

Heritage trees to get branch of support following Council approval

Heritage trees in Aurora will now enjoy an extra degree of protection following Council's approval of a new tree management guide.

Council formally gave the green light to the new green measure at the March 31 meeting of Council.

The Heritage Tree Management Guide outlines a complete process of identifying, documenting, preserving and commemorating significant trees.

The guide will manage heritage trees on public property, but although Council approved the new measures, they questioned what could be done to protect similarly significant trees on private property as well.

The Guide was developed in response to a Council motion from September 23, 2025 calling for stronger protection of Aurora's oldest trees, said the Town in a statement following the meeting. With Council's endorsement, staff will now finalize the criteria for listing Town-owned heritage trees and begin creating an initial registry that includes each tree's location, historical significance, specimen details, scientific data, and photographic documentation. This multi-year effort will continue through 2027 and will include individualized planning for each tree based on its condition and future risk. Once assessments are complete, appropriate preservation measures will be implemented.

Ward 3 Councillor Wendy Gaertner, however, said it's really important to consider similar measures for eligible trees on private property, particularly properties that are slated for development.

Currently, it's just dealing with public property, but there was an interest through [Aurora's Parks and Recreation Advisory] Committee and also through staff to recognize potentially some private trees that we know exist that have some heritage value, both in species and age, said Sara Tienkamp, Aurora's Director of Operations. At this time, we're just dealing with the public ones, and then we'll do some research about how to tackle the private ones.

Some residents may be interested in participating, some may not be interested in having trees recognized on their property, so that's something we'll work through in the coming year or so.

Aurora began taking a look at heritage trees in September of last year following Council's adoption of a motion put forward by Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland. It tasked staff with returning a report on recommendations to ensure the long-term protection of designated trees, including long-term health plans, as well as appropriate ways to commemorate the trees in question.

Aurora is home to a handful of trees believed to be senescent or centenarian in nature, are presenting important natural, cultural and historical significance, and these trees serve as living testament and hold future cultivar legacies to Aurora's ecological heritage, said Councillor Gilliland in her motion.

The resulting report, penned by Manager of Parks and Fleet Matthew Volpintesta, was presented to the Parks & Recreation Advisory Committee in January.

The committee focused on the end-of-life tree management guide within the report, which notes the first step in the process will be firming up the criteria of what characterizes a tree as having cultural or natural heritage significance.

Once the trees are selected, they should then be thoroughly documented for the historical archives.

Risk assessment should confirm structural decline and assess health under existing tree categorization, the report stated. There is also a public engagement component which would seek input, including notifying public, community and stakeholders, [and] consider commemorative options.

If the tree fails, the report notes their lumber could be transformed into park furniture, such as picnic tables, public art installations, and more. Seeds and cuttings could also ensure their legacy continues.

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter