



TREES IN THE PUBLIC REALM

This **+PLACE MAKER** held on Earth Day created a discussion about the challenges facing trees in the public realm including climate change, invasive species, competition for space and lack of government support.



This +PLACE MAKER featured a keynote presentation by Philip van Wassenauer (Urban Forest Innovations) and a panel discussion facilitated by Mary Wiens (CBC Radio) featuring Professor Sandy Smith (University of Toronto), Norman DeFraeye (City of Toronto) and Carolyn Woodland (Toronto and Region Conservation Authority).

COMPETING DEMANDS FOR SPACE

Van Wassenauer explained that the part of the tree we see is only 50-60% of the tree, the other 40% of the biomass is underground in the root system. This means that trees are competing with many priorities for an already compact space, including underground services, overhead wires, parking lots and subways. He explained how this can be addressed by engineered solutions that create vaults of soil to allow trees to successfully grow without disrupting other underground services.

Municipalities need to work together to insure the ecological integrity of the urban forest.

Taking space demands into consideration, van Wassenauer suggests that an ideal place to plant trees is on private land because there tend to be fewer underground services, which provides a more viable root zone, giving a tree a chance at a natural lifetime.

One way to inspire private landowners to support trees on their properties is by encouraging them to see these trees as part of a forest, not as individual trees. This mindset encourages property owners to make decisions about individual trees with the public good in mind, explains Smith. She says that she “wants people to see their neighbourhood as a park in itself, feel the forest in the city.”

COORDINATED APPROACH

Van Wassenauer suggests that a coordinated approach to maintain or increase the urban forest. Policies need to consider all aspects of urban forest management. There need to be strict enforcement of policies to ensure replacement of trees that are been removed.

Currently, the urban forest is within the jurisdiction of municipalities little or no involvement at the provincial and federal level.

Woodland, agrees that better coordination between levels of government is also necessary. She suggests that municipalities need to work together to insure the ecological integrity of the urban forest because the urban forest does not recognize political boundaries. Woodland asserts that that federal and provincial could support research to provide tools and guidelines for maintaining urban forests.

CONFLICTING PRIORITIES

There can be conflicting priorities between development and the preservation of trees. The ability for a land owner to develop their property is protected under the Provincial Planning Act, DeFraeye explains. Although a landowner must apply for a tree removal permit before removing a tree, it is difficult to deny them their development rights as allowed under the local zoning, and so, a specific tree may not be able to be saved where it conflicts with legal development. Therefore, in order to more stringently regulate tree removal, the regulation would have to be written into the Planning Act. Van Wassenauer’s solution to this is to get provincial and municipal planners on board.

Make planting and preserving trees in the public realm a priority by assigning a value to them.



VALUATION OF TREES

Smith suggested that one way to influence the perception of trees in the public realm and make planting and preserving them a priority is to assign a value to them. A 2004 study released by TD Bank quantified the value of the urban forest in Toronto as \$7 billion or \$700/tree.

Because trees represent different things to different groups of people, Smith suggests working on a value system that points to a commonality between all groups. She says, “we need to rework the value system at all different levels... to see the regional forest on all scales: backyards, streets, and communities.” While putting a dollar value on the asset helps emphasize the importance of urban forest, it is difficult to monetize aesthetic, cultural, and recreational values, which could still be better demonstrated through more research and education.



Knowledge Experts

NORMAN DEFRAEYE MLA, BSc., OALA, CSLA is the Supervisor, Ravine & Natural Feature Protection Unit, Urban Forestry at the City of Toronto. The unit implements the City's Ravine and Natural Feature Protection bylaw and represents the Natural Heritage System in the City's OP. Norman has over 30 years of experience working in both municipal and private sectors, applying skills in environment science, landscape architecture and environmental planning on projects related to natural heritage, open space impact assessment and land development.

PROFESSOR SANDY SMITH PHD is a Professor and Dean, Faculty of Forestry at the University of Toronto. She is cross-appointed to the University's Centre for the Environment and Department Ecology & Evolutionary Biology. She has conducted research and teaching at the University since 1998. Sandy has served as Examiner for the Ontario Professional Foresters Association and is an international management expert for invasive species. She also acts as a consultant to federal, provincial and municipal operations and policy-makers.

PHILIP VAN WASSENAER MFC is the principal consultant for Urban Forest Innovations Inc., which specializes in the preservation, enhancement and management of urban forest research and science. He is an ISA certified arborist.

CAROLYN WOODLAND OALA, FCSLA, MCIP, RPP is the Senior Director, Planning, Greenspace and Communication for the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA). Since 2002, she has overseen the environmental planning, development review, policy and environmental assessment functions for the conservation authority within 18 municipalities. She has worked with Waterfront Toronto, the National Capital Commission (Ottawa), the former Crombie Commission, and the City of Toronto on many landmark planning and design assignments.



About CUI

We build wisdom and inspire leadership for healthy urban development. CUI works to help you meet your mission by improving urban performance through research, analysis and communication.

We catalyze connections to build community around issues. We deliver non-partisan, consumable information in support of decision-making that sustains economically, socially and environmentally resilient communities.

Roles

Applied Research Collect data and ideas about global practices and thought leadership, analyze their application to the local conditions and communicate the opportunities arising for learning and inspiration.

Capacity Building Transfer thought leadership and lessons learned to increase capacity for public and private sector partners.

Stakeholder Connections Help organizations improve decision-making by incorporating thought leadership into the stakeholder connection process.

Data Visualization Aggregating and organizing data from disparate sources to support decision-making. Examples have involved energy, water, culture and transportation.

Project Categories

- *Optimizing public infrastructure decisions*
- *Identifying critical success factors for successful community development*
- *Organizing data to support effective urban investment*
- *Increasing public sector (governance) ability to address change*

Latest Work

- Waterfront Toronto Resilience & Innovation Framework
- 2015 Canadian Infrastructure Report Card
- TO Core: Community Services & Facilities Review
- TO Core: Public Engagement & Stakeholder Consultation
- City of Fredericton Culture Mapping
- Toronto Ward Boundary Review
- Project YU: Engaging Young Urbanists
- The Value of Investing in Canadian
- Advancing Energy Efficient Water Delivery Services in Toronto
- Ontario Energy Community of Practice (ECOP)
- Philippines Local Economic Development

*CUI is a public good enterprise funded through project work.
Established in 1999.*

  @canurb canurb.org