



City of Delta
COUNCIL REPORT
Regular Meeting

To: **Council**

From: **Corporate Services Department**

Date: **February 23, 2026**

Sunshine Hills Neighbourhood Tree Protection Pilot Program Update

The following report has been reviewed and endorsed by the City Manager's Office.

▪ **RECOMMENDATION:**

THAT staff proceed to Phase Two of community engagement on the proposed Neighbourhood Tree Protection Pilot Program for Sunshine Hills as outlined in this report.

▪ **PURPOSE:**

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Sunshine Hills Neighbourhood Tree Protection Pilot Program, including providing the results of the engagement to date, outlining staff recommendations for the Program, and suggesting next steps to complete this work.

▪ **BACKGROUND:**

Sunshine Hills is a well-established neighbourhood in North Delta known for its mature tree canopy and distinct character. On October 6, 2025, in response to community concerns about tree loss, Council directed staff to engage the Sunshine Hills community to explore the development of a Neighbourhood Tree Protection Pilot Program that may include:

- A Heritage Tree designation for landmark trees of significant size, age, or community value;
- Enhanced tree replacement requirements or higher cash-in-lieu contributions.
- A neighbourhood opt-in mechanism for stronger protection;
- Incentives and education for homeowners to retain mature trees during redevelopment; and
- Enhanced reporting on heritage tree impacts and replacement requirements.

Based on this direction, staff reviewed existing tree protection rules, relevant legislation, available municipal tools, and the work of other cities to understand available options. Some of the key considerations from this review that informed the engagement program include:

- The provincial *Community Charter* limits the City's authority to prevent removal of trees on private property if the preservation limits development that is otherwise allowed under existing zoning;
- The *Delta Tree Protection and Regulation Bylaw No. 7969, 2021* ("tree protection bylaw") provides the framework to regulate tree removal throughout the City;
- The Delta Heritage Register protects trees on identified heritage properties. As there are no heritage properties currently registered in the Sunshine Hills neighbourhood, this tool was not explored in depth;
- Covenants to protect trees on private property are a voluntary option for residents but can be rigid and owners must carefully understand and consider all legal aspects of this option.

▪ **DISCUSSION:**

Community Engagement

To involve the Sunshine Hills neighbourhood in the creation of the tree protection pilot program, Delta initiated an engagement process early this year. Key activities included:

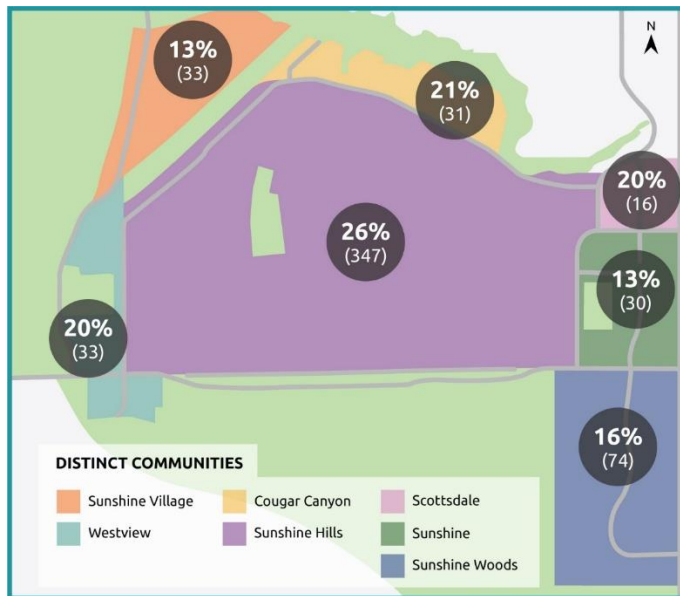
- A survey of the area property owners to gauge interest in and gather input into a neighbourhood-specific pilot program. The survey ran between January 19 and February 15, 2026. Invitations were sent to 2,693 properties and generated 564 responses.
- An online information session held on February 4, 2026, to provide residents with an opportunity to learn more and ask questions. This was attended by 36 residents.
- Other interested residents outside of the notification area were invited to share comments through the Let's Talk Delta website and 23 comment forms were submitted.
- Staff raised awareness of the survey and engagement process through postcard mailouts to property owners, installation of lawn signs by staff throughout the neighbourhood as well as through social media and e-blasts.
- A fact sheet with background details, potential tools for tree protection, and next steps was distributed to residents along with the survey and to non-residents on Let's Talk Delta, and is provided as Attachment D.

A complete report on the activities conducted and the results is available in Attachment A.

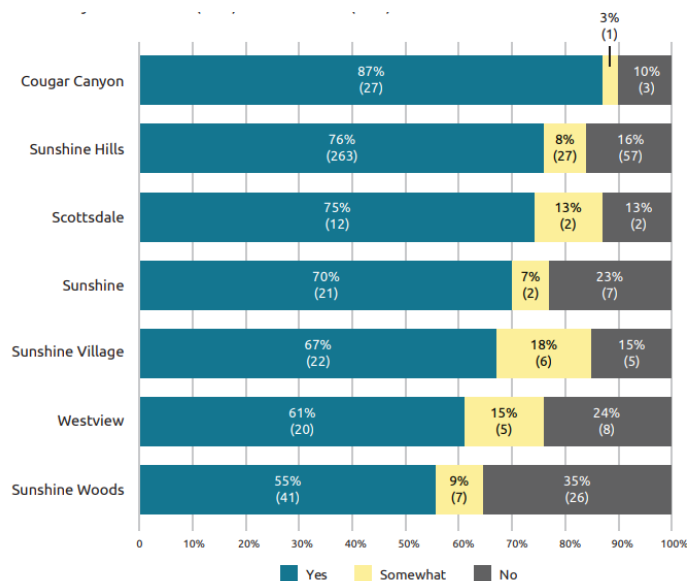
Survey Participation

Defining the Sunshine Hills area to include in the engagement program was an important part of the process. The 2011 North Delta Area Plan with distinct neighbourhood boundaries informed the targeted engagement area, which included a total of seven neighbourhoods with similar tree characteristics (Sunshine, Sunshine Woods, Sunshine Hills, Sunshine Village, Westview, Cougar Canyon and Scottsdale).

Below is a map illustrating the response rates by neighbourhood. Sunshine Hills recorded the highest response rate at 26% of properties in the neighbourhood providing a response, followed by Cougar Canyon at 21%, and Scottsdale and Westview at 20%.



Overall Support for Pilot Program - Support for a pilot program was strong amongst respondents and highest in Cougar Canyon (87%), followed by Sunshine Hills (76%) and Scottsdale (75%).



What We Heard

The following is a summary of resident feedback on the potential tools of a pilot program for the Sunshine Hills community. These findings reflect the views of survey participants and are not necessarily representative of perspectives across the broader community.

- Higher Cash-in Lieu Fees** - Support for increasing cash-in-lieu fees was mixed. While 30% supported higher fees and 28% supported increases with conditions, 42% did not support this approach. Concerns were raised that higher fees may not deter tree loss for properties being redeveloped if they can be absorbed as a business cost and could disproportionately impact homeowners. Some respondents

suggested substantially higher or escalating fees tied to the number of trees removed would be a better deterrent to removal of a large number of trees on a single lot.

- **Higher Replacement Requirements** - Feedback reflected divided views on increasing replacement requirements. While 45% supported higher replacement ratios (fully or with changes), the majority (55%) did not. Many respondents expressed skepticism that small replacement trees would meaningfully compensate for mature canopy loss and raised concerns about lot capacity, overcrowding, and the long-term health and successful establishment of new trees.
- **Redefining “Large Trees”** - Lowering the diameter threshold for a large tree under the current bylaw was presented as a tool to expand protection to more mature trees. A majority of respondents expressed support for redefining what qualifies as a “large” tree, with 50% indicating support for the change and an additional 16% expressing support with modifications. As this tool continues to rely on fee- and replacement-based mechanisms—approaches that received mixed support overall—the feedback suggests residents favour a layered approach rather than a single standalone measure.
- **Removing Allowance for One Large Tree Removal every 24 months** - Currently, property owners may remove one large-diameter tree every 24 months without an arborist report. A majority of respondents (62%) supported removing this allowance, including 45% who supported the change and 17% who supported it with modifications. While some felt this could help slow incremental canopy loss, others noted it would not address redevelopment-related tree removal and could disproportionately impact individual property owners.
- **Introducing a Significant Tree Definition** - Creating a Significant Tree definition with enhanced protections received the strongest overall support, with 78% of respondents indicating support or support with changes. The proposed definition of a Significant Tree is a tree with a trunk diameter over 70 cm and one of five species commonly found in Sunshine Hills, while a large diameter tree is currently defined in the bylaw as a tree of any species with a trunk diameter over 60 cm. While there were mixed views on the adequacy of the proposed criteria—suggesting refinement and further consultation would be warranted—the high level of support signals interest in stronger protections for mature trees. Among the eight options presented for enhanced protection, the highest support was for requiring that staff review of development applications include consideration of reasonable design changes to preserve significant trees. Lowering the fee to register a covenant received the least support. This appears to reinforce that interest is primarily focused on redevelopment-related impacts rather than individual homeowner actions.
- **Incentivization and Education** - Respondents shared ideas largely focused on mechanisms to restrict redevelopment, reinforcing the need for continued public education and advocacy to the Province regarding municipal authority limits. Additional themes included stronger monitoring and enforcement, incentives to encourage retention with homeowners and developers, increased community

involvement, and higher penalties for violations.

- Awareness of Existing Tree Protection Tools and Legislative Constraints -** Residents demonstrated strong awareness of Delta's Tree Protection and Regulation Bylaw, with 92% indicating they were very or somewhat familiar. However, 60% indicated they were not aware of provincial constraints that limit municipal authority to require tree retention where development is otherwise permitted. This was reflected in frequent calls for stronger development restrictions and highlights the need for continued public education, as well as interest in ongoing advocacy to strengthen municipal tree protection tools.
- Other Themes -** In addition to feedback on the proposed options, several key themes emerged across responses. Respondents consistently emphasized the need to focus on preventing redevelopment-related tree removal rather than further restricting single tree removals for individual homeowners, alongside a strong preference for preservation first mechanisms to maintain the current canopy over replacement requirements. It was indicated that no single tool would be sufficient, and that a coordinated, layered approach would be required to meaningfully address canopy loss. Respondents also underscored the importance of balancing environmental objectives with homeowner autonomy and property rights and that parcels with more trees will be unfairly penalized with new restrictions. As well as ensuring clear, practical exemptions for hazardous or unsafe trees.

Proposed Neighbourhood Tree Protection Pilot Program

Based on analysis of the community's comments and survey results, there are several recommended bylaw changes that are being proposed for the potential pilot program. Staff are proposing the pilot program be introduced in the Sunshine Hills, Cougar Canyon, and Scottsdale neighbourhoods as defined in Schedule D of Attachment B. These neighbourhoods were identified through the survey as those with at least 75% of respondents in support of the development of a tree protection pilot program in their neighbourhood. The recommended bylaw changes for the specified neighbourhoods are as follows:

Proposed Bylaw Amendment	What We Heard	Implications
Amend the definition of a "large diameter" tree to include trees with a diameter of 50 cm or greater	Most respondents were supportive of changing the definition which is currently defined as a tree with a trunk diameter of 60 cm or greater	More trees would be considered large diameter, resulting in more replacement trees being required for trees with a trunk diameter between 50 and 59 cm
Removing the "1 tree in 24 months" allowance without an arborist report stating rationale	Most respondents were supportive of removing this allowance	All tree removals would require an arborist report with supporting rationale for removal

Proposed Bylaw Amendment	What We Heard	Implications
Establishing a “Significant Tree” Designation which would include: • any tree with a trunk diameter of 70 cm or greater; and • one of the following 5 species: Douglas Fir, Western Red Cedar, Himalayan Cedar, Norway Spruce and Giant Redwood	Most respondents were supportive of the creation of a new class of trees called “Significant Trees” that would receive enhanced protection measures	Proposed protection measures for a Significant Tree would include: • Review development applications that propose Significant Tree removal to assess whether reasonable design changes could accommodate tree retention • Doubling the tree removal permit application fee for a Significant Tree from \$100 to \$200; and • Tripling replacement requirements and cash-in-lieu amounts for proposed removals of five or more Significant Trees.

A redlined version of the tree protection bylaw with the proposed measures is provided as Attachment B, and sample calculations for the increased fees and replacement requirements are provided as Attachment C.

It is important to note that in line with the *Community Charter*, none of the proposed measures would prevent the removal of trees associated with a development application that meets existing zoning bylaws, except that the creation of a Significant Tree definition would specify that reasonable design changes may be requested to retain Significant Trees. Also, none of the tools explored are necessarily time-limited and the most appropriate tool to regulate tree removal is the tree protection bylaw. Should the next stage result in bylaw changes, it is recommended that there be a defined period of review (i.e. two years) followed by reporting back to determine the success of the program and for Council to decide if further bylaw changes are needed to enhance or remove any of the regulations.

Next Step

As a next step, it is proposed that staff proceed with Phase 2 of the community engagement by sharing the proposed changes with Sunshine Hills property owners to confirm their support of the proposed direction. Proposed bylaw amendments have been drafted (Attachment B) for transparency of the suggested amendments and to allow for residents to comment on specific changes rather than high-level approaches as was done in Phase 1. Supporting materials will also be prepared.

Should property owners be supportive of the proposed bylaw changes, staff would bring the bylaw amendments forward to Council for consideration of readings at an upcoming meeting.

Should the program be implemented in Sunshine Hills, staff would canvass Sunshine Hills property owners during the second year of the program for their views on the outcomes of the program and report back to Council.

Implications:

Financial Implications - There are no financial implications.

▪ **CONCLUSION:**

Following community consultation, a number of measures are being proposed for a Neighbourhood Tree Protection Pilot Program that would be introduced first in Sunshine Hills. If Council is supportive, staff will proceed with a second phase of engagement with residents to determine the level of community support for proposed bylaw amendments under a 2-year pilot program, and report back to Council.



Mike Brotherston
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This report has been prepared in consultation with the following listed departments.

Concurring Departments		
Department	Name	Signature
Communications & Engagement	JoAnne Kleb	JK
Development	Tanya Mitchner	TM
Engineering	Steven Lan	SL

▪ **ATTACHMENTS:**

- A. Final Sunshine Hills Engagement Summary Report
- B. Redline of *Delta Tree Protection and Regulation Bylaw No. 7969, 2021*
- C. Sample Calculations of Updated Fees and Replacement Requirements
- D. Sunshine Hills Fact Sheet