



April 8, 2025

MEMO TO : Park Board Commissioners

FROM : Director, Park Operations

SUBJECT : **Urban Forest Strategy and Tree Planting Direction Update – Board Briefing Memo**

Hello Commissioners,

The following Urban Forestry update considers the [Tree Planting](#) and [Let's Talk Trees!](#) motions approved by the Board on April 24, 2023, and May 6, 2024, respectively, as well as the [Increasing Vancouver's Tree Canopy for a Safer and Healthier City](#) motion approved by Council on June 12, 2024, and subsequently on June 26, 2024. All motions direct staff to coordinate with City Council to plant 100,000 new trees, with one motion specifying a 2026 timeline. This briefing memo provides a high-level overview of the current state of inventory, maintenance and both staff and planting capacity. It also provides a progress update on tree planting and funding, and staff recommendations for next steps to deliver the Urban Forest Strategy in keeping with the principle of the 'right tree' in the 'right place' at the 'right pace'.

In-Progress

Currently, Urban Forestry staff manage approximately 150,000 street trees, 35,000 trees in parks and golf courses, and over 1 million trees in forest areas across the city. Over the last 10-years, Urban Forestry staff have planted an average of approximately 2,000 street trees annually, totaling 19,672 trees. Tree planting is currently funded through Urban Forestry's operating and capital budgets. Maintenance of newly planted trees is the responsibility of Urban Forestry. Limited tree planting support is also received from local stewardship groups and the Adopt-a-Tree program launched in late summer 2024 provides residents with stewardship opportunities of young street trees.

Staff have also been tasked with delivering restoration tree planting in Stanley Park following hemlock looper mitigation efforts. In 2024 and 2025, the project will plant over 50,000 replacement seedlings, many of which were donated by Western Forest Products who have committed to donating up to 65,000 over the duration of the project that will extend until 2027. As directed by Council in June 2024, Urban Forestry and Engineering staff have collaborated on two grant applications through the Growing Canada's Community Canopies (GCCC) program that has proposed to plant approximately 16,000 small trees and seedlings to revitalize forested areas in Jericho and Vanier Parks, and 3,050 new stand-alone street trees in grass boulevards in low-canopy neighbourhoods. It is anticipated that confirmation of the GCCC grant funding will occur in spring 2025.

Challenges

Although tree planting contributes to canopy cover, planting 100,000 net new trees by the end of 2026 necessitates a substantial lift in funding. This represents a significant increase to current capacities and annual operational funding needs. Costs to plant new trees in areas with higher urban heat and disproportionately impacted populations can vary as seen in Figure 1. Depending on the site conditions, from reforestation planting to urban tree pits, costs range from <\$100 per tree to upwards of \$20,000 per tree. For example, the average cost for staff to plant a tree in a

residential grass boulevard is \$1500 per tree (including internal labour and materials), plus \$500/tree for watering in two subsequent years.



Figure 1: Range in Planting Costs

Discussion

Since 2021, staff have been updating the Urban Forest Strategy (2018) which has integrated both Park Board and Council motions to support a sustainable urban forest. The 2025 Urban Forest Strategy is expected to be presented to the Board on April 28, 2025, and City Council on May 20, 2025. The update confirms that Vancouver's urban forest canopy currently extends across 25% of the city's area – this is based on the most recent LiDAR measurements captured in the summer of 2022. It also establishes an updated forest canopy cover target of 30% by 2050, which was previously adopted by the Park Board on December 7, 2020.

Canopy cover, rather than trees planted, remains the primary and contemporary metric staff use to measure success regarding the City's urban forest. Canopy cover changes over time illustrate trends in the efficacy of both the protection of existing trees and the planting of new trees, as well as an understanding of where social, ecological and economic benefits are being afforded to the community. The Strategy update includes updated goals, objectives, and actions to deliver an additional 5% of urban forest canopy cover over the next 25 years. The strategy establishes the following 5 goals to support stewardship and canopy growth across the City:

1. Manage trees for health and safety
2. Protect the urban forest
3. Engage residents in the urban forest
4. Monitor the status and condition of the urban forest
5. Expand the urban forest

To develop a budget-conscious approach to tree planting, Urban Forestry staff have collaborated cross-departmentally to recommend an Action Plan in the 2025 Urban Forest Strategy. Additionally, staff are recommending to advance three short term high priority actions to inform strategic tree planting efforts to have the greatest positive impact on the community.



Recommended 3 Short Term High Priority Actions

Priority Action 1: Maintain and protect existing canopy

This action aims to enhance the operational effectiveness of the Urban Forestry department by completing the transition to an upgraded asset management software (VanTree) which will support delivery of a City-wide approach to the management of all City and Park Board trees.

- Timeline: Current - Q1 2026

Priority Action 2: Deliver area-based canopy modelling project

To implement the city-wide canopy target effectively, a comprehensive assessment is needed to evaluate various land-uses and their capacity to support tree canopy equitably and strategically by adding the 'right tree' in the 'right place' at the 'right pace'.

- Timeline: Q2 2025 – Q2 2026

Priority Action 3: Grow canopy on private and public land

Investing in tree canopy growth on both public and private land is essential for the city to achieve its canopy target. Efforts will be focused on pursuing financial support donations and grant opportunities, such as a three-year private donation of seedlings to the Stanley Park Forest restoration and the 'GCCC' grant to enhance canopy expansion on public land. Additionally, a 2025 Vancouver Tree Sale will aim to provide trees directly to residents, encouraging increased planting on private properties.

- Timeline: 2025-2027, Ongoing

Next Steps

Staff will be presenting the 2025 Urban Forestry Strategy Update to Park Board on April 28, 2025, and City Council on May 20, 2025, seeking adoption and support for staff to advance cross-departmental collaboration that will advance the three short term high priority actions, and continue to deliver already funded actions outlined in the 2025 Urban Forest Strategy. A subsequent report back in Q2/Q3 2026 will include a 4-year action plan to inform the next capital budget cycle for Park Board and City Council consideration. Park Board staff appreciate your support in advancing this work.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Amit Gandha".

Amit Gandha
Director, Park Operations, Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation
jm/ag

Copy to: PB Senior Leadership Team
PB Communications