



April 16, 2025

RE: Private Tree Protection By-law By-law Number (2025) – 21059

Dear Mayor Guthrie and City Council,

SCAN! supports Council’s approval of an updated by-law to protect trees at least 10 cm DBH on private lots greater than 0.2 hectares, and trees at least 30 cm DBH on any private lots.

It’s crucial to protect the trees we have, and as much as we can. Investing in our green infrastructure and protecting our natural environment is increasingly important for the planet and City of Guelph residents.

The City of Guelph’s Climate Adaptation Plan quotes Guelph’s Urban Forest Management Plan which describes trees as a “practical and relatively inexpensive opportunity to both mitigate and adapt to climate changes”¹. That was written in 2012. The climate crisis has escalated significantly since then. Our tree canopy remains a critical climate adaptation strategy. Every tree is important, whether it be on public or private land, and regardless of its size or the lot size.

According to the Global Covenant of Mayors for Energy and Climate, Guelph is at significant risk of several climate related hazards²:

Hazard	Probability	Time Scale
Extreme hot temperature	High	Medium term
Water Scarcity	High	medium term
Biological hazards	High	not known
Severe Wind	Medium	Medium
Extreme Precipitation	Medium High	Medium

Our tree canopy addresses each of these hazards:

¹ <https://guelph.ca/wp-content/uploads/Guelph-CAP-Final-Report.pdf>

² <https://www.globalcovenantofmayors.org/cities/canada/canada/guelph/>

Extreme Heat - In addition to shade protection, and cooler outdoor temperatures, “trees and vegetation can decrease indoor air temperatures enough to reduce the energy required to cool the building, thereby reducing costs. Conifers help protect homes from cold winds in the winter.”³

Water Scarcity - Urban tree canopies intercept rainfall. Tree roots facilitate soil infiltration by creating pathways for water to penetrate deeper into the soil, recharging groundwater reserves and reducing surface runoff.

Biological Hazards and Degraded Ecosystems - Trees regulate and improve air quality, they store and sequester carbon, they filter pollutants from rainwater before it enters waterways, improving water quality and maintaining ecosystem health. They also contribute to local wildlife habitat and biodiversity.

Severe Wind - Trees and hedges act as natural barriers, disrupting and slowing down airflow to reduce ground-level gusts thereby protecting buildings, infrastructure and other trees.

Extreme Precipitation - Tree canopies intercept rainfall, reducing the amount of water that reaches the ground. This interception can significantly decrease runoff volumes; large trees can intercept over 100,000 gallons of rainfall annually.

Our tree canopy also offers other benefits to city residents:

Health and Wellbeing - City trees support and promote physical and mental health and well-being. Trees in urban areas are directly “related to better health, primarily through lower overweight/obesity and better social cohesion, and to a lesser extent through less type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, and asthma”⁴. Trees also offer protection from extreme heat.

Return on Investment - The expense of protecting trees at 30 cm DBH can be offset by the economical benefits that the tree canopy provides. Trees in the City of Toronto, with a 30 cm DBH or more and on private property are protected. The City of Toronto and TD Bank found that “Toronto’s urban forest contributes to energy savings of \$6.42-million annually through shading and climate moderation”⁵, and provides residents with over \$80 million, or about \$8 per-tree, worth of environmental benefits and cost savings each year. For the average single family household, this works out to \$125 of savings per annum.⁶ The same TD study found that “For every dollar spent on annual maintenance, Toronto’s urban forest returns anywhere from \$1.35–\$3.20 worth of benefits and cost savings each year.”⁷

³https://www.intactcentreclimateadaptation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/UoW_ICCA_2022_04-Irreversible-Extreme-Heat.pdf

⁴ https://www.fs.usda.gov/pnw/pubs/journals/pnw_2016_ulmer001.pdf

⁵ <https://www.td.com/document/PDF/economics/special/UrbanForests.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.td.com/document/PDF/economics/special/UrbanForests.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.td.com/document/PDF/economics/special/UrbanForests.pdf>

It is also worthy to note that Toronto has been proactive and innovative in supporting and protecting its tree canopy while supporting opportunities for infill residential housing. Toronto recognizes that both are critical to addressing the climate emergency, and so do we.⁸

Additionally, several other municipalities are protecting their smaller urban trees on private lots. Mississauga and Oakville protect trees over 15 cm DBH on private land regardless of the lot size. Vancouver protects trees 20 cm in DBH or greater on private property, regardless of the lot size. These municipalities recognize the importance of protecting smaller trees to maintain and grow their urban forests. Guelph needs to as well. By protecting trees at least 30 cm DBH on all private lots, Guelph would increase the protection from 4% to 14% of its urban trees.

Finally, Guelph touts itself as GREEN leader. It's a member of the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy, "the largest global alliance for city climate leadership". Mayor Guthrie is a board member. Protecting our small trees so they can grow into large ones, is urban climate action. Funding the enforcement of a by-law that would do this is climate leadership.

For all of these reasons, SCAN! is calling on Mayor Guthrie and Council to support the by-law protecting our small trees and those growing on private lots, so they may grow and contribute to our urban tree canopy. It's for the good of us all, for the good of our city, and for the good of our planet.

Sincerely,

Gina Lammel

Chair, [Seniors for Climate Action NOW!](#)

EARTH DAY is April 22, 2025. Act for the planet.

⁸ <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2023/ph/bgrd/backgroundfile-240809.pdf>