to the satisfaction of the Director'.

Under Partner Indicators there is a rating of low for 'involvement of large private and institutional landholders', but no partner actions. This appears to be a gap, to which our proposed workshop may be one response.

We would appreciate a more focused final draft emphasizing guidelines and costed policy recommendations, with a companion resource document for the research-oriented reader.

Murray Presley · chairman · 951 Fitzgerald Ave, Courtenay, BC, V9N 2R6 · (250) 338-1394

The associations goal is to provide a single unified voice for developers and builders and professionals on matters that relate to development in the Comox Valley.



There appears to be an inference that there will be a heavy reliance for canopy maintenance and enhancement through retention of existing stands of trees on private lands. Is that the intent? To what extent? Mandatory retention as required in the current Tree bylaw is difficult and costly, and would be a key item to discuss at the workshop proposed above. If pursued, these costs are eventually passed on directly to the consumer, impacting housing affordability in the region, which we understand is also an important objective of council.

Council should consider a sliding scale of replacement, either cash or trees, which encourages retention, but does not make it mandatory. This will provide flexibility, and will help manage cost/affordability, while still achieving tree canopy targets.

The cost implications of meeting the targets suggested in the UFS are not clear. This needs to be remedied. It is not reasonable to create a policy framework that ignores the costs of implementation to existing residents and industry. We would appreciate a cost impact analysis of implementing the Goals, Strategies and Actions, both on the City finances and private sector, and a comparison of this to the survey results of what the public anticipate spending through their tax dollars. For example, some of the potential initiatives appear to have substantial cost implications.

As we looked at the front cover of the document we were reminded that on an airshed and regional basis we are among the fortunate regions in the world in terms of tree opportunities. We applaud this effort to extend that regional strength in practical terms into the urban environment for our community well being and the health of our citizens. We are here to share in that challenge.

Yours truly,

Murray Presley

Murray Presley · chairman · 951 Fitzgerald Ave, Courtenay, BC, V9N 2R6 · (250) 338-1394

The associations goal is to provide a single unified voice for developers and builders and professionals on matters that relate to development in the Comox Valley.