
Report of the Commissioner of Public Works

2024 Regional Greening Strategy Achievements and Street Tree Removal Offsetting Policy

1. Recommendation

1. Council approve the Street Tree Removal Offsetting Policy (Attachment 1).
2. Council approve the fees and charges for offsetting to be charged in accordance with the Street Tree Removal Offsetting Policy and these fees and charges be effective immediately upon Council approval and included Schedule A of the Fees and Charges for Services and Activities Bylaw No. 2020-04.
3. The Regional Clerk circulate this report to the Clerks of local municipalities, Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation, Environment and Climate Change Canada, Natural Resources Canada, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, Ontario Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks, Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority, and Toronto and Region Conservation Authority.

2. Purpose

This report updates Council on activities and significant Greening Strategy Achievements for 2024. This report also seeks Council approval for the new Street Tree Removal Offsetting Policy and to authorize the inclusion of replacement costs for street trees removed in Schedule A of the Fees and Charges for Services and Activities Bylaw No. 2020-04.

Key Points:

- In 2024, the Greening Strategy resulted in 123,823 trees and shrubs planted, 159 resident engagement events and over \$2.44 million in external funding leveraged
- Planting through the Greening Strategy supported progress on key Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation Fund (DMAF) deliverables, including planting 36,602 trees and shrubs in urban areas and planting 32,690 seedlings on land secured through DMAF

- 111 hectares of land were secured to meet DMAF deliverables, and to expand the York Regional Forest
- The Street Tree Removal Offsetting Policy supports program delivery under the Forest Management Plan, as amended, to achieve the goal of increasing canopy cover to 40%

3. Background

Greening Strategy provides a comprehensive approach to developing sustainable and resilient communities

The Regional Greening Strategy provides an array of programs and actions supporting the Region's goal of sustainable and resilient communities. The Strategy focuses on working with community partners and local Municipalities to deliver positive action throughout York Region, protecting and enhancing the natural environment for current and future generations (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Benefits of Protecting and Enhancing the Natural Environment



Green Infrastructure provides several environmental, economic and health benefits that support a sustainable York Region. The Greening Strategy delivers results through four key action areas to achieve these benefits:

- Environmental Land Protection and Preservation
- Enhancement and Rehabilitation
- Community Stewardship and Education
- Innovation and Knowledge

Healthy and thriving Regional street trees contribute to the goal of increasing canopy cover

Trees and forests provide a multitude of environmental, health and economic benefits making our communities more sustainable and helping the Region mitigate and adapt to climate change. Healthy trees and forests are fundamental to the Sustainable Environment Area of Focus found within the Region's Vision. In recognition of the vital role that trees and forests play, Council approved the York Region Forest Management Plan on [November 17, 2016](#). The Plan expands on the Greening Strategy and includes a goal to increase tree canopy cover to 40% by 2051. Canopy cover was last reported to Council through the State of the Forest report on [May 13, 2021](#) as 33.4%. Canopy cover will be reassessed in 2025 and reported to Council through the State of the Forest report in 2026.

The Region maintains over 77,800 street trees along Regional roads. With an estimated value of over \$600 million, these trees contribute to the Region's canopy cover goal. As the Region's population grows, developing and expanding the Regional road network will continue to have impacts on Regional street trees. To mitigate these impacts a set of comprehensive street tree preservation guidelines were developed to prioritize preservation of street trees and offset unavoidable losses. Preserving existing street trees and offsetting unavoidable losses are critical to achieving the Region's 40% canopy cover goal.

4. Analysis

York Regional Forest celebrated its 100th year anniversary through storytelling and reflection

In 2024, the York Regional Forest celebrated its 100th year anniversary. This significant achievement was an opportunity for York Region to recognize its strong commitment to the protection and restoration of the natural environment. A series of projects, activities and events were held throughout the year to mark this significant milestone. Key activities included:

- A documentary video on social media to feature the history and future of the Forest
- Historical exhibits at Regional facilities and Whitchurch-Stouffville Museum
- Ceremonial tree planting with Regional Council, Province of Ontario and Indigenous partners
- Recently acquired addition to the Forest named the Centennial Tract
- Adventure challenge to visit and learn about York Regional Forest tracts

Greening Strategy achievements helped York Region meet or exceed targets

In 2024, Greening Strategy achievements exceeded targets in several action areas, contributing to a healthy and sustainable York Region (key highlights summarized in Table 1). Appendix 1 presents a more detailed summary of 2024 Greening Strategy achievements.

Table 1
Greening Strategy 2024 Achievements

Action Area	Goal	Target (Minimum)	2024 Achievement	
Enhancement and Rehabilitation	Enhance and rehabilitate the natural environment on public and private lands	Plant 70,000 trees and shrubs	123,823 trees and shrubs planted	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Environmental Land Protection and Preservation	Protect and enhance natural areas and create and strengthen connections and corridors	Increasing area (hectares) of environmental lands secured	Secured 111 hectares of environmental land	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Community Stewardship and Education	Inspire stewardship and action through education and facilitating connections with nature	100 outreach events 10,000 residents participated in programs	159 outreach events 16,752 program participants	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Innovation and Knowledge	Seek and transfer knowledge and demonstrate leadership and innovation in the protection and promotion of the natural environment	Lead or present at 15 professional learning events	Lead or presented at 23 professional learning events	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Through implementation of new and existing Greening Strategy programs, York Region was able to plant 123,823 trees and shrubs in 2024, creating over 50 hectares of new woodlands. Trees and shrubs are planted through several programs that support planting projects for schools, private residents, municipalities, conservation areas, Regional streets and facilities and the York Regional Forest. In 2024, a new native plant sale program was established, allowing residents to purchase trees, shrubs and perennial wildflowers for their properties.

Approved by Council in 2023, a significant land donation of 65 hectares was finalized in 2024 and added to the York Regional Forest. The newly acquired Sylvestre Woodlands will contribute to growing publicly accessible greenspace in East Gwillimbury and increase connectivity between existing York Regional Forest tracts.

Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation Fund (DMAF) Natural Infrastructure Project goal to acquire land for new woodland creation achieved

In 2019, York Region was awarded \$10 million in funding through Infrastructure Canada's DMAF to implement a \$25 million natural infrastructure project over eight years. The project will result in over 400,000 trees and shrubs planted across the Region, including establishing 100 hectares of new woodland by 2028. This project will increase resilience to climate change through carbon removal and storage, and mitigate local impacts including extreme heat and flooding.

Acquisition of 14 hectares of land adjacent to Metro Road Tract and 32 hectares near Udora in the Town of Georgina was approved by Council in 2023 and finalized in 2024. These acquisitions completed the land purchases needed to support establishment of 100 hectares of new woodland over the remaining project timeline.

Proposed Regional street tree removal offsetting requirements provide a balanced approach to offsetting unavoidable losses

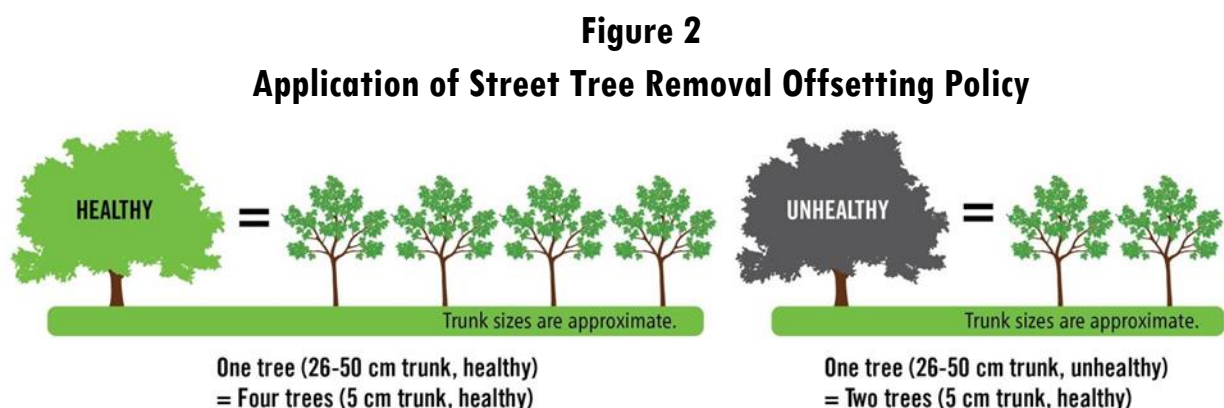
While the Region seeks to preserve street trees in Regional road allowances, there are circumstances where removals are unavoidable. Where unavoidable losses occur, it is industry practice to seek offsetting in the form of replacement plantings or cash in lieu of replacement plantings.

In 2016, the Region prepared comprehensive street tree preservation guidelines, including guidelines for offsetting unavoidable losses. Currently, offsetting requirements are determined using a formula that divides the size of the tree removed by the size of a standard replacement tree and discounts for trees in poorer health. Current requirements resulted in implementation challenges in some circumstances and warranted a review.

To ensure a balanced approach to offsetting unavoidable losses, the Region undertook a review of its offsetting practices, including a jurisdictional scan of public tree offsetting practices, a review of existing street tree data, and a scenario analysis. Using the results, staff are proposing updated street tree removal offsetting requirements that employ a simplified table rather than a formula.

If approved by Council, updated requirements will be incorporated into the Region's Street Tree and Forest Preservation Guidelines and applied through creation of a new Street Tree Removal Offsetting Policy (see Attachment 1). The policy only applies to street trees removed that have been approved by the Region.

Figure 2 illustrates an example of how the updated offsetting requirements would be applied to a healthy tree and an unhealthy tree. These updated requirements were shared with stakeholders including internal staff, senior management, our local municipal partners, and the Building Industry and Land Development Association. Stakeholders provided valuable input into development of the policy and were supportive of the Region's approach. Offsetting received under the updated requirements remains sufficient to ensure progress towards our canopy cover goal.



Offsetting is typically undertaken through replacement plantings. In instances where the required number of replacement trees cannot reasonably be accommodated within the Regional road allowance, then all or the balance of offsetting would be received through monetary payment. Staff are proposing an amendment to the Region's Fees and Charges for Services and Activities Bylaw No. 2020-04, to include the collection of monetary payments for street tree removal offsetting where permitted in accordance with the Street Tree Removal Offsetting Policy.

5. Financial Considerations

Greening Strategy leverages partner support and additional funds to deliver strong results

In 2024, \$6,131,373 was spent on Greening Strategy programs, including \$2,423,792 to support large-scale reforestation, backyard tree planting, outdoor education, and contribution to land securement reserve. The remaining \$3,707,581 supported DMAF urban tree planting and environmental land purchases and was funded from the Land Securement Reserve.

Through partnerships, the Greening Strategy leverages in-kind resources and external funding for each action area. In 2024, the Region and partners leveraged a total of \$2,443,432 in additional

funding towards Strategy projects and programming, including \$987,298 in funding received by the Region from DMAF. The balance of leveraged funding was received directly by partners.

Replacement cost for street trees removed to be included in Schedule A of the Fees and Charges for Services and Activities Bylaw

In applying the Street Tree Removal Offsetting Policy, replacement planting may not always be possible. In these instances, the Region would collect offsetting in the form of a monetary payment through Schedule A of the Fees and Charges for Services and Activities Bylaw (2020-04). Payment would be based on the number of replacement trees required for offsetting and the replacement cost which is the cost incurred by the Region to plant a single street tree including its establishment. This cost is updated annually by calculating the weighted average of tree planting cost for the previous year plus the cost to water that tree for 3 years. For 2025, replacement cost is equal to \$1,290.00. Funds collected for street tree removal offsetting would be deposited into the Land Securement Reserve and used to support replacement tree planting initiatives throughout the Region.

This report does not present current or anticipated financial changes to the Region's Budget or fiscal position. Staff will continue to monitor implementation of the program including effectiveness of tree replacement outcomes.

6. Local Impact

Through Greening Strategy programs and actions, local municipalities and residents take action to protect and enhance the Region's natural environment. Local municipalities and non-government organizations have benefited directly from the Greening Strategy through on-the-ground actions or direct support for their programs. Local municipalities and residents remain key stakeholders in the development and implementation of new programs to support a sustainable York Region.

Using results from the jurisdictional scan of public tree offsetting practices, the proposed updates to Regional street tree removal offsetting requirements aim to simplify the methodology and better align with the tree compensation approach of our local municipal partners.

7. Conclusion

With over 123,000 trees and shrubs planted in 2024, significant gains continue to be made towards increasing tree canopy and woodland cover in York Region. The 100-year anniversary of the York Regional Forest is a testament to the Region's long-term leadership and support for creating a sustainable York Region.

With approval, the Street Tree Removal Offsetting Policy will provide a balanced and efficient approach to offsetting unavoidable losses and ensuring progress towards our canopy cover goal.

For more information on this report, please contact Lindsay Milne, Director, Waste Management and Forestry, Operations and Services, Public Works at 1-877-464-9675 ext. 75714. Accessible formats or communication supports are available upon request.



Recommended by:

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Approved for Submission:

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April 22, 2025

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Appendix A – Greening Strategy Achievements Summary
Attachment 1 – Street Tree Removal Offsetting Policy

2024 GREENING STRATEGY ACHIEVEMENTS

York Region's Greening Strategy puts into action the Region's commitment to a healthier, more resilient natural environment.



ENHANCEMENT AND REHABILITATION

Planting trees, shrubs and pollinator plants, restoring streams and wetlands, and establishing new forests, hedgerows and meadows ensure a sustainable environment for future generations.

PLANTED
123,823 TREES AND SHRUBS
EXCEEDED TARGET OF 70,000 PLANTINGS

123,823 trees and shrubs were planted through more than **20 partnerships**:

- 33,764** Grow Your Legacy
- 511** Backyard Trees
- 5,310** Ontario Streams Program
- 4,185** Green Action Partnership Fund
- 67,417** Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation Fund
- 12,636** Other Programs

Plantings occurred on both public and private land in a variety of habitats.

50 HECTARES
OF WOODLAND COVER CREATED IN 2024

TARGETS

WOODLAND COVER		CANOPY COVER	
2021*	2051 Target	2021*	2051 Target
23.6%	25%	33.4%	40%

*Woodland and Canopy cover is assessed every five years.

COMMUNITY STEWARDSHIP AND EDUCATION

Inspiring stewardship and action through education and facilitating connections with nature is one of our strongest tools.

159 OUTREACH EVENTS
ENGAGED RESIDENTS

Residents reconnected with nature and learned about the natural environment through a variety of events hosted by York Region and partners. These events were delivered through in-person and digital media.

16,752 RESIDENTS PARTICIPATED
IN GREENING STRATEGY SUPPORTED PROGRAMS

100 YEAR ANNIVERSARY OF YRF CELEBRATED –



York Region Forest Walks and Events celebrated the York Regional Forest with historical education and open houses to explore the Bill Fisch Forest Stewardship and Education Centre.

ENVIRONMENTAL LAND PROTECTION AND PRESERVATION

A healthy, extensive and connected natural heritage system is essential for biodiversity, and public green spaces are important amenities that provide recreation opportunities and support the physical and mental well-being of residents.

1,628 HECTARES
OF ENVIRONMENTALLY SIGNIFICANT LAND PROTECTED

111 Hectares of land protected this year, expanding the York Regional Forest in East Gwillimbury and Georgina.

ESTIMATED 30 MILLION
TREES TOTAL IN YORK REGION

INNOVATION AND KNOWLEDGE

York Region remains a leader in the protection and promotion of natural environment through its policies, programs and use of innovative strategies.

Exchanged information, shared accomplishments, and continued innovation at **17 Regional Forums** and **6 technical presentations** throughout the Region.

\$2,443,432 LEVERAGED TOWARDS
GREENING STRATEGY PROJECTS



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