

The Ottawa Forests and Greenspace Advisory Committee supports the approval of funding to address the Emerald Ash Borer, the Tree Replacement Lifecycle, the TREE Program and the Acquisition funding for the Urban Natural Areas, and urges Council to ensure they are retained in the 2009 Budget.

There also needs to be more emphasis on the retention of existing trees. Specifically, there are 2 items in the 2009 Draft Budget which have been identified for removal that need to be put back in the budget. They are the **Tree and Maintenance Program** and the **Green Partnership Program**.

OFGAC would like the city to have a similar priority put on roads, be put on to trees and, view trees and greenspace as a **fundamental critical component of our city's infrastructure**. There are programs in the 2009 Budget to plant new trees, however "preserving our current tree infrastructure" is being cut in the 2009 Draft Budget.

Value of Trees

We all need to acknowledge that trees and greenspace are a **fundamental critical infrastructure** component that makes an important contribution to the well-being of residents across the entire City of Ottawa.

- Currently only 17% of the land within the urban area of the City is sheltered by tree canopy. Trees are an important part of the City's critical infrastructure and require their just share of maintenance dollars. They should be accorded the same level of care and duty as is provided to our roads. The City fixes roads to prolong their lifespan, well; we need to do the same in maintaining the city owned trees. This is part of the City's Core Responsibilities for a sustainable City.
- Trees are **shade providers**, and provide cooling benefits. The air currents they supply are a crucial function in **reducing the "heat island effect"** and energy consumption requirements.
- Trees function to **reduce air pollution**, reducing ground zero ozone and other pollutants and **reducing the health impacts** that air pollution has.
- Trees soak up rain water and significantly contribute towards **storm water management** allowing the city to reduce budget for new infrastructure.
- Wetland's major ecological function is to act as a sponge to **maintain water in the water table** and balance hydrological systems.

Proposed Cuts – 2009 Draft Budget

The 3 items being proposed for deferral in 2009 are the:

1. **Tree and Forest Maintenance Program** - 2009 operating budget of \$830K is the 2nd year of an approved 5 year program. The service standards were adopted by Council in 2006, removing this funding will impact the City's ability to achieve the approved arboricultural practices recommended by the Auditor General in 2007. The impact for Forestry is:
 - a. Prevent the City's ability to complete the **Tree Inventory** which is tied to the strategy funding and working on the Emerald Ash Borer impacts on the tree inventory.
 - b. Delay in implementing a **Tree Lifecycle Program**; just when staff was starting to make progress in providing maintenance service to City owned trees. Tree maintenance in the past was "once every 40 years" (and currently stands at "once every 32 years"). But now being considered for deferral in its 2nd year, the City is taking steps backwards instead of moving forward by not maintaining its current assets which includes city owned trees and protecting our green infrastructure. To suggest cutting maintenance is like saying we will stop maintaining the road infrastructure and put off the regular maintenance to sometime in the future. Eventually, we all pay the price for the elevated cost of providing maintenance in the future or worse face the full replacement costs. We don't schedule furnace maintenance only once every 32 years, but that is the current inspection interval for our city owned trees. Maintenance for city trees is not a luxury or an option that can be cut from year to year. Trees that are not maintained are more susceptible to disease and pests. To preserve the City's trees, you need to approve the cost to keep them healthy and provide adequate maintenance to let them live out their full potential life.
2. **Green Partnership Program** -- \$325K has been earmarked for deferral. The Green Partnership Program was to encourage and support community involvement in keeping the city clean and green. This was achieved by funding sustainable community-based cleaning and greening initiatives. This community-based program just completed its three year pilot project with a total of 112 projects.

The Green Partnership Program has provided excellent value. For every City dollar allocated to projects, the community has matched it dollar for dollar (either through cash, in-kind services or volunteer labour contributions). In many cases applicants provided more funding or in-kind services than the minimum required. This Program is well appreciated by the community. No additional operational costs have been incurred by the City as a result of approved projects.

The value of the projects extend far beyond the dollar value and the length of the project: This Program has very positive environmental benefits.

3. **Gravel Roads Dust Control Program** – This budget amount of \$400K is planned for elimination in the 2009 budget and will result in increased dust pollution for residences, businesses and farms located on gravel roads. It will also result in the deterioration of gravel roads and increased long-term lifecycle costs. The elimination of this program also has a negative impact on trees. The build-up of dust on trees blocks the ability for trees to breath and eliminates their air filtering capabilities as dust travels. This affects mostly the rural areas where the majority of the City's forests are situated.

Other City Priorities Need Review

1. **Roads and Surfaces** - Approximately 50% of the budget is for Roads and Surfaces and there is **100% growth** planned in the 2009 Draft Budget. There are many road projects on the table throughout the city, which in our opinion, should not be considered for implementation by Council.

The City of Ottawa cannot maintain the roads we have now, so it makes no sense to have a large amount of new road construction projects. The only new road construction that should go forward are those that:

- Are for reasons of public safety;
- And are shared by rapid-transit buses or/and future light rail

Recommendation: Deferral of all new road construction that do not qualify for public safety reasons or for use as a multi-purpose road. And place a moratorium on new road construction that fail to meet the aforementioned criteria.

Recommendation: Maintain current assets, the existing road infrastructure, to prolong its lifespan.

2. **Environmental Assessment for Roads** – In many situations, the City of Ottawa has not proceeded with completed Environmental Assessment Studies within its limited shelf-life, therefore, it makes no sense to continue paying thousands of dollars to do these studies if there are no funds to support the recommended project's construction work.

Recommendation: Deferral of all new EA's for roads if no funding is available to commence and complete the project's construction work within the shelf-life of the study.

Recommendation: Complete the links to the existing road infrastructure, prior to commencing any new roads, for example widening road construction projects.

Summary

In conclusion, trees and forests are part of the City's **fundamental critical infrastructure** and should be accorded the same level of priority as roads. Maintenance of our trees and the preservation of our forests are an integral part of the City's core responsibilities. We are asking you to put trees and forests on a more level playing field with roads, street lights, sewers and buildings. The city's focus on building new roads or widening existing ones (new projects) when viable alternatives exist, is similar to planting only new trees while ignoring the potential for the existing tree canopy to thrive if only it had regular funding for its maintenance.

The Ottawa Forests and Greenspace Advisory Committee recommends that:

The City reinstates the 2nd year of the Tree and Forest Maintenance Program, and the Green Partnership Program. The city can offset this funding by looking at minor reductions in Road Projects and Environmental Assessment Studies.

Council place a motion to fund the **Tree and Forest Maintenance Program** to get it included in the 2009 budget. OFGAC views this as a crucial priority, for the overall health of the City's trees and forests; the maintenance program needs to be maintained.

OFGAC is concerned that trees are a low priority with the City of Ottawa. There needs to be more emphasis put on maintaining and preserving mature trees and natural areas.

Thank You.

Nicole Parent, Chair
Ottawa Forests and Greenspace Advisory Committee