



Staff Report

Operations – Sustainability & Solid Waste

Report To: COW - Operations, Planning and Building Services
Meeting Date: October 28, 2025
Report Number: OPS.25.042
Title: Terms of Reference for Biodiversity and Urban Forest Strategy Task Force
Prepared by: John McMullen, Urban Forestry Coordinator

A. Recommendations

THAT Council receive Staff Report OPS.25.042, entitled “Terms of Reference for Biodiversity and Urban Forest Strategy Task Force”;

AND THAT Council direct staff to assemble a Biodiversity and Urban Forest Strategy Task Force (BUFS Task Force) as per the attached Terms of Reference;

AND THAT Council direct staff to initiate the workplan for a BUFS Task Force as per the attached Terms of Reference;

AND THAT Council direct staff to include \$12,000 in the 2026 Sustainability Operating Budget to support the Task Force activities and peer review of the Biodiversity and Urban Forest Strategy.

B. Overview

The Town of The Blue Mountains is seeking to assemble a Biodiversity and Urban Forest Strategy Task Force (BUFS Task Force) to guide and support ongoing efforts to protect, preserve and enhance the Town’s tree canopy with policy and by-laws to strengthen climate resilience, preserve the aesthetic of the built environment, and maintain the character of the growing community.

The intention of the Task Force is to ensure a new plan includes resident comments, concerns, and expertise as staff works through the preparation of a Draft BUFS.

C. Background

The Town of The Blue Mountains has identified a need to prepare a comprehensive plan for Urban Forestry and Biodiversity. Both include strategies for naturalization and tree-planting and aim to reduce deforestation while enhancing tree cover and therefore support one another.

The BUFS will guide and inform policy, protect trees and woodlots, and inform operations with best practices in tree management. The biodiversity component would provide direction for expanding naturalized areas, planting pollinating plants and improving the ecosystem services provided by trees and plants, such as carbon sequestration, water filtration, and flood mitigation.

The BUFS Task Force, endorsed by Council, will provide guidance on the above to foster collaboration among residents, stakeholders, and municipal staff to begin the process of preparing a final BUFS for the Town of The Blue Mountains. The Task Force will prioritize transparency and public engagement to build trust and build consensus on contentious issues, such as tree protection on private property, municipal practices, and municipal projects impacting trees.

D. Analysis

The Terms of Reference (TOR) for the establishment of a BUFS Task Force is attached as Attachment 1. The BUFS Task Force will enable a dynamic collaboration between dedicated residents, stakeholders, and municipal staff. At the end of the process staff will report back to Council with a Draft BUFS and final steps for its completion.

The BUFS will be used to plan and manage the TBM tree canopy, ensuring environmental, social, and economic benefits. It will identify details and specifications for tree planting, maintenance, and removal. The benefits of healthy urban trees to enhance air quality, reduce heat islands, and improve public health will be documented.

The BUFS will prioritize resource allocation, address risks like pests or storms, consider equitable green space distribution, and align with community goals for sustainability and resilience.

The BUFS will provide recommendations addressing:

1. Tree Management and Implementation
2. Community Engagement and Stewardship
3. Tree Protection and Preservation
4. Tree Replenishment and Enhancement
5. Tree Health and Risk Management
6. Tree Canopy Targets
7. Integrated Urban Biodiversity Considerations
8. Implementation and Projected Costs.

To achieve this, Town staff will introduce and review the following items with the Task Force and seek their input while working towards consensus regarding new policy, practice, and overarching goals:

- Review Current Town Practices,
- Urban Forest Familiarization,
- Identify Gaps and Opportunities,
- Review Digital Tools for Tree Management,
- Establish Canopy Targets,
- Review Tree Implications for Town-Led Projects,
- Update Tree Preservation By-law and Exemptions,
- Biodiversity Strategy Integration,
- Street Trees Guidance,
- Heritage Trees Guidance,
- Memorial Tree Donation Program Review,
- Public Engagement and Transparency,
- Financial Implications,
- Draft BUFS and Recommendations,
- Peer Review of BUFS and Recommendations,
- Report to Council.

As identified in the attached TOR the BUFS Task Force will consist of 11-13 members, including: Urban Forestry Coordinator (1), Town Staff (2-3), Urban Planning Community (2), Tree Conservation (2), Town Residents (3-5). A Chair for the Task Force will be selected at the first meeting.

A Workplan and Timeline for the Task Force is further detailed in the attached TOR. Monthly meetings will be held for 12 months, with flexibility to extend if additional public input is needed. The Task Force will end with a Report to Council presenting a Draft BUFS and outlining next steps for finalizing the BUFS.

Key milestones include:

- Month 1-2: Initiation and Familiarization
- Month 3-4: Analysis and Initial Outreach

- Month 5-7: Policy Development and Engagement
- Month 8-10: Refinement and Final Outreach
- Month 11-12: Finalization and Reporting.

E. Strategic Priorities

1. Communication and Engagement

We will enhance communications and engagement between Town Staff, Town residents and stakeholders

2. Organizational Excellence

We will continually seek out ways to improve the internal organization of Town Staff and the management of Town assets.

3. Community

We will protect and enhance the community feel and the character of the Town, while ensuring the responsible use of resources and restoration of nature.

4. Quality of Life

We will foster a high quality of life for full-time and part-time residents of all ages and stages, while welcoming visitors.

F. Environmental Impacts

The environmental impacts related to the end goal of the BUFS Task Force are significant.

Following a clear project timeline with representation from residents, conservation organizations, and the development community, the Task Force will work cooperatively towards clarifying the municipality's position and goals related to trees. Tree conservation, risk management, planting and canopy targets, biodiversity and natural heritage overlap, enforcement, budgeting, staffing implications, and identifying trees as important assets managed by the Town.

The Task Force will be entrusted to work cooperatively with staff to align recommendations for a BUFS with community goals for sustainability and resilience.

G. Financial Impacts

No compensation will be provided to non-Town Staff members, though training or travel reimbursements could be considered.

Staff recommend including \$12,000 in the 2026 Sustainability Operating Budget to support the Task Force and peer review of the BUFS.

H. In Consultation With

Jeffery Fletcher, Manager of Sustainability and Solid Waste

Betty Muise, TBM Tree Trust.

I. Public Engagement

The topic of this Staff Report has not been the subject of a Public Meeting and/or a Public Information Centre as neither a Public Meeting nor a Public Information Centre are required. However, any comments regarding this report should be submitted to John McMullen, Urban Forestry Coordinator jmcmullen@thebluemountains.ca .

J. Attached

1. Attachment 1 Terms of Reference for Biodiversity and Urban Forest Strategy Task Force

Respectfully submitted,

John McMullen
Urban Forestry Coordinator

Jeffery Fletcher
Manager of Sustainability and Solid Waste

Alan Pacheco
Director of Operations

For more information, please contact:
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Report Approval Details

Document Title:	OPS.25.042 Terms of Reference for Biodiversity and Urban Forest Strategy Task Force.docx
Attachments:	- Attachment 1 Terms of Reference for Biodiversity and Urban Forest Strategy Task Force.pdf
Final Approval Date:	Oct 9, 2025

This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:

Jeff Fletcher - Oct 7, 2025 - 2:29 PM

Alan Pacheco - Oct 9, 2025 - 8:50 AM