

Urban Forest or Community Woods? How Residents See Trees in Ottawa's Champlain Park Neighbourhood

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Background

In his research on the urban forest in Ottawa's Champlain Park, Alex Copp (2016) argued that the management of forests is best approached from a neighbourhood perspective. However, his research lacked a survey of neighbourhood residents. The purpose of this research was to fill this gap and explore how residents of Champlain Park relate to their neighbourhood trees. A random sample of homes was conducted, and interviews collected data from 10 homes with an average 19 years living in the area.

How do Residents Feel about their Neighbourhood Trees and the Urban Forest?

Residents surveyed in Champlain Park agreed unanimously that trees are important to them personally. Half of the residents surveyed believed that their relationship to the trees was an emotional one. Several respondents stated they simply enjoyed the trees present. Others answered that the relationship was mixed: their relationship to the trees was both personal and one of simple pleasure. When asked how important the urban forest was to the Champlain Park neighbourhood, residents listed the benefits they appreciated most including: casting shade, being aesthetically pleasing, providing environmental benefits, adding to the character of the neighbourhood, and offsetting heating and cooling costs. These results reflected a more personal engagement and experience with the trees.

Are Residents Concerned about the Urban Forest?

The majority of residents questioned said that they have concerns about the urban forest in their neighbourhood. Of greatest concern were encroachment, the loss of trees due to infill and development. Residents believe that the urban forest in Champlain Park is under threat, having lost many trees to pests (particularly Emerald Ash Borer) and urban in-filling. When asked whether they believed the urban forest was stable, deteriorating or improving, half of respondents believe that the urban forest in Champlain Park is deteriorating.

Who Should Be Responsible?

All but one surveyed participant believed the City should protect trees from being cut down in Champlain Park. There was a belief that the issue is not taken seriously and that follow-through on protecting the trees is lacking. There was no consensus on who should be responsible for caring for the trees. Some residents believed it should be the City. Others thought the community associations should. Some respondents argued that a joint effort would be most effective. Although the majority of respondents are not currently part of a community group that is actively protecting neighbourhood trees, most said that they would take part in a community decision group.

Results

Additional research will be conducted during the fall to further examine how residents view the trees in the Champlain Park neighbourhood. There is clearly a vested interest by the neighbourhood residents to protect the trees and maintain the character of the neighbourhood. Residents worry that developers do not care for the trees and that the City is not protecting trees from damage during development. However, the issues of responsibility for caring for the trees and ownership of the trees do not have straightforward solutions.