

# Report to Council



**Date:** April 17, 2023  
**To:** Council  
**From:** City Manager  
**Subject:** Sustainable Urban Forest Strategy: Goals & Strategies  
**Department:** Parks Services and Policy & Planning

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## **Recommendation:**

THAT Council receives, for information, the report from the Parks Services and Policy & Planning Departments dated April 17, 2023, with respect to the Sustainable Urban Forest Strategy goals and strategies.

## **Purpose:**

To provide Council with an update on the progress of the Sustainable Urban Forest Strategy and to discuss its vision, goals, and strategies.

## **Background:**

Kelowna's urban forest is defined as the total collection of trees and their growing environments found within the City's boundary. This can include treed environments in both public and privately owned lands and can be both cultivated and managed landscapes or completely natural areas. Kelowna's urban forest provides cleaner air, shade, wildlife habitat, and a myriad of benefits accessible to everyone who lives, works, and visits here.

In 2011, Council endorsed the City's first Sustainable Urban Forest Strategy (SUFS) to establish clear direction for urban forest growth and management. The ten-year strategy provided a suite of practical tools and recommendations to help achieve the goals and objectives of managing and growing the urban forest. Since its endorsement, a variety of the Strategy's recommendations have been implemented including the NeighbourWoods program, updates to the Municipal Properties Tree Bylaw, wildfire fuel management treatments and staffing and funding increases for the City's Urban Forestry Department.

As the lifespan of the current SUFS has lapsed, staff are working with a consultant to develop an updated strategy that will respond to the complex challenges currently faced by Kelowna's urban forest. These include challenges related to development and urbanization; climate change and extreme weather (e.g., drought, extreme heat, wildfire); forest pests and disease; tree care and forest management; and urban ecosystem pressures. Building on the previous Strategy's goals and

objectives, the updated SUFS will establish clear direction for urban forest growth and management over the next ten years. As illustrated in Figure 1, the update will provide recommendations to enhancing and protecting the urban forest under both the City’s management and the urban forest that is privately stewarded. The update’s recommendations will put us on a path to achieving several of the 2040 Official Community Plan objectives, including improving the climate resilience of the urban forest resource.

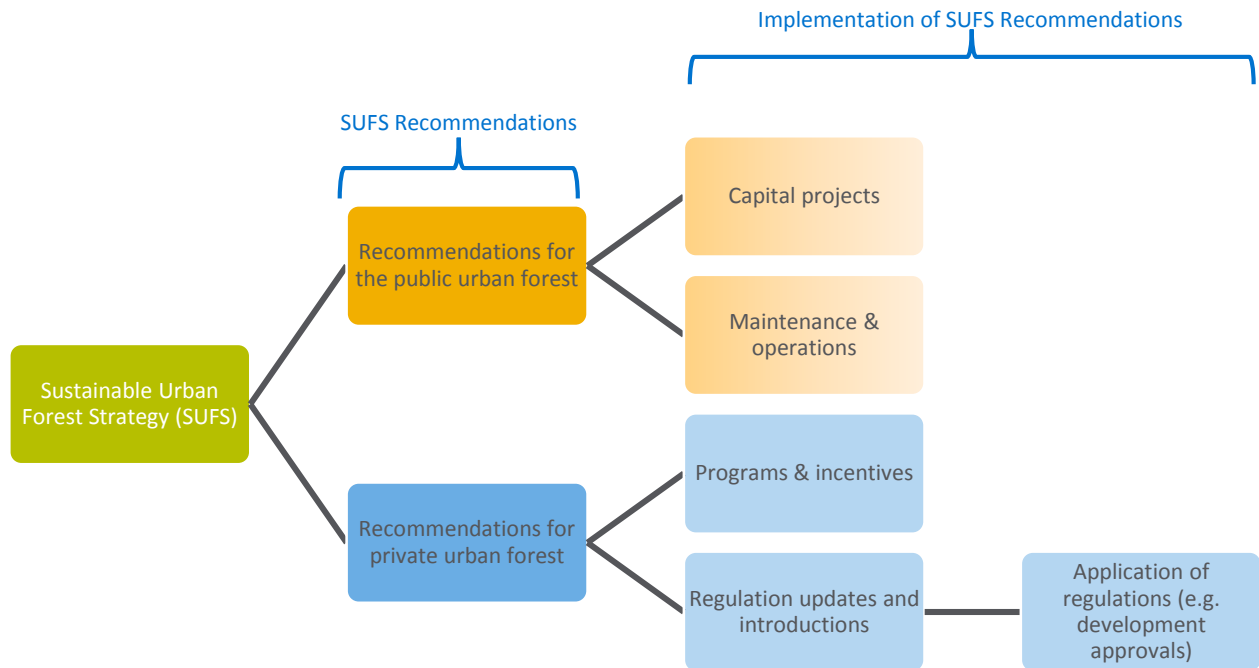


Figure 1: How the SUFS influences Kelowna's urban forest

**Discussion:**

To support development of the SUFS, a technical analysis was completed to examine the current state of the City’s urban forest. Scope of analysis included: a high-level estimate of current canopy cover using orthoimagery, assessment of the current street and park tree inventory, and evaluation of land types and distribution throughout the city. Staff anticipate acquisition of new LiDAR data in 2023 that will provide a more detailed understanding of our urban forest, particularly with respect to canopy cover percentages. Once the new LiDAR has been analyzed, it is recommended that the information be used to inform new OCP canopy coverage targets, one for each growth strategy district as each has unique challenges and opportunities for expanding the urban forest.

The technical analysis, staff input, and the public engagement that took place in the late fall of 2022 (see *Appendix A: Sustainable Urban Forest Strategy Engagement Summary*), was used to draft a long-term vision, goals, and strategies for the development of the SUFS to guide planning, growing, managing, protecting, and partnering to steward the urban forest.

The urban forest is an integral part of Kelowna’s infrastructure and urban realm, contributing to the resilience of our community to a changing climate. The draft vision for Kelowna’s urban forest is:

*"Our vision is for an expanding urban forest, connecting our green urban centres to our natural areas, managed to maintain a healthy, safe, and viable natural asset that helps our community mitigate and adapt to climate change."*

To achieve the vision, the SUFS update proposes four goals supported by ten strategies as outlined in Table 2.

Table 2 1: Draft Goals and Strategies for the SUFS Update

Goal	Strategy to Achieve Goal
<b>Protect, connect, and expand the urban forest</b>	Continue to integrate policy and planning to protect, connect and expand tree canopy.
	Expand the urban forest equitably in urban areas.
	Restore forests to expand habitat, enhance biodiversity and improve connectivity.
	Improve the quality and suitability of trees being planted for the site and climate requirements.
<b>Maintain a healthy, safe, and viable urban forest</b>	Clarify operational procedures and standards to improve efficiency and manage risk.
	Transition from reactive to proactive maintenance of urban trees.
	Ensure resources are sufficient to deliver levels of service that maximize urban forest benefits.
<b>Involve people and organizations in urban forest management</b>	Improve governance and public and institutional awareness of urban forest management.
	Strengthen community partnerships and participation to implement the Urban Forest Strategy.
	Strengthen relationships with syilx/Okanagan communities, First Nations governments and Indigenous peoples through forest management.
<b>Monitor and innovate to achieve our urban forest vision</b>	Monitor change, report and adapt management to new information.
	Trial innovative approaches to dryland urban forestry.

**Next Steps:**

Based on staff and public input received, the consultant is drafting a series of recommended actions for each of the proposed strategies. These recommendations will be reviewed with staff to understand feasibility and impacts to resourcing. The SUFS 2023 update will then be drafted and will include a prioritized implementation plan which will demonstrate what can be achieved with existing resources and what can be achieved with additional staff and financial resources. It is anticipated that the draft SUFS 2023 update will be shared with Council in late spring this year, and subsequently used to facilitate the final round of public engagement. We anticipate returning to Council for adoption of the strategy in Q3 of 2023.

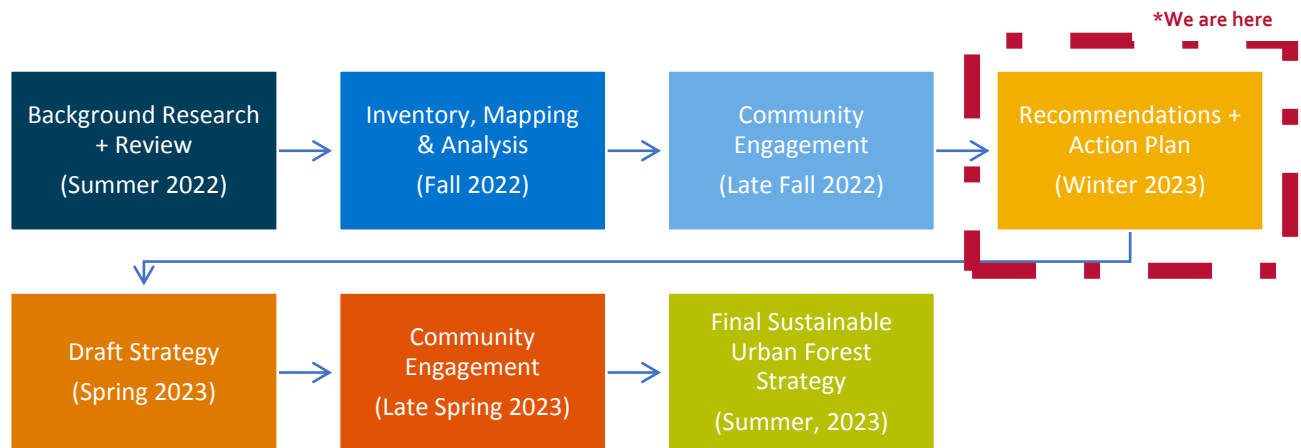


Figure 2: Timeline for developing the Sustainable Urban Forest Strategy Update

**Conclusion:**

The urban forest, and urban greening in general, are increasingly recognized as approaches for improving the resilience of people and cities to climate change, by reducing the impact of extreme events on human health, infrastructure, and the environment.

Kelowna, and other dry cities around the world, are integrating urban forestry into urban development planning to improve ecosystem service delivery and climate resilience (a foundational pillar of the OCP). Updating the Sustainable Urban Forest Strategy is an implementation action of the OCP, which also includes policy direction for expanding a healthy and diverse urban forest, prioritizing street trees, and investing in ecosystem services and green infrastructure to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

**Internal Circulation:**

- Financial Services
- Infrastructure
- Planning & Development Services
- Capital Planning & Asset Management
- Community Communications
- Data Services & Analytics
- Development Engineering
- Development Planning
- Fire Department
- Information Services
- Infrastructure Delivery
- Infrastructure Operations
- Parks & Buildings Planning
- Suburban and Rural Planning
- Transportation Engineering
- Utility Planning

**Considerations applicable to this report:**

**Existing Policy:**

- 2040 OCP
  - Objective 14.2 Protect and expand a healthy and viable urban forest.
- Bylaw No. 8041 Tree Protection Bylaw
- Bylaw No. 8042 Municipal Properties Tree Bylaw
- Bylaw No. 6469 Nuisance Trees and Shrubs Bylaw
- Bylaw No. 7900 Subdivision, Development & Servicing Bylaw (Schedule 4, Section 7, Landscape & Irrigation)
- Bylaw No. 12375 Zoning Bylaw (Section 7 Landscaping Standards)

**Financial/Budgetary Considerations:**

The recommendations in the upcoming draft Sustainable Urban Forest Strategy update will illustrate what can be achieved with existing resources and what can be achieved with the addition of financial and staff resources.

**External Agency/Public Comments:**

The public had an opportunity to provide their input on Kelowna's urban forest through a survey (hosted from November 17 – December 11, 2022) and a virtual Open House (hosted November 30, 2022). Interested and Affected parties also provided input at a workshop hosted on October 27, 2022. This engagement is summarized in Appendix A: Sustainable Urban Forest Strategy Engagement Summary. The next opportunity for public engagement will be late spring 2022 after the strategy is drafted and presented to Council.

**Considerations not applicable to this report:**

**Legal/Statutory Authority:**

**Legal/Statutory Procedural Requirements:**

**Communications Comments:**

**Submitted by:** T. Bergeson, Urban Forestry Supervisor  
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**Approved for inclusion:** M. Logan, Infrastructure General Manager

Appendix A: Sustainable Urban Forest Strategy Engagement Summary

cc: Divisional Director, Corporate Strategic Services