



Urban Forest Issues

Taken from Bill Morsink's Urban Forest Scrapbook - To be expanded upon in a revised edition coming soon. .

Our environment: a place fit to live in?

The major issue we face as urbanites is "the survival of human beings as persons who are fit to live with and of the earth as a place which is fit for persons to live in"(10.1). There is no escaping the fact that we as humans are part of the 'nature of things' and part of the 'environment' as mother earth has provided us with through geological, climatic and biological processes. These processes are very much imbedded into our present and will continue to do so for a long time. We scratch at this environment by removing tree cover, bulldozing soils, polluting air and water and we may be contributing to the natural fluctuating process of global cooling and warming. It is immaterial to 'planet earth' whether Toronto is a warm shallow sea, a glacial-covered landscape or a degraded temperate environment. A healthy treed urban environment, however, is of great importance to many of us.

The Ontario Shade Tree Council has, since 1965, focused on the well being of shade trees in urban settings (chapters seven and 8). This Council, as of the year 2000, changed its focus from shade trees to one that focuses on the well being of the urban forest for the benefit of urbanites. This change of focus is expressed as a change in the name to that of the Ontario Urban Forest Council. The Council must create an educational program about urban forests, and a tangible focus on urban forests, because it is difficult to rally people around abstract concepts such as sustainable urban forest management.

The following issues are seen as priorities:

Issue 1: public education on the value of urban forest, to be pursued through the media by the Urban Tree Council or other urban forest interest groups. Peter Newman, retired broadcaster, presented a series of TV documentaries on National and Provincial Parks, for TVO. A similar style documentary TV show would be desirable to show the general public the extent and value of the urban forests.

Issue 2: The Ontario Urban Forest Council needs to collaborate with a regional arboretum to create a Model-Urban Forest as a focus for its year 2000 aim to further urban forest management.

Issue 3: Local urban forest groups can work through the political process, to make their municipality include a 'Nature in the City value clause' in the 'Official Plan'. These would include regulations for building projects, and the establishment of 'No Built Zones' in sensitive green areas of urban regions.

Issue 4: Many groups focus their attention on a single issue concerning an aspect of the urban forests. Invasive Tree Species, Tree Leaf groups and so on, as small groups can be

quite effective in dealing with specific and local tree issues. Strength of promoting the urban forest values, however, comes in numbers. Forming an alliance or confederation of such groups is an important task that should be pursued by all.

Issue 5: Urban forestry provides a conceptual framework allowing for a mandate to organize vegetation management in a municipality or urban region to maximize benefits. Trees and woodlands can contribute to the urban environment in a variety of ways. Only some of the larger urban centres have developed urban forest management programs. The Ontario Urban Forest Council should promote such programs for the smaller communities.

Issue 6: The Urban forestry concept also provides a frame work to establish research programs to develop urban tree species of known origin and performance for Ontario's urban forests. Such a program is as valid today as it was in 1967.

Issue 7: Conveying the essence of the quality, quantity or lack thereof of the community or neighbourhood tree canopy to the municipal or management authority is an important but often overlooked task of the urban forest manager.

Issue 8: Sustaining the urban forest requires:

1. Design for diversity in species, sizes and ages of trees.
2. Selection of species adaptable to local sites and a regional climate.
3. Maintenance of trees and wooded areas for maximum benefits and least amount of liability, Tree protection by-laws are required to sustain trees on non-municipal lands.
4. Conservation and maintenance of remnant natural ecosystems by inclusion of these values in 'Official Plans'.
5. Provision of 'Tree Health Management' programs.
6. Creation of 'tree management-information-communication systems'.
7. Providing opportunities for public involvement in sustaining the urban forest (i.e. Winnipeg's urban forest).
8. Providing overviews (graphic displays, videos) of the quality and quantity of your community urban forest to communicate the needs for maintaining the forest with budget decision makers .

Although sustainable management of urban forests is gaining support, many municipalities operate at a ground level only. Governments do not initiate programs or actions, unless such action is articulated to them through sufficiently large numbers of citizens.

Issue 9: Research support and overall coordination for urban forest management should be attempted through a 'Provincial Strategy' for urban forest management, in cooperation with Arboreta and Universities and the municipal and/or conservation authority partners. Obtaining a Provincial commitment to a funded urban forestry strategy still remains a most essential issue to pursue by an alliance of the many urban forest interest groups.

Issue 10: The Ontario Urban Forest Council should approach the University of Guelph, (for example) to administer various building blocks (groups of subjects) that would form a menu for a qualified urban forest inspector, supervisor or manager, etc. One could accumulate urban forest building block credits at various universities and community colleges. Over time, students could qualify at different levels of competence.

Such a program could be administered by the University of Guelph in partnership with urban forestry groups.

REFERENCES 10

01 -Nelson, R.F.W., 1978. The Illusions of Urban Man. The Ministry of State for Urban Affairs. Macmillan Co.of Canada.