

**TO: MAYOR & EACH
COUNCILLOR
FROM: CITY CLERK'S OFFICE**

Schedule 3 to the Minutes of the Planning Committee meeting of Richmond City Council held on Wednesday, April 7, 2021.

Dear Planning Committee:

Re: Tree Bylaw Amendments, April 7, 2021.

While we support the tree bylaw amendments in the staff report, we believe they do not go far enough. In particular, there should be much higher application fees and penalties for the removal of very large healthy trees and staff should have greater discretion to specify all replacement tree characteristics and location depending upon the individual site.

Very Large Healthy Trees

The bylaw requires a permit to remove trees 20cm caliper or larger. There should be additional provisions for the removal of very large healthy trees 30cm caliper or larger which average 75' in height and provide our community tree canopy. Removing such a tree provides only one benefit – a larger footprint for a structure. What is lost is shade to cope with global warming, oxygen production, carbon storage, bird and animal habitat, and natural beauty that makes Richmond a better place to live. The proposed bylaw changes ensure that there is at least one replacement 6 cm tree. Unfortunately, that tree will provide no meaningful shade and carbon storage and no bird will build a nest in it. It takes on average more than 35 years for the new tree to grow to the size of the removed 30cm tree. In the meantime, it is the community which suffers the loss, not just the property owner more interested in a larger house.

Application Fees and Penalties for Removal of Very Large Healthy Trees

The staff report gives excellent examples of the installation of new infrastructure near a tree while protecting it. Clearly staff will spend a disproportionately large amount of time on an application to remove a very large healthy tree to seek alternatives. A \$75 application fee does not cover the time involved nor the far larger cost to the community of losing the tree.

We suggest a \$5,000 application fee of which \$4,000 will be refunded if the application is refused. The retained \$1,000 covers the staff time involved. The additional \$4,000 covers the loss of benefits from the removed tree over 35 years and should be used to help offset the cost of an additional City arborist to review tree removal applications.

The current fine for removing a tree without a permit is \$1,000 which makes it easier and cheaper to simply remove a very large tree. The fine should be increased to \$10,000 in the case of removal or damage affecting the health of a tree 30cm or larger and \$5,000 in the case of unwarranted damage affecting the benefits provided by such a tree.

Greater Discretion for Staff

As the staff report points out, replacement trees can be the required size, but if they are an inappropriate species, not properly planted or not cared for, the survival rate and benefit to the community is poor. In many cases, the survival rate is much better on public property such as parks, schools and boulevards. It is not sufficient that the applicant can request that a tree be planted on public property. City staff should have much wider discretion to specify the species of tree, how it is planted and where, including on public property. Staff should also be able to direct that City staff plant the tree with the cost borne by the applicant.

John Roston, Michelle Li and Laura Gillanders

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