



## **OUFC Participates in "Listening to Toronto"** **by Fran Moscall**

Mayor David Miller and Council invited citizens to participate in round-table discussions to help set priorities for Toronto's 2004 budget. The city asked for advice by posing three questions at sessions convened across the city during the week of January 17<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>:

What makes Toronto great?

What challenges are we facing?

What advice would you offer the city as it considers its 2004 budget?

I represented the OUFC at the January 17<sup>th</sup> session (1:00 to 4:00 p.m.) at Memorial Hall, North York Civic Centre and am pleased to report on the meeting.

The OUFC complimented the city on re-appointing Joe Pantalone as city tree advocate and on its tree protection by-law. Also OUFC supported the city's work-in-progress to extend Toronto's (former) private tree protection by-law to all parts of the city and to include residential infill construction in site plan reviews.

The OUFC also cited challenges facing Toronto's urban forest e.g., age, insect invasion, climate change, urban infill and sprawl, loopholes in the tree protection by-law and site plan reviews, abuse and/or neglect of city trees by some in the construction business and by some citizens generally.

Finally, the OUFC offered some constructive suggestions for the city's consideration. A sampling follows below.

- Currently urban forestry has no real profile in the city. While citizens enjoy the city's forest canopy, many are unaware of how vulnerable it is and that they are responsible to ensure it survives and flourishes. As citizens we share this responsibility with our municipal government. Therefore ~
- Technical Services and Forestry, now buried within Economic Development, Culture and Tourism, should be removed from that department to form a new entity with an "environment focus" within city government.
- The city should upgrade the definition of 'parkland' to include a major focus on urban forests. Does the Official Plan recognize parkland as being distinct from private golf courses and cemeteries? It should.
- The city budget must provide resources and staff to implement current by-laws e.g., maintaining existing tree protection, and new by-laws e.g., tree protection on private property by-law. Current staffing cannot cope with the many tasks at hand.

- Funding is needed to maintain new plantings throughout the city e.g., aftercare and to provide necessary growing space e.g., soil volume areas for trees
- The city should direct funding from developers (new construction) to tree care, new plantings and parkland with trees instead of to capital projects such as recreation centres
- The formula should be revised to increase developers' cash-in-lieu funds for parkland; the current formula which is restricted to the footprint of a building is too low
- More rigorous criteria for building design and site landscaping is needed to make Toronto a green city. Lessons can be learned from Sydney Australia where buildings are required to create green spaces ~ new architectural plans require exterior plantings up the walls of buildings and planning of green spaces is given priority to placement of buildings.
- The Official Plan should be amended to include a "nature in the city value clause" that would include regulations for building projects and the establishment of 'no build zones' in sensitive green areas of urban centres.
- The city's tourism department should set a priority in its long-term strategic plan for the promotion of Toronto's urban forests and green spaces as a tourist attraction e.g., ravine walks, arboreta, treed parkland, mazes etc. Resources from this department should in part be directed to promoting the health of this environment
- City/citizen partnerships should be formed for tree and ravine protection and parkland upkeep etc. Perhaps Tree Watch groups could be formed e.g., to remove burlap bindings from new plantings, report on tree protection violations, water trees in periods of drought, participate in committees of adjustment to ensure protection of city trees and to advocate for protection of trees on private property
- Urban forests groups' assistance could be invited to prepare an inventory of city trees including heritage trees and help maintain that inventory using instruments developed by the Faculty of Forestry and the Ministry of Natural Resources
- The city could empower its Municipal Heritage Committee to work on its behalf to negotiate with the Ministry of Culture to include the protection of Heritage Trees in its revision of the Ontario Heritage Act.
- The city could negotiate with forestry faculties, horticultural departments in universities and colleges, ratepayer groups etc. to provide students with practicum opportunities to carry out some of the work described in the foregoing clauses.
- Volunteers should be invited to help the city get its message out about the importance of the urban forest e.g., offsets energy costs, reduces storm water runoff and soil erosion, and to show how citizens can help to ensure its health and longevity.

Citizens of Toronto have another opportunity to make their concerns and solutions known to the city by making deputations at standing committees. Those eager to protect urban forests can make deputations to the Economic Development and Parks Committee on February 2, 2004; the meeting starts at 2:00 p.m. with Councillor Brian Ashton in the chair. The meeting will be at Toronto City Hall on Queen Street W. in Committee Room #1, 2 nd Floor.

Deputants should register with Secretary Betty Henderson (416-392-8088) prior to the meeting. Deputations are not to exceed 5 minutes. Written documentation to expand on oral presentations can be submitted.