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Information Item No. 2
Environment and Sustainability Standing Committee
May 4, 2017

TO: Chair and Members of Environment and Sustainability Standing Committee

Original signed

SUBMITTED BY: _____

Bruce Zvaniga, Director, Transportation and Public Works

DATE: April 4, 2017

SUBJECT: Residential Component to the Urban Forest Master Plan

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

THAT the Environment and Sustainability Standing Committee request a staff report on when the residential component of the Urban Forest Master Plan will be implemented and the process to extend this program to the public.

On September 25, 2012, Halifax Regional Council adopted the Urban Forest Master Plan ("UFMP"). The comprehensive plan laid out guiding principles to help ensure the ongoing sustainability of HRM's urban forest.

Chapter seven of the Urban Forest Master Plan (Implementation) lists 32 priority actions. Action 22 (pg. 110) states "Provide incentives to homeowner to plant trees on their properties".

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Subclause 77(1)(b)(ii) of the *Halifax Regional Municipality Charter* ("HRM Charter") says that "The Municipality may... recommend and encourage the planting of trees of suitable species at desirable sites within the Municipality."

Subclauses 79(1)(av)(v, vii) of the HRM Charter says that "The Council may expend money required by the Municipality for....(av) a grant or contribution to....(v) any charitable, nursing, medical, athletic, educational, environmental, cultural, community, fraternal, recreational, religious, sporting or social organization within the Province," and "(vii) a registered Canadian charitable organization".

BACKGROUND

On September 25, 2012, Halifax Regional Council adopted the Urban Forest Master Plan which lays out guiding principles to help ensure the ongoing sustainability of the municipality's urban forest. The Urban Forest Master Plan was developed in cooperation with Dalhousie University's School for Resource and

Environmental Studies (SRES) after many years of research, public engagement, workshops and reports. The overall goal of the Urban Forest Master Plan is to **ensure a sustainable future for our urban forest**. The multiyear community engagement process and research initiatives that led to the development of the Plan resulted in an integrated social, ecological, and economic strategy that strives to incorporate the values of HRM citizens.

It is estimated that 50 percent of HRM's Urban Canopy is on private lands. Part of having a healthy urban canopy is educating residents and supporting the need to plant trees on private lands. The benefits of trees to the environment and the public in urban areas are well documented.

There are many benefits to having a healthy urban canopy including their ability to save energy by cooling homes via shade and reducing the need for air conditioning and in the winter months blocking northerly winds reducing energy demands. Trees provide food and shelter for birds and small vertebrates and invertebrates contributing to a healthy ecosystem.

Mature trees assist in reducing peak demands on storm systems which is particularly relevant to the municipality as we have combined storm sewer systems and during peak events storm and sewer waters could go into live aquifers. Evidence shows that increased canopy can extend the life cycle of asphalt by reducing light and direct heat

In addition, trees assist with mental and physical well-being as they contribute to improved air quality, mental health and reduction of stress. A well-developed canopy also contributes to increased property value, studies have shown that one mature tree in front of a property can increase its value by 15 percent.

DISCUSSION

Residential components of the Urban Forest Master Plan are ongoing including education and planting. In addition to the broader activities currently happening with respect to the Urban Forest Master Plan, specific to the residential component staff has already initiated the following:

- Hosted educational walks for approximately 400 residents in the north and south ends of the peninsula, and downtown Dartmouth;

Participated with NGOs to host mass tree planting (seedling) on HRM property in areas across the municipality;
- Supported community groups and NGOs to develop an urban orchard in the Dartmouth Common; and,
- Sponsored fruit trees to be placed in garden projects in community groups across the municipality.

The HRM Charter allows Council to give grants to an environmental organization or registered charity, but the municipality is not permitted to provide individuals with grants. Accordingly, HRM could give a grant to a not-for-profit organization or charity that could then provide cash incentives to plant trees on private property. With respect to expanding residential programming to include a reimbursement program; staff is aware of only one other municipality in NS that presently offers a grant program toward homeowners purchasing trees.

Our long range goal is to promote education on the importance of trees and stewardship of placing trees on private lands which will in turn augment our urban canopy.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Urban Forest Master Plan was communicated to the public in the following ways: a media campaign, focus groups, urban forest walkabouts, open houses, workshops and an online survey.

ATTACHMENTS

NONE

A copy of this report can be obtained online at <http://www.halifax.ca/commcoun/index.php> then choose the appropriate [Community Council/Board] and meeting date, or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210, or Fax 902.490.4208

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