

Protecting Natural Heritage Through Ecological Offsetting: City of Barrie's Ecological Offsetting Policy

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Urban growth and development put municipal natural heritage features at risk. To address the removal of trees and woodland areas for development purposes, the City of Barrie has implemented an Ecological Offsetting Policy that establishes a consistent approach to maintaining a minimum No Net Loss of terrestrial natural heritage.

In this webinar, David Featherstone, Terrestrial Ecologist with the City of Barrie, discussed the Policy's development and implementation and shared key transferrable insights for municipalities.

Presenters

- David Featherstone, Terrestrial Ecologist, City of Barrie, david.featherstone@barrie.ca

Key Findings

- Ecologists need to be involved in developing ecological offsetting policies to ensure accurate and consistent definitions are provided, and to ensure effective implementation.
- There is a gap in policy enforcement and adherence, particularly with unapproved tree removals.
- A holistic approach to restoration is encouraged, one that not only considers tree planting but seeks to address additional issues (i.e., invasive species) and focuses on the overall functionality of ecosystems.

Presentation Overview

- The City of Barrie's ecological offsetting policy was developed to address concerns regarding the loss of natural habitats from urban development.
- The policy aims for No Net Loss of terrestrial natural heritage systems.
- Definitions within policies should be clear to ensure the policy effectively communicates its principles.
- To assist developers in identifying native and non-native species, a comprehensive list can be included in policies to provide an opportunity to clear up misconceptions regarding the native status of species.
- A central tenet of the policy is the mitigation hierarchy, which outlines the process for developers to avoid, minimize, or mitigate ecological damages before seeking compensation through offsetting.

- Two types of offsetting are provided within the policy: woodlands and individual trees.
- This is a cash-based policy. This means that when trees or woodlands are removed, developers pay into a fund dedicated to restoring areas within the City, as opposed to relying on proponent-driven offsetting. Thus, allowing funds to be used effectively for habitat restoration.
- The presenter explained the methods for calculating ecological offsetting fees based on type and extent removed, where rates for approved vs. unapproved removals differentiate, with higher costs associated with the latter to incentivize compliance.
- The approach to ecological offsetting should be broadened, especially by including forested wetlands as something that requires ecological offsetting.
- It is important to identify which properties could be considered high priority for restoration, and to establish a systematic approach for selecting areas for ecological improvement.
- Transparency to the public should be a priority when reporting the outcomes of restoration projects. It is important to understand what habitat is lost and what is gained through these projects.
- Ecologists should review policies related to ecological offsetting to prevent pitfalls and ensure effective implementation.
- During the planning stages of projects, protective measures are considered, especially for vital habitats like amphibian breeding areas.
- Incorporating public health impacts in ecosystem valuation strategies can help reduce heat-related illnesses, improve air and water quality, and increase access to nature, which are considered essential outcomes of urban forestry and climate adaptation efforts.

Additional Resources

- [City of Barrie - Ecological Offsetting Policy](#)
- [Credit Valley Conservation Ecosystem Offsetting Guidelines \(2020\)](#)
- [Leading Practices for Wetland Offsets \(Webinar\)](#)
- [Wetland Offsetting Policies for Local Planning Authorities: A Review of Wise Practices in Ontario](#)

Contact Information

Please reach out to us at any time with questions, input, or for additional information.

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