

UMGSA Campus Forestry Initiative (UMGSA-CFI)

There is a popular African axiom that says, “It takes a village to raise a child”. Though a child belongs to a particular household, the training of a child should be seen as a collective community responsibility because the community at large benefits from a well-trained child.

The University of Manitoba has made bold statements and commitments to reducing the institution’s carbon footprint by 2050, with a target of reducing carbon emissions by 50% by 2030. Part of the strategy include investing in smart building and infrastructure.

The UM has established the following targets:

- To reduce the greenhouse gas emissions resulting from its facilities, operations, and activities by 50% by 2030; and
- To produce net-zero emissions by 2050.

To achieve these bold targets and the three major deliverable objectives, multistage stakeholder involvement is required especially around increasing the green infrastructure around our campuses. Urban trees increase urban wealth and wellbeing. Just like in the axiom, it will take the effort of all of us to increase the urban forestry around our campuses. Therefore, the larger University of Manitoba community is expected to get involved through active engagement activities, meaningful contributions of ideas and actions that can reduce carbon footprints and improve green the infrastructure, while reducing grey infrastructures in and around the University of Manitoba campuses. Every member of the University of Manitoba community must be made to feel a sense of ownership and active stakeholder to achieve these objectives.

Part of the campaign promises of the current UMGSA Executives are to support and promote activities and actions that can increase the green infrastructure in our campuses in alignment with the UoM’s strategic Climate Action Plan as well as promote active outdoor recreation activities for health living. This understanding gave rise to the UMGSA Campus Forestry Initiative (UMGSA-CFI). Promotion of active forestry improvement and replacement of dead trees in the campus is part of this activity. Trees and urban forestry are among the strategies to be implemented if the goal reversing negative climate challenges is to be achieved.

Steps taken so far

Our initial meeting and discussion started with Kevin Handkamer (Campus Planning Office) through email and phone conversation, later there was a meeting at the Tim Hortons. Kevin noted during the first physical meeting that the proposal aligns with the goal of the Campus Planning Office. Several meetings were also held with City Councillors who agreed to be part of the multistage stakeholder collaboration. The initial discussions from these meetings were conveyed to the President and Vice Chancellor of the University of Manitoba Professor Michael Benarroch during one of the UMGSA and President meeting. Subsequently, the President requested that the UMGSA should hold a further meeting with Laurie Schnarr (Vice-Provost,

Students) and Kelley Main (Acting Dean of FGS) to address the questions/issues raised after the August 30th, 2022, meeting with Kevin Handkamer and his team.

Till date, several other collaborative meetings and communication have occurred with the following stakeholder Departments and Organizations:

- The President of the University of Manitoba
- Vice Provosts, Students
- Acting Dean of FGS
- Director of Operations and Maintenance
- Grounds and General Services
- Sustainability Office
- Trees Winnipeg
- Climate Action Reality Project
- UMSU
- Athletics and Recreation

More meetings are planned before the end of 2022 to finetune this initiative.

Strategy

There is popular axiom that says: “One individual is the owner of a Cock, but the community own the voice.” The reasoning behind this wise idiom is that the Cock as a timekeeper crow from the owner’s house, the entire neighbourhood hears the Cock crowing and are served by the time keeping. This is analogues of planting trees at the UofM campuses. The benefits will probably outlive those who planted the trees and will enhance the beauty of the university as well as contribute to urban wealth and the reduction of greenhouse emission. This benefit is global, just as negative environmental actions in one community can have negative impact beyond the border where it occurred.

It would therefor take our collective commitment to achieve this because it will take a community of the UofM to have a greener environment. Besides, we can not all get the privilege of having a street, building, hall, or lecture room named after us, but we can all have a tree or trees named after us. We can immortalize our names or the names of our loved ones, including pets, by planting and nurturing commemorative trees.

Some of the strategies we are proposing to adopt are:

- Multistage involvement of identified and potential stakeholders
- Collaboration among multistage stakeholders, including staff and alumni
- Identifying areas for more tree planting
- Converting some of the grey infrastructure around the campus especially the convocation ground, to green infrastructure
- Forming tree planting clubs and staging a booth/tent during orientations to promote active tree planting and maintenance culture among existing and new students

- Raising awareness about the importance of maintaining health trees in our campus
- Sourcing for funds and supports from various sources

It is important to note that the UMSU Executives are also part of the initiative because it aligns with their goals and campaign objectives. Discussions were held with the UMSU President and Vice-President on the UMGSA-CFI project, while further meetings are scheduled before the end of the year.

One of the pitches, which seems to resonate with many stakeholders is that “We can not all have a room, hall, building or street at the UofM named after us, but we can all have a tree(s) named after us. The idea behind this is to get students, staff, alumni, or other stakeholders to have a commemorative tree(s) dedicated to them or named after them. This aspect of the project will entail that individuals will be actively engaged in ensuring that the tree(s) is maintained, nurtured and cared for. Individuals can have their name engraved around the tree(s) based on what is determined that will not harm the tree.

Mr. Kevin Handkamer revealed that the University already have an online tree inventory platform in all the campuses. The platform shows the species of tree, date planted, diameter, and size of the tree. With this existing technology, we can incorporate other tagging such as the name of the owner, dedicated to someone, in memory of someone, or any other type of information an individual might wish to integrate into the online platform. The platform will also contain other details like photo of the tree, planting ceremony, when the individual graduated, and photo of the owner of the tree.

There is so much flexibility of details to be integrated into the inventory as well as translation into Indigenous languages.

Other aspect of this initiative is to integrate fruit trees, have some designated areas where with some facilities where students/staff can relax to unwind during the day. Already, the cost per tree, including maintenance/nurturing cost, is determined. The Physical Planning Unit and the Sustainability Office have provided the maps of areas where more trees can be planted. The UMGSA-CFI project covers the Fort Garry and the Bannatyne campuses. The next stage of discussion is funding and number of trees to be planted, and how to raise the funds.



Example of conversion of grey infrastructure to green infrastructure – St. Vital Mall parking lot