

Environmental Advisory Committee Advice – Urban Forest Management Plan and proposed Canopy Cover Target

Recommendation

At the January 2017 meeting of the EAC, the committee received a presentation from City staff on the Urban Forest Management Plan (UFMP).

In the opinion of the EAC, urban forests are passive infrastructure assets which reduce municipal costs by helping with stormwater management, water conservation, air quality management and carbon capture and storage. Urban forests contribute to improving the health of the environment while also improving the visual appeal of the community.

The EAC feels that the presented UFMP is progressive insofar as it addresses the need for a healthy and functioning urban forest as an integral element of city infrastructure. Additionally, the proposed UFMP will help the city to achieve policy aims stated in St. Albert's Environmental Master Plan. Finally, the UFMP will contribute to reinforcing St. Albert's identity as a botanic city.

At this time, the EAC has been asked to provide advice to Council on a target for overall tree canopy coverage in St. Albert. The EAC feels that St. Albert's tree canopy target should be both aspirational and attainable. The target should be aspirational in the sense that it encourages tree-planting efforts beyond the management of trees that have already been planted. At the same time, it should be an attainable target that is realistic given St. Albert's available resources. As such, the EAC offers the following advice:

- 1) Council should adopt an overall tree canopy target of 25% for St. Albert.** *Based on the information presented to the EAC, St. Albert will attain a coverage level of 20% by following the City's current tree planting and maintenance program, especially given that already-planted trees in newer areas of St. Albert have yet to reach maturity. The EAC believes that a target of 25% is a realistic and feasible goal which can be achieved with a slightly more ambitious planting program.*

- 2) Council should seek to educate residents on best management of trees on private property.** *In order to attain a tree canopy target of 25% and maintain this coverage level over time, Council should provide for public education on the subject of tree management and replacement on private property. The EAC feels that public education regarding optimal strategies for tree replacement will be especially important in coming years as trees in older neighbourhoods die or are cut down for other reasons. The EAC also believes that the City's tax assessment base will be enhanced by ensuring that St. Albert's tree canopy cover on private land remains robust.*