

Updating Guelph's Private Tree Protection Bylaw: What We Heard During the Phase 2 Engagement

Executive Summary

What is this summary?

This report provides a summary of what was heard during the second round (i.e., Phase 2) of community engagement on Guelph's Private Tree Protection Bylaw update.

When was Phase 2?

The Phase 2 engagement for Guelph's Private Tree Protection Bylaw update took place between April 30 and May 27, 2024, and was preceded by a presentation to Council's Committee of the Whole on March 5, 2024.

Who was engaged and by whom?

- Participants included a range of individuals and representatives of organizations from across the community.
- Indigenous Nations were invited to engage in the process by City representatives.
- Grounded Solutions and Kennedy Consulting jointly led the Phase 2 engagement planning, delivery and reporting with support from the City project team.
- Engagement and communications materials were created and delivered collaboratively by the consulting team and City staff from Parks, Planning and Building Services, and Strategic Communications and Community Engagement.

Why is Guelph's private tree bylaw being updated?

Guelph's current Private Tree Protection Bylaw regulates trees of at least 10 cm diameter on private lots greater than 0.2 hectares. It was last updated in 2010 and requires another update for several reasons.

- **Shift towards intensification:** The City needs to accommodate growth within its existing boundaries. This means more compact development and intensification, putting more pressure on trees in these areas.
- **Need to adapt to climate change:** Maintaining and increasing tree canopy cover is recognized as a fundamental community adaptation strategy in the City's [Climate Adaptation Plan](#) (2023). Updating Guelph's private tree bylaw is also specifically recognized as a key tool to support this direction in the City's [Strategic Plan 2024-2027](#).
- **Need to align with other updated policies and rules:** Since 2010, the City has:
 - adopted new policies for its natural heritage system and tree canopy cover;
 - developed guidelines for tree protection and compensation; and
 - designated its first Heritage Conservation District, including tree regulations.



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- **Alignment with best practices:** Periodic updates of municipal private tree bylaws are a best practice and such updates are recommended in the City's [Urban Forest Management Plan 2013-2032](#).

How were participants engaged?

Engaged parties were asked to provide feedback through an online survey posted on the [Have Your Say Guelph](#) page and/or by attending one of the engagement sessions listed below.

- **Pop-up**, Victoria Road Recreation Centre, 151 Victoria Road North, May 4, 10:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.
- **Virtual community information session**, May 8, 6:30 to 8 p.m.
- **Pop-up**, Guelph Farmer's Market, 2 Gordon Street, May 11, 8 a.m. to 1 p.m.
- **In-person community information session**, Guelph City Hall, 1 Carden Street, May 14, 6:30 to 8 p.m.

In addition, we made presentations to and received feedback at additional engagement sessions.

- The City's Natural Heritage Advisory Committee meeting [April 30 \(hybrid event\)](#).
- Three virtual focus groups over May 14 and 15.
- A workshop with City staff from various departments on May 17 (hybrid event).

What did we hear?

- **More than half of the survey and focus group participants supported expanding the scope of the current private tree bylaw**, although opinions were divided on how the scope should be expanded.
- **About a third of the survey respondents were opposed to expanding the current level of regulation.** This opinion was also shared by a few focus group and information session participants.
- The importance of **regulating mature trees as a priority** was expressed by more than half of the Phase 2 engagement participants through the survey, and was also reflected in the supplemental verbal and written feedback.
- The majority of survey respondents indicated **support for additional investment by the City to administer and enforce an expanded private tree bylaw.** However, in both the survey and the engagement sessions we repeatedly heard that additional costs to Guelph residents should be limited or avoided.
- Many of the survey and engagement session participants indicated **support for more education about the bylaw.** Engagement session participants also expressed support for simplification of the bylaw implementation processes and requirements.
- Additional themes that emerged from the survey and the engagement sessions included suggestions that the City should
 - consider the huge **value of the services provided by trees** (e.g., air pollution control, shade/cooling) in their resourcing deliberations;
 - look for ways to make the permitting and tree compensation requirements associated with this bylaw **more equitable**; and
 - provide **support and/or incentives for mature tree care and tree establishment** on private lands.



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What are we doing?

We will be confirming a preferred direction for Guelph's private tree bylaw update and developing an updated bylaw based on this direction over 2024.

The direction for updating Guelph's Private Tree Protection Bylaw will be confirmed based on careful consideration of the findings of the background review and assessments, feedback gathered in Phase 1 and 2, and input from City staff.

What are we not doing?

This bylaw focuses on the regulation of trees on private lands in Guelph; a separate bylaw for trees on City lands will be developed in the future.



Pop-up display at the Guelph Farmer's Market on May 11, 2024.

Contact

Please direct all questions and comments about the update process and this summary to Timea Filer, Urban Forestry Field Technologist, City of Guelph, timea.filer@guelph.ca.

Next steps

An updated bylaw will be finalized over the fall of 2024 and presented to Council for approval in the first half of 2025.



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Acknowledgements

The City and the consulting team wish to sincerely thank everyone who participated in the second round of engagement. The time, expertise, creativity and valuable insights shared are truly appreciated.

A multi-disciplinary consulting team led by Grounded Solutions including Kennedy Consulting, Terrastory Environmental and Urban Forest Innovations was hired by the City to lead the private tree bylaw update process. Guidance and support have been provided by City staff from Parks, Planning and Building Services, and Strategic Communications and Community Engagement. This summary was developed by the consulting team and approved by City staff.



1 Why is Guelph's private tree bylaw being updated?

Guelph values its trees and the many benefits and services they provide. Guelph's Private Tree Protection Bylaw is one of several tools the City uses to encourage the retention of trees and ensure replacement trees are planted when trees are approved for removal.

The current Private Tree Protection Bylaw applies to trees with a diameter of at least 10 centimetres (cm) on privately-owned lots greater than 0.2 hectares (ha) (0.5 acres). This private tree bylaw has been in place since 1986 and was last updated in 2010. Many changes have occurred since 2010, triggering the need for another update.

- **Shift towards intensification:** Guelph's current population of about 150,000 is forecast to exceed 200,000 by 2051. The City needs to accommodate growth within its existing boundaries, which means more compact development and intensification, putting more pressure on trees found on lots of all sizes.
- **Need to adapt to climate change:** Trees help the community adapt to climate change by providing cooling when it is hot, filtering air pollutants, and helping to manage stormwater quantity and quality. Maintaining and increasing tree canopy cover is recognized as one of the simplest and most cost-effective actions to help the community adapt to climate change (see the City's [Climate Adaptation Plan](#)). The private tree bylaw is specifically recognized as a tool to support this direction in the City's [Strategic Plan 2024-2027](#).
- **Need to align with other updated policies and rules:** Since 2010, the City has adopted new policies for its natural heritage system and tree canopy cover, developed guidelines for tree protection and compensation, and designated its first Heritage Conservation District, including tree regulations. The City's private tree bylaw needs to be updated to align with the current planning context.
- **Alignment with best practices:** Periodic updates of municipal private tree bylaws are a best practice and such updates are recommended in the City's [Urban Forest Management Plan 2013-2032](#).

An updated bylaw is expected to help the City accommodate the required growth while supporting protection and enhancement of Guelph's tree canopy cover.

Gathering and considering community input is an essential part of the bylaw update process.

Almost 70 per cent of Guelph's tree canopy cover is on lands that can be regulated by a private tree bylaw (e.g., residential, commercial, institutional and conservation authority lands referred to collectively as "private lands" in this process). About 50 per cent of the city's canopy cover is regulated under the current private tree bylaw. Through this update process, Guelph Council has confirmed its commitment to maintaining and possibly expanding the scope of the current private tree bylaw.



1.1 Key take-aways from the Phase 1 engagement

In the first round of engagement (which took place from March to April 2023) the following themes emerged.

- Guelph's community values its trees for many reasons, including the valuable ecosystem services they provide.
- Mature trees should be a priority for protection.
- Many people are not aware of and/or do not fully understand the current private tree bylaw.
- Community members have strong and differing opinions about how the private tree bylaw could be updated.

The feedback received in Phase 2 (as outlined in this summary) was consistent with these themes. The full Phase 1 engagement summary can be found on the private tree bylaw update [Have Your Say](#) page.

2 Options for updating the bylaw presented

Four feasible options for updating Guelph's private tree bylaw were identified and presented to the community for their consideration through the Phase 2 engagement. These options were identified based on Guelph's local context, background research and analysis, and input from the community, Council and City staff.

Option 1: Same as current bylaw

- Regulation of trees at least 10 cm diameter on private lots greater than 0.2 hectares.

Option 2: Somewhat expanded

- Regulation of trees at least 10 cm diameter on private lots greater than 0.1 hectares.

Option 3: Significantly expanded

- Regulation of trees at least 20 cm diameter on all private lots.

Option 4: Current bylaw plus mature trees everywhere

- Regulation of trees at least 10 cm diameter on private lots greater than 0.2 hectares, plus regulation of trees at least 50 cm diameter on all private lots.

One of these options, or potentially a combination of different elements from these options, will form the basis of the updated bylaw.

For more details about each of the four options please see the [Phase 2 Summary](#).

For a detailed explanation of how the four options were identified, please see the [Issues and Options Report](#).



3 What was the timing and focus of the engagement?

The second round (i.e., Phase 2) of community engagement took place between April 30 and May 27, 2024. This was preceded by a presentation of the four private tree bylaw update options outlined above to Council's Committee of the Whole on March 5, 2024. Presenting these options to the community for their consideration through the Phase 2 engagement was supported by Council on March 26, 2024.

The intent of Phase 2 was to listen to the community's input on the options for updating Guelph's private tree bylaw and hear any ideas and/or concerns related to these options.

During Phase 2 we asked community members what they think about the options for updating Guelph's private tree bylaw. We specifically asked the community to weigh in on whether the size of tree(s) regulated and/or the size of lot(s) captured by the bylaw should change, and to share their thoughts on a few other aspects of the bylaw.

4 Who was engaged?

As part of this process, we sought feedback from the following:

- City staff from all divisions who work with the private tree bylaw regularly or periodically
- Indigenous Nations and Councils (see below)
- the City's Natural Heritage Advisory Committee
- private property owners
- local developers and builders
- tree care professionals who work in Guelph
- community organizations with an interest in trees
- local agencies and institutions, including those specifically noted in the current bylaw
- residents from across the community

4.1 Indigenous engagement

In advance of the Phase 2 engagement, letters were sent by the City to the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation (MCFN), the Six Nations of the Grand River (SNGR) Elected Council and the Métis Nation of Ontario – Grand River Métis Council (MNO-GRMC). Letters included information about the reasons for the bylaw update, the options for updating the bylaw, the Phase 2 engagement process, and an offer to meet to discuss the bylaw update options.

During the first phase of engagement both the MCFN and SNGR requested copies of the Phase 1 project summary (which the City sent following the Phase 1 engagement) but did not request to meet. No response was received from the MNO-GRMC. To date, no additional requests have been received by the City in response to the Phase 2 engagement outreach.



5 How did we seek and obtain feedback?

A presentation was made to Council's [Committee of the Whole on March 5](#) to confirm their support for the four bylaw update options proposed for community consideration prior to initiating the Phase 2 engagement. Once [Council support was confirmed on March 26](#), the Phase 2 engagement was launched.

As in Phase 1, the primary source of feedback for Phase 2 was the online survey. This survey was posted on the private tree bylaw update [Have Your Say](#) page for the duration of the engagement period from April 30 to May 27. This survey was promoted on the City's website and social media, at in-person and virtual engagement sessions, through a public notice and digital news articles, and in targeted emails to those with an expressed interest in tree-related matters.

Through the Phase 2 engagement process, a total of **454 surveys were completed and supplemental feedback was gathered from 238 people who participated in virtual and/or in-person engagement sessions** (i.e., about 200 at pop-ups, 27 at focus groups, and another 11 at the community information sessions). What we heard from these participants is summarized in [Section 6](#) of this summary.

In addition, six (6) Natural Heritage Advisory Committee members were engaged at a hybrid meeting held [April 30](#), and 11 City staff who help administer, implement and/or enforce the private tree bylaw as part of their regular duties were engaged through a workshop on May 17.

The Phase 2 engagement included a variety of in-person and virtual engagement opportunities (summarized below) which the City promoted through its website and social media accounts (Facebook and Twitter), digital newsletters to residents signed up to the City's engagement platform, direct email to those registered with the City as having an interest in tree issues, on screens and posters in City-owned facilities, and through a public notice, City news and coverage in the local media.

Overview of Phase 2 engagement sessions open to the public

- Pop-up, Victoria Road Recreation Centre, 151 Victoria Road North, May 4, 10:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.
- Virtual community information session, May 8, 6:30 to 8 p.m.
- Pop-up, Guelph Farmer's Market, 2 Gordon Street, May 11, 8 a.m. to 1 p.m.
- In-person community information session, Guelph City Hall, 1 Carden Street, May 14, 6:30 to 8 p.m.

Overview of targeted Phase 2 engagement sessions

- Hybrid meeting for the City's Natural Heritage Advisory Committee, April 30, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.
- Three focus groups with (a) local institutions, agencies and utilities on May 14 from 10:30 a.m. to noon, (b) developers, large landowners and tree care experts on May 14 from 1 to 2:30 p.m., and (c) community groups and residents on May 15 from 3 to 4:30 p.m.
- Hybrid workshop with City staff from various departments, May 17 from 9 a.m. to noon.



Those wishing to participate but unable to attend these sessions were invited to share their thoughts by completing the Phase 2 survey, commenting on the project Have Your Say page and/or reaching out to the City's project manager.

6 What did we hear?

Many ideas and comments were heard during the second round of engagement for Guelph's Private Tree Protection Bylaw. This feedback has been grouped under the following **nine topic areas which align with the topic areas in the survey** and is presented in the following sub-sections of this summary report.

6.1 Community values

6.2 Regulating tree size

6.3 Regulating lot size

6.4 Potential costs associated with the updated bylaw

6.5 Regulating replacement trees

6.6 Equity considerations related to the tree bylaw permit and compensation fees

6.7 Concerns about updating the private tree bylaw

6.8 Education and outreach about the private tree bylaw

6.9 Additional feedback related to the private tree bylaw

We reviewed the results from the Phase 2 survey, synthesized and analyzed the feedback documented at the various engagement sessions, and considered the supplemental feedback (e.g., emails, letters, social media comments). Some of the key themes that emerged are outlined below.

- **More than half of the survey and focus group participants supported expanding the scope of the current private tree bylaw** in some way, although opinions were divided on how the scope should be expanded.
- **About a third of the survey respondents were opposed to expanding the current level of regulation.** This opinion was also shared by a few focus group and information session participants.
- The importance of **regulating mature trees as a priority** was expressed by more than half of the Phase 2 engagement participants through the survey. This perspective was also reflected in the supplemental verbal and written feedback (and echoed the feedback heard in Phase 1).
- The majority of survey respondents indicated **support for additional investment by the City to administer and enforce an expanded private tree bylaw.** However, in both the survey and the engagement sessions we repeatedly heard that additional costs to Guelph residents should be limited or avoided.
- Many of the survey and engagement session participants indicated **support for more education about the bylaw.** Engagement session participants also expressed support for simplification of the bylaw implementation processes and requirements.



- Additional themes that emerged from the survey and the engagement sessions included suggestions that the City should:
 - consider the huge **value of the services provided by trees** (e.g., air pollution control, shade/cooling) in their resourcing deliberations;
 - look for ways to make the permitting and tree compensation requirements associated with this bylaw **more equitable**; and
 - provide **support and/or incentives for mature tree care and tree establishment** on private lands.

More details of the results from the 454 survey responses are presented and summarized with some representative comments and quotes from engagement participants in [Section 6.1](#) through [Section 6.8](#). Additional themes and key points that emerged from analysis of the survey comments and at the various engagement sessions, as well as selected quotes reflecting different participant perspectives, are provided in [Section 6.9](#).

6.1 Community values

Participants were asked to share what they value most when it comes to the possible options identified for updating Guelph's private tree bylaw. As shown in [Figure 1](#)

- Thirty-five (35) per cent of the respondents supported an updated bylaw focused on larger lots (i.e., no change in scope from the current bylaw), while 48 per cent did not, indicating an openness to regulating trees on smaller lots.
- Fifty-five (55) per cent of the respondents supported an updated bylaw focused on regulating large or mature trees, while twenty-six (26) per cent did not.
- Fifty-three (53) per cent of the respondents supported an updated bylaw that captures as much of the tree canopy cover as possible, while 32 per cent did not.

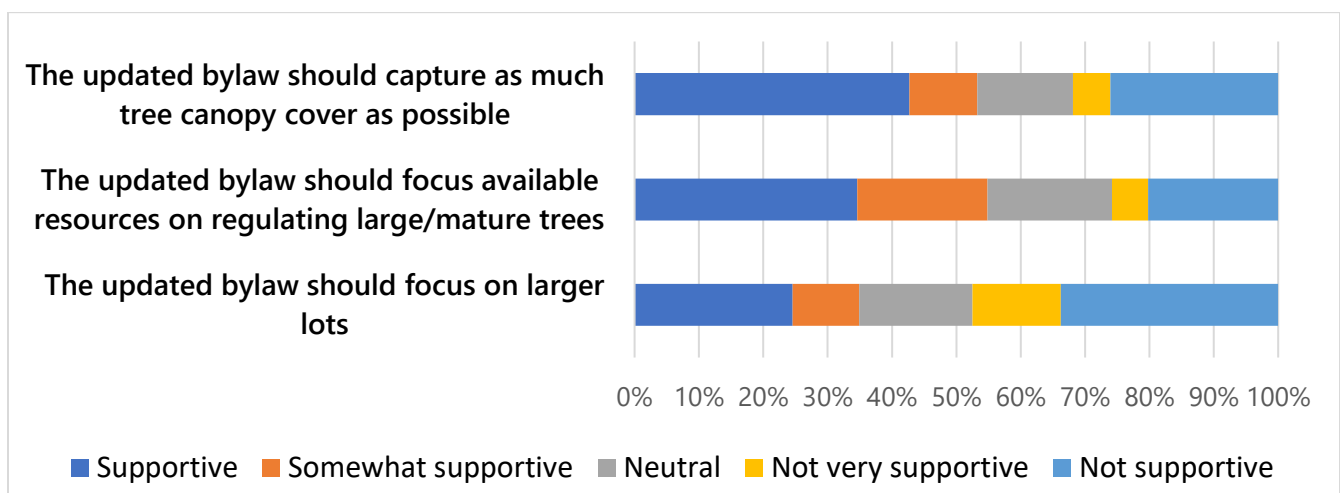


Figure 1. Results from the survey questions about levels of support for different aspects of the options identified for updating the private tree bylaw.



Survey participants were also asked for their perspectives on the level of tree regulation in Guelph. As shown in [Figure 2](#)

- Fifty-six (56) per cent of respondents indicated they supported expanding regulations.
- Twenty-nine (29) per cent indicated the current level of regulation is about right.
- Nine (9) per cent selected "none of the above".
- Six (6) per cent were unsure.

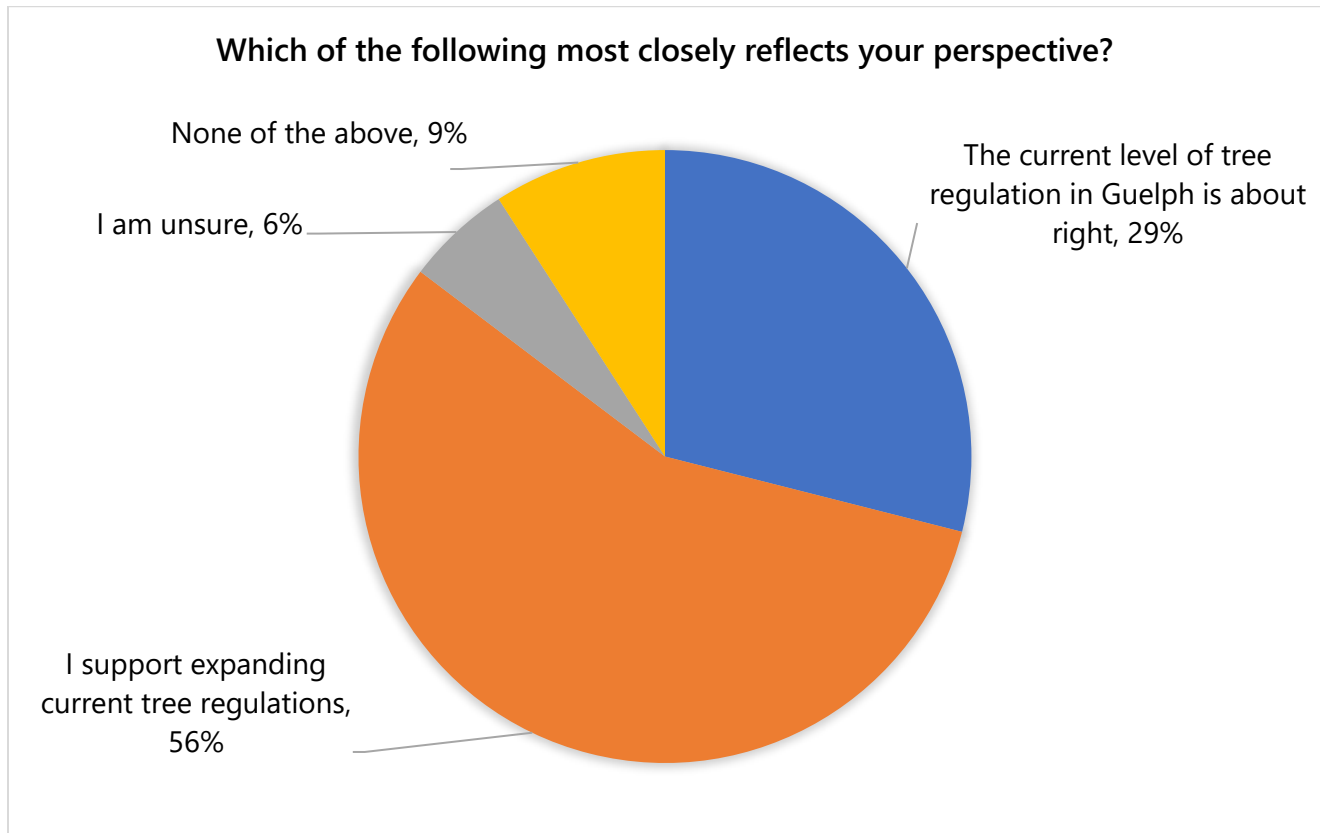


Figure 2. Results from the survey question about perspectives on the level of tree regulation in Guelph.

When it comes to the level of tree regulation in Guelph, opinions were mixed. A slight majority of respondents supported expanding the scope of the current bylaw, while a minority were opposed.

- More than half of the respondents supported expanding the private tree bylaw to regulate more tree canopy cover, including a focus on large or mature trees and consideration for trees on smaller lot sizes than are currently captured.
- About a third of the respondents supported maintaining the current private tree bylaw scope (i.e., regulation of trees of at least 10 cm diameter on lots greater than 0.2 hectares).

"I believe the updates to Guelph's private tree bylaw should balance environmental sustainability with practical considerations for property owners." – Survey respondent



6.2 Regulating tree size

Guelph's current private tree bylaw regulates trees that are at least 10 cm diameter, which captures relatively young or small trees, but only on larger lots. As shown in [Figure 3](#)

- Twenty-two (22) per cent of respondents felt regulatory efforts should focus on trees of at least 50 cm in diameter (i.e., mature trees).
- Thirty-nine (39) per cent felt efforts should focus on trees of at least 20 cm in diameter (i.e., semi-mature and mature trees).
- Twenty-one (21) per cent felt efforts should focus on trees of at least 10 cm in diameter (i.e., young, semi-mature and mature trees).
- Five (5) per cent indicated they were unsure.
- Thirteen (13) per cent selected "none of the above."

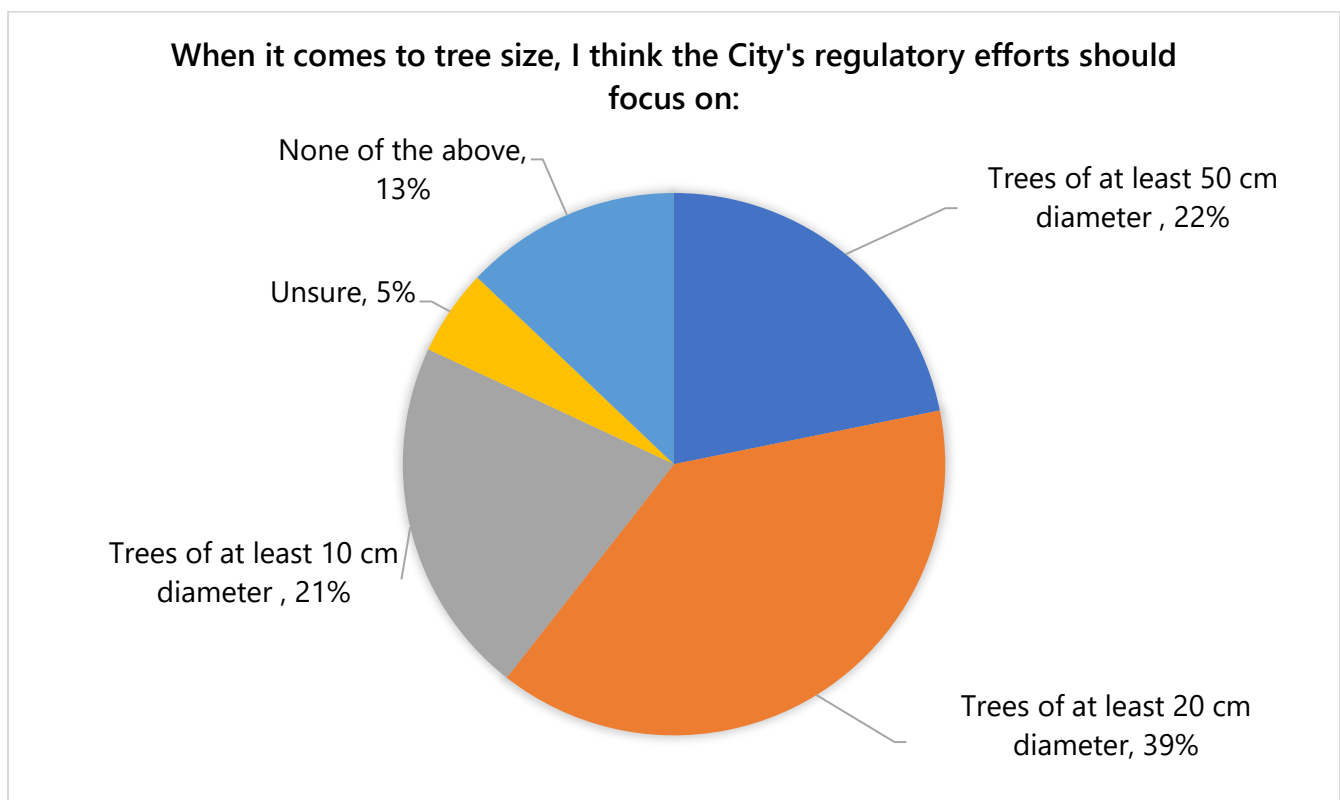


Figure 3. Results from the survey question what size trees the City should focus its regulatory efforts on.

With respect to tree size, responses were somewhat mixed. The greatest proportion of respondents (i.e., 39 per cent) supported a focus on regulation of trees of at least 20 cm diameter, while the remaining respondents were generally split between support for a focus on trees of at least 10 cm diameter and trees of at least 50 cm diameter. Eighteen (18) per cent did not select any of these options. The importance of regulating mature trees as a priority was expressed by many Phase 2 engagement participants through verbal and written feedback (see [Section 6.9](#)).



6.3 Regulating lot size



Aerial view of a neighborhood in the City of London showing examples of an 0.2 and 0.1 hectare lots.

The current private tree bylaw, which applies to large private lots (greater than 0.2 hectares), captures about 50 per cent of Guelph's tree canopy cover. Expanding the scope of the bylaw to apply to "semi-large" private lots (greater than 0.1 hectares), would capture about 55 per cent of Guelph's tree canopy cover. Expanding the scope of the bylaw to apply to all private lots would capture as much as 69 per cent of Guelph's tree canopy cover. (Notably, expanding the scope of the bylaw to all private lots is expected to add new costs for bylaw administration and enforcement).

As shown in [Figure 4](#)

- Forty-two (42) per cent of respondents indicated efforts should focus all privately owned lots.
- Twenty-eight (28) per cent indicated regulatory efforts should continue to focus on larger privately owned lots (i.e., greater than 0.2 ha).
- Sixteen (16) per cent indicated efforts should focus on semi-large and larger privately owned lots (i.e., greater than 0.1 ha).
- Twelve (12) per cent selected "none of the above."
- Two (2) per cent indicated they were unsure.

"This bylaw needs to apply to all lots with particular consideration for mature trees. We are seeing developers sever lots into minimum allowable size and clear cut these lots because there is nothing stopping them." – Survey respondent

"I am opposed to the private tree bylaw applying to all private property in Guelph. I think the current lot size of .2 hectares is appropriate." – Survey respondent



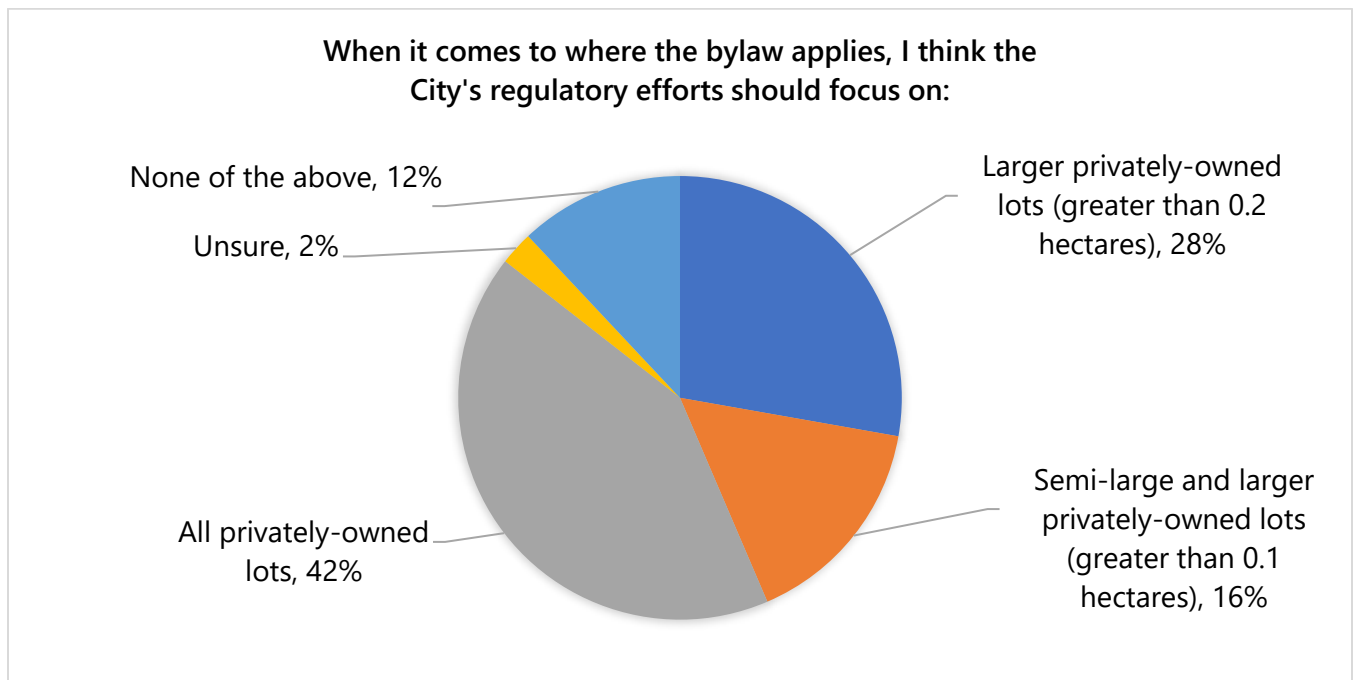


Figure 4. Results from the survey question about what size lots the City should focus its regulatory efforts on.

Overall, the greatest proportion of respondents supported expanding the scope of the bylaw to capture all private lots, while almost a third were supportive of maintaining the current focus on larger lots. The remainder indicated support for expanding the bylaw scope somewhat or for none of the options presented.

6.4 Potential City costs associated with the updated bylaw

As shown in Figure 5, when asked if, and to what extent, they support the City spending additional funds to help support an updated private tree bylaw (if needed)

- Thirty-five (35) per cent of respondents indicated they do not support it.
- Twenty-seven (27) per cent indicated they support it as a moderate priority.
- Twenty-three (23) per cent indicated they strongly support it as a top priority.
- Fourteen (14) per cent indicated they support it as a low priority.
- One (1) per cent indicated they were unsure.

Overall, the majority of survey respondents (i.e., 64 per cent in total) indicated they support investing additional dollars in administering and enforcing an updated private tree bylaw including 50 per cent considering this a moderate or high priority. However, over a third (i.e., 35 per cent) did not support investing additional dollars to implement an updated private tree bylaw.



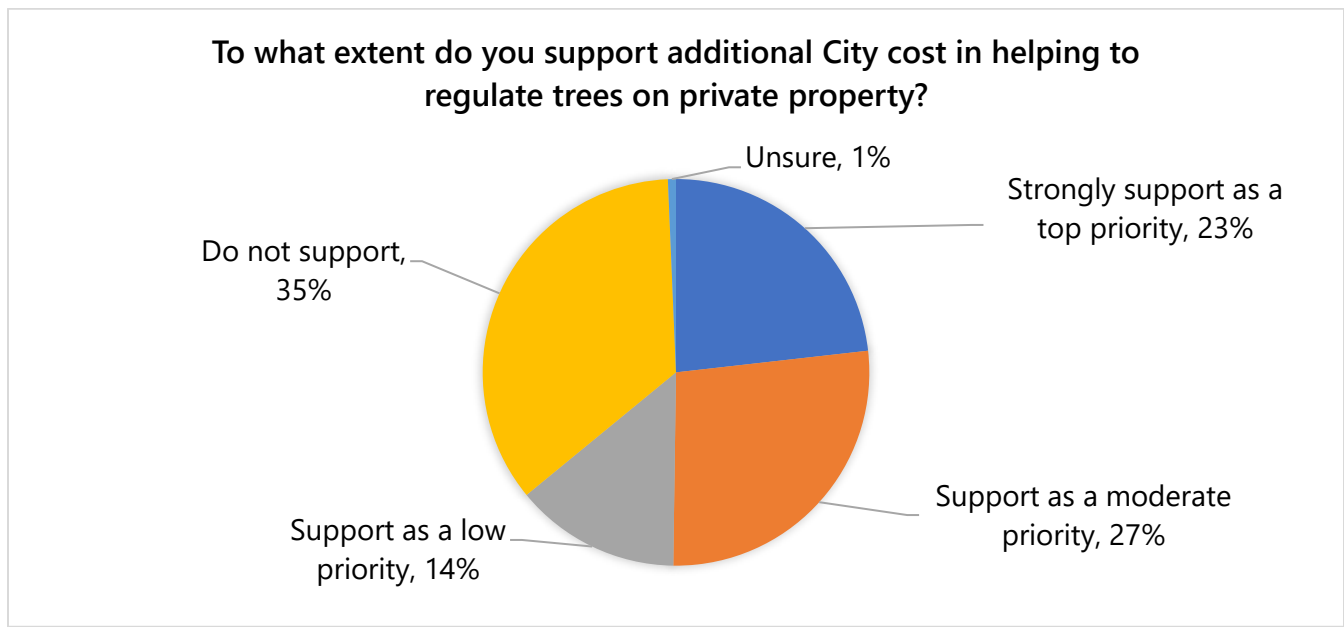


Figure 5. Results from the survey question whether participants support the City taking on additional costs to help regulate trees on private property.

6.5 Regulating replacement trees

Under the current private tree bylaw, newly planted replacement trees are unregulated until they reach 10 cm diameter. As shown in [Figure 6](#)

- Forty-one (41) per cent of respondents indicated they support regulating replacement trees, even if it results in some additional costs to the City.
- Thirty-one (31) per cent indicated they support regulating replacement trees, but only if it does not mean additional costs to the City.
- Twenty-one (21) per cent of respondents did not support regulation of replacement trees.
- Four (4) per cent indicated they were unsure.
- Three (3) per cent selected "none of the above."

Although most survey respondents (72 per cent) supported the regulation of replacement trees, 31 per cent only support it if it can be accommodated without additional costs and an additional 21 per cent do not support it at all. Notably, City staff engaged through the workshop confirmed that expanding the private tree bylaw to capture replacement trees would invariably require additional resourcing.

Several themes related to this topic emerged from the survey comments and engagement sessions.

- Many participants felt this additional regulation could be **challenging to enforce**. This concern was also expressed quite strongly by City staff in the Planning, Bylaw Enforcement and Legal divisions.
- Several suggested a **clear definition of 'replacement tree'** should be included in the updated bylaw.



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- Several participants indicated bylaw implementation would be improved by **simplifying the approach currently used** to determine the number of replacement trees and/or amount of cash-in-lieu required when regulated trees are approved for removal.

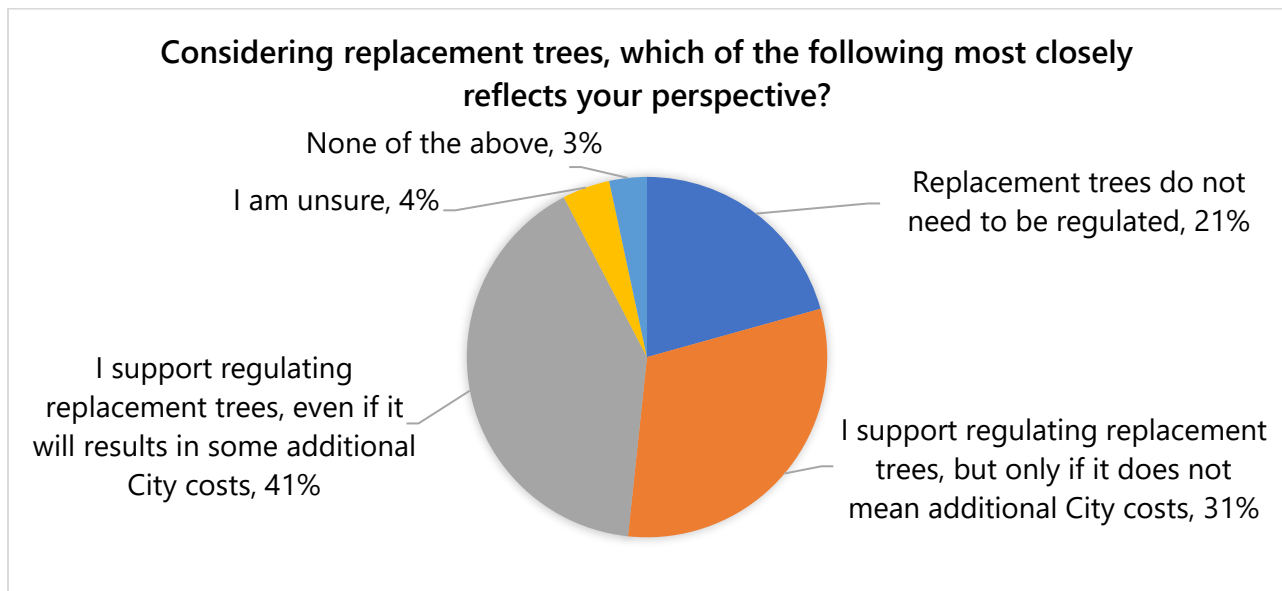


Figure 6. Results from the survey question about support for the regulation of replacement trees.



Pop-up display at Victoria Road Recreation Centre on May 4, 2024.



6.6 Equity considerations related to private tree bylaw permit and compensation fees

Currently, someone applying for a permit under Guelph's private tree bylaw must pay a flat permit fee of \$122 irrespective of the number of trees proposed to be removed and/or damaged, unless the trees are exempt from the permitting process (e.g., trees certified as being dead or hazardous). Notably, the current permit fees collected only cover a small fraction of the costs related to administering and enforcing the bylaw.

As shown in [Figure 7](#)

- Fifty (50) per cent of respondents indicated the permit fee should reflect a sliding scale (i.e., increased based on the number of trees to be removed).
- Twelve (12) per cent indicated the permit fee should be reduced, particularly for residents living on low incomes.
- Eleven (11) per cent indicated the current flat fee is reasonable.
- Eleven (11) per cent specified other options, with the bulk of the "other options" suggesting there should be no fees (or City involvement) in regulating tree removal on private property.
- Seven (7) per cent indicated the permit fee should remain flat but be increased to cover City costs.
- Four (4) per cent were unsure.
- Four (4) per cent selected "none of the above."

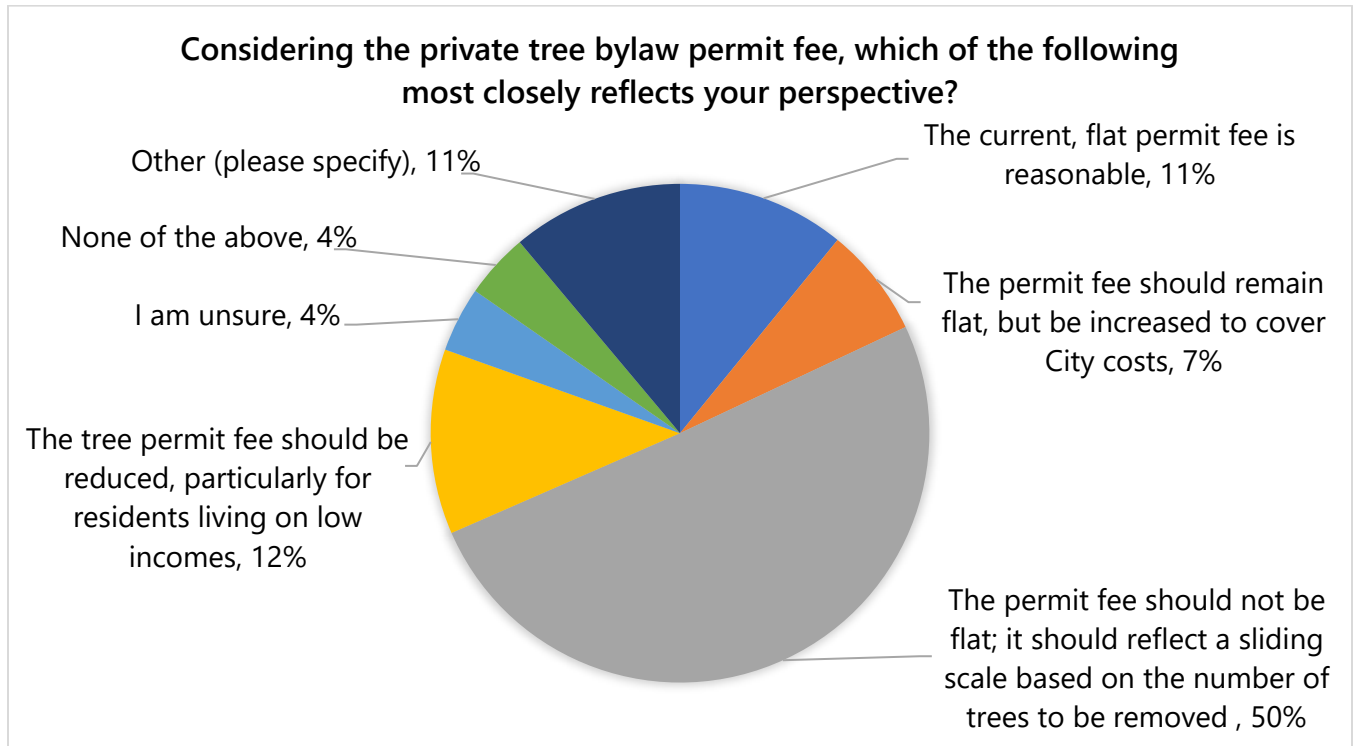


Figure 7. Results from the survey question about permit fees.



"... Perhaps a sliding scale where up to say 10 trees (or whatever is a typical amount for a home), and then more for say if a developer is clearing out trees to build condos or whatever should be higher." – Survey respondent

"There should be no fee or inspection needed. Trees are expensive enough to maintain or remove without City interference." – Survey respondent

Currently, an applicant who receives a permit under Guelph's private tree bylaw must pay a fee of \$500 per regulated tree removed if they cannot accommodate replacement trees on their property. This fee (which has remained unchanged since 2010) generally covers the cost for the City to establish a small but not a standard size replacement tree (i.e., 5 to 6 mm diameter). The costs include planting and maintaining the tree for at least two years. In addition, one replacement tree generally does not adequately replace the loss of canopy when one mature or large regulated tree is removed.

As shown in **Figure 8**

- Thirty-eight (38) per cent of respondents supported the tree compensation fee being increased to allow for full cost recovery (i.e., to cover the costs of the City planting a standard replacement tree).
- Twenty-two (22) per cent supported the tree compensation fee being reduced, particularly for low-income residents.
- Sixteen (16) per cent indicated that the current tree compensation fee is reasonable.
- Twelve (12) per cent were unsure.
- Twelve (12) per cent selected "none of the above."

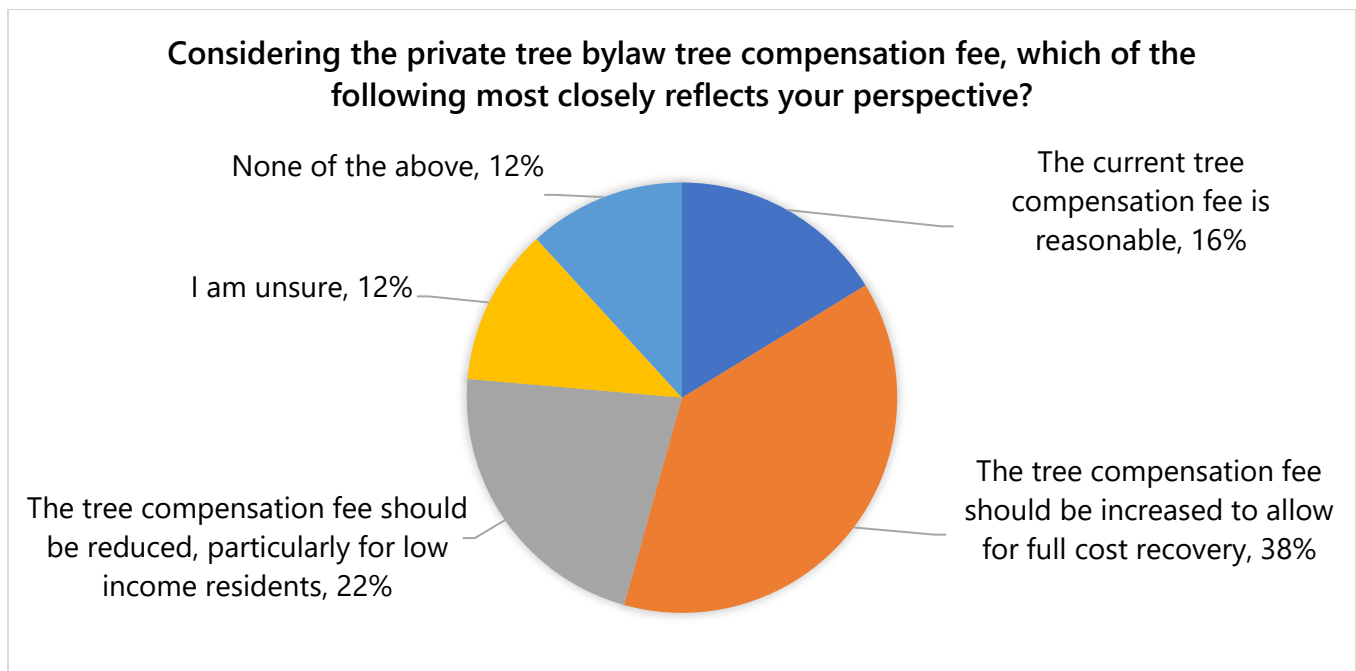


Figure 8. Results from the survey question about compensation fees.



A wide diversity of perspectives about equity considerations related to private tree bylaw permit and tree compensation fees were expressed through the survey and engagement sessions. The greatest amount of support was expressed for

- updating the bylaw permit fee to a sliding scale (i.e., a fee that increases incrementally with the number of trees proposed for removal); and
- increasing the per tree cash-in-lieu fee to cover the full costs for the City to establish a standard-sized replacement tree.

6.7 Concerns about updating the private tree bylaw

A survey question was asked about top concerns related to updating Guelph's private tree bylaw. Respondents were able to select more than one response, so the total exceeds 100%. As shown in [Figure 9](#)

- Fifty-five (55) per cent of respondents indicated concern about the lack of community awareness about the bylaw.
- Fifty (50) per cent expressed concern about potential new costs for local property owners.
- Fifty (50) per cent expressed concern about the City's ability to enforce the updated bylaw effectively.
- Forty-five (45) per cent expressed concern about potential new rules for property owners.
- Ten (10) per cent selected "none of the above."
- One (1) per cent were unsure.

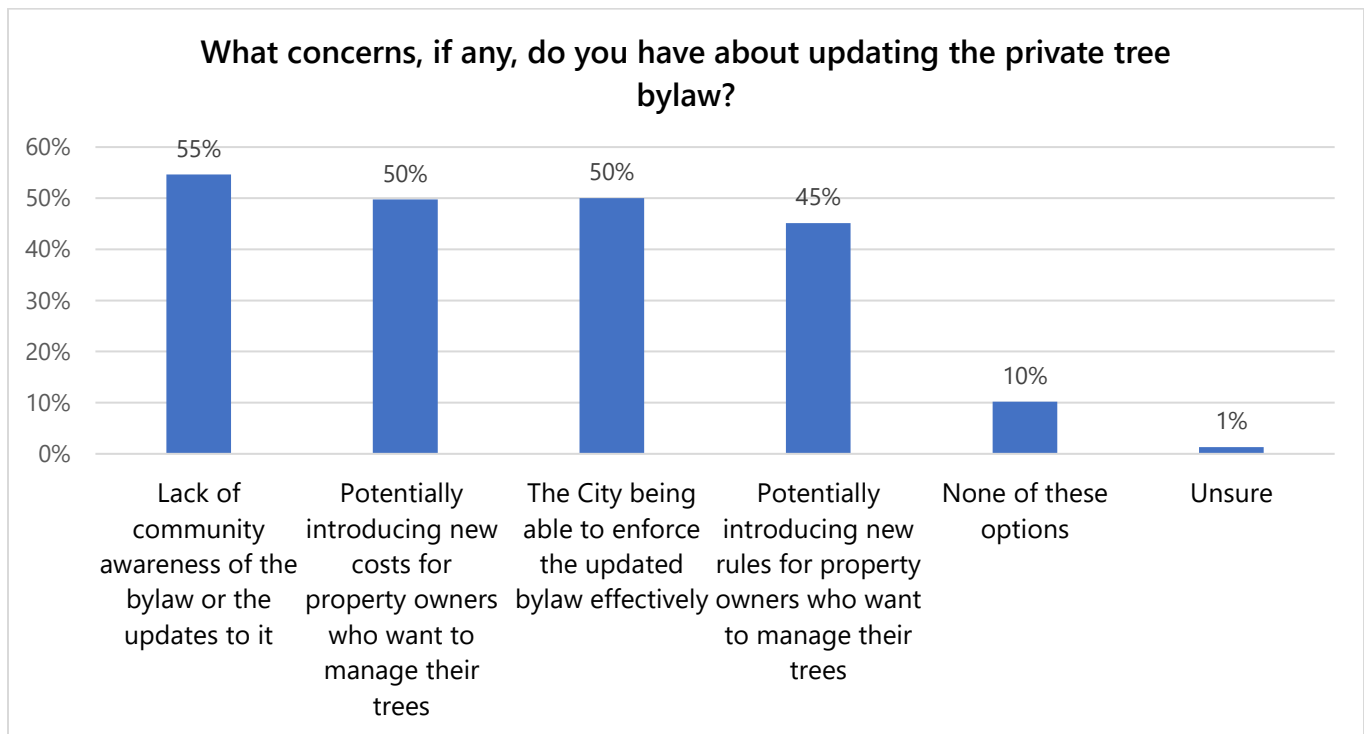


Figure 9. Results from the survey's question on concerns about updating the bylaw.



Despite the substantial support for expanding the scope of the current private tree bylaw, all four concerns listed in the survey (i.e., about lack of awareness, new costs and new rules for property owners, and the City's ability to enforce the bylaw) resonated with about 50 per cent of the survey respondents. Additional concerns and ideas repeatedly shared about the private tree bylaw are noted in [Section 6.9](#).

"Bylaws that are too restrictive will have a likely undesired effect. People will always find ways around them, possibly even cutting down tre[e]s before the bylaw comes into effect. Focus on promoting the planting and care of trees rather on punitive measures..." – Survey respondent

6.8 Education and outreach about the private tree bylaw

As shown in [Figure 10](#), when asked how they would prefer to learn about the City's private tree bylaw:

- Fifty-nine (59) per cent of respondents indicated a preference for the City website (guelph.ca).
- Fifty-one (51) per cent indicated a preference for online media (e.g., Guelphtoday.com).
- Forty-two (42) per cent indicated a preference for the City's social media (e.g., Facebook).
- Thirty-four (34) per cent indicated a preference for notice in City tax mailouts.
- Fifteen (15) per cent indicated a preference for messages on mobile signs in the City.
- Thirteen (13) per cent indicated a preference for the City's e-newsletter.
- Thirteen (13) per cent indicated a preference for the local newspaper (e.g., Guelph Mercury Tribune).
- Three (3) per cent indicated a preference for another method.

Note: Participants were able to select more than one response, so the total exceeds 100%.

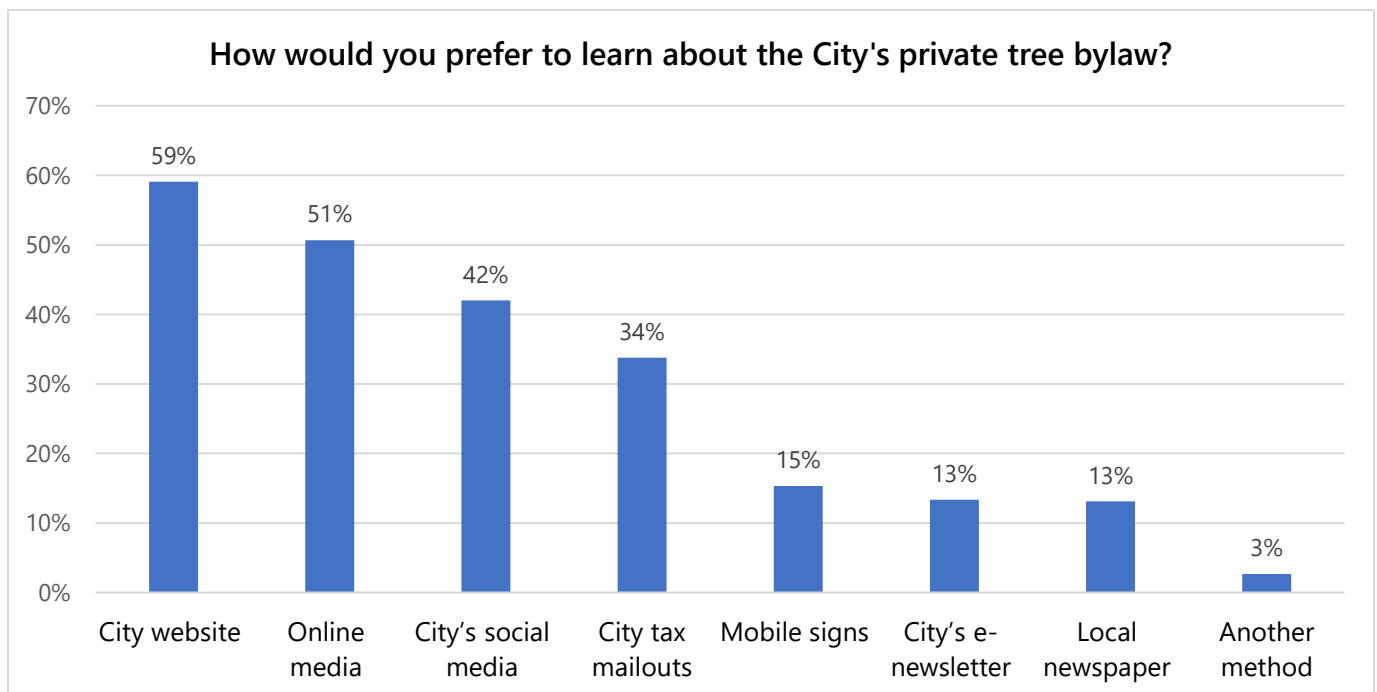


Figure 10. Results from the survey question about how participants would prefer to learn about the bylaw.



"I think regardless of the final decision, more public education is required about who is affected by the bylaw and what "damaging" means. I want to be able to maintain my trees (mainly meaning "remove dead and/or problematic branches") without worrying about bylaw violations." – Survey respondent

As shown in Figure 11, when asked which topics related to the private tree bylaw they would be most interested in learning about, respondents identified the following:

- where and when the bylaw applies (60 per cent of respondents)
- how to deal with hazard (i.e., high risk) trees (45 per cent)
- native species for replacement plantings (40 per cent)
- how to identify invasive tree species exempt under the bylaw (35 per cent)
- how the permitting process works (29 per cent)
- what penalties and enforcement mechanisms are in place (28 per cent)
- how to compensate for approved tree removals (15 per cent)

Note: Participants were able to select more than one response, so the total exceeds 100%.

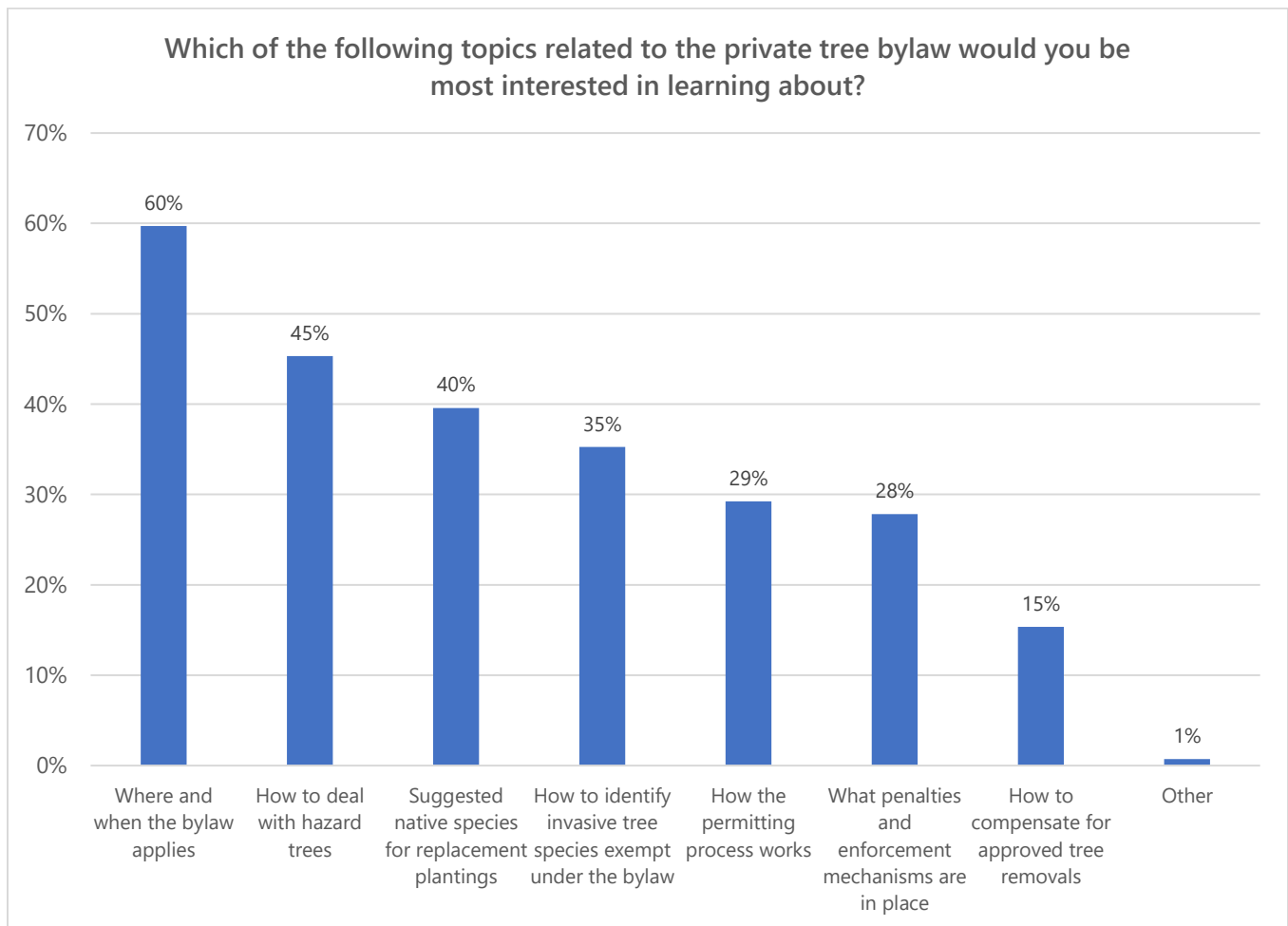


Figure 11. Results from the survey question about which topics related to the private tree bylaw participants would be most interested in learning about.



Many survey respondents and engagement session participants expressed strong support for more public awareness and education about the bylaw. Responses were varied, but the greatest amount of support was expressed for:

- receiving information and updates about Guelph's private tree bylaw via the City's website, on-line media, social media, and City tax mailouts; and
- learning about where the bylaw applies, how to deal with hazard (i.e., high-risk) trees, suitable native species for plantings, and how to identify invasive species exempt from the bylaw.

6.9 Additional feedback related to the private tree bylaw

Additional themes and key points that emerged from analysis of the survey comments and feedback documented during the various engagement sessions are provided in this section with selected quotes.

Trees provide valued services to the entire community

Several participants in the Phase 2 engagement, including a City Councillor, felt strongly that the estimated value of the services provided by trees to the entire community of Guelph should be a key consideration if, and when, additional funding for the private tree bylaw is requested. These participants stressed that a request for a few hundred thousand dollars per year was small in comparison to the millions of dollars of services¹ provided by Guelph's trees.

Strong minority opposition to expanding the private tree bylaw

More than half of the survey respondents expressed support for expanding the scope of Guelph's private tree bylaw to regulate more tree canopy cover on private lands. However, about a third of the respondents were strongly opposed to expanding the bylaw, and many survey comments reflected this perspective, as illustrated in the following quote.

"Trees on privately owned residential property should be 100% the responsibility of the homeowner and managed at their discretion and at their cost, without the added administrative and financial burdens of more unnecessary permits..." – Survey respondent

Continued focus on mature trees as a regulatory priority

Many participants felt that too many mature trees continue to be removed without adequate consideration. These participants supported broader regulation of large / mature trees on more or all private lots. This perspective was reflected in many survey and engagement session comments.

¹ The [Guelph Urban Forest Study](#) estimated there are about 2,973,000 trees across the city providing over \$5.6 million in services each year (i.e., related to home energy savings from moderating temperatures, pollution removal, avoided stormwater runoff, and carbon sequestration). In addition, trees in Guelph were estimated to store about 200,000 tonnes of carbon valued at \$22.6 million, with all these services helping the community mitigate and adapt to climate change. Notably, these estimated values do not include other services (such as physical and mental health benefits) which are harder to quantify and value.



"Tree canopy is hugely important and no one should be able to remove a "mature" tree without at least consultation..." – Survey respondent

"Trees of 50 cm or more on every private property should require a site visit prior to any approvals being issued to determine if/how mitigation measures could be implemented to preclude removal." – Survey respondent

Concerns about financial impacts and equity

Concerns about placing additional financial burdens on private property owners were also expressed in many survey comments and engagement sessions. This concern was raised in the context of potentially new and/or increased private tree bylaw permit and compensation fees, as well as in the context of increases in City operational costs potentially adding to the municipal tax burden.

Many of those opposed to expanding the scope of Guelph's private tree bylaw suggested the City should prioritize other pressing issues (such as fixing infrastructure and addressing homelessness). Among those supportive of an expanded bylaw, many recognized that a bylaw generally seen as fair and not overly burdensome to residents would be crucial to ensuring broad compliance and support.

"Any increased costs are not justifiable. Leave current bylaw as is. Homeowners were just hit with a 38% increase in taxes over several years. If the city is worried about tree coverage some of these funds need to be direct[ed] to tree planting/management." – Survey respondent

Concerns about unintended consequences of expanding the private tree bylaw

Some participants in the survey and at engagement sessions, including those supportive of expanding the scope of the private tree bylaw, expressed concerns about unintended consequences such as

- pre-emptive tree removals in advance of updating the bylaw;
- deterring private property owners from planting trees on their lands voluntarily;
- deterring private property owners from maintaining trees of all sizes on their property; and
- property owners trying to remove trees without a permit to avoid paying fees.

Suggested ideas for mitigating these risks included

- limiting or not expanding the scope of the bylaw;
- promoting tree planting and care along with broad outreach about the bylaw; and
- consistent implementation of the bylaw, including a demonstrated willingness to press charges when needed.

"Some property owners such as ourselv[e]s love trees and are debating planting additional trees, but if unnecessary bylaws come into effect taking away our ability to manage them, while adding more costs we will likely NOT plant those trees..." – Survey respondent



Combining private tree bylaw update options

Potentially combining different elements of the identified options for updating the private tree bylaw was raised both by the City's Natural Heritage Advisory Committee, City staff and a few focus group participants.

"The Natural Heritage Advisory Committee recommended that a [fifth] option be considered: regulate trees of at least 10 cm diameter on private lots greater than 0.1 hectares plus trees of at least 50 cm diameter on all private lots." – Minutes of Natural Heritage Advisory Committee, April 30, 2024

Calls for a balanced approach

Another theme that emerged was a repeated recognition, even among staunch tree advocates, of the need to balance ongoing development and intensification with sustaining and enhancing Guelph's tree canopy cover. Many participants stressed the need to both protect Guelph's existing large or mature trees wherever possible while also requiring new plantings to ensure long term canopy growth.

Many participants also suggested complementing the punitive aspects of the private tree bylaw with incentives such as free tree giveaways, rewarding homeowners who plant and care for their trees (e.g., tax rebates), and financial support for mature tree maintenance and planting native species.

"Tree Removal Permits should be given easily if residents doing it to increase space for housing as Guelph is already facing shortage of living places." – Survey respondent

Use of incentives and other ideas

Some notable and repeated suggestions related to improving the private tree bylaw processes and implementation included:

- better and sustained public education to help ensure bylaw compliance and community buy-in, including clearly defining key terms and explaining how the bylaw applies in different situations
- making it easier to remove and replace invasive tree species that are not exempt from the bylaw permitting process, along with resources to support appropriate replacements with native trees
- an online tool to calculate tree replacement and/or financial compensation requirements
- more tree planting and/or tree care supports and incentives for private landowners

"The replacement fee should be changed to reflect the true cost of replacement and ensuring the tree has the best chance to survive AND have a sliding scale for low, mid and high income residents to allow everyone the opportunity to manage their properties while balancing the need to grow our tree canopy." – Survey respondent



7 What are we doing?

The direction for updating Guelph's Private Tree Protection Bylaw will be confirmed based on careful consideration of the findings of the background review and assessments, feedback gathered in both phases of engagement, and input and guidance from City staff.

The project team will be working with City staff to confirm a preferred direction for Guelph's private tree bylaw update and developing an updated bylaw based on this direction over 2024.

In addition, no matter how the private tree bylaw is updated, the City plans to

- implement a sustained outreach and education campaign once the updated bylaw has been passed;
- update tree replacement and/or compensation requirements; and
- adjust staffing as needed to help administer and enforce the private tree bylaw cost-effectively.

8 What are we not doing?

Participants in both phases of engagement asked about a bylaw for the trees on City-owned lands. The City is not looking at regulating trees on public lands as part of this update, which is focused on the regulation of trees on private lands in Guelph. However, a separate bylaw for trees on public lands will be explored in the future.

9 Next steps and how to get more information

An updated private tree bylaw is to be finalized over 2024 and presented to Council for approval in the first half of 2025.

For more details about this phase of the process, see the [Phase 2 Summary](#).

For more details about the findings of the background research and analysis, and about how the options for updating the private tree bylaw were identified, please see the [Issues and Options Report](#).

If you have additional comments or questions please contact:

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