



CAFES Ottawa
Community Associations for
Environmental Sustainability



Pilot Backyard Tree Planting Project

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Pilot Backyard Tree Planting Project

Post-Event Report

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1) Executive Summary

Part 1: Mother's Day Tree Give Away

CAFES, Foret Capitale Forest, Forest Ontario and the office of MP Yasir Naqvi partnered to pilot a Mother's Day Tree planting project to promote a backyard tree planting program and boost the urban canopy. Ottawa currently does not have a back-yard tree planting program. The City of



Ottawa's current tree planting program, *Trees in Trust*, offers residents a free tree on their front yard in the right of way, i.e., the city-owned portion of a property. A backyard tree planting program would bolster Ottawa's capacity to get ahead of tree loss in the face of past and future extreme weather events and climatic changes; expanding and diversifying tree canopy in urban and suburban Ottawa.

The organisers planned the free tree event for Mother's Day weekend. The pilot was promoted across Ottawa, focusing on schools in the Somerset and Capital wards for students to gift a tree to their mother, but welcomed any urban and suburban resident. The trees were pre ordered by recipients on the CAFES e-commerce website,

and recipients had to answer a 3 question assessment in order to ensure they would plant the tree in an appropriate space and would maintain it.

Successes

- 70 1-2 gallon trees were matched to pre-screened recipients.
- Species given away include Allegheny Serviceberry, Sugar Maple, Kentucky Coffee, Red Maple, Red Oak, Yellow Birch, Bitternut Hickory, Chokecherry, Northern Hackberry, Bur Oak, Shagbark Hickory, Native Plum.
- A tree planting instruction sheet was developed for the 1-2 gallon pot saplings, with special attention to freeing roots to prevent girdling.
- Overall part 1 of the pilot was a success - all partners had a chance to connect with citizens and advocate for the importance of trees and greenspace stewardship.

Lessons Learned

- Time needed for communications was more than anticipated. As the pilot was mostly promoted through schools, it was challenging to screen each tree sapling recipient in order to prevent young kids from ordering trees to give to their moms (without parental

knowledge). This was due to email questionnaires going to spam folders, or students not responding to emails, therefore requiring re-sending emails, and calling individuals.

Part 2: Area Planting

The area planting was planned to 1) meet equity concerns for those that do not have a planting space on their property, but would like to participate in the pilot project, 2) guarantee a planting space for any leftover trees from part 1, and 3) enhance an urban greenspace area.

- *Successes*
 - Together 40 individuals planted 40 trees in the space across from Billings Bridge, between the Rideau river and Riverside Drive.
 - The goal of this prong of the project was to educate tree recipients on how to properly plant and care for a tree.
 - A water plan was created for local community members to come by and water trees regularly to ensure their survival during the warm months. Foret Capitale Forest provided a 1000 L water tote that will be placed in the space for easy watering.
 - Overall part 2 of the pilot was a success - all partners had a chance to connect with citizens and promote the importance of residential land advocacy and stewardship.
- *Lessons Learned*
 - Securing a post-planting water vessel, watering schedule, and watering team was significant. Due to various limitations, the water vessel for volunteers to water the saplings arrived several weeks after the planting, however the saplings are thriving thanks to the dedicated effort of Foret Capitale Forest and volunteers.

If Ottawa wants to keep up with or even just maintain the urban canopy in Ottawa, a backyard tree planting program is essential, as well as more frequent monitoring of the tree canopy in Ottawa. Therefore, an intention for the partners of this project was to pilot elements of a backyard tree planting program, later to be discussed with other stakeholders and the Forestry department of the City of Ottawa for consideration.



2) Introduction & Background

Vision: To pilot a tree planting program for Mothers' Day 2023 executed through a partnership with CAFES, Forests Ontario, Forêt Capitale Forest and the office of MP Yasir Naqvi.

Introduction

The state of tree canopy in the city of Ottawa is a growing concern and a source of uncertainty. In its Official Plan, the city has adopted a no net loss policy, an urban canopy target of 40%, with monitoring happening around every 5 years. The new Mayor, Mark Sutcliffe, promised in 2022 to plant 1 million trees across Ottawa's municipality in his term, meaning 250 000 planted each year but this initiative has not begun implementation. In May 2022 the derecho storm destroyed thousands of trees, followed by another significant tree loss in the mini-ice storm of April 2023. Thus one year into Mayor Sutcliffe's term, approximately 100,000 trees have been planted. This has further prompted concerns as to whether Ottawa is gaining, or actually losing tree canopy over the last several years. The rate of tree loss in Ottawa is unknown to the public, yet visible through urban sprawl, densification, ineffective bylaws, extreme weather events, and climatic changes. Individuals and communities across Ottawa are interested in taking tree planting initiatives into their own hands with the support of local organisations like CAFES Ottawa, Forêt Capitale Forests, Forest Ontario, and local political leaders.

Ottawa has several tree programs that support Ottawa's Urban Forest Management Plan. The city's *Trees In Trust* program offers Ottawa homeowners the opportunity to request a free tree to be planted in the right of way space at the front of their property, with the promise of caring for the tree especially while it is young and becoming established. Although this program does typically result in several hundred trees planted yearly, some limitations are evident such as the challenge for renters to acquire a tree, and the failure of the program to replace felled trees. CAFES continues to advocate for evaluation and enhancement of the program, encouraging the city to take a more pro-active role in planting and maintaining the street trees in the right of way.

The majority of Ottawa's urban canopy is in the form of backyard trees. However, there currently is no back-yard tree planting or tree maintenance program, excepting the right of Hydro Ottawa and Hydro One to maintain its utility corridors including at rear yards. Part of the purpose of the Mother's Day Tree Project is to explore and demonstrate elements of a successful *backyard* tree planting program.



Partners Background

MP Yasir Naqvi and team: Local MP for Ottawa Centre, Yasir Naqvi, made a commitment to launch a local tree planting program as part of his Ottawa Centre Climate Action Plan. The riding's tree canopies are an integral part of the constituent's quality of life and an important way our community can combat and mitigate the impacts of the climate crisis. It is his hope that this pilot program could evolve into a broader long-term program that will benefit the residents of Ottawa Centre and contribute to tree planting efforts in the city.

CAFES: Community Associations for Environmental Sustainability (CAFES) has been working since 2010 to help community associations and environmental leaders in Ottawa share ideas and achieve common environmental goals. Their network promotes environmental sustainability in our city and our neighbourhoods, sharing info on concerns, community events, best practices and research. In 2023 CAFES capacity for trees and greenspace programming has also benefited from support from Canada Eco-Internships and TD Friends of the Environment Foundation.

Forêt Capitale Forest: is a local non-profit organisation whose mission aims to mitigate the effects of climate change by facilitating the planting of forests and raising awareness of the importance of trees and biodiversity. FCF links ecosystems, and steward resilient urban forests by enabling communities to become urban forest stewards through private and public landowner collaboration.

Forests Ontario: is a not-for-profit organisation focused on tree planting, forest stewardship, forest education and awareness. Born from a 2014 merger between Trees Ontario and the Ontario Forestry Association, Forests Ontario has successfully planted more than 41 million trees. Through their extensive partnerships and our diverse planting programs, they work to increase forest cover, restore forests impacted by natural occurrences and improve forest conditions.

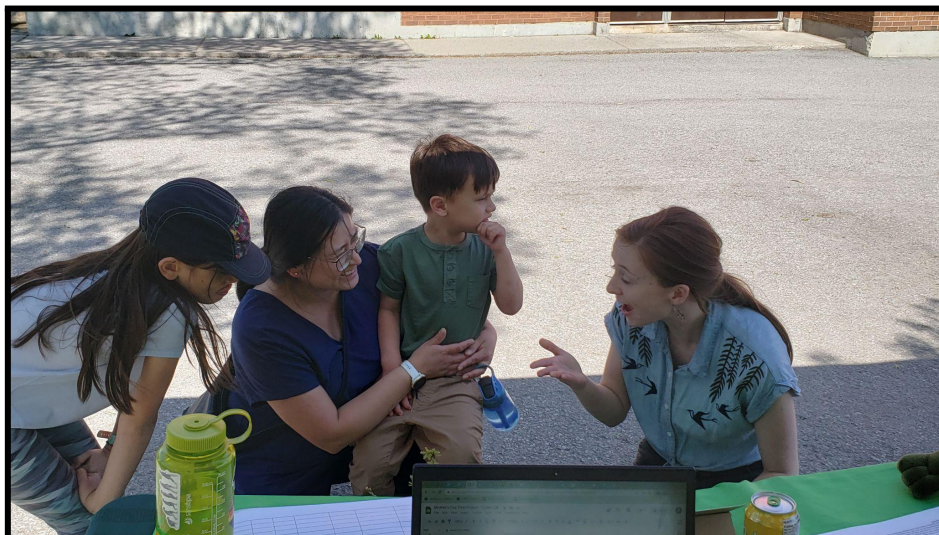


3) Project Scope

Overview:

The overarching scope of the project focused on several key elements

- I. *Creating connections.*
 - A. Partnership between organisations and groups. and
 - B. Partnership between the tree recipients and organisations.
- II. *Diversifying, and increasing Ottawa's urban and suburban tree canopy.*
 - A. A backyard urban/suburban free tree planting pilot.
 - B. A mass urban area planting in a suitable existing greenspace.
- III. *Education and awareness.*
 - A. Promoting the value and importance of urban and suburban tree canopy.
 - B. Ensuring tree recipients have a suitable space for tree saplings to thrive, as well as willingness to pledge to maintain and care for the tree.
 - C. The creation of tree planting instructions which follow current best practices - to be shared with tree recipients as well as partnering organisations and the public for future use.



Resource Planning

Item	What	Provided by	For When
Tree Saplings	Decisions as to the - Quantity of tree saplings - The species - Manner of distribution and inventory tracking	- Provided by Forest Ontario - CAFES ordered more trees.	- Mother's Day Weekend 2023 (May 13th, 14th) - Area planting 2023 (May 28th)
Promotional	- Designed by volunteer	- Funded by	- Promotion

Materials	graphic designer Magdalene Carson. - Printing, and costs. - Physical Distribution - Social Media/Online distribution	MP office of Yasir Naqvi - Designed & distributed by by CAFES	beginning one months beforehand
Tree Planting & Care Instructions	Requiring - Research - Expert consultation	- Outside expertise. - Written and distributed by CAFES.	- Ready for Mother's Day weekend tree sapling give-away. - Made permanently available for public use.
Tree stock inventory tracking distribution to recipients	E commerce - Tracking - Providing screening questionnaires to applicants prior to order confirmation.	- CAFES - Supported by other partners	- Monitored until Mother's Day Free Tree event on May 13th and 14th.

Risk Identification

- *Promotion and outreach*
 - Success problems (too many interested individuals for the number of trees available)
 - Back-up plan required for acquiring more tree saplings, or pointing individuals to other methods of acquiring free trees (i.e., Trees In Trust for front yard tree planting, or Ecology Ottawa tree giveaways).
 - Leftover trees
 - Who will be responsible for them? Ensuring they get planted. Back-up plan required for spare trees: all spare trees would be planted in the area planting event on May 28th. Any tree species that were not desirable for the area planting would be cared for by CAFES until a suitable home is found.
- *Tree Planting and Care*
 - Ensuring that the free trees given to individuals go to suitable homes.
 - 1) The tree will be planted (i.e., not left in the pot on a porch)
 - 2) The outdoor space for the tree is suitable (i.e., proper sun exposure and space)
 - 3) The recipients pledge to care for the tree (i.e., for the foreseeable future, the owner will water the plant as much as needed, and protect the sapling while vulnerable)
 - 4) The recipients are willing to let CAFES follow up with them in one year's time to check-in on the tree sapling.

- Planning after-care for area planting. Ensuring that trees planted in the area planting on May 28th are cared for – after the planting – during the summer months of 2023 and 2024.
- Drafting tree planting instructions and after-care instructions. Providing current information and resources for tree recipients to succeed and properly care for their trees.



4) Project Objectives

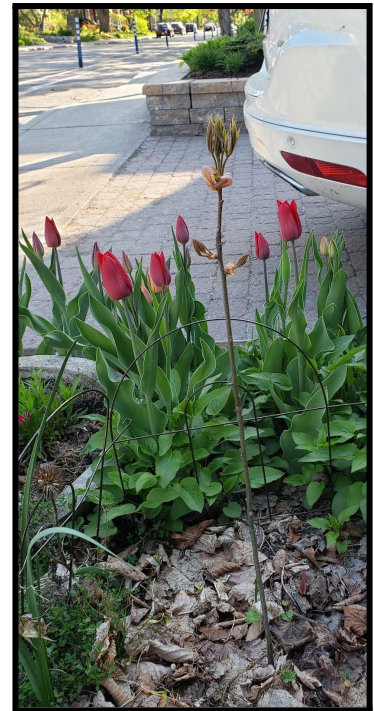
Overall

- I. To create connection amongst the partners in facilitating the expansion of tree canopy and greenspace in Ottawa's Municipality.
- II. To investigate and encourage the adoption of a backyard tree planting program in the city of Ottawa. Which as of May 2023 is not a program available in the city of Ottawa.

- III. To connect participating citizens and communities with supporting resources to undertake front, backyard, and planting initiatives.
- IV. To pilot this initiative to share findings with the city of Ottawa, as well as to share amongst partnering and other organisations for future tree planting initiatives.
- V. To expand, diversify, and densify Ottawa's urban and suburban tree canopy

5) Event Achievements

- I. Planting trees: in backyards, front yards, and mass area planting.
 - A. The dissemination of 70 trees for backyard/frontyard tree planting
 - B. The area planting of 40 trees along Riverside Dr. between the Rideau River and Billings Bridge
 - C. 12 different species of trees were planted across Ottawa, including, Sugar Maple, Red Maple, Red Oak, Bur Oak, Yellow Birch, Kentucky Coffee, Allegheny Serviceberry, Northern Hackberry, Bitternut Hickory, Shagbark Hickory, Chokecherry, and Native Plum
- II. Community connection; Connections made between project parties, and Ottawa Communities.
 - A. Reaffirmed connection between CAFES and Foret Capitale Forest
 - B. New connection between CAFES and Forest Ontario
 - C. City support and connection by MP Yasir Naqvi and team
 - D. Connection between Foret Capitale Forest and Forest Ontario
- III. Highlighting the potential for a backyard tree planting program in Ottawa.



6) Assessment of Objectives

- I. To create connection amongst the partners in facilitating the expansion of tree canopy and greenspace in Ottawa's Municipality.
 - Connection and collaboration was made between all parties of the project.
- II. To investigate and encourage the adoption of a backyard tree planting program in the city of Ottawa. As of May 2023 is not a program available in the city of Ottawa.
 - 70 Trees were planted in back or front yards in Ottawa.
- III. To connect participating citizens and communities with supporting resources to undertake front, backyard, and planting initiatives.
 - CAFES researched and provided tree planting instructions (Appendix C) for tree sapling recipients, to encourage best practices in planting and maintaining a tree sapling in an urban/suburban setting.

- IV. To pilot this initiative to share findings with the city of Ottawa, as well as to share amongst partnering and other organisations for future tree planting initiatives.
 - The pilot was successful through planning, operation, and completion. Challenges were overcome, and the demand and interest in the tree canopy of Ottawa was apparent. Through this report, the findings will be shared with all project partners, the community, and the city for future use.
- V. To expand, diversify, and densify Ottawa's urban and suburban tree canopy
 - The project resulted in 110 trees planted, and 12 different species of trees.



7) Lessons Learned

- I. **Promotional Materials:** 3000 Promotional cards were ordered - ~2000 were distributed before tree stock became depleted. The pilot drew more interest than anticipated so there were ~ 700 of the cards not distributed.
- II. **Communicating the intention of the project to recipients:**
 - 70 saplings were given away in total.
 - 35 recipients filled out the survey in detail, in advance either by email or google forms.
 - Of those 35 that gave documented detailed information, 14 participants detailed the intentions of planting trees in their backyard; 9 detailed intentions of planting in the front yard (23 Total). 6 of these 23 participants detailed what area of urban/suburban Ottawa they were living/intending to plant the tree in. The rest did not detail, therefore there is the possibility that the saplings were not planted in urban or suburban Ottawa.

6 participants of the 35 did not detail whether the tree was being planted in the front or backyard but did detail a photo of the planting location.

Another 6 of the 35 participants detailed their intentions of bringing the saplings either a) outside of Ottawa's municipality or b) planting the sapling in rural Ottawa.

The 35 recipients who did not answer the 3 question assessments in advance via google forms or email were not recorded in these capacities. This considered, the trees & greenspace coordinator recounts verbal assessments (i.e. phone calls and in-person pickups) where the individual disclosed intentions of planting the saplings outside the urban/suburban boundary, or outside of Ottawa all together. It seems that this was not clear to some customers resulting in time spent in communications finding homes that met this criteria and communicating with individuals who did not.

III. **3 Question Assessment Recommendations:** Sending out the survey through Google forms presented some challenges.

- The questionnaire was typically sent out individually as the orders came in. Therefore the questionnaire usually had to be sent individually, not in mass.
- The questionnaire sent using google forms would often end up in the recipient's *spam* folders. Before this was known, multiple email reminders were sent through/using google forms without any response, which became time intensive through multiple attempts followed by calling individuals. When individuals continued without response, an email was sent to individuals directly (using an email account, not through using google forms) a '*last call to confirm your tree order*'. Majority of these emails would be met with response, and individuals noted that the previous emails sent through/using google forms were sent to their spam folders.
- There were also 17 individuals who 1) were not comfortable submitting information via google forms 2) Could not figure out or make the google form submit/work 3) Preferred to send a photo of their planting space so they answered the form by email anyways.
- Of the 70 tree sapling recipients, only 15 responded to the 3 question assessment through google forms. All others answered directly through email, by phone, or in person. On average, each recipient required 2-3 attempts at contacting in order to reach them.

IV. **Preventing multiple tree orders:** It was not clear to recipients that the tree giveaway policy was one tree per household (not per child or per mother). The e-commerce website was set up so that individuals could not order more than one of the same species of tree, but the e-commerce website could not stop individuals from ordering one of different species of tree, resulting in 16 multiple tree orders ranging from 2 trees to 7 trees in an order.

- Contacting multiple-tree-order recipients became time-intensive. This also meant (despite best efforts) that trees were being liberated very close to the tree-giveaway event due to slow response or last minute multiple-tree orders. This exacerbated tree stock challenges because there were suitable homes/recipients missing out on trees as the e-commerce would be out of stock temporarily; then trees would be liberated from multiple-tree orders but there was no way to know/communicate this to suitable recipients who visited the site while out of stock (unless they contacted us).
- V. **Order reminders for recipients:** 13 recipients did not come to pick up their sapling - which was assumed to likely be because they had forgotten.

8) Future Considerations

- I. **A base fee:** \$5 or \$10 per tree payable by credit card. If people have to pay they tend to forget the engagement less. If people have to pay by credit card, the middle school students would need to talk to a parent about this so it is a way to involve an adult.
- II. **Communication of intention:** On the website or promotional cards the specific goal of the project towards backyard tree planting could be stated more often if it is deemed crucial to the project; individuals who do not meet this more specific criteria could be pointed to other tree-giveaways (Ecology Ottawa) or Trees in Trust.
- III. **3 Question Assessment:**
 - A. The 3 Question Assessment could be included when the customer orders their tree - or noted on e-commerce/promo cards that there will be a 3 question assessment in order to confirm your order. Perhaps an email could be listed where customers could send their answers to the 3 Question Assessment listed on the e-commerce site - thereby saving time.

NOTE: E-commerce sends a confirmation email when the order has been changed from processing to completed (this was tracked manually on the e-commerce site to keep track of individuals who had responded to the 3 questionnaires). The communications organiser was sending order confirmation emails - but this may not be necessary as the website notifies the customer of order completion anyways (i.e., potential to save time).
 - B. Include a question in the assessment to ask how the individual heard about the tree giveaway, and whether the tree will be planted in a front or backyard.
- IV. **Order reminders for recipients:** Due to the time consumption of communicating with recipients regarding the 3 question assessment and multiple tree orders, there was no time to send out order reminders. However this is recommended.

- V. **Implementing a Waitlist:** It would be helpful to have a waitlist prepared throughout the tree-giveaway operations- perhaps interested customers could sign up online if there is a tree they want but is out of stock - or if they just want one in general. A few individuals did contact the coordinators if they were hoping for a specific tree that was out of stock, however there must have been individuals who did not reach out.
Note: If multiple-tree orders can be prevented then a waitlist may not be as essential, but it would still be helpful in cases where trees are forgotten/not picked up (specifically for species that FCF & NCC do not want to include in the area planting) or in the rare case where a tree is returned.
- VI. **Individuals that cannot pick up their trees on the proposed pick-up dates:** This came up for 5 recipients. Having one alternative date could be useful in preventing extra communication in planning different alternative dates.
Note: Individuals who cannot physically get to the tree-pick up or who do not have a car - could accommodation plans be made? A tree delivery date perhaps in order to ensure program inclusiveness? Or an alternate date/location for pick-up?
- VII. **Tree Purchasing:** It would be good to consider purchasing native species that will do well in city settings, particularly species that will be resilient in increasing climate change impacts (pollution, wind resistance, heat tolerance, etc.) Furthermore, information regarding a tree's sensitivities or resilience could be included on the website to help individuals pick the right species for the space they have.

Many thanks to the partners, volunteers, and capacity supporters! This wouldn't have been possible without the dedicated collaboration by all involved.



**TD Friends of the
Environment Foundation**