

The Honourable Kathleen Wynne
Premier of Ontario
Email: premier@ontario.ca

June 9, 2015

Re: Support for Ontario's Urban Forests

Dear Premier Wynne,

Ontario's urban forests are the backbone of our province's urban green infrastructure. We all intuitively know that they play a key role in the overall health and resilience of our communities. However, stewardship of our urban forests is not being coordinated at a provincial scale as it faces common challenges such as pests, climate change and urban growth and intensification. We are asking that you help Ontario's communities by supporting a provincial urban forest strategy and efforts to improve policy efficiency through knowledge transfer.

The benefits our urban forests

According to a recent TD Economics Special Report, Toronto's urban forest provides residents with over \$80 million worth of environmental benefits and cost savings. This means that for every dollar spent on annual maintenance, Toronto's urban forest returns \$1.35 - \$3.20 worth of benefits and cost savings each year.

Urban forests also reduce emissions and help us to adapt to a changing climate. As a climate change mitigation tool they improve air quality, sequester carbon and reduce energy consumption by lowering temperatures through shading surfaces and evapotranspiration.

Trees also moderate stormwater runoff, decreasing the need for costly stormwater control and treatment facilities. Urban forest planting, maintenance and protection are also less expensive than traditional stormwater management practices. Many US municipalities have conducted cost-benefits analyses and elected to spend millions on green infrastructure projects instead of billions on expanding treatment capacity and storage within their sewer systems.

The issues facing our urban forests

Our urban forests are under threat. An Emerald Ash Borer infestation is currently wreaking havoc across Southern Ontario; it will kill millions of Ash trees from our backyards, streets and parks. Urban trees also face increasingly difficult growing conditions, including denser built urban areas and nutrient-deficient soils in land development.

Provincial leadership is needed to help Ontario communities grow mature, diverse and healthy urban forests that can help address the extreme weather and urban heat issues associated with climate change. This added

climate change resilience will also save governments, businesses and consumers millions in future costs. For example, insurers are raising premiums and cutting coverage in light of increasingly costly and frequent extreme weather events, such as the GTA's July 2013 flooding that cost insurers \$850M.

How the Province can support communities in urban forest stewardship

Work with the Green Infrastructure Ontario Coalition (GIO) to develop an Ontario Urban Forestry Strategy:

This would include a consultation process with municipalities and other stakeholders that would seek consensus on priorities. GIO's membership includes key urban forest stakeholders from across the province, and has already started the conversation through the development of 'Ontario's Urban Forests: A Call to Action'. Outcomes of this process could identify potential changes to legislation, regulations or policy that would remove barriers and assist stakeholders in better managing the urban forest.

We would also urge the government to assign the file to a specific ministry to oversee implementation and provide further support for urban forestry.

Support urban forest knowledge transfer: Support the implementation of best management approaches to urban forest stewardship across the province by creating a central information hub, with a dedicated staff person.

Municipalities across Ontario have inconsistent and varying approaches to managing their urban forests. Some are leaders in the sector while others struggle, lacking the necessary expertise and resources to proactively manage their urban forests. Modest provincial support would facilitate sharing of best practices and leverage expertise to assist all municipalities across Ontario. Municipal urban forestry staff, consultants, academics, non-profit organizations and businesses all agree - one central hub of information and support is overdue in Ontario.

By working together we can ensure that the tools and resources are in place to support municipalities and other stakeholders in the management of urban forests. This modest investment will reap huge benefits - mitigating the effects of climate change while reducing overall costs of ever increasing significant weather events.

We would be very pleased to discuss this further.

Sincerely,



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Cc: Hon Ted McMeekin, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing;
Hon Glen R. Murray Minister of Environment and Climate Change;
Hon Bill Mauro, Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry;
Hon Brad Duguid, Minister of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure

WHO WE ARE

The Green Infrastructure Ontario Coalition (GIO) is an alliance of local governments, not-for-profit organizations, community groups, and businesses working to promote green infrastructure across the province. Green infrastructure is the system of vegetation, soil, and vegetative technologies that provide important services to our cities and contribute to the quality of life in our communities.

RECOMMENDED PROVINCIAL ACTIONS TO SUPPORT URBAN FORESTRY

- Take a leading role in the development of the Ontario Urban Forest Strategy – this could be accomplished in partnership with GIO.
- Designate one Provincial ministry as the “home” for urban forests.
- Support urban forest knowledge transfer – this would help municipalities and other stakeholders proactively manage Ontario’s urban forests. Support could be provided in a variety of ways, including: a central information hub, assistance in the development of best management practices, and a dedicated staff person.

STATE OF URBAN FORESTS

Over 85% of the province’s population lives in urban and suburban areas. As urban development intensifies, our urban forests are becoming increasingly important green infrastructure assets for taxpayers and communities across Ontario.

With the added pressures of climate change, invasive species, urban development pressures, and widespread loss to urban tree canopies throughout Ontario, there is now a critical need for a province-wide approach. We need to work together to sustain large, healthy, genetically appropriate trees on public and private land through long-term planning and budgeting, inclusive decision-making, and strategic policy development that supports adaptive management.

PROVINCIAL WORK IN URBAN FORESTRY

Many Provincial ministries are directly involved in or depend on urban forestry. The government’s priorities that connect with urban forestry include (more details on next page):

- Planting 1 million urban trees
- Minimizing the impact of invasive species
- Guiding and improving land use planning
- Strengthening biodiversity
- Protecting the great lakes
- Building modern infrastructure
- Strengthening partnerships with municipalities
- Amending the building code
- Moving forward on climate change
- Improving pollinator health
- Developing infrastructure investment strategies

Five key Provincial government priorities that connect with urban forestry

Mandate	How Urban Forestry is connected
Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing	
1 Strengthening Partnerships with Municipalities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting municipal urban forestry programs through knowledge transfer would improve best practices in urban forestry across the province and strengthen partnerships with municipalities. There will be a key opportunity to work with municipalities to integrate consideration for urban forestry and resilient communities in the Municipal Act review in 2015.
2 Improving Land Use Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The extent and condition of the province's urban forests is determined to a great degree by the built environment and its related planning and development processes. Including guidance and support for the inclusion of urban forest policies, targets, and goals in municipal planning policies would support the development of sustainable communities.
Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry	
3 Planting 1 million urban trees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planting a million trees is a commendable goal. However, sustainable urban forestry involves more than planting trees, it includes ongoing maintenance, protection, strategic planning, and stewardship.
Ministry of Environment and Climate Change	
4 Moving Forward on Climate Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The urban forest is a unique tool that helps both reduce emissions and adapt to climate change. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Our urban trees help cities mitigate climate change by sequestering carbon and reducing energy use and its associated carbon emissions. They support climate change adaptation by providing the backbone of our cities' green infrastructure that reduces flooding and moderates urban temperature. The urban forest is also vulnerable to the impacts of climate change such as drought, ice storms, high winds and other extreme weather events. Urban forest management is required to ensure this asset remains resilient in the face of climate change.
Ministry of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure	
5 Developing Infrastructure Investment Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Including urban forests in capital investment strategies will help align these strategies with growth planning, economic goals and environmental priorities.