



Youth helps City of Cornwall build on climate goals

EVERY MORNING BY 6:15 A.M., JILL REN was on the road for her 45-minute commute from outside Montreal to the City of Cornwall, where she worked as an Urban Tree Inventory Assistant.



CITY OF CORNWALL,
ONTARIO

Canada

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Jill Ren, Urban Tree Inventory Assistant and
master’s student at McGill University

While it was an early start to the day, she always arrived by 7 a.m. with a smile — eager to begin her day, and truly thankful for the opportunity to work in a field she feels passionately about.

“This job has meant a lot to me,” says Ren, who is a master’s student at McGill University. “I feel really grateful and lucky to do this. I enjoy working in nature and with an amazing team.”

In 2023, the City of Cornwall was able to hire Ren for this position thanks to funding from the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association’s Youth Employment Experience (YEE) program. This program, funded by the Government of Canada, is designed to build skills and remove barriers to employment for youth. The program further builds capacity in the parks and recreation sector by providing mentorship support to each youth throughout their work experience.

In her role as an Urban Tree Inventory Assistant, Ren conducted a forest inventory of trees on the city’s properties. She used GIS to map out the trees and indicate their condition, and created a report for her mentor and supervisor, Todd Lalonde. Ren also regularly worked with the city’s foreperson, arborist, and GIS specialist. Additionally, she identified public properties where new trees could be planted.

“There’s a lot of knowledge and information I’ve learned from amazing people like Todd, and my other coworkers,” Ren says.

Lalonde, who is the City of Cornwall’s supervisor for parks and landscaping, says the funding meant a lot to the municipality — particularly because it helped the city

achieve some of its goals within its Climate Action Plan, which focuses on reducing greenhouse gas emissions in Cornwall.

As part of the Climate Action Plan adapted by Cornwall City Council, Lalonde said it was recommended that the municipality take an inventory of its trees on city properties.

“There’s no doubt that municipalities are strapped for money in these difficult times. This program allowed us to bring in someone of Jill’s calibre to start the calculation of our trees within the city and help us achieve our goals sooner rather than later,” Lalonde says, adding that program also allowed Ren to bring fresh ideas to the city. “Young adults can bring great insight into a workforce. They give us ideas and a wealth of knowledge that’s going to help us. Jill was a godsend.”

He adds that the program has also given youth like Ren real-world experience that teaches them lessons outside the classroom. Hands on experience, he says, is a powerful tool.

“In Cornwall, this is a true success story. We’re all winning here,” he says.

Ren says the job has given her a solid foundation for her future career — which she hopes will be related to the environment and sustainability.

“This experience will definitely help me a lot in the future,” she says. “It’s like a milestone for me, because it’s taught me about environmental services at the municipal level. It gives me an idea of how the city maps areas and how the city collects information. I feel like I’m part of the bigger picture of sustainability in Cornwall and also in Canada.” 