



SIDNEY COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION INPUT ON SIDNEY'S URBAN FOREST STRATEGY

Submission by SCA members and friends

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Introduction

The Community Association commends the Town for addressing the long term management of trees on both public and private land. We support the establishment of a clear vision and set of objectives. We believe that every Sidney resident has a part in creating the future of the Town. Few of our members have technical expertise in arboriculture, but all of us have daily experience with the trees and green space around our homes, in the parks and natural places we love and on our streets. SCA members tend to be well read and many feel an emotional connection to Sidney’s trees. Many of us are deeply concerned about the loss of mature trees to development and want to be informed and engaged with Town staff and Council to increase our tree canopy and grow a sustainable urban forest for the future. A few have said that Sidney’s position as the urban centre for the peninsula makes our tree canopy less important. We strongly disagree. In more compact communities, trees are a critical indicator of the quality of life.

To create this submission, we invited all interested members to meet October 21 and [recorded the input](#) of the 12 people who attended. We then developed draft recommendations and sent them to all SCA members to solicit their feedback. We also [surveyed SCA members and Facebook followers](#). 65 people responded, 83% of whom were members.

Vision – 10 years from now (2029)

Barefoot Planning’s October 2018 Urban Forest survey asked about a vision for 30 years from now, 2050. Recent Climate Change research says we don’t have 30 years to prevent runaway climate change.

Summer drought and winter storms are already causing significant damage to trees and infrastructure. A ten year time line is much more appropriate. Our vision is that by 2029, Sidney's citizens will be proud of their shaded streets and confident that the town has for the past 10 years followed a clear, well researched plan conserve and increase the canopy of healthy trees essential to air quality, mitigation of summer drought and winter storms, wildlife habitat and connection with nature. By 2019, a web of green space will be integrated with neighboring municipalities, connecting parks & ecologically sensitive areas. Sidney will have more than doubled its tree cover with appropriate species. Protected, functional wildlife habitat will exist along the shoreline, Reay Creek and in many other parts of town, supporting diverse and abundant fish, birds and other creatures.

General Recommendations

1. Emphasize the "Whys"
 - The Strategy should emphasize the reasons for maintaining and increasing the presence of trees in Sidney, including human health, air quality, recreation, wildlife habitat, carbon storage, climate change mitigation (energy saving, shade), human mental and physical health, property values, sea level rise, stormwater management and many more. Our survey respondents valued trees for many reasons, with beautification and protecting biodiversity at the top of the list.
2. The Urban Forest Strategy must be differentiated by zone and neighbourhood.
 - Sidney is compact but has various zones based on land use, soils, other ecology and history. What is appropriate for single and 2 family residential areas is not appropriate downtown. Proximity to the shoreline, environmentally sensitive areas and wildlife habitat are other considerations. See Appendix A for ideas about zones.
 - Engage residents in the development of neighbourhood plans and measurable targets. See recommendation # 20 below. 58% of respondents to our survey (Reference #2) wanted a say in planning for trees in their neighbourhood.
3. Publish an inventory of the current canopy, identifying species, approximate age, size, public or private land, general health and prognosis. Such an inventory is essential for planning and to inform residents. How many protected trees have been lost in the past 5 years, 10 years?
4. Canopy goal - Sidney's 14% canopy is very low compared to Oak Bay and Victoria. We should at least set targets to match the best regional municipalities in tree cover. American Forests, the US's oldest non-profit citizens' conservation organization, recommends a 40% tree canopy for healthy cities. (Reference # 11 - Baltimore Parks and Recreation)
5. Canopy goals should be measurable and include annual interim targets to discourage future Councils from postponing action.
6. Goals and targets should also include shrubs and groundcover, green space and natural areas for habitat, ecology and sustainability. Intact stands like Beaufort Grove and Reay Creek, where the shrubby undergrowth has been preserved, have far greater biodiversity than in other areas as demonstrated by frequency and variety of birdsong, etc.
7. Include preparation and preservation of healthy soils.
 - Currently, residents observe developers dumping cement and paint and using heavy machinery on clay soil, then bringing in a layer of good soil on top without apparently mitigating the underlying compaction. The result requires irrigation and increased water use. The compacted clay cannot be healthy for large trees to grow to maturity.

8. Stewardship – planning and budgeting for the care of both new and mature trees is essential.
9. Include green corridors between parks and natural spaces with substantial flora and fauna (but designed to prevent deer coming into town). Encourage pollinator- friendly species.
10. Where possible and especially in sensitive habitat, preserve big, old trees, dead wildlife trees and native vegetation. The larger the tree, the more useful it is. The Trees Matter Network (reference #10) cites research that it takes 259 saplings to do the work of a single mature tree 36” in diameter.
11. Review the criteria for saving old trees in residential areas. Create zoning requirements and incentives for developers to save trees, to include appropriate boulevard trees in every development and to give back green space to the community. (See recommendation # 13 below.)
12. The Strategy should identify appropriate species for new plantings in specific zones, species and planting techniques that have the most impact to increase the canopy without damage to public infrastructure (sidewalks, utilities etc.) or that of neighbours (driveways, parking, patios), or becoming dangerous or unusually costly to maintain in the future. Experts emphasize the importance of a diversity of species (see Reference #12 “Urban Forests Key to Managing Climate Change”). Residents appreciate deciduous trees on boulevards because they provide shade in summer and let the light through in winter. They are also fire resistant.
13. Review all Town Bylaws to support the Urban Forest Strategy, including:
 - Tree Protection Bylaw – a survey respondent pointed out that Sidney’s protected tree diameter of 75 cm is far too big. We found several other provisions in Sidney’s Bylaw are weaker than in other municipalities.
 - Require that all new developments include street trees. Too many new buildings in the downtown are built to the lot line without provision for large street trees or green space.
 - In residential areas, requiring that any subdivision plan includes a net gain in street trees. Some streets like Third, Malaview and Bradford which have consistent trees shading the street and homes are far more pleasant than others like Mills and Ardwell where the tree coverage is inconsistent or absent.
 - Review and expand Environmentally Sensitive Area boundaries to include significant nest and perch trees, especially Allbay peninsula, Resthaven Island.
 - Development Permit Guidelines should require an environmental assessment by a professional not selected by the developer of any request for tree removal in an ESA.
 - Incentives and regulations should encourage property owners and especially developers to design their structures to retain rather than remove healthy mature trees.
 - Include tree protection in the objectives for Environmentally Sensitive Areas.
14. Bring transparency to the management of trees by requiring a Tree Management Report similar to the Monthly Building Permit Report listing all protected trees as defined in the Tree Protection Bylaw that have been cut down, indicating location, species, approximate age, reason for removal and whether the owner paid or replaced the tree. The report should also list the location and species of replacement trees and the current funds held by the town under the Tree Bylaw.
15. **Protect Beaufort Grove.** We understand that the area described as Beaufort Grove in the OCP was originally 2 properties. One (the Britten’s) was allowed to be subdivided and the trees cut down. Concerned SCA members believe the only way to protect what remains is to it for parkland. This grove, which includes Sidney’s famous eagle tree now has a single, elderly owner and is highly vulnerable to be sold for development.
16. Recognize the Vancouver Island Aspen and other native species for protection.

17. The Strategy should take account of the full range of existing mechanisms and use combination of regulations and incentives for public and private property to achieve objectives. (See Appendix B.)
18. The Urban Forest Strategy must be based on up-to-date science. Summer drought and winter storms are bringing down mature trees. It is critical to understand the conditions and varieties that will survive and meet future needs.
19. Invite partnerships with First Nations in the area, both to better understand the natural history and to ensure that First Nations values, knowledge and perspectives in management of the natural environment are recognized as integral to the development of the Strategy.

Recommendations about Public Engagement – Role of Sidney Residents

20. Educate and engage all levels of community – youth and families, seniors, existing organizations. Our survey found significant interest in participating in all of these listed below.
 - Tree Appreciation Day – as is done in [neighbouring municipalities](#), hold a community event to plant trees, inform and engage residents about the role of trees in a healthy community.
 - Sponsor or encourage a program to connect volunteers with homeowners and renters who need help to pick fruit, rake leaves, etc.
 - Give residents information about how to help trees on the boulevard and their own property. This might include watering during drought, removing invasives. Encourage property owners who will be away for long periods to notify the Town and/or neighbours to care for boulevard trees. “Adopt a tree”.
 - Provide information and incentives to help residents choose trees for their own property.
 - Identify how volunteers can help care for trees in parks and beach accesses, eg. Invasive plant removal, with some training and supervision by staff. Seek “Friends of Sidney Parks”.
 - Interpretive signage helps all ages understand the value of trees and nature.
 - Tree stewardship programs with local school children
21. Make sure that residents know about and can participate in neighbourhood planning. Neighbours are more likely to support and protect what they understand and helped to create.
22. Require the developer to notify neighbours (within 100 meters) when applying for a tree removal permit and provide time for comments.
23. Encourage developers to treat neighbours with courtesy and respect. Our members have too many stories about developers removing long standing trees without understanding what they mean to neighbours and without any warning.
24. Educate and inform residents about the benefits of and best practices for Sidney’s urban trees.

Conclusion

Preserving and expanding Sidney’s Urban Forest is important to residents. The Community Association looks forward to participating in further discussion and helping to engage the community.

Appendix A - Thoughts on Urban Forest Zones in Sidney

- The [Downtown Streetscape and Urban Design Standards](#) document provides good information on location, species, soil and other conditions for healthy trees downtown. (page 39-45)
- Multi-family zones – many residents believe that reduced setbacks have led to loss of large trees and limit opportunities to replace them. The Urban Forest Strategy should require shade trees in these zones.
- High Density Residential
- Other residential – Single and 2 Family
- Parks
- Environmentally Sensitive Areas – conserve, maintain and restore native species
- Shoreline – natural and residential shorelines, industrial shoreline, marina shoreline.

Appendix B Tools and Mechanisms for achieving Urban Forest Goals

See the [Green Bylaws Toolkit](#), for discussion of the conditions for use and the pros and cons of #1-8. It would be necessary to determine which are appropriate and available for Sidney.

1. Property tax exemptions – exemption agreements to tie tax exemptions to measurable performance by the property owner
2. Conservation Covenants - can apparently be hard to enforce, especially if the property is sold.
3. Canada’s Ecological Gifts Program
4. CRD Conservation Fund
5. Private Conservation Funds
6. Environmental Impact Assessments
7. Development Permit Information Areas (p 211 [Green Bylaws Toolkit PDF](#))
8. Environmental and Social Review to identify required information, eg Highlands Sustainability Appraisal Form Policy (p. 111 [Green Bylaws Toolkit](#))
9. Can amenity funds be used to acquire property such as Beaufort Grove?
10. Can the funds from tree removal permits be used to acquire property such as Beaufort Grove?
11. Waive subdivision and other fees to help acquire Beaufort Grove
12. As a condition of Development Permit approval, require and hold back a sufficient deposit to cover the cost of removal and replacement of trees, until it is established that healthy soil and trees are established (2 years?) by impartial inspection and testing. (See [Town Council Minutes of October 9, 2018](#), APC Recommendations p 2,3)
13. Require a Construction Management Plan similar to that recommended by the Advisory Planning Commission for 2325 Harbour Road. ([Advisory Planning Commission Minutes June 5, 2018](#) regarding heron nests) where construction will temporarily disturb wildlife.

Appendix C Some Notable stands of trees in need of protection (in private hands)

Beaufort Grove	Allbay peninsula, Eden Place, Jocelyn Place, Lyme Grove and the east end of Harbour Road
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Mermaid Creek area	Resthaven Island
Great Garry Oak specimen NW corner of Allbay and Bowden	

Appendix D Locations for more trees

N.B. All residential streets should be assessed in the course of developing neighbourhood plans

Sidney Elementary	Rathdown Park
New Employee Parking Lot	New Community Safety Building when completed
West Sidney Industrial and Residential areas	Peter Grant Park
Between Mary Winspear Centre and the highway	Iroquois and Tulista Parks??

Appendix E Definition of Tree Canopy

Tree canopy refers to the part of a city that is shaded by trees. Imagine that you are a bird flying high above Sidney, looking down. The tree leaves and branches covering the ground form our tree canopy. (Based on Baltimore Parks and Recreation.)

Appendix F List of References

1. [Urban Forest Strategy SCA Workshop Notes Oct 21 2018](#)
2. [Survey Monkey – SCA Input into Urban Forest Strategy](#)
3. [Green Bylaws Toolkit \(PDF\) University of Victoria Environmental Law Planting Our Future: a Tree Toolkit for Communities, Province of BC and the Union of BC Municipalities.](#)
4. Sidney [Downtown Streetscape and Urban Design Standards](#) (p. 39-45),
5. Town of Sidney [Guide to Applying for a Development Permit](#),
6. Town of Sidney [Official Community Plan](#), especially Part 3, Development Permit Area Guidelines.
7. Town of Sidney [Tree Preservation Bylaw](#)
8. [Town of Sidney Minutes of Town Council Meeting October 9, 2018](#) (#10a, pages 2,3 – Advisory Planning Commission recommendations re. trees)
9. [Advisory Planning Commission Minutes June 5, 2018](#) Construction Management Plan re heron nests.
10. [Community Trees Matter Network](#) centered in Victoria, advocates for urban trees. There are excellent, well researched articles on its website, including: [Why Trees Matter – A Lot!](#)
11. [City of Baltimore Department of Parks and Recreation: What is the Tree Canopy?](#)
12. Vancouver Sun Oct 13 2018 article by Brian Minter [Urban Forests Key to Managing Climate Change, UBC Conference.](#)
13. Public information material and Tree Protection Bylaws for Victoria, Saanich, Oak Bay, Colwood