

To: Community Services Committee

From: Ron Diskey, Commissioner,  
Community Services Department

Report Number: CS-20-21

Date of Report: March 3, 2020

Date of Meeting: March 9, 2020

Subject: Subsidized Tree Planting Program

File: E-6100

---

## **1.0 Purpose**

The purpose of this report is to seek Council support to co-fund, along with the Region of Durham, the Town of Ajax and Whitby, the City of Pickering, and the Township of Scugog, a subsidized public outreach and private property tree planting program. The pilot program will be operated by Local Enhancement and Appreciation of Forests (LEAF) on behalf of participating municipalities with the goal of planting the right tree, in the right place with the right care.

## **2.0 Recommendation**

That the Community Services Committee recommend to City Council:

1. That Report CS-20-21, dated March 9, 2020, on the implementation of a subsidized backyard tree planting program in Oshawa, which leverages additional funding from the Region of Durham, be endorsed;
2. That pending budget approval of all partner municipalities and the Region of Durham, the City enter into a joint agreement with LEAF for the implementation of the backyard tree planting program;
3. That the Mayor and Clerk be authorized to execute a joint agreement with the Region of Durham, participating municipalities and LEAF, consistent with the terms and conditions contained in this Report and in a form and content satisfactory to the Commissioner of Community Services and the City Solicitor;
4. That Staff be directed to work cooperatively to roll out and communicate the program;
5. That staff review the pilot after the first year and report back to Committee with a summary of the results and consideration in the 2021 budget to proceed for a further 5-year agreement based on the success of the pilot; and,

6. That Council request Oshawa Power and Utilities Corporation consider providing an additional rebate for Oshawa property owners who participate in the LEAF Program as a mechanism to promote energy conservation.

### **3.0 Executive Summary**

N/A

### **4.0 Input From Other Sources**

- Oshawa Environmental Advisory Committee
- Legal Services
- Corporate Communications
- Region of Durham, Town of Whitby and Ajax, City of Pickering and the Township of Scugog
- Local Enhancement and Appreciation of Forests (LEAF)
- Oshawa Power and Utilities Corporation

### **5.0 Analysis**

#### **5.1 Background**

Trees planted in urban environments offer numerous environmental, economic and social benefits to residents such as improved air and water quality, increased carbon sequestration, energy savings, habitat enhancement, noise reduction and increased property values. The City's Forestry Services leads and undertakes a number of planting programs mainly focused on public lands including boulevard and park tree planting and maintenance programs. Although trees on public lands - in our parks, greenspaces/ ravines, and along our boulevards represent a valuable component of the City's overall tree canopy it is recognized that private property presents one of the best opportunities to enhance the urban forest through the planting of new trees and shrubs as it provides the greatest proportion of plantable area across the city.

Planting programs that focus on private property provide an opportunity for property owners to take action on climate change while also providing them with direct benefits of trees, including increasing property value and aesthetics, creating shade leading to energy savings, improving privacy, and reducing noise.

Recognizing the importance of engaging property owners in environmental actions that directly benefit them while contributing to the greater community, City staff have been in discussions with the Region of Durham, Town of Ajax and Whitby, the City of Pickering, and the Township of Scugog, to offer a subsidized public outreach and backyard tree planting program. The program will be operated by Local Enhancement and Appreciation of Forests (LEAF) on behalf of participating municipalities and expanding on the success of the program currently offered in the Town of Ajax (since 2015). Staff would like to pilot the program to determine the success of the partnership in 2020 with the goal of continuing based on the success and budget.

LEAF is a non-profit organization dedicated to the protection and enhancement of the urban forest. LEAF has been working with the Town of Ajax since 2015, and with other municipalities across the Greater Toronto Area since the early 2000's to meet urban forestry objectives including increasing tree canopy cover. LEAF is uniquely positioned to leverage municipal contributions across Durham Region in support of these new programs and has a demonstrated track-record of meeting private property tree planting objectives. They have operated in Toronto for well over 20 years with a high tree survival rate after a 10 year period.

## **5.2 Backyard Tree Planting Program Details**

The partnership with LEAF would provide Oshawa residents and business owners the opportunity to add more green to their property at a discounted rate. The program removes barriers to successful tree planting often experienced by homeowners such as time, knowledge, physical ability, transportation and cost. This eliminates haphazard or hasty tree planting decisions which may not yield the full benefits.

The goal for the first year of this program is to plant a minimum of 40 large growing shade trees for each participating municipality and engage property owners to understand the benefits of tree planting and proper care. Tree limit per property is based on available space based on future growth of the tree(s). If the interest in the program exceeds the 40 tree limit we may consider instituting a limit per property. In this case LEAF will provide the additional consultation with the interested property owners who would then be placed on a planting list for the following spring pending program review and approval.

The program focusses on education, providing property owners with the necessary guidance and support to ensure that the trees planted not only survive but thrive. The goal of the program is to ensure the right tree gets planted in the right place, with the right care. LEAF works with each property owner to consider the specific site conditions, such as light, soil quality, distance to property lines and infrastructure.

Properly planted trees can provide a number of direct benefits to homeowners including much needed shade during the summer months thereby reducing air conditioning needs and makes non-air conditioned homes more comfortable. The same tree may also provide wind protection during the winter months reducing energy use for heating. Studies have also shown that trees increase property values, increase home salability, and make neighborhoods more visually appealing and contribute to a sense of pride. In addition to the aesthetic values, trees also have the ability to add privacy and reduce noise.

Through LEAF's Backyard Tree Planting Program and leveraging funding from the Region of Durham, Oshawa property owners will save \$330/tree on select species. For this subsidized rate LEAF's Backyard Tree Planting Program provides property owners with the following:

- online application process
- a 30 minute consultation with a LEAF arborist;
- a 5-8 foot tall native, deciduous tree or 2-4 foot tall native evergreen tree with a less expensive option for native shrub or garden kits;
- full delivery, planting service, and mulch, with a less expensive do-it-yourself option;

- tree care guide; and,
- follow-up tree care advice by email or phone

Multi-unit and/or commercial properties may also qualify for this discounted rate. Although the program focuses on backyards other areas of the property may be considered but will be reviewed based on site conditions such as space, soil and light. The program however does not include any plantings on public land (street/park trees).

Providing a value on the tree and planting program ensures that the property owners are committed to tree care and the success of the program by following the guidelines for spacing and species selection. The program prioritizes customer service and includes follow up tree care advice providing an additional level of care which is often not seen in other tree give-away programs. This maximizes the potential for trees to survive and thrive thereby offering ecological services back to the community.

The selection of trees available are native to the area, which add to the natural biodiversity of our tree canopy. The program also supports the City's Bee City Initiative as native trees and shrubs also flower and provide habitat for native bees. The program offers a number of less expensive options including a "do-it-yourself option" which includes proper care guidance including a virtual consultation with a LEAF arborist and instructional videos along with delivery of the tree. Options for native shrubs and garden kits may also be opted for by property owners at an even lower rate.

LEAF provides extensive metrics and reporting mechanism back to each municipality to demonstrate success and satisfaction of property owners. This will be reviewed at the end of 2020 to determine the success in moving forward with an annual program commitment.

### **5.3 Program Promotion**

LEAF provides a number of pre-developed communication material for use by the City to promote the backyard tree planting program including pre-developed social media posts, graphics, brochures, etc. The City would be responsible to work collaboratively with the Region to promote the program, which may include various advertising and promotional activities. Corporate Communications will be involved to coordinate efforts with the various partners and to ensure consistent messaging. Additional opportunities may exist in promoting the program through other external avenues.

## **6.0 Financial Implications**

This partnership eliminates any resource burden to the City while actively working towards growing the City's tree canopy and engaging property owners in the goal. The Region of Durham is seeking approval of \$80,000 grant allocation towards the program which is anticipated to go to Regional Council on March 25th. If approved this will cover the overhead costs associated with administering the program across the Region including planning, staffing, marketing, tracking, reporting, insurance, and W.S.I.B., etc.

The City's contribution of \$15,000 will be funded from the City's Annual Operating Budget. This includes a direct subsidy of \$330 towards each tree up to 40 trees and an additional

\$1800 for LEAF to generate and develop targeted communications including social media and event attendance. The remaining value of \$220/tree will be paid by the property owner.

Staff will continue to investigate additional partners that could provide further rebates for property owners and assistance in promoting the program including Oshawa Power and Utilities Corporation (O.P.U.C.). O.P.U.C. could be a valuable partner given the known benefits of planting trees for energy conservation and the importance of promoting proper tree planting and care techniques to limit conflicts with power lines and other obstructions. Additional rebates would allow for an even further reduction in the cost per tree for property owners and encourage more to participate.

By leveraging the funding from the Region of Durham and through the City’s contribution, the subsidized cost/tree is as follows:

<b>Program Responsibilities</b>	<b>Total (40 Trees)</b>	<b>Cost / Tree</b>
LEAF Cost of Program Includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Office tasks - processing applications, client communications, booking consultations, preparing and processing consult packages, sending and processing locates, preparing planting schedules, quality control checks and data entry at all stages</li> <li>• Consultation (includes transport, arborist, materials, etc.)</li> <li>• Tree and materials (mulch, stakes, amendments, nursery delivery charges, etc.)</li> <li>• Planting (includes transport, labour, equipment, etc.)</li> <li>• Follow up advice - request for arborist advice (phone, email), in person follow ups (done at 20% of plantings)</li> <li>• Development of both municipal targeted communications such as attendance/participation at municipal events and social media and Regional communications including development including website, brochure and additional promotional items (\$1800)</li> </ul>	\$23,800	\$595
City Contribution \$15,000: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Includes \$330/tree towards subsidizing the direct cost per tree; and,</li> <li>• LEAF to develop targeted communication in Oshawa</li> </ul>	\$13,200 \$1800	\$330 \$45
Property Owner Contribution: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensures commitment to ongoing care</li> </ul>	\$8,800	\$220

## **7.0 Relationship to the Oshawa Strategic Plan**

This report addresses the Oshawa Strategic Plan by responding to the goal “Environmental Responsibility” under the themes of “Proactive Environmental Management” and “Cleaner Air, Land and Water” by providing measures to strengthen the City’s resilience to a changing climate, improved stormwater management, improved water quality, enhanced natural environment and educating the public about the value and importance of our urban tree canopy.



Mike Saulnier, Director,  
Operations Services



Ron Diskey, Commissioner,  
Community Services Department