

July 2025

“A Green and Resilient City” Recommendations

Cost-Effective Ideas to Make Ottawa more Green & Resilient

CAFES (Community Action for Environmental Sustainability) submits the following cost-saving and service-enhancing ideas in response to the City of Ottawa’s Service Review call under the “Green and Resilient” strategic priority. These initiatives from the CAFES network are rooted in sustainability, equity, and fiscal responsibility and respond to the City’s [Engage Ottawa invitation](#). We acknowledge that the following sections are not siloed; rather, are interrelated and require integration between city departments and services. These proposals reflect win-win solutions that reduce long-term costs, mitigate climate risk, and build more livable communities. The recommendations draw on the lived experience of residents and are the outcome of an internal call for ideas, an internal consultation process and a CAFES network discussion at the CAFES joint caucus meeting of June 11, 2025.

1. Expand and Integrate Green Infrastructure into Urban Planning *Relevant Services: Planning, Infrastructure and Water Services; Public Works*

Recommendations:

- Expand public education in the priority stormwater retrofit areas for the *Rain Ready Ottawa Program* to increase uptake of stormwater retrofits (ie. rain gardens, permeable pavements, soak pits).
- Integrate Stormwater Tree Trenches into planned road reconstructions (eg. Glebe Ave and Bank St. tree trench pilot). This is a cost-effective way to introduce green stormwater infrastructure. “Complete Streets” should include both stormwater and trees.
- Standardize tree planting with adequate soil volumes in all street reconstruction projects (30 m³ per medium tree at 1m depth). We get the most cost-effective outcome (a thriving tree that lives for decades) by planting properly.
- Improve integrated, cross-departmental coordination to embed tree planting and other nature-based solutions into Low Impact Development stormwater projects.

How this saves money: Reduces flood damage, erosion repair costs, and future grey infrastructure upgrades. Investing now in green stormwater solutions avoids far higher costs in climate disaster recovery.



2. Strengthen Urban Forest Protection and Growth

Relevant Services: Forestry; Public Works; Recreation Culture and Facilities Services (RCFS)

Recommendations:

- Set ambitious targets for the new *Plant Your Place!* and proactive *Trees in Trust* program with clear monitoring and tracking metrics (ie. minimum number of trees to be distributed/planted per year; tree survival rates).
- Permit residents to plant trees on the boulevard (Right of Way) as part of the new *Community-Led Green Initiatives and Garden Program*.
 - Provide a set of standards/requirements that can be found online including needing to locate utilities before digging, instructions for planting under hydro wires, choosing suitable species, etc.
 - This new program should create an accessible application system by which community groups/residents can request stewardship activities through a single portal.
- City tree maintenance services should better prioritize managing tree diseases, pruning and watering in order to maintain a healthy canopy - and reduce high costs associated with replacing dead or dying trees.
- Revise the city tree species list to remove invasives like Callery Pear, and replace with native edible species.
- Reduce mowing services next to tree trunks to help preserve critical root zones and insect habitats while saving on maintenance costs, and focusing on planting understory species below canopy trees and groundcover plants that don't require mowing.
- Better prioritize care and maintenance of existing city trees, including feeding city trees with compost so they are healthier, more pest and disease resistant and less likely to require costly tree replacements.
- Examine the cost benefits of installing tiny forests on city property; this is an efficient way to significantly increase green resilience and biodiversity.
- Revise system by which residents report issues with trees and developments; only one forester for certain areas in the city has led to inefficiencies with city staff responding to conflicts despite not having ability to address them.

How this saves money: Healthy urban trees reduce energy demand (cooling), extend pavement lifespan, prevent erosion, and delay tree replacement costs. Community planting reduces city labour costs.



3. Transition to Renewable Energy with Battery Storage

Relevant Services: Planning; Hydro Ottawa; Building Code Services

Recommendations:

- Promote local battery energy storage system (BESS) permitting with streamlined zoning approvals for principal use BESS; pursuing greenbelt and urban locations for BESS and utilizing combinations of renewable energy and BESS in municipal facilities for energy resiliency and emergencies.
- Promote private accessory battery energy storage systems through permitting and incentives to better harness the power of microgrids.
- Pilot vehicle-to-grid infrastructure for city fleet and public use; adding electric vehicles to municipal fleets.

How this saves money: Investing in local energy storage cuts fossil fuel use, stabilizes energy costs, and lowers risk during outages or peak demand — reducing both operating and emergency costs.

4. Invest to Scale in Waste Reduction and Diversion

Relevant Services: Solid Waste Services

Recommendations:

- Reducing waste lowers landfill management costs, will extend the lifespan of waste facilities and is a long-term financially and ecologically sustainable solution. The city should accelerate and ramp up its investment in waste reduction. Following the waste hierarchy also in financial terms (not talk only), the city should spend equal or more on waste reduction and diversion as on residual solid waste solutions. The city should spend equal amounts or more on feasibility studies and strategies for waste reduction and diversion, as it is spending on feasibility studies on residual waste and incineration (very bottom of the waste hierarchy). Incineration business cases should factor in successful and aggressive investments in waste reduction and diversion (reducing feedstocks).
- The city should work with the considerable social and entrepreneurial energy in the community to find ways to reduce and divert waste. For example, a dedicated time for metal waste pick ups.
- The city should finish its roll out of three-stream trash bins across city parks ensuring trash is sorted and recycled properly. This will also encourage sorting and recycling as ongoing active practice for residents. This should accompany boosted education.
- Create, through community centres or city property, freecycle locations throughout the city to divert perfectly good items from landfills and make life more affordable for residents. This model has been done at the University of Ottawa to great success.



- Create and implement a circular economy model for the city's organic waste where citizens are educated and supported in source diversion (including students and new arrivals); the MURB organic diversion program is accelerated; the city invests in anaerobic digestion both centrally and at diversified farm locations in rural areas to harvest natural renewable gas and digestate is produced at adequate quality to return to agricultural soils. As well, the City should create spaces for wood chips, and community composts and invest in education around composting.
- The city of Ottawa should explore increasing the cost of sending houses to landfill when properties are redeveloped in order to incentivize innovative construction and demolition waste recycling methods and reduce waste. This has been done in cities like Victoria with a lot of success and upsides.
- Ottawa Public Health should develop and implement a strategy for combatting air, soil and water pollution by micro-plastics.

How this saves money: Improves landfill lifespan, reduces need for new facilities, and avoids costly environmental and health liabilities. Education reduces contamination and enforcement costs.

5. Halt Urban Sprawl and Protect Natural Areas

Relevant Services: Planning and Zoning; Environment and Climate Change

Recommendations:

- Ensure greenspace access targets identified in the Official Plan are tracked and enforced by city planning services (that all residents should have public greenspace within a 5 min walking distance, two public greenspaces within a 10 min walking distance and a "public natural area" within a 15 minute transit ride). This may resemble guardrails on development with clear monitoring and tracking to ensure the OP targets are realized.
- Create a task force or designate existing staff to monitor tools to maintain the urban boundary against the high costs of sprawl.
- The new Comprehensive Zoning By-law should require 30 m³ of contiguous soft landscaping for tree planting in surface parking lots, above stormwater attenuation infrastructure, above underground structures, and in front and rear yards, accompanied by large 6m+ front yard setbacks. Planting and caring for trees in optimal conditions with sufficient permeable space will save costs long term by reducing the need to replace failing trees every few years.
- Given the benefits of 15 minute neighbourhoods, analyses should be conducted every 5 years to measure and address gaps in essential neighbourhood services including greenspace, food systems, child care, transit, commercial and employment opportunities, etc.

Additional Ideas: The city should examine regulations for permitting and encouraging chickens within the urban boundaries of Ottawa.



How this saves money: Dense development lowers costs for transit, emergency services, and infrastructure development and maintenance, such as road repairs and expansions. Green, natural areas mitigate flood and heat risk, saving costs on future climate damages.

6. Mandate and Share Municipal Data including Emissions and Canopy Data

Relevant Services: Natural Services; IT Services

Recommendations:

- The city has access to two world class research universities, and numerous colleges in its vicinity. Post-secondary institutions have already done research on municipal issues, including using existing data sets like Ottawa's mapping tools, which have created innovative solutions to the city's problems at no cost to the city. This is a practice that should be maintained and incentivized with large scale access to city data sets. These post-secondary institutions provide immense amounts of capacity for research and innovation municipally which can lead to cost savings, better policy and outcomes.
- The city should share base data supporting emissions inventories annually (last data provided is 2020)
- The city should share base data for canopy cover, including satellite mapping data from Hydro Ottawa (last canopy data provided is from 2017).

How this saves money: Data sharing is a low cost way to ensure accountability, and allows for analysis by citizen scientists, academics and others to come up with innovative solutions. Both Council and staff are able to make better evidence-based decisions with better outcomes.

7. Build Climate Resilience into City Planning

Relevant Services: Planning; Infrastructure Services; Emergency Preparedness

Recommendations:

- The city's new rate long term financial plan, with focus on stormwater and water management, demonstrates that early proactive spending on flood response saves the city money in the long term, with the city planning to spend over 150 million in the next handful of years on climate change mitigation and adaptation related to stormwater and flooding. We encourage the City to continue this approach and make key investments now in flood prevention rather than spend millions later on flood response. A dedicated resource should be assigned to study water infrastructure adaptation and identify further investment opportunities.



How this saves money: Funding climate action now is more affordable than managing future detrimental climate disaster recovery costs. A coordinated approach reduces inefficiencies across city departments.

8. Improve Public Transit and Active Transportation

Relevant Services: OC Transpo; Transportation Services

Recommendations:

- The City and OCTranspo have binding legal agreements with the post-secondary institutions of Ottawa stating u-pass increases may not be above 2.5% without a referendum. The City should save money on expensive legal fees and the potential loss of millions in operating costs if the referendum fails by respecting this agreement with the students of Ottawa.
- The City should pursue establishing a transit pass program with the federal government for public servants as well as large private employers, ensuring ridership and encouraging folks to commute by transit, as well as guaranteeing a larger consistent base of transit fares.
- The City should invest in dedicated bus lanes, but where redoing streets is expensive or unfeasible the City shouldn't let that be a barrier to a more efficient, active, sustainable city. We encourage the city to conduct an analysis of where bus lanes could move a large number of people quickly, like Bank street, and engage in a pilot project in those areas to test the efficiency using cheap infrastructure solutions involving paint, concrete dividers, or plastic dividers.
- Encourage the use of cargo bikes and e-bikes in the city fleet.
- Explore on-demand busing for areas not served well by regular bussing infrastructure or systems.
- The City identified 30 high-volume intersections where there is increased risk of harm, and it would cost 30 million to implement safety measures. These should be prioritized to keep people safe. The city risks lawsuits if people are hurt and these safety mechanisms are a way to ensure you don't have to spend money on expensive legal fees or lawsuits.

How this saves money: Encouraging walking, cycling, and transit reduces road congestion, maintenance costs, supports lower emission transport and reduces air pollution. These systems are cheaper to build and operate than car-dependent infrastructure.



9. Foster Community-Based Environmental Stewardship

Relevant Services: Public Works; Forestry; Use and Care of Roads By-law; Recreation Culture and Facilities Services (RCFS)

Recommendations:

- Expand the *Cleaning the Capital* program by adapting it into a year-round community stewardship opportunity to save on city maintenance costs.
 - Include compost bags in addition to the garbage bags that are typically provided.
 - Include invasive plant species removal as a clean-up activity, allowing people to remove invasive species and have the city dispose of them.
 - Create a community clean up alert, allowing you to notify the city of trash picked up on the fly and have the city pick it up in a reasonable time.
- Increase public education on recent by-law updates that permit food gardening on residential boulevards - to increase uptake and prevent unnecessary by-law complaints.
 - Train city maintenance staff on these new updates to ensure they respond to by-law complaints/requests properly, and so gardens are not accidentally mowed over during routine maintenance services.
- Launch the new *Community-Led Green Initiatives and Garden Program* ASAP to allow community groups to apply for stewardship opportunities including tree planting, gardening, weeding, invasive species removal, etc. - through a one-stop portal.
 - Introduce a waiver system through which groups agree to the terms, conditions and risks before engaging in volunteer stewardship activities (as opposed to requiring insurance, which poses massive barriers to community participation).
 - Model this program after the City of Toronto Nature Stewards program, which uses a waiver form and online application system for volunteers to sign up for stewardship activities on city property.
 - Look into the City of Vancouver's *Seeding Stewardship Program* which allows residents to volunteer for stewardship groups that maintain nature-based solutions like rain gardens and wildflower meadows on city-owned public land.
 - Permit residents to plant wildflower meadows, shrubs and ground cover plants in ditches and slopes as they provide superior stormwater absorption rates than turf grass, reduce damages from erosion and flooding, provide biodiversity benefits, and reduce the need for city mowing services.

How this saves money: Empowering local groups saves money on outreach, enforcement, and maintenance. Volunteerism, stewardship and education increase efficiency and reduce long-term service demands.



10. Promote Environmental and Social Equity

Relevant Services: Forestry; Planning and Zoning; Public Works

Recommendations:

- Adopt a “*Heat in the Street*” by-law in which greenspace services or de-paving will need to be provided by the city if the average street temperature rises above a particular threshold. This is particularly important in equity-deserving, low-income and/or canopy-deprived neighbourhoods like Vanier, Mechanicsville, Hintonburg, Centretown and the Downtown Core - where heat islands occur.
- Increase shade in heat mapped hot spots in these equity areas through strategic tree planting.
- Link tree canopy data with the city’s public health heat and air quality warnings - the public needs to be able to see the links between a lack of trees and worse heat/air quality.
- Set ambitious targets and performance reporting for all tree planting services that occur as a result of the Tree Equity Analysis, to demonstrate measurable outcomes resulting from these investments.
- Conduct a neighbourhood-specific analysis of resident tree uptake from the *Plant Your Place! Program* and consider redistributing the number of trees available for each area in future years to better reflect equity needs. (ie. to increase trees allocated for equity areas; decrease trees available in areas that had either low uptake or already high canopy cover).
- The city should encourage tree trimming, and maintenance rather than removal for large and old trees.

How this saves money: Investing in vulnerable communities avoids future social, health and climate costs, including impacts from extreme heat. Inclusive policy ensures more resilient systems and reduces strain on city services.

Conclusion and Next Steps

CAFES welcomes the opportunity to meet with staff to explore these ideas further. We are committed to being a constructive partner in building a more cost-effective, sustainable, and resilient Ottawa.

You can contact us at info@cafesottawa.ca.