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The Regional Municipality of Durham Report

To: Community Growth & Economic Development Committee
From: Commissioner, Community Growth & Economic Development
Report: #2025-CG-9
Date: September 2, 2025

Subject:

Letter of Support for funding application to FCM Growing Canada's Community Canopies (GCCC) grant program

Recommendation:

That the Community Growth & Economic Development Committee recommends to Regional Council:

That Durham Region provides a letter of support for Local Enhancement and Appreciation of Forests' (LEAF) funding application to the Federation of Canadian Municipalities' Growing Canada's Community Canopies grant program.

Report:

1. Purpose

- 1.1 Durham Region has partnered with local area municipalities and non-profit organization Local Enhancement and Appreciation of Forests (LEAF) to deliver community-based tree planting programs since 2020. LEAF is applying for funding through the Federation of Canadian Municipalities' (FCM) Growing Canada's Community Canopies (GCCC) grant program to expand its partnership with the Region and local area municipalities to support tree planting on community housing properties. LEAF requires a letter of support endorsed by Regional Council as part of a complete application to the FCM GCCC program.

2. Background

- 2.1 Durham Region began its partnership with LEAF in 2020, launching a subsidized tree planting initiative in partnership with local area municipalities that aims to enhance climate resilience, biodiversity, and community engagement. The collaboration has been focused on the [Backyard Tree Planting Program](#), which offers residents expert advice on tree selection and planting locations, as well as a full planting service through a cost-sharing model that reduces costs to participating homeowners.
- 2.2 From 2020 and 2024, the partnership resulted in the planting of 5,761 native trees and shrubs across the Region. These efforts were aligned with Durham's climate adaptation priorities and supported by local municipalities across the Region. The proposed expansion of the LEAF partnership to support tree planting on community housing properties builds on this foundation by shifting focus to community housing sites.

3. Program Overview

- 3.1 LEAF has submitted a grant application to FCM under the GCCC program for a new initiative titled Growing Urban Tree Canopies on Community Housing Properties in Durham Region. This three-year project, scheduled to begin late in 2025 and continue through 2028, will result in the planting of 80 native trees and 150 native shrubs across 15 social housing sites in the Region.
- 3.2 This initiative is designed to advance equity by focusing planting in priority neighbourhoods identified by the Durham Region Health Department. These neighbourhoods are typically lower income, and also have lower tree canopy cover than average, which exacerbates the urban heat island effect. This combination of socio-economic, and demographic factors with the urban heat island means that residents in these areas often experience disproportionate health impacts from extreme weather events like heat waves. The proposed project aligns with Durham Region's Strategic Plan and Community Climate Adaptation Plan.
- 3.3 Led by LEAF, the project is in collaboration with Durham Region serving as the municipal lead. Key partners include the Durham Region Non-Profit Housing Corporation (DRNPHC), Durham Region Local Housing Corporation (DRLHC), the City of Oshawa, and the Town of Whitby. The total project cost is \$135,000, with \$67,500 requested from FCM and a matching contribution from Durham Region funded through the approved 2025 operating budget.

3.4 LEAF will oversee all aspects of community engagement, planting, and stewardship. This includes outreach to tenants and housing staff, development of site-specific planting plans by certified arborists, and the use of high-quality native species to enhance biodiversity and climate resilience. A key feature of the program is the formation of Tree Care Teams composed of tenants and housing staff at each site. These teams will receive hands-on training, stewardship resources, and ongoing support to ensure the long-term health and survival of the trees. The project also includes monitoring and maintenance protocols, including tree health assessments, corrective pruning, and replanting strategies.

4. Relationship to Strategic Plan

4.1 This report aligns with the following Strategic Directions and Pathways in Durham Region's 2025-2035 Strategic Plan:

a. Connected and Vibrant Communities

- C7. Create accessible, lively, and culturally welcoming public spaces, including opportunities to access nature.

b. Environmental Sustainability and Climate Action

- E2. Collaborate with partners on the low-carbon transition to reduce community greenhouse gas emissions across Durham Region.
- E5. Respect the natural environment, including greenspaces, waterways, and agricultural lands.

c. Healthy People, Caring Communities

- H3. Integrate and co-ordinate service delivery for positive life outcomes, including investments in poverty prevention, housing solutions, and homelessness supports.

5. Conclusion

5.1 LEAF's proposed *Growing Urban Tree Canopies on Community Housing Properties* initiative represents a collaborative, equity-focused project that will enhance climate resilience, biodiversity, and community well-being in Durham Region. A resolution letter of support from Regional Council is a requirement of the FCM GCCC program and affirms the Region's commitment to environmental sustainability and inclusive community development.

Respectfully submitted,

Original signed by

Sandra Austin
Commissioner of Community Growth and
Economic Development

Recommended for Presentation to Committee

Original signed by

Elaine C. Baxter-Trahair
Chief Administrative Officer