



Biodiversity and Urban Forest Strategy Task Force

TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. Purpose

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 within the Settlement Areas 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 BUFS Task Force, endorsed by Council, will provide guidance on the above to foster collaboration among residents, stakeholders, and municipal staff to initiate a Biodiversity and Urban Forest Strategy (BUFS) for the Town of The Blue Mountains. The Task Force will prioritize transparency and public engagement to build trust and consensus on contentious issues, such as tree protection on private property, municipal practices and projects impacting trees.

2. Mandate

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.

The BUFS Task Force will enable dynamic collaboration between dedicated residents, stakeholders, and municipal staff, with staff reporting back to Council with a Draft Biodiversity and Urban Forest Strategy addressing:

1. Management and Implementation
2. Community Engagement and Stewardship
3. Protection and Preservation
4. Replenishment and Enhancement
5. Tree Health and Risk Management

6. Tree Canopy Targets

7. 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:** Assess existing tree policies, programs, guidelines, and planning rules, identifying updates needed to address gaps or controversies (e.g., private tree removal, hazard tree management).
- **Urban Forest Familiarization:** Schedule informal 'Tree Walks and Talks' in neighborhoods, parks, trails, and public spaces to build practical knowledge and foster knowledge-sharing among members and the public. Specific Walks could be open to community participation with advance notice.
- **Identify Gaps and Opportunities:** Determine gaps in the existing tree inventory, explore methodologies to complete, and explore opportunities to enhance biodiversity and canopy coverage.
- **Digital Tools for Tree Management:** Introduce TreePlotter and TreeKeeper as possible GIS solutions for use in tree inventory and operationalizing public trees. These GIS tools support data driven decisions, simplify tree inventory, schedule tasks, and share accurate mapping and tree related statistics with the public.
- **Establishing Targets:** Develop tree canopy targets for public and private lands, ensuring they are measurable and community-informed through public feedback.
- **Town-Led Projects:** Propose methodologies for tree protection and compensation in municipal projects (e.g., road, boulevard, or utility works), ensuring transparent communication of impacts and proactively determine planting opportunities.
- **Review Tree Cutting By-law History:** Evaluate By-law 2010-68, deferred in October 2022, to recommend updates, including:
 - Expanding regulation to private land within the Settlement Areas.
 - Establishing a permit process for tree removal with clear terms.
 - Refining exemptions (e.g., agricultural uses, NEC Development Control).

- Tree Preservation By-law: Propose a new by-law building on Grey County's Forest Management By-law, extending regulations to private properties with fines and compensation for unauthorized clearing.
- Site Alteration By-law: Explore a by-law for grading, fill placement, and tree preservation across all private lands within Settlement Areas, requiring County delegation.
- Exemptions: Define exemptions for tree cutting or site alteration (e.g., agricultural, NEC-regulated lands).
- Biodiversity Strategy Integration: Incorporate recommendations from the completed Natural Heritage Strategy, i.e. target linking existing areas rich in natural heritage together with green corridors (ideal for compensation requirements) to support and strengthen biodiversity.
- Street Trees: Set goals for new and existing street trees, addressing planting, species selection, Town assumption of boulevard trees, departmental responsibilities, maintenance, hazard trees, and replacement needs.
- Heritage Trees Guidance: Develop policy to identify and preserve heritage trees.
- Memorial Tree Donation Program: Review and consider enhancing the tree donation program for Town-owned land.
- Public Engagement and Transparency:
 - Conduct at least three public engagement events (i.e., open houses, virtual town halls) to collect resident input on draft recommendations, by-law updates, and canopy targets.
 - Launch web-based surveys at key milestones (i.e., after gap analysis, before final report) to gather broad community feedback, accessible via the Town's website.
 - Publish quarterly progress reports on the Town's website, summarizing Task Force discussions, action items, and upcoming steps to ensure transparency.
 - Host a dedicated Task Force webpage with meeting agendas, notes (non-confidential summaries), and feedback forms to keep the public informed.
- Financial Implications: Review draft financial implications for implementing the BUFS, incorporating public feedback on cost priorities.
- Peer Review: Engage an independent and experienced urban forestry consultant to provide professional opinion and feedback on the Task Force's work at the end of milestone *Analysis and Initial Outreach* and again at the end of milestone *Policy Development and Engagement*.

- Report to Council: Deliver a final staff report to Council, detailing recommendations for completing the BUFS, informed by Task Force collaboration, professional peer review, and public input.

3. Membership

The UFMP Task Force will consist of 11-13 members, including:

- Chair: Selected at the first meeting to facilitate discussions, ensure objectives are met, and foster fairness.
- Urban Forestry Coordinator (1): Prepares agendas, provides expertise, coordinates logistics, and assists with report preparation.
- Town Staff (3): Representatives from Planning, Operations, and Community Services to provide technical support.
- Urban Planning Community (2): Stakeholders with community design, land use planning, or private development experience.
- Tree Conservation (2): Representatives from local conservation organizations focused on tree preservation and environmental stewardship.
- Town Residents (3-5): Individuals with expertise or interest in urban planning, forestry, biodiversity, or tree management, selected to reflect diverse community perspectives.

Roles and Responsibilities

- Chair: Facilitates meetings, ensures inclusivity, and resolves disputes respectfully.
- Urban Forestry Coordinator: Supports the Chair, compiles data, manages public engagement logistics, and drafts the final report.
- Members: Attend meetings, contribute expertise, participate in Walks and Talks, and assist with public outreach.
- Town Staff: Provide technical data and ensure alignment with municipal policies.
- Community Representatives: Offer local knowledge and stakeholder perspectives.

Member Expectations

- Adhere to Town policies (e.g., POL.COR.18.08 Workplace Violence & Harassment, POL.COR.19.02 Council Staff Relationship Protocol).
- Maintain confidentiality of sensitive discussions, sharing only approved public summaries.

- Declare affiliations or Lobbyist Registry inclusion to the Town Clerk in writing.
- Engage in constructive debate, using evidence-based arguments and respecting diverse views.
- Participate in public engagement events to represent Task Force progress.

4. Quorum

No formal quorum is required per the Municipal Act, 2001, as the Task Force provides recommendations only. Meetings require at least two resident members and one Town Staff member to proceed.

5. Remuneration

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

6. Meetings

- Meet monthly or as called by the Chair, with meetings capped at 2 hours.
- Select the Chair at the first meeting.
- Urban Forestry Coordinator circulates agendas 1 week prior and action-item notes within 2-3 days post-meeting.
- Schedule at least two public ‘Tree Walks and Talks’ alongside member-only sessions to foster community involvement.
- Resident members are selected via the Town’s Committee selection procedure.
- Term ends with the submission of the final staff report to Council.

7. Agenda and Procedure

- Agendas, set by the Chair with member input, are prepared by the Urban Forestry Coordinator to advance the mandate.
- Public engagement milestones (e.g., surveys, open houses) are included in agendas to ensure transparency.

8. Workplan and Timeline

The Task Force will operate for 12 months, with flexibility to extend if additional public input is needed. Key milestones include:

- Month 1-2: Initiation and Familiarization
 - Select Chair and establish Task Force protocols.
 - Schedule (weather permitting) initial ‘Tree Walks and Talks’ (one public) to build knowledge.
 - Review by-law history (By-law 2010-68).
 - Review current engineering standards related to street trees.
 - Review current practice for assumption of developer planted trees in boulevards.
 - Review current policies, by-laws, and data; identify gaps.
 - Launch Task Force webpage with initial public survey on community priorities.
- Month 3-4: Analysis and Initial Outreach
 - Complete and summarize gap analysis.
 - Introduce TreePlotter and TreeKeeper as possible GIS solutions.
 - Draft preliminary canopy targets and by-law recommendations.
 - Hold first public open house to present findings and collect feedback.
 - Publish first quarterly progress report.
- Month 5-7: Policy Development and Engagement
 - Review possible updates to engineering standards for tree planting.
 - Discuss Biodiversity and Natural Heritage Strategy integration.
 - Review possible updates to policy and by-laws.
 - Conduct second public engagement event (e.g., virtual town hall) to introduce draft policies, by-law updates and canopy targets.
 - Launch second public survey on proposed by-law updates and canopy targets.
 - Publish second quarterly progress report.
- Month 8-10: Refinement and Final Outreach
 - Draft BUFS and recommendations, including financial implications.
 - Hold third public engagement event to present near-final report and recommendations.
 - Publish third quarterly progress report.
- Month 11-12: Finalization and Reporting

- Complete Draft BUFS and recommendations to include public input.
- Draft staff report for Council, incorporating feedback from all engagement points.
- Submit report to Council, identifying next steps to finalize and adopt BUFS.
- If needed, extend for additional public input or refinements.

9. Related Policies and Training Requirements

- POL.COR.18.08 Workplace Violence & Harassment Policy
- POL.COR.18.10 Social Media Policy
- POL.COR.19.02 Council Staff Relationship Protocol
- Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005, S.O. 2005, c.11
- Municipal Conflict of Interest Act, R.S.O. 1990
- Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, R.S.O. 1990