

City of Mississauga Corporate Report



Date: February 27, 2024

To: Chair and Members of General Committee

From: Jodi Robillos, Commissioner of Community Services

Originator's files:

Meeting date:
April 10, 2024

Subject

Forestry Service Update

Recommendation

That the report entitled "Forestry Service Update" from the Commissioner of Community Services, dated February 27, 2024 be received for information.

Executive Summary

- There has been a significant increase in workload and demand for forestry services citywide. Over the past 10 years, service requests have increased by 61% from 9,830 to 15,800.
- Tree permit applications have increased by 694% from 150 in 2021 to 1,191 in 2023.
- There is a growing backlog of deferred tree maintenance and planting, as Forestry prioritizes addressing imminent hazards resulting in delays responding to service requests and in the completion of work orders.
- Forestry has taken action to improve timelines and to address the backlog. This includes systematically clearing the backlog, developing a new tree maintenance contract, and adopting a proactive tree maintenance approach.
- Technology solutions will streamline workflows, provide access to data live in real time, and provide full transparency to the public on the status and progress of work orders.
- A number of strategic initiatives are underway to ensure that we are making the best possible decisions to meet current needs and future demands.

Background

The Forestry section's mandate is to protect, enhance, restore, expand and connect Mississauga's urban forest and natural heritage system. Services provided to achieve this mandate encompass tree maintenance, tree planting, tree protection, tree permits, bylaw

enforcement, development and design review, forest management, naturalization, habitat restoration, stewardship and education, and boulevard vegetation management.

Mississauga’s urban forest is growing. With close to 300,000 street trees, and over a million tree in our parks and natural areas, there has been a significant increase in workload and demand for forestry services citywide. Over the past 10 years, the number of requests for service received per year has increased by 60% from 9,830 in 2014 to 15,800 in 2023.

The increase in demand for Forestry services is the result of multiple factors including, a growing and maturing urban forest, a growing city and population, the spread of invasive species and forest pests (such as the emerald ash borer), and the increased frequency and severity of extreme weather as a result of climate change. These factors directly affect the health and structure of individual trees and impact their lifecycle maintenance and replacement requirements.

Forestry’s tree maintenance programming and resource deployment model is designed to prioritize work based on the level of risk, and seeks to reduce, mitigate, or eliminate unacceptable levels of risk to public safety. This means that, when faced with a high volume of requests, lower risk requests are deferred in order to respond to imminent hazards. As a result, a backlog of deferred tree maintenance and planting has accumulated over time leading to increased wait times and delays in responding to service requests and the completion of work orders.

Growing pressures from development and construction activities across Mississauga has also had a measurable impact on the protection and preservation of existing trees. Since the enactment of the updated Public and Private Tree Protection Bylaws in 2022, the number of tree permit applications has increased by 694% from 150 in 2021 to 1,191 in 2023. They have helped reduce and mitigate tree losses and underscore the importance of protecting and preserving existing trees.

Historic practices around the spading and transplanting trees (e.g. tree donations from private property onto City property), have been discontinued for several years as they represent a considerable risk and liability to the City. Spading and transplanting trees often results in irreparable damage to the tree’s root system and causes overall stress to the trees; deeming these as costly endeavours that are ineffective to the long-term viability of trees. These practices are inconsistent with industry best practices and are not recommended to be reinstated for the protection and preservation of Mississauga’s urban forest.

Comments

Forestry has taken immediate action to improve timelines and to address the backlog of deferred tree maintenance and planting with existing resources.

Approach to Addressing the Backlog

A multi-staged approach is being taken to address the backlog. This began in July 2023, with a concerted effort to eliminate the backlog of 3,573 stumping work orders. This was successfully accomplished over the course of 6 months from July 2023 to January 2024, with the mobilization of several additional stumping crews to clear the backlog and ensure all new stumps were removed within service levels. This will enable the completion of deferred tree planting beginning in this spring and lays the groundwork for the next phase of work, which entails addressing the tree removal and pruning backlog.

Strengthen Capacity

A new contract for tree maintenance services is expected to be awarded in spring of 2024. This contract will provide the necessary capacity to address the current backlog of tree removals and pruning, and to meet future demand for tree pruning, removals, and stumping work. The contract is structured to optimize pricing and maximize value, utilizing fixed unit costs, clear timeframes for work completion; it also provides flexibility to complete tree maintenance proactively, and respond to needs reactively, as required.

Proactive Tree Maintenance Approach

Adopting a proactive tree maintenance approach is needed to improve the overall health and resilience of the urban forest, and to achieve a sustainable service level. A 7-year proactive tree maintenance cycle is in line with arboricultural best practice and consistent with the approach taken by peer municipalities. It will reduce the likelihood and severity of tree failures, the City's potential risk and liability exposure, and improve public safety by proactively addressing potential safety concerns such as sightlines at intersections and with traffic lights and signage. Proactive tree maintenance will also improve tree health and structure, increase the lifespan and benefits provided by trees, lower lifecycle maintenance costs, and result in fewer tree maintenance requests over time. The economic benefits of tree maintenance are well documented. TD Economics found that every dollar invested in maintenance returned \$1.35 - \$3.20 worth of benefits and cost savings each year. A 7-year proactive tree maintenance cycle is being developed and will be launched as part of the rollout of the new contract for tree maintenance services.

Leveraging Efficiencies and Improvements

A number of process improvements are underway to streamline and accelerate the way we provide tree maintenance services. This includes the bundling of tree removal and stumping work orders to reduce touch-points and shorten wait times beginning in fall 2024. Under the new contract, work will be assigned to contractors on an ongoing rolling-basis which will result in faster turnaround times for work completion. Forestry is also looking into identifying additional efficiencies and cost savings through continuous improvement to strengthen current investments in tree maintenance with existing resources.

Transforming our Business through Technology

Enhancements to our work management system will enable the successful vendor(s) of the new tree maintenance services contract to have work assigned to them directly to their mobile device. Allowing for seamless integration to Forestry's existing workflows and processes, which will reduce delays and accelerate turnaround times. Advanced internal dashboards and interactive mapping software has also been developed to enable Forestry staff to deploy operational resources in the most efficient way possible when faced with high volumes. Beginning April 1, 2024, the public will also be provided with full transparency on the status of any work orders created against an individual street or park tree online through the City's Tree Inventory Map. Details that will be made available to the public include the work order initiation date, due date, status, and completion date.

Financial Impact

There are no financial impacts resulting from the Recommendation in this report.

Conclusion

A healthy and resilient urban forest is critical to fighting climate change and to sustaining a healthy and vibrant community for future generations. Strategic initiatives underway such as a new Forestry and Natural Heritage Master Plan, Forestry asset growth model, and Forestry asset management plan will help ensure cost-effective and service-efficient decisions are made to meet current needs and to plan for future demand. These will be brought forward to Council as part of Forestry's continual evolution.

Forestry will continue to monitor progress in improving timelines and addressing the backlog of deferred tree maintenance and planting.



Jodi Robillos, Commissioner of Community Services

Prepared by: Amory Ngan, Manager, Forestry