

Guelph Urban Forest Friends Delegation to City Council regarding Royal City Park November 23 2009

Good Evening Madame Mayor and Councilors:

I am here to present on behalf of Guelph Urban Forest Friends.

Regarding the Royal City Park mass tree removals:

Tree canopy is confusing for some people. Put simply, it refers to the diameter of shade on the ground under the tree leaves and branches above. Big broad trees give the best density of shade and contribute to our city canopy of 26-27%. This number is from the latest GRCA report that lists 27% and shows the connection between city health, tree canopy and water protection. Their number does not reflect the 60 acres of trees removed by one developer in the south end and the many other trees cut down all over the city these past few months. Unfortunately newly planted trees do not add to our canopy for 20-30 years.

So let us focus on RCP trees which are part of our 26% of tree canopy. This canopy provides many benefits which are listed on the Guelph Urban Forest Friends website, www.guffguelph.ca.

Some include reducing our city temperature during hot spells and reduces our community energy demand for air conditioning. We have experienced several hot dry summers in the last five years which caused concern regarding water security and health of our city. Most of the world's scientists say that we are in for much more of the same.

GUFF formed as a result of the impending mass tree removals of RCP a few years ago.

Many of us looked at our tree protection policy and found some surprising facts.

1991 Park Naturalization Policy - Tree by-law must be revised “in order to control the number of trees, woodlots & habitat destroyed annually by development”

1994 Green Plan - “Methods for protecting trees from development should be developed”

2003 Environmental Action Plan recommends tree inventory, updating tree by-law to protect natural features and developing guidelines to protect trees during construction.

2003 Tree Protection Report - Background Review & Recommendations, Aboud & Associates, Inc., September 29, 2003 recommends professional forester with a degree in forestry or arboriculture.

2005 Council resolution asking staff to prepare funding request for urban forest study and tree maintenance program

2007 Council resolution on the urban forest that staff report back following the visioning process with cost estimate for urban forest management plan

2007 Strategic Plan Goal 6.6 “A bio-diverse city with the highest tree canopy percentage among comparable municipalities”

2008 Framework for a Strategic Urban Forest Management Plan is prioritized by council. When the Framework is finalized, hopefully in 2010, then an Urban Forest Management Plan will be studied and written and after that a public tree protective bylaw will be worked on.

2009 Strategic Urban Forest Management Plan Recommendations contains 28 uses of the word ‘should’ instead of ‘will’ or ‘shall’ or ‘must’. The word ‘should’ is equal to the word ‘suggest’ and offers absolutely no protection for our urban forest.

Our lack of a protective tree bylaw and an urban forestry department to protect our green infrastructure has resulted in the removal of thousands of trees over the last 20 years. It is clear that we need proactive support from this council to protect green spaces like Royal City Park.

S. Ontario has the strongest UV radiation in Canada. Ontario Public Health agencies recognize the importance of big broad trees to health in addition to their benefits to groundwater recharge and air quality. Skin cancer is the fastest growing rate of cancers and is very costly in lives and health care budgets. Since 80% of UV radiation is accumulated in the first 18 years of life, our children now are very much at risk. Healthy communities want children playing outdoors and citizens out walking and biking. But continual loss of canopy is raising the risks.

For Royal City Park

We must maintain and protect the medium-risk and low-risk trees to preserve some shade to cool the earth and support the growth of new plantings. We need to accept the citizen input that you have documented that is asking for increased naturalized areas in the park.

Extreme climate change is facing us. We have experienced several record droughts in the past 10 years. We need our big broad trees for our resilience. Every mature tree removed is another hole in our protective canopy.

GRCA Water Forum September 2009 commentary

The role for cities, business, academe, and the citizenry is to protect ecosystem integrity for sustainable cities. There is a lot of uncertainty in our future. We have no control over temperature and climate change. We have control over our land practices.

For additional information on ‘Sustainable Guelph’ we refer you to our new PowerPoint on our website, www.guffguelph.ca

Norah Chaloner, for GUFF