

# **REPORT**

## ***Parks & Recreation Department***

**To:** Mayor Johnstone and Members of Council  
**Date:** March 13, 2023

**From:** Dean Gibson,  
Director of Parks and Recreation  
**File:** 2238695  
**Item #:** 2023-146

**Subject:** **Urban Reforestation and Biodiversity Enhancement Initiative Update and Proposed Tree Planting at City Hall**

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### **RECOMMENDATION**

**THAT** Council receive this progress update on the Urban Reforestation and Biodiversity Enhancement Initiative; and

**THAT** Council approve planting of a full tree grove (Option A) on a portion of City Hall lands as outlined in this report.

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### **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this report is to share a summary of progress towards the Urban Reforestation and Biodiversity Enhancement Initiative (referred to as “URBEI”) and to seek approval to plant new trees on a portion of City Hall lands to help reach the URBEI tree planting target intended to accelerate the broader goals in the Urban Forest Management Strategy (2016) climate emergency response (Bold Step #6).

### **SUMMARY**

Since award in September of 2021, staff have been working with Diamond Head Consulting, a leading urban forest consulting company based in Vancouver, to plan and implement planting of 2,200 new trees within city-owned parks and open spaces. Taking a systematic approach to tree planting, approximately 800 new trees were planted in 2022 with 1,400 remaining trees to be planted in 2023. In reviewing the 2023 planting locations, front lawn at City Hall (511 Royal Avenue) was identified as an opportunity for planting up to 60 new trees.

### **BACKGROUND**

The inventory and analysis conducted as part of the Urban Forest Management Strategy (2017), outlines an ambitious, yet achievable target of 27% canopy cover by

2035. Council recognized the urgency required to tackle the impacts of a changing climate and, therefore, **expedited the 27% canopy cover target to 2030** rather than 2035 (as originally targeted in the Urban Forest Management Strategy) with adoption of the 7 Bold Steps. To achieve 27% in given timeframe, the City is required to plant approximately 11,800 trees (2,200 new trees on City-owned parks and open spaces; 6,300 new trees in streets; and 3,300 new trees on private land). Over a three year period (2018-2020), approximately 1,605 trees were planted on both city-owned and private lands. As proposed, the URBEI adds 2,200 trees planted by 2023 to advance our total to ~3,805 trees planted (approx. 30% of the total # of trees to be planted by 2030).

On [September 13, 2021](#) staff provided a report to inform Council that the grant funding, up to \$1,746,238 had been awarded to New Westminster from the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program - COVID-19 Resilience Infrastructure Stream. Tree planting is currently under way to accelerate the city's climate action goals through a city-wide URBEI to plant 2,200 trees in city's parks and open spaces by December 31, 2023. In addition to planting trees in parks and public open spaces, the grant funding is also being used to rewild 1.0 hectare of mowed turf grass, and where possible, installation of temporary drip irrigation to support establishment of the young trees.

## **DISCUSSION**

In reviewing the potential planting locations planned for the URBEI in 2023, City Hall lands (specifically the front lawn on the south side of City Hall, adjacent to Royal Avenue, extending between Sixth Street and Fourth Street) has been identified for potential tree planting. Located on the border of the Downtown (currently with the lowest tree canopy cover in New Westminster at 10%), Uptown (at 16% tree canopy cover) and Queen's Park (currently with the highest tree canopy cover at 33%) neighbourhoods, tree planting in this area contributes to more equitable tree canopy cover throughout our city.

In addition to helping reach the URBEI target, this location would transform a south-facing mowed turf lawn area into a formal grove of trees in the foreground of an iconic civic building. Currently, City Hall front lawn includes a central cenotaph, rain garden, tree planting, community garden, walkways and a large area of sloped mowed turf grass. The turf grass slopes from the south parking area down to Royal Avenue (Refer to Attachment 'A' for diagram and images of existing condition).

Staff have evaluated two options for planting new trees at City Hall front lawn (refer to table below and Attachment 'A' for diagrams for each option). Both consider requirements for existing uses such as the Remembrance Day Ceremony, community garden activities and pedestrian circulation. Additionally, both options aim to help increase the city's overall tree canopy coverage, improve air quality, sequester carbon, infiltrate storm water, buffer vehicular traffic from Royal Ave. and, over time, increase wildlife habitat over time:

<b>OPTION</b>	<b>PROPOSED # OF TREES</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION (refer to Attachment 'A' for plans and images)</b>
Option A- Full Tree Grove	Up to 60	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maximize full potential for future tree canopy cover;</li> <li>• Formal deciduous tree planting on a grid;</li> <li>• Tall grass and wildflower mix understory; and</li> <li>• Mowed pathways to accommodate pedestrian circulation/ desire lines.</li> </ul>
Option B- Half Tree Grove	Up to 30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maximize half the potential for future tree canopy cover;</li> <li>• Formal deciduous tree planting on a grid on the southern portion only;</li> <li>• Tall grass and wildflower mix understory on the southern portion only; and</li> <li>• Mowed areas to accommodate passive use and pedestrian circulation/ desire lines.</li> </ul>

Staff recommend Option A to maximize full potential for future tree canopy cover.

**NEXT STEPS**

Staff will continue to implement the URBEI systematically across the city to complete tree planting by December 31, 2023. Pending Council approval, staff will prepare a more detailed tree planting plan for City Hall front lawn and include the number of trees in the overall count accordingly.

**SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS**

Financial Impact

The approved URBEI funding of \$1,746,238 supports the existing capital plan requirements to support accelerated climate action in achieving its ambitious targets for growing robust urban forest (Bold Step #6). Staff estimate the ongoing operating cost impacts associated with the establishment of the new trees in their early years will be mitigated by installing temporary drip irrigation systems, where possible, thereby eliminating the need for hand labour intensive watering.

Environmental Impact

The benefits of urban trees are many, including carbon sequestration, beautification, reduction of the urban heat island effect, reduction of storm water runoff, reduction of air pollution, reduction of energy costs through increased shade over buildings, enhancement of property values, improved wildlife habitat, and climate adaptation. The

sooner new green areas and tree planting are initiated, the sooner the many benefits will be maximized for the community and future generations.

For the Metro Vancouver Region, climate change is projected to result in warmer, drier summers, reduced snow-packs, more frequent extreme rainfall events and rising sea levels. The management of the urban forest, creating structural and species diversity, is an important climate adaptation tool for New Westminster and cities across the region.

## **OPTIONS**

**There are two options for Council's consideration; they are:**

1. Receive this progress update on the Urban Reforestation and Biodiversity Enhancement Initiative; and
2. Approve planting of a full tree grove (Option A) on a portion of City Hall lands as outlined in this report; or
3. Provide staff with alternate direction.

Option #1 and #2 are recommended.

## **INTERDEPARTMENTAL LIAISON**

Interdepartmental liaison to date has included coordination with Parks & Recreation, Electrical Department and Engineering Services.

## **CONCLUSION**

Urban forests are increasingly recognized as a critical part of a healthy and sustainable city. The URBEI funding is helping to achieve New Westminster's Urban Forest Canopy cover target of 27% by 2030 to support the removal of 4,050 tonnes of carbon pollution every year and increase our forest's carbon storage capacity by 50%. As part of this initiative, there is an opportunity transform City Hall front lawn into a sustainable civic landscape that better reflects city's commitment to climate action and increasing biodiversity.

## **ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment A- Existing City Hall Front Lawn and Options for Tree Planting

## **APPROVALS**

This report was prepared by:

Erika Mashig, Manager – Parks & Open Space Planning, Design and Construction

This report was approved by:

Lisa Spitale, Chief Administrative Officer

Dean Gibson, Director of Parks and Recreation