

## COUNCIL MEMBERS' MOTION

*For consideration at the Standing Committee on Policy and Strategic Priorities meeting on  
September 17, 2025*

### **8. Greening the City – Enhancing Livability and the Tree Canopy Through Healthy Afforestation**

Submitted by: Councillor Fry

#### WHEREAS

1. Afforestation is the process of transforming of non-forest into forest land. Distinct from reforestation, the process of replanting trees where forests were removed, afforestation seeks to create new complete forests where there are none (or in the case of Vancouver, for 150 years);
2. Urban forests play a critical role in improving air quality, reducing heat island effects, supporting biodiversity, and enhancing the overall health and well-being of residents. Equitable access to green space supports livability, particularly in underserved and high-density neighbourhoods;
3. In Vancouver, the urban forest is typically defined by our tree canopy. From the Urban Forest Action Plan of 2012 <sup>1</sup> to the Urban Forest Strategy of 2025 <sup>2</sup> the primary metric to define the health, vitality and state of the urban forest has been a measure of tree canopy coverage;
4. Vancouver's tree canopy is experiencing multiple pressures, from development, aging tree stock, heat stress, and drought resulting from climate change. Infestations are another climate-related threat to Vancouver's tree canopy, particularly in arboreal monocultures typical to public trees, where large homogenous population of single tree species can allow diseases and migrant pests like the Looper Moth, Ash Borer, or Japanese Beetle to thrive and spread rapidly, potentially decimating tree stock;
5. Tree canopy and urban forest are not synonymous. The urban tree canopy is a two-dimensional measure of the urban forest, representing the extent of tree cover when viewed from above. The urban forest is the entire collection of trees, plants, and other organic elements that exist, including not just the visible foliage from above (the canopy), but also the stems, roots, soil, ground cover, and understory vegetation that contribute to the broader ecosystem;
6. Afforestation, the creation of healthy forest ecosystems in places they otherwise don't exist, considers greening beyond adding trees. While trees are important,

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<sup>1</sup> Vancouver 2012 | Urban Forest Action Plan

<https://parkboardmeetings.vancouver.ca/2012/121015/DECISION-UrbanForestActionPlanandProtectionforMatureTrees-20121015.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Vancouver 2025 | Urban Forest Strategy

<https://council.vancouver.ca/20250521/documents/cfsc1.pdf>

the bigger picture is restoring a working, balanced forest ecosystem that is more resilient, improves soil, manages water, suppresses invasive species while supporting birds, pollinators, and other wildlife. Afforestation can contribute to climate and disease resilience, carbon sequestration, heat island mitigation, livability, and community engagement in environmental stewardship;

7. Miyawaki forests, or "mini forests," are dense, small-scale woodlands of native trees and shrubs planted to rapidly accelerate forest growth in urban or degraded areas. Developed fifty years ago in Japan by botanist Akira Miyawaki, this technique creates a multi-layered, self-sustaining forest ecosystem that grows quickly and provides numerous environmental benefits. The Miyawaki method has inspired micro-forest solutions adapted to local conditions in cities around the world as an effective tool for greening cities in dense urban environments from Asia to Europe,<sup>3</sup> to Canada;<sup>4</sup>
8. Compared to more traditional short-term approaches to urban forestry that focus on planting trees, the Miyawaki method may be a more effective long-term strategy to generate tree canopy, while creating dense, self-sustaining and resilient forests adapted to small spaces;<sup>5</sup>
9. Under the current City of Vancouver Tree By-law and policies regarding property development tree requirements and replacement, trees planted to meet permit requirements, aren't necessarily planted or maintained for health and survival. Tree Bylaw updates anticipated to come forward to Council in early 2026 may address this and afforestation techniques could support viability of tree retention; and
10. Vancouver's Urban Forestry Strategy report back on priority actions is scheduled for 2026, and includes advancing a canopy modelling study to better understand available planting space and determine private and public land contribution for equitable and strategic long-term urban forestry planning, as well as Ecological Network implementation, a joint initiative between Planning and Environmental Services in collaboration with Parks and Engineering toward developing a model of connected ecological network across the city.

#### THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED

- A. THAT Council direct staff to report back on actions to support afforestation and micro-forest initiatives across the city and integrating them into existing work on forestry and tree canopy, including the Urban Forestry Strategy and Ecological Network implementation, with a focus on:
  - Planting native and climate-resilient trees, ground cover, and understory

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<sup>3</sup> UNESCO 2015, 2023 | Tiny Forest

<https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/tiny-forest>

<sup>4</sup> Canadian Geographic 2022 | The many benefits of the minuscule but mighty Miyawaki forests

<https://canadiangeographic.ca/articles/the-many-benefits-of-the-minuscule-but-mighty-miyawaki-forests/>

<sup>5</sup> Simiran K. Gill, University of Alberta, 2024 | Maintaining age diversity in urban forests through continuous tree planting: The potential of the Miyawaki method for urban forestry in Edmonton, AB.

[https://sites.ualberta.ca/~ahamann/people/pdfs/Gill\\_2024\\_MF.pdf](https://sites.ualberta.ca/~ahamann/people/pdfs/Gill_2024_MF.pdf)

- vegetation;
- Prioritizing areas with low canopy coverage, poor soil, and/or vulnerability to climate impacts;
- Ensuring long-term financial capacity to support these afforestation initiatives; and
- Integrating afforestation into new developments, public spaces, and transportation corridors.

B. THAT Council request staff to report back as part of work underway, on:

- Funding mechanisms, including partnerships with community organizations, provincial and federal programs, and private sector contributions;
- Opportunities for community-led planting, afforestation, and stewardship initiatives;
- Metrics and timelines for monitoring forest and canopy growth and ecological impact.

C. THAT Council direct staff to report back as part of work underway on policy tools and incentives to:

- Protect existing and encourage new micro-forests on private and public lands;
- Encourage afforestation in urban design and development applications;
- Support long-term maintenance and health of newly planted trees and forests; and
- To include afforestation as part of work underway to update property development tree requirements.

D. THAT Council affirm the City's commitment to urban afforestation initiatives as part of its broader climate action, equity, and livability goals.

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