



IN THE NEWS

CONSULTING PROJECT IN BANFF

Banff working on tree plan

By Cathy Ellis - Rocky Mountain Outlook - May 22, 2008

A plan is in the works for the future planting, removal and care of Banff's treasured trees on public lands. The Town of Banff has hired an expert consulting company to help create an urban forest management plan, which aims to inventory trees, and update and revise the municipality's existing practices.

Municipal officials say Banff's urban forest is under pressure for a number of reasons, including forest health, age and the potential for a mountain pine beetle infestation. Trees considered hazardous to public safety or from a fire perspective are also proving to be significant issues.

Officials say that finding a balance between the principles of a national park environment, public safety and mountain resort town aesthetics will be a difficult challenge, but solutions are needed.

"We're looking for direction for the future planting, removal and maintenance of trees," said Chad Townsend, environmental services coordinator for the Town of Banff. "We're looking for some help on this."

The plan is being created, in part, to address public concerns that followed the redevelopment of Central Park and a number of significant windstorms that have toppled hundreds of trees over the past couple of years.

There are roughly 90 hectares of parks and open spaces within the four square-kilometre boundary of the Banff townsite, most of which is covered in some form by forest. Over the past five years, an estimated 800 trees have been planted, while around 1,400 have been removed.

Once the 170 trees are planted along the 100 and 200 blocks of Banff Avenue for the Banff Refreshing project, there will be a total of about 350 boulevard and street trees the town will be responsible for managing.

Coun. Leslie Taylor, who is council's representative on the town's internal urban forest management plan steering committee, said she is pleased to see the project moving ahead.

"It will help us create a plan for keeping the trees that we have healthy, replanting the ones that have to be removed and coordinating with FireSmart so we don't do anything that works against that," she said. "I think it will also help us to put some money in the budget for replanting and be able to carry out a coordinated program year-after-year to make sure our urban forest stays healthy."

Coun. Taylor said trees are an important part of how residents and visitors view the image of Banff, particularly given its location within a national park, not just from an aesthetic point of view, but also for the astounding environmental benefits.

"Because of the kind of climate we have and the length of time trees take to grow here, trees are particularly special to people," said Coun. Taylor. "It's not like the lower mainland - a tree doesn't grow up overnight here. A tree is something that develops over a long time and people grow to love them."

The municipality's hired consultants will provide a detailed health and hazard assessment of trees, including identification of heritage trees and trees of historical significance in town.

They will also suggest best practices for pruning, tree care and maintenance of trees, and identify tree-planting opportunities, with an emphasis on hardy and native trees and shrubs indigenous and endemic to the Banff area and surrounding park.

Other work includes providing recommendations to address concerns with wildlife impacts on the health of the town's trees, with a particular focus on impacts from elk and deer browsing.

The prime consultant on the project is Teresa Systems Inc. TREES Consulting Inc., **For Trees Company Ltd.** and HAB-TECH Environmental Ltd., are all contributing to the plan.