

SIDNEY COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION, HABITAT AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE
INPUT ON THE URBAN FOREST STRATEGY, MARCH 2019
RESPONSE TO BAREFOOT PLANNING DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

Context: As noted in the Barefoot Planning document, currently, Sidney has relatively low urban forest and canopy coverage, degraded biodiversity and watersheds, little mature forest and few, if any, large natural parks. Further, existing tree replacement is not increasing, and may well not even be maintaining, overall canopy cover. Lately, many mature trees have been lost due to “development pressure” and our “development pattern and policies typically limit plantable space in most areas.” As well, as the Draft Recommendations note, current town resources do not allow for any significant improvement of this situation.

In other words, Sidney has a pressing need to create and implement an Urban Forest Strategy (UFS) and the Town is committed to addressing this need as part of its review of the Official Community Plan (OCP).

We would add to these contextual observations 1. that many citizens and the Sidney Community Association, (SCA) have been dismayed at many recent developments being allowed to remove mature trees and by the evident failure of current policies to prevent that or to provide adequate and sustainable replacement trees.

2. We also note concern about the lack of transparency and engagement with citizens over these issues.

3. We would also add, as context, that citizens including the SCA have been dismayed at the recent loss of permeable and healthy private and public land/soil and of habitat as developments increasingly cover every possible centimeter of lot with buildings.

4. We also wish to stress the context of current and future climate change and the need to integrate Town planning for the OCP and its UFS with plans to adapt to and mitigate climate change pressures on our green infrastructure and, indeed, on all infrastructure, as well as other current pressures such as those facing compliance with The Provincial Wildlife Protection Act, inclusiveness, engagement, and food security.

In this regard, note that the SCA vision for 10 years on includes a focus on climate change adaptation, wildlife habitat and corridors (integrated with those of neighbouring communities), green and shaded streets and also on citizen pride in the improvements and confidence that the Town followed a clear, well-researched plan of conservation.

SCA Response to the Draft UFS Recommendations

In general, we strongly support Barefoot Planning's Recommendations. However, to date, they do not adequately incorporate our call for UFS goals to include greenspace, natural areas for habitat and polinators, healthy soils and ecology and sustainability. Nor do they sufficiently note the importance of engagement and transparency. We also would like to see more focus on requirements as well as incentives to ensure that developers confirm to our developing OCP, ESA, tree protection, and other policies including proposed expanded notice.

We suggest that the Town develop a requirement that developers set aside funds for a town appointed evaluation of soil, habitat and tree health before an occupancy permit is granted – in addition to the Draft Recommendation's call for a 2 year holdback to ensure the health of trees on developed land.

We would like to see a change in the current practice in which trees, soil and habitat must give way to the building footprint, in the context of the increasing propensity for developments to cover all of the available land with buildings.

We note that the Recommendations fall into 3 categories:

- Protection and management
- Planting and enhancement, and
- Stewardship and learning.

Since "protection and management" amounts to stopping the harm that has recently been done and doing no further harm, we strongly support that as the priority. We also strongly support the Barefoot proposals in the current Draft (section 5) but would add the goal of promoting the quantity of permeable soils, the quality of healthy soils, habitat, watersheds and water management and our concern that trees seem to lose their importance if they fall within a proposed building footprint.

The related inventory and mapping, restoration and dealing with invasives in Section 6 well support the Policy and bylaw development in Section 5. Here we would add that the inventory and database incorporate as much information as possible about the health of the soils, green infrastructure and habitat as well as the proposed information on all trees, significant trees, and plantable space.

In regard to staffing and resources we would like to see a recommendation to assess the feasibility of using teams of expert arborist/ environmental planners etc. contractors, students, and volunteers to work accomplish some of the needed work. We re-iterate the call for transparency and engagement at all stages.

In other words, we suggest attention to working “From the Ground Up” both by engaging citizens and by attending to the ecological roles of and support for trees in the UFS.

We support the Draft documents’ recommendations in regard to b) S. 7 & 8 Planting and Enhancement and c S. 9, Stewardship and Learning. We would reiterate our encouragement to take a broad lens on “trees” and their value and role, our interest in seeing broad as well as local-area engagement, including engagement with First Nations, and transparency and opportunities to build civic confidence and pride through this process. As an example, Tree Appreciation Days exist in several neighbouring communities and could be incorporated here. We reiterate our strong support for native plantings, attention to our very rich ecological gifts on the Peninsula and love for such ideas as a Gary Oak Meadow with suitable acknowledgement of the First Nations role.

Implementation Timeline

In regard to the Recommendations’ sections 10, 11, 12 setting out ongoing, short-term and longer-term priorities:

Ongoing Actions:

- We strongly support the priority place of the OCP, ESA, DPA being strengthened in regard to the urban forest and ecological connectivity (adding our interest in a broad lens so that we ensure healthy and permeable soils increasingly become available for the expansion of and connection of healthy green infrastructure including trees, native plants and native species including pollinators.
- We strongly support the high priority given to the public tree inventory – but would expand the lens “from the roots up”,
- We strongly support the high priority given to improving the development review process and the inclusion of “growing conditions and landscape design and construction oversight” in that recommendation, and to community partnerships, engagement (including wider notice) and transparency.

Short Term Actions

- In addition to the proposed review of internal staff and resources we recommend a review of other potential resources (citizens, contractor/ student teams, partnerships, donations, a foundation??) etc.
- We consider tree and plantable space preservation as the top priority, together with the education and resources necessary to promote that and ensure compliance.