URBAN FOREST STUDY
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

NANAIMO, BC | APRIL 2022

RESOURCES REVIEWED

28 documents reviewed

303 references to trees

86 policies align with urban forestry

STAFF SURVEYS

20 staff invited, 75% participation

4 City departments

60% desire information, resources, benchmarking and goal setting from this study

BENCHMARKING

10 cities or regions compared

6 categories (city stats, budget, trees, program, community, policy)

35 attributes evaluated

AUDIT ("GAP ANALYSIS")

130 urban forestry elements ranked

53% level of attainment*

53% of indicators are "moderate"

87 Vibrant Cities Lab's "gap score"

*Attainment refers to 11 urban forest management category rankings. 53% of indicators as moderate refers to Nanaimo's status for indicators across a low to optimal spectrum. The Vibrant Cities Lab's gap score is an assessment and goal-setting tool to identify strengths and areas for improvement. These audits informed Report recommendations.

The trees and associated vegetation that we live around, including in parks, rights-of-way, boulevards, medians, facility grounds, and greenbelts, are collectively known as the urban forest. Like storm drains and sidewalks, the urban forest is an essential part of city infrastructure and provides meaningful, measurable benefits, like urban heat mitigation, energy savings, climate resilience, and much more.

Urban forests face unprecedented challenges in a warming environment with ever expanding development needs. New and introduced tree pests and diseases threaten the health and longevity of trees, and programs often face uncertainty when it comes to a consistent budget that meets the needs of the trees and the community.

To identify the challenges and priorities of Nanaimo's urban forest and to explore opportunities where benefits can be maximized, the Urban Forest Benchmarking and Audit Study of 2022 ("Study") evaluated the City's urban forestry program with the goal of supporting human and ecosystem health and well-being. Evaluations and analyses included research deep-dives, City staff surveys, benchmarking research, and auditing systems. The findings from the Study provide the program's baseline conditions and the guidance for updating the City's 2010 Urban Forest Management Strategy ("UFMS") and supporting studies.

URBAN FOREST STUDY
RECOMMENDATIONS

TIMING	THEME	RECOMMENDATIONS (CONDENSED)
Pre-Strategy Update	Plan Evaluate Share Budget Assess Partner Engage	1. Review Study findings and recommendations 2. Establish an urban forestry working group 3. Update status of UFMS modules 4. Share findings of Study 5. Prepare for UFMS update 6. Budget for UFMS update 7. Inventory public trees 8. Analyze tree benefits and services 9. Assess citywide urban tree canopy 10. Communicate assessment findings 11. Collaborate to update the UFMS 12. Gather public input to develop the UFMS
Strategy Update	Plan	13. Develop the UFMS scope and framework 14. Complete the UFMS update
Post-Strategy Update	Share Monitor	15. Communicate UFMS results 16. Track, monitor, and adapt implementation

Based on the findings from the urban forest study, recommendations for advancing the City's urban forestry programs, expanding tree canopy cover, and strengthening community stewardship were developed. Primarily, the recommendations will build the framework for updating the 2010 Urban Forest Management Strategy and support implementation to achieve higher levels of service and urban forest sustainability.

Urban trees can play a significant role in making cities resilient to weather and climate extremes, and in protecting human and ecosystem health and safety. To do so, trees must be consciously selected, planted, and managed as the central component of an urban forest where individual trees are maintained as part of a greater system with the purpose of improving the urban environment and enhancing the benefits of that ecosystem. This Urban Forest Benchmarking and Audit Study is an important piece of that larger mission and should be utilized to launch new initiatives, programs, and studies that enhance the urban forest for current and future generations.