



NEWS RELEASE

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Environment Committee needs to reject unprofessional and inadequate update report on Ottawa's Urban Tree Conservation By-law

Ottawa, ON, April 18, 2016 - When Environment Committee meets on April 19, Kitchissippi residents—where 59 distinctive trees were removed in 2015—will call on city councilors from the committee to reject the report.

How many distinctive trees were removed in Kitchissippi between 2010 and 2014? The report does not provide this information. It only provides details on 2015, even though the by-law was enacted in 2009 and the city began implementing it in 2010. Lack of reporting for four of the last five years points to a flawed and unprofessional update on a by-law that aims to *conserve* large trees on private property (unless the tree poses a danger to people or property).

“I think there’s unwillingness on the part of city officials to recognize that healthy and mature trees matter to residents of Ottawa,” said Debra Huron, a spokesperson for BIG TREES of Kitchissippi. “We expected this report to provide not just data but also analysis on implementation of the by-law. Instead, we see here a sloppy and unprofessional report that we are urging Environment Committee to send back for immediate and serious revisions.”

City-wide statistics are flawed and misleading

The so-called update does not answer a fundamental question: How many tree-cutting permits did citizens of Ottawa actually ask the city to issue between 2010 and 2014? Table 1 tells citizens that 2,678 trees were removed after permits were issued. But the report fudges what it calls “numbers of requests” by defining that category as:

“...the total number of calls received through 3-1-1, which includes requests for information on the by-law, duplicate calls, status of request, etc.”

Someone who calls the city seeking general information is not someone making a request for a permit. And ***duplicate calls***? Or an inquiry about the ***status of a request***? These are irrelevant to a true understanding of how the city is implementing the by-law.

Yet Table 1 of the report claims to be comparing these vague and irrelevant “Distinctive Tree Permit Requests” to the number of “Permits issued by Year.”

What Councillor Leiper required from the update

When he filed a formal request in May 2015 asking city officials to produce an update on the city's tree by-law, Councillor Jeff Leiper of Kitchissippi asked for:

“...number of tree removal permits, number applied for, number rejected and the regulatory basis for granting removal permits under the by-law on a ward-by-ward basis.”

The flawed definition of “number [of permits] applied for” offered up by this report points to a lack of adherence to—and understanding of—the original request. Our group believes there are many other examples of unprofessional and inadequate reporting techniques that provide grounds for the committee to reject the report.

Update sadly lacking in analysis

The single bit of analysis that exists in the update also relates to Table 1, where the authors conclude, on the basis of correlating irrelevant “numbers of requests” to the “number of permits issued,” that:

“The consistent decrease in the number of calls can largely be attributed to the effort made by the City to educate residents, developers, and arborists on the By-law and its requirements.”

There is no basis in the reporting that could lead anyone to draw this conclusion. It sounds like public relations spin, and must be taken as such by anyone with a critical mind.

Members of the public will be allowed to speak to the report (item #3 on the committee's agenda) on April 19, and representatives of BIG TREES of Kitchissippi will do so, with the goal of convincing Committee members to mandate that staff produce a meaningful document for the public record.

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