

Surrey Tree Canopy in Decline

Urban Systems report shows 5% depletion in the last 12 years

A recent report authored by Urban Systems shows that Surrey has seen more than a 5% drop in its tree canopy over the past 12 years. The report, which looks at the past, present and future state of Surrey's tree canopy, reveals that the city's tree canopy was at 33% in 2001, 30% in 2009, and by 2013 had dropped to 27.7%. If current practices stay the same, the report predicts that Surrey's tree canopy will drop to as low as 21% over the next 50 years.

Urban Systems Community Planner and Landscape Architect Catherine Berris, who led the project, explains that trees have a major impact on communities and that their loss is significant. "As urbanization increases, we're losing our urban forests," she says. "This affects the environment, the economy and also has social and health implications."

She notes that in Surrey in particular, there is currently a large amount of development on greenfield sites and that as a fast-growing

community with increasing density, it is particularly at risk of losing trees. "One could argue that as density increases, preserving trees and nature is even more important since residents live in smaller spaces and often don't have back yards. We must be very deliberate and have tree canopy as a priority in development planning processes."

The Importance of Trees

The tree canopy project was of particular interest to Catherine because she feels it's consistent with Urban's values. "I think trees are part of a vibrant community. What I like about this project is that it looks at the issue from a high level down to a very detailed level. It's a complex project and if the city acts on our recommendations, this could have major benefits for the community."

There are multiple ways in which trees contribute to vibrant communities. For example:

Environmental Benefits of Trees:

- Remove carbon dioxide and other gasses from the air
- Purify the air
- Interception of urban runoff/rainwater
- Wildlife habitat for birds, insects and small mammals
- Climate change mitigation (trees help manage temperature by providing shade, which reduces the heat that's increased due to urban paving).

Social & Health Benefits of Trees:

- Psychological benefits: trees screen ugly views and make urban areas more tolerable, comfortable, interesting and attractive
- Reduce exposure to UV rays
- Reduce traffic noise
- Improve air quality
- Heritage value of old trees

Economic Benefits of Trees

- Commercial areas with trees attract more people
- Shade can reduce heating and cooling cost, less need for AC in summer and help with wind protection in the winter.
- Natural means of managing stormwater, reduced need for hard infrastructure costs like piping for stormwater, shade for paving areas, increased property values – more trees = higher in value.

What now?

The City of Surrey has committed to updating this report every five years as part of City Council's sustainability strategy. Stay tuned for more information as it becomes available.

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Urban Systems has partnered with Cindy Hughes, a freelance writer, to produce stories related to building vibrant communities. Those interviewed for these stories are making a contribution to their communities through various channels and in many cases will not be representatives of Urban Systems itself. If you have comments or story ideas please write to cindysmac@gmail.com

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