
The Corporation of the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake Information Report to Council

SUBJECT: Tree Canopy Coverage and Planting Initiatives
DATE: 2026-04-21
REPORT #: OPS-26-009
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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In 2025, the Niagara Region released its *Tree and Forest Canopy Summary Report*, identifying Niagara-on-the-Lake as having the lowest overall canopy cover in the Region at 18.0%, compared to the Regional average of 25.0%. Notable variation exists within the Town's urban areas, with Queenston recording the highest canopy cover at 46.0%, ranking first in both the Town and the Region's urban areas, while Glendale has the lowest urban canopy at 13.0%.

Following the report's release, Town Council and Staff sought clarification regarding data sources and methodology, particularly the inclusion of orchards and vineyards, which represent a significant portion of Niagara-on-the-Lake's landscape, and a comparison of urban versus rural canopy coverage. The Region confirmed that orchards and fruit trees were included, accounting for 4.2% of the Town's total canopy cover, with the remaining 13.8% classified as general canopy. Vineyards were excluded, as the study only measured trees over one metre in height with a crown width exceeding one metre.

The Region also provided an urban and rural breakdown. Niagara-on-the-Lake's average urban canopy cover is 24.8%, exceeding the Regional urban average of 23.8%, while rural canopy cover in Niagara-on-the-Lake is 17.3% and below the Regional average. These findings indicate that while Niagara-on-the-Lake's overall canopy cover appears low when urban and rural areas are combined, the Town's urban canopy performs well relative to other municipalities.

Further analysis by Staff using the 2024 Annual Crop Inventory (Open Government Portal) shows that 64.9% of Niagara-on-the-Lake's land base is agricultural (including orchards and vineyards), 13.2% consists of natural assets, 19.9% is urban area, and 2.0% is barren land. Given the dominance of agriculture, particularly vineyards that were not captured in the Regional analysis, the Town's overall canopy percentage in the report does not fully reflect its landscape context. While disparities remain among urban areas, Glendale's ongoing development presents opportunities to improve canopy equity through future planting and greening initiatives.

Tree Planting and Joint Procurement

In late 2025, the Niagara Region announced a joint procurement initiative for tree planting and maintenance services. The Town confirmed participation for 2027 and 2028, with an optional two-year extension to 2030. The Region released its Request for Proposal in February 2026, and Town Staff participated on the evaluation committee to select qualified contractors.

Using the approved tree planting budget and Tree Fund, the Town plans to plant approximately 150 trees, 75 in 2027 and 75 in 2028, at an estimated cost of \$800 per tree. This cost includes tree supply, installation, and a three-year maintenance and warranty period, encompassing watering, mulching, weeding, and the replacement of trees that do not survive within the warranty period. This approach is more cost-effective than the current model of approximately \$1,000 per tree with Staff installation and no ongoing maintenance. The three-year maintenance period is critical to tree survival and will increase canopy growth while reducing the likelihood of tree mortality. Use of contractors will also allow Town Staff to focus on other priorities during these years.

NEXT STEP / CONCLUSION

Town Staff are developing a clear public narrative that reflects Niagara-on-the-Lake's unique identity is rooted in its agricultural landscape, with 65% of the Town's land dedicated to vineyards, orchards, and farms. With much of the land dedicated to farming, the Town is focusing on thoughtful, well-placed tree planting to enhance canopy cover while celebrating the agricultural landscape.

Staff will continue to support the joint procurement process and use Regional canopy data alongside an upcoming Town tree inventory, scheduled to begin Spring 2026, to guide planting priorities for 2027 and 2028. The tree inventory will provide detailed, individual tree-level information on town-owned and managed trees and will complement the Natural Asset Inventory and Assessment. Together, these datasets will help establish canopy targets, identify gaps, prioritize equitable planting locations, and inform species selection for diversity and climate resilience. The information collected will support the development of the Town's first Urban Forestry Management Plan, which is being undertaken in 2026.

Tree planting initiatives will continue in 2026 with support from the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority's Trees for All program, funded through the federal 2 Billion Trees program. Town Staff are coordinating with the Conservation Authority to facilitate the planting of approximately 600 trees on Town-owned property.

Through the joint procurement process, Staff will continue to plan planting and maintenance at an estimated cost of \$800 per park or street tree and will assess future budget needs beyond 2028 as planting priorities become more defined. Tree planting locations will be prioritized by sites ranked from lowest to highest canopy cover, as well as identified sites requiring tree removal and replacement to prevent net canopy loss.

Finally, Staff will continue to pursue funding and partnership opportunities aligned with the Town's environmental priorities. Through these combined efforts, Niagara-on-the-Lake is well-positioned to enhance both urban and rural canopy cover and advance sustainability, environmental, and climate resilience objectives.

ATTACHMENTS

- Appendix I – Niagara Region Tree and Forest Canopy Summary Report (2024)
- Appendix II – Niagara-on-the-Lake Land Usage Map