



100 John West Way
Aurora, Ontario
L4G 6J1
(905) 727-3123
aurora.ca

Town of Aurora
Memorandum
Operational Services

Re: The Protection and Commemoration of Aurora's Oldest Trees that Hold Natural and Cultural Significance

To: Heritage Advisory Committee

From: Matthew Volpintesta, Manager of Parks and Fleet

Date: February 9, 2026

Recommendation

1. That the memorandum regarding The Protection and Commemoration of Aurora's Oldest Trees that Hold Natural and Cultural Significance be received; and
2. That the Heritage Advisory Committee comments regarding The Protection and Commemoration of Aurora's Oldest Trees that Hold Natural and Cultural Significance be received and referred to staff for consideration and further action as appropriate.

Background

The following motion was carried by Council on September 23, 2025:

Whereas Aurora is home to a handful of trees believed to be senescent or centenarian in nature, re presenting important natural, cultural and historical significance; and

Whereas these trees serve as a living testament and hold future cultivar legacies to Aurora's ecological heritage and is valued by residents and visitors alike; and

Whereas the preservation of significant natural features aligns with the Town's ongoing commitment to environmental stewardship, public education, and the protection of its natural assets;

1. Now Therefore Be It Hereby Resolved That staff be directed to identify these trees, assess the health, species, and estimated age of these trees in collaboration with certified arborists and local environmental groups; and

2. Be It Further Resolved That staff report back with recommendations on measures to ensure the long-term protection and maintenance of these trees, including hazard risk assessments, long-term health plans with yearly evaluations and other necessary practices to extend longevity; and
3. Be It Further Resolved That the report should also include commemorative recognition elements such as an interactive plaque at the site highlighting its ecological, cultural, and natural significance to the community; a neighbourhood ribbon cutting event to foster community pride; and collaborative tours or map-based integration with the arboretum; and
4. Be It Further Resolved That staff consult with the Town's Museum and Archives, Heritage and Environmental Advisory Committees, if applicable, for input on the design and wording of the commemorative plaque; and
5. Be It Further Resolved That staff develop an afterlife life plan should the tree perish such as architectural art; repurposing of wood; and cultivating seeds and cuttings to expand its genus strain; and
6. Be It Further Resolved That any costs associated with the plaque, assessment, and preservation measures be considered as part of the next applicable operating or capital budget or funded through available grants or sponsorship opportunities.

In response to the above referenced motion, staff have conducted a best practice review and prepared a working draft of an End-of-Life Tree Management Guide (the draft Guide) attached as an appendix. Through this report, staff provide details of considerations made in working toward a go-forward approach for strategizing efforts to protect, celebrate and extend the life of Aurora's heritage trees.

The draft Guide provides a structured framework to manage heritage and mature trees approaching the end of their lifecycle. The draft Guide was formulated through a review of tree policies from municipalities across Canada, including provincial and municipal legislation, best practices from urban forestry organizations and innovative programs such as TreeCycle Canada. Some examples on municipalities reviewed include Middlesex Centre (Ontario), Burnaby (British Columbia), LaSalle (Ontario), and Whitehorse (Yukon Territories), which embed end-of-life considerations within broader tree management policies.

Furthermore, building on policies from Ontario's Forestry Act, *Ontario Heritage Act*, and *Municipal Act* combined with best practices from urban forestry organizations such as Tree Canada, who developed an Urban Forestry Guide that emphasize lifecycle management, risk assessment and sustainable disposal, key components reveal themselves as core functions of a successful management guide.

Several key components around assessment, preservation, and commemoration form a comprehensive End-of-Life Guide.

The following details the key components proposed within the draft Guide:

Assessment and Decision Framework, and Registry of Trees

The first step is to establish criterion including what characterizes a tree as having cultural or natural heritage significance, being; age of tree; species; geographical location; or other historical occurrences. Once a criterion is set, the tree should be thoroughly documented, including photographs, measurement, and record of historical significance for archives.

As part of this assessment, risk assessment should confirm structural decline and assess health under existing tree inventory categorization. There is also a public engagement component, which would seek input, including notifying public community and stakeholders; consider commemorative options.

Tree Protection or Preservation Strategies

Dependent on risk assessment, this can involve species and lineage preservation strategies (seed bank, nursery reproduction). Further, additional strategies include heavy pruning focusing on structural integrity, vertical mulching and deep root fertilization and watering regime.

Disposal and Repurposing

Recycling and re-use are excellent options should failure/removal occur. This includes urban lumber programs, and partnerships with local sawmills or artisans to turn logs into park furniture, tables, public art installations.

A cited example is TreeCycle Canada who partner with municipalities to turn urban wood (biomass energy) into clean energy or wood products.

Commemorative Practices

Commemorative practices may involve a myriad of options which include memorial plaques in place of heritage displays, archival and repurposed wood through options detailed above such as public art.

Replacement and Ecological Continuity

Plant native or climate-resilient species near the original site or genetic duplicates through preservation methods detailed above such as nursery reproduction. This is also a potential consideration as a commemorative practice. It is also recommended to exceed tree replacement policies and By-law (example: multiple young trees for one large heritage tree).

Policy and Program integration

This focuses on including end-of-life options in Tree Protection By-Laws and Urban Forestry Master Plans. Further, there are options to integrate practices into other programs and municipal strategic goals, such as canopy cover targets.

Communication and Education

Communication and Education play a pivotal role in the process from the outset through the course of the Management Guide. At the outset, engagement and education help formulate a list and criterion for designation as having significant. Through the Management Plan for a particular tree, engagement and communication allow for promotion of the tree, in celebrating any commemorative practice or enlightening public on the process to protect or repurpose a tree.

Funding

Funding is a key component to this work and a consideration when applying this Guide to Town trees. Considerations around archiving, and tree protection/preservation are likely the most significant when accounting for budget needs, as would repurposing. Communication and education also may impact a need for funding, should materials be produced. There is a possibility of revenue generation which may contribute to funding the end-of-life program, through sale of repurposed materials.

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Next Steps

Staff will consolidate feedback from the presentation of this report and the draft Guide to the Town's Advisory Committees, including the Environmental Advisory Committee (EAC), Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee (PRAC) and Heritage Advisory Committee (HAC) early in 2026. Once received, staff will report to Council with a go-forward approach and complete Management Guide, including assessment and listing criteria, and funding strategy to begin this process.

It should be noted, once a final guide is presented, staff will incorporate any endorsed practices or procedures into the Town's associated Tree By-laws which are planned to be updated in 2027, such as the Tree Protection By-law.

Attached for comment is an initial draft of the End-of-Life Tree Management Guide for any initial comment or consideration.

Attachments

Attachment 1: Draft End-of-Life Tree Management Guide (v.1)