

## Growing Together: A Tree Equity Q&A Session

May 13, 2025

[Webinar Recording](#)

City of Toronto and City of Ottawa have each adopted a tree equity approach to address the unequal distribution of urban canopy in their cities. Both cities are working to identify and prioritize areas of tree inequity, focusing tree planting efforts where they are needed most. In this session, staff from City of Toronto and City of Ottawa answered your questions regarding their approaches and the challenges so far.

### Presenters

- Connie Pinto, Supervisor, Policy and Standards, City of Toronto
- Geena Richards, Program Standards & Development Officer, Urban Forestry, City of Toronto
- Martha Copestake, Senior Forester, Natural Systems, City of Ottawa
- Zoe Bedford, Planning Forester, Natural Systems, City of Ottawa

### Key Findings

- A tree equity approach aims to improve canopy cover across a municipality so that *everyone* can experience the environmental, health, and economic benefits of an urban forest.
- The Tree Equity Score (TESA) allows municipalities to identify neighborhoods for potential canopy increases based on weighted equity factors including, but not limited to, income, race, and health.
- Tree planting strategies should be tailored to meet the needs of different neighborhoods, particularly those that may lack sufficient tree cover. This approach can ensure that *all* neighborhoods receive adequate shade and reap tree canopy benefits.
- One prominent challenge to this approach is collecting the data necessary to produce the score. This requires sorting through large datasets. To streamline the process, collaboration with relevant parties (i.e., public health units) to access data is beneficial.
- It is beneficial to begin engaging with various stakeholders to identify and obtain relevant data and generate support and excitement early on.

### Presentation Overview

- The objective of the tree equity approach is to enhance urban canopy cover to provide community-wide environmental, health, and economic benefits.
- This approach assists in prioritizing the implementation of forestry programs and targeting efforts where impact will be most significant.

- The TESA is an interactive online platform that converts data into accessible resources for the public. The tool utilizes urban forestry data and helps residents understanding tree distribution.
- The City of Toronto received funding through American Forests to develop their TESA, the first municipal TESA outside of the U.S.
- The Tree Equity Score integrates canopy cover and socioeconomic data to assess equity across neighborhoods and measures a ‘tree canopy gap’, which compares actual canopy cover against neighborhood goals. This can help municipalities prioritize tree planting initiatives.
- Areas with significant disparity between existing and target canopy cover are prioritized for tree planting initiatives, particularly those with higher proportions of vulnerable populations.
- Residents should be engaged throughout planning and implementation to ensure that planting initiatives accurately reflect community needs.
- Private property plays a significant role in urban forestry, within Ottawa, 40% of property is privately owned. To advance planting initiatives on private land, City of Ottawa has launched Plant Your Place, a private land tree planting program in partnership with EnviroCentre.
- Within Toronto, impervious surfaces are increasing, leading to less available space for tree planting. As available space declines, private property becomes increasingly important for improving local canopy cover. TESA can help identify opportunities for tree planting on private property.
- Integrating tree equity goals into broader municipal plans and projects is vital for sustainable urban development. Collaborating with municipal departments, including Planning, can help ensure tree equity considerations are included in development and infrastructure projects early on.
- Trees are often viewed as supplementary or as an “add-on” within projects, rather than a priority. Engaging with various departments to highlight tree-canopy benefits, such as reducing urban heat island effect, can help bring tree planting to the forefront.

### Additional Resources

- [Promoting Equity in Urban Forestry: City of Ottawa’s Tree Equity Approach Webinar](#)
- [Promoting Equity in Urban Forestry: City of Ottawa’s Tree Equity Analysis Webinar Summary](#)
- [The American Forest Tree Equity Score Tool](#)
- [City of Ottawa’s Tree Equity Analysis staff report](#)
- [City of Ottawa’s Environment and Climate Change Committee Agenda \(June 18, 2024\)](#)
- [Private Land Tree Planting Program Research Briefing](#)
- [Tree Equity Score Analyzer, Toronto, ON](#)
- [Factsheet: Advancing tree equity and growing community canopies](#)
- [City of Toronto’s Actions to Reaffirm Toronto’s Tree Canopy Target staff report](#)

## Contact Information

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

Lauren Patterson, Program Coordinator: [lpatterson@cleanairpartnership.org](mailto:lpatterson@cleanairpartnership.org)

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