

TO: MAYOR & COUNCILLORS
FROM: GENERAL MANAGER PARKS, RECREATION AND CULTURE
SUBJECT: **RESPONSE TO DELEGATION: NIKKEI PLACE FOUNDATION - PLANTING OF CHERRY BLOSSOM AND JAPANESE MAPLE TREES PROPOSAL**
PURPOSE: To respond to the Nikkei Place Foundation's delegation regarding the planting of Cherry Blossom and Japanese Maple Trees along the Highland Park Line Corridor.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the report titled "Response to Delegation: Nikkei Place Foundation - Planting of Cherry Blossom and Japanese Maple Trees Proposal" dated November 4, 2024 be received for information.

1.0 POLICY SECTION

This report aligns with the Tree Management Policy for Public Lands and the Burnaby Tree Bylaw (1996), Environmentally Sensitive Areas Strategy (1992), and Burnaby Environmental Sustainability Strategy (2016). This report also supports the following Council-adopted policies, plans and strategies: Corporate Strategic Plan (2017), Social Sustainability Strategy (2016), and Healthy Community Policy (1991).

2.0 BACKGROUND

On March 25, 2024, a delegation from the Nikkei Place Foundation presented a proposal at a City Council meeting for a tree planting project along the Highland Park Line that included 94 trees: 66 cherry blossoms and 28 Japanese maples. Many of these trees were suggested to be planted along the Highland Park Line corridor. Six trees were proposed to be planted along the property line on the lawn between the City's Alan Emmott Centre and the Nikkei Place Foundation. Council referred the item to staff for follow-up.

3.0 GENERAL INFORMATION

3.1 Urban Forestry Growth Strategy and Policy Compliance

The primary goal of the Urban Forestry Growth Strategy and the Tree Bylaw is to enhance and protect the City's urban forest. To ensure these objectives are met, in accordance with the City of Burnaby's Tree Management Policy for Public Lands, tree planting on public land is governed through the Parks, Recreation and Culture Department.

The policy encourages planting in a manner that considers the neighborhood characteristics, the existing trees, and future maintenance costs, using only desirable, long-lived tree species free from undesirable characteristics. It also ensures that tree planting initiatives align with the Urban Forestry Growth Strategy and adhere to guidelines to prevent issues such as damage to utilities, obstruction of traffic vision, and interference with street lighting, thereby contributing to the sustainable expansion of the urban canopy.

3.2 Objectives of the Nikkei Place Foundation’s Proposal

In line with these objectives, the Nikkei Place Foundation's tree planting proposal aims to expand the urban canopy. This initiative seeks to bolster ecological resilience, support our strategic urban forestry goals, and deliver significant environmental, social, and cultural benefits.

3.3 Challenges in the Highland Park Line Corridor

The Nikkei Place Foundation initially proposed planting 94 trees consisting of cherry blossom and Japanese maple trees along the Highland Park Line. To evaluate the feasibility of this plan, the Foundation engaged with BC Hydro, which identified conflicts due to overhead power lines and nearby utility placements.

The Foundation then approached Fortis, which revealed significant utility conflicts, particularly with critical underground gas pipes along the trail. Fortis required a minimum clearance of 0.6 metres from the edge of a fully mature tree's root ball to prevent interference with these essential gas pipes, which supply a substantial portion of south Burnaby. Given that the trees planned for planting could have a root spread of up to 10 metres based on the last known tree variety, Fortis communicated to the Foundation that no trees could be planted near their gas pipes. These discussions revealed the complex challenges of integrating large tree species within the existing infrastructure.

Efforts to relocate the planting site to the southern portion of the boulevard along Beresford Street involved direct negotiations with both utility companies and the City. However, similar constraints, such as proximity to water lines and limited City-owned land for planting, continued to complicate these plans. Despite thorough and direct discussions with BC Hydro and Fortis, and a strong commitment to the tree planting proposal, the conclusion was reached that planting trees in the initially proposed and alternative locations was unfeasible without significant modifications to the existing infrastructure. Therefore, it is recommended that no planting take place along the Highland Park Line due to these substantial challenges.

3.4 Feasibility of Southern Property Line Planting

Staff have reviewed the proposed planting of cherry blossom trees along the southern portion of the property and concluded that it cannot proceed. This decision follows consultations with staff in Engineering, revealing that the proximity of storm and sanitary sewer main pipes within the statutory right-of-way (SROW) - at a distance of just 5 metres - presents significant challenges.

The City holds a covenant on the title of the property, granting rights for the installation, operation, maintenance, repair, and replacement of sanitary and storm sewers within this SROW. According to the terms of the covenant, the property owner is not permitted to excavate or install any structures, including trees, either over or under the right-of-way, which significantly impacts the feasibility of the proposed tree planting.

Key concerns include the potential for root intrusion into the sewer pipes and accessibility issues for future pipe maintenance. Given the shallow depth of the pipes (approximately 1.5 metres underground) and their proximity to the proposed planting site, the required excavation for tree root balls would dangerously position the roots near the sewer infrastructure. Additionally, a minimum clearance of two metres from the outer edge of the utility pipes to any tree planting is required, and a root barrier would be mandatory if the utility lies within the root zone. The extensive root spread of cherry blossom trees, estimated to reach a diameter up to 10 metres, exacerbates the risk, rendering the planting location unsuitable.

3.5 Tree Planting Considerations at Burnaby South Memorial Park

PRC staff have examined the feasibility of tree planting in Burnaby South Memorial Park. It is not advisable to plant trees directly adjacent to the tennis courts due to safety and maintenance concerns. The remainder of the area to the west will require further selective planting in direct relation to future Parks Plans based on the park's usage.

3.6 Assessment of Tree Planting along the Property Line between Alan Emmott Centre and Nikkei Place Foundation

PRC staff have assessed the lawn area along the property line between the Nikkei Place Foundation and the Alan Emmott Centre, initially finding it suitable for planting. However, further investigation into property lines and existing constraints has revealed that there is only enough space to plant one or two trees due to the limited width of the property and its proximity to the Hydro right-of-way. Additionally, conflicts with existing tree structures and underground infrastructure, such as sewer and storm lines, a ductile iron watermain, and Hydro lines, further restrict planting options.

3.7 Tree Species Selection

When selecting tree species for urban planting, assessing the longevity and environmental adaptation of the species selected are key factors. Given the ecological characteristics of the Coastal Western Hemlock (CWH) biogeoclimatic zone in BC, choosing native tree species for this zone offers significant advantages over cherry blossom and Japanese maple trees. Native trees tend to be well-adapted to local climates, support local biodiversity, and are robust, contributing to sustainable urban forestry. Their faster maturity and longer lifespans help ensure that urban green spaces thrive and deliver ecological benefits more rapidly.

Cherry blossom trees are known for their beautiful blossoms but have a relatively short lifespan, typically ranging from 30 to 40 years. Similarly, Japanese maple trees, while capable of living beyond 100 years in suitable conditions, require significant time to mature, often taking several years to reach their full size and aesthetic potential. This slow maturation can delay their contributions to urban landscapes.

Although culturally significant alternatives such as *Cercidiphyllum japonicum* (Katsura Tree), *Styrax japonica* (Snowdrop Tree), and *Prunus subhirtella* 'Autumnalis' (Autumnalis Cherry) are preferred planting species that align well with Japanese heritage, they present similar practical challenges, including potential conflicts with existing infrastructure. Given these constraints, the feasibility of tree planting in the proposed areas remains limited. Native species adapted to the CWH zone may provide more suitable options if planting proceeds in other locations, but only if all site requirements are met without impacting existing infrastructure.

4.0 COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Staff will continue to collaborate with the Nikkei Place Foundation to provide best practice information and guidance on tree management, ensuring the longevity and health of the trees. This collaboration will include advice on tree retention, considering both species and genus, and maintenance to assist with existing and future tree planning decisions on public lands.

5.0 FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

The proposed planting and maintenance costs for the adjusted tree planting on Nikkei Place Foundation’s property will be managed by the Nikkei Place Foundation. As no planting will take place on City land, there will be no financial implications for the City.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Morrison-Clark, General Manager Parks, Recreation and Culture

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – Nikkei Place Foundation Original Proposed Planting Map

Attachment 2 – City’s Statutory Right-of-Way (SROW) Map

REPORT CONTRIBUTORS

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