

Preserve the Semiahmoo Trail Forest!



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INTRODUCTION

The City of Surrey is developing a master plan for the expansion of the Sunnyside Lawn Cemetery (14850-28th Avenue) to increase the cemetery capacity and creating diverse interment options. They are looking for community input to shape their plan. The area of concern is approximately 30 acres of mature second-growth mature forest South of 28th Avenue and East of 148th Street (marked in red). The Semiahmoo Trail and adjacent trails pass through this forest. This is a bio-diverse mature forest that recovered from logging 140 years ago that is enjoyed daily by our community, wildlife, and birds.

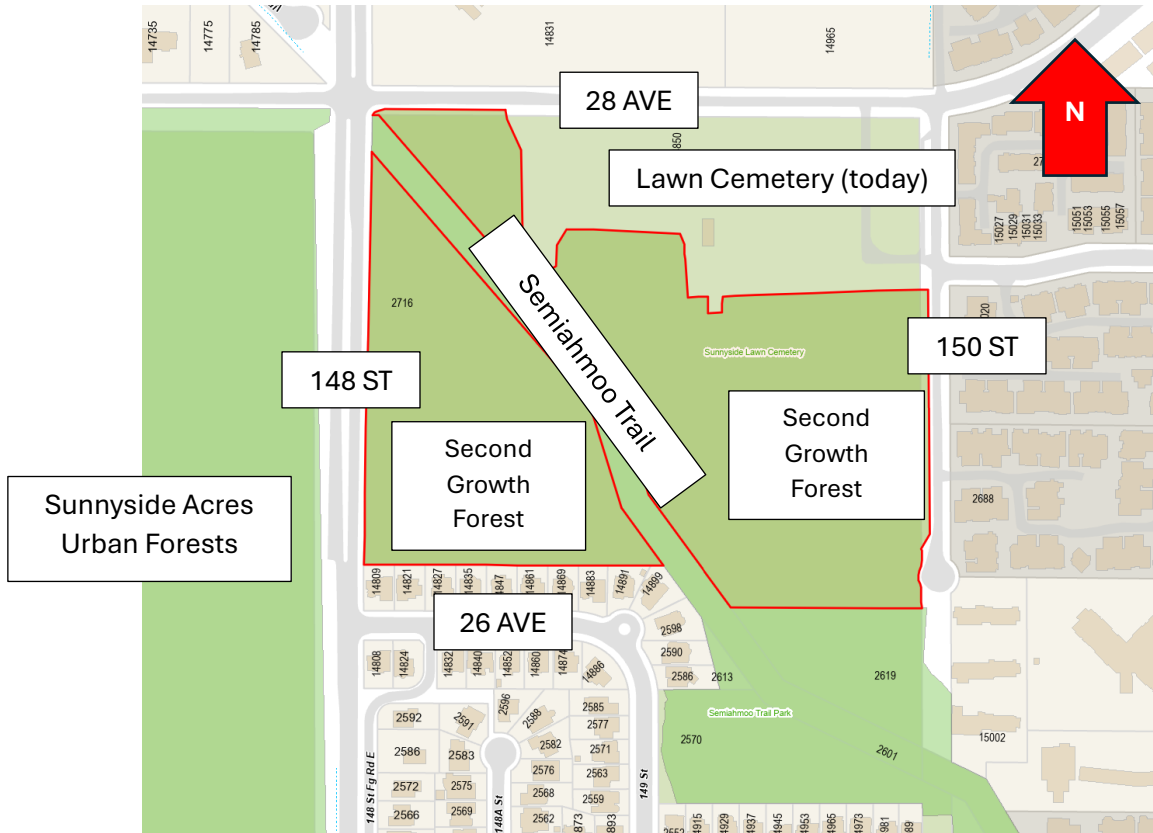


Figure 1 - Remaining forested section of Sunnyside Lawn Cemetery (City of Surrey Mapping Online System)

The Sunnyside Acres Heritage Society, White Rock And Surrey Naturalists, SORCE Bike Club, and Surrey Environmental Partners want to promote strong community participation as part of the public engagement process with the city. The previous expansion of the Sunnyside Lawn Cemetery resulted in the removal of the forest. We would like the City of Surrey to honour their own recommendations in their Biodiversity Conservation Strategy document that recommends we should preserve the remaining high-quality habitats.

We ask the public to speak up and advocate for the adoption of environmentally responsible options that minimize the impact on the existing second-growth forest. It is also important to recognize the heritage of the Semiahmoo Trail and preserve this last remaining significantly forested section of this historic trail.

SUNNYSIDE CEMETERY MASTER PLAN

The City of Surrey is developing a master plan for the expansion of the Sunnyside Lawn Cemetery at 14850-28 Avenue (<https://engage.surrey.ca/sunnyside-cemetery-master-plan>). They are looking for community input to shape their plan.

Through the Sunnyside Cemetery Master Plan, the City is claiming they are aiming to:

- increase cemetery capacity,
- offer diverse interment options,
- ensure compliance with archaeological and environmental regulations, and
- protect the Semiahmoo Trail, which runs through the property, and other important site features.

The city has communicated the following timeline. Opportunities for the public to participate are highlighted.

- **Project start up**

October and November 2024
Initial site analysis and background research

- **Public engagement**

Survey opens November 12, 2024 and closes December 5, 2024

Public open house on November 20, 2024 at the South Surrey Recreation & Arts Centre (14601 - 20 Ave) in the Turnbull Gallery, 5-8pm.

- **Draft master plan concepts**

December 2024 to February 2025

- **Public engagement**

January 2025 to March 2025
Draft master plan concepts presented to the public for comment

- **Final master plan**

Spring 2025
Final master plan developed and presented to the public

RECOMMENDATION

The position of Sunnyside Acres Heritage Society is aligned with the city's Biodiversity Conservation Strategy in that we need to preserve as much of the last remaining natural "Mature Forest" areas in Surrey and as contiguous areas rather than fragmented pieces.

The Sunnyside Acres Heritage Society recommends adoption of environmentally responsible options that minimize the impact on the existing second-growth forest and recognize the heritage of the Semiahmoo Trail as this is the last remaining forested section of this historic trail. The track record of the Sunnyside Lawn expansion in the last couple of years unfortunately has been to clear-cut the forest. These actions were directly against the City of Surrey's own Biodiversity Strategy.

Finally, aside from the heritage and conservation aspects, 148th Street is a key traffic corridor into South Surrey Athletic Park, South Surrey Arena, Softball City, and the South Surrey Recreation and Arts Centre enjoyed by residents and visitors. Driving south from 32nd Avenue, the 148th Street corridor is flanked by Sunnyside Acres Urban Forest Park to the west and the last remaining forested section of Semiahmoo Trail to the east as shown in Figure 2.

Aesthetically this is a majestic entrance to Sunnyside Acres and the White Rock/Surrey Peninsula that really showcases Surrey as a "City of Parks".



Figure 2 – View of 148th Street facing South from Semiahmoo Trail overpass.

CONCLUSION

- We need to explore options that minimize the impact on the existing second-growth forest. Preserving the remaining forest of Sunnyside Lawn Cemetery aligns with the City of Surrey's own Biodiversity Conservation Strategy.
- Preserving this forest would avoid further reducing the remaining 0.6% mature forest in Surrey and protect this area for future generations to enjoy as a place to recover and rejuvenate from the ever-increasing urban pressures.
- A cemetery lawn is an extremely low biodiversity option that serves a single purpose. As a community we need to strike a healthy balance and explore alternate burial options and allocating less biodiverse land for traditional burial interments.
- We need to recognize and protect the heritage of the Semiahmoo Trail and preserve this last remaining significantly forested section of this historic trail.
- We need to ask ourselves what environmental legacy do we want to leave for future generations?

WHAT CAN YOU DO

- 1) Share your thoughts, ideas, and concerns during the public consultation process. Advocate for the adoption of environmentally responsible options that minimize the impact on the existing second-growth forest and recognize the heritage of the Semiahmoo Trail.
 - a. Sign up for updates to the city's <https://engage.surrey.ca/> website.
 - b. Follow the city's updates for participation at <https://engage.surrey.ca/sunnyside-cemetery-master-plan>
- 2) Help us inform the community and pass this information along to other people so that they can participate in this public consultation process.
- 3) If you are interested in being more involved, contact us at sunnysideacresheritagesociety@gmail.com or whiterockandsurreynats@gmail.com.

BACKGROUND

Of the historic Semiahmoo Trail that once extended 40 km from New Westminster to Blaine, Washington, only a 3.5 km section from Crescent Road to 20th Avenue remains. The trail bifurcates the existing Sunnyside Lawn Cemetery property marked in blue in the figure below. Only the North-East corner of the Sunnyside Lawn Cemetery is cleared for burial plots. The remaining part of the property is forested.



Figure 3 - City of Surrey Nature Trail Brochure showing Semiahmoo Trail with overlay to show Sunnyside Lawn Cemetery Property

Most of the Semiahmoo Trail today is either paved or surrounded by houses with a narrow 10 meter green border (as required by By-law 15280). Only a short 0.8 km section from 26th Avenue & 150th Street to 28th Avenue & 148th Street remains surrounded by a wide border of mature forest with a well-developed canopy of second-growth Douglas-firs and cedars, younger black cottonwoods, alders, large leaf maple trees, and a dense and diverse understory.

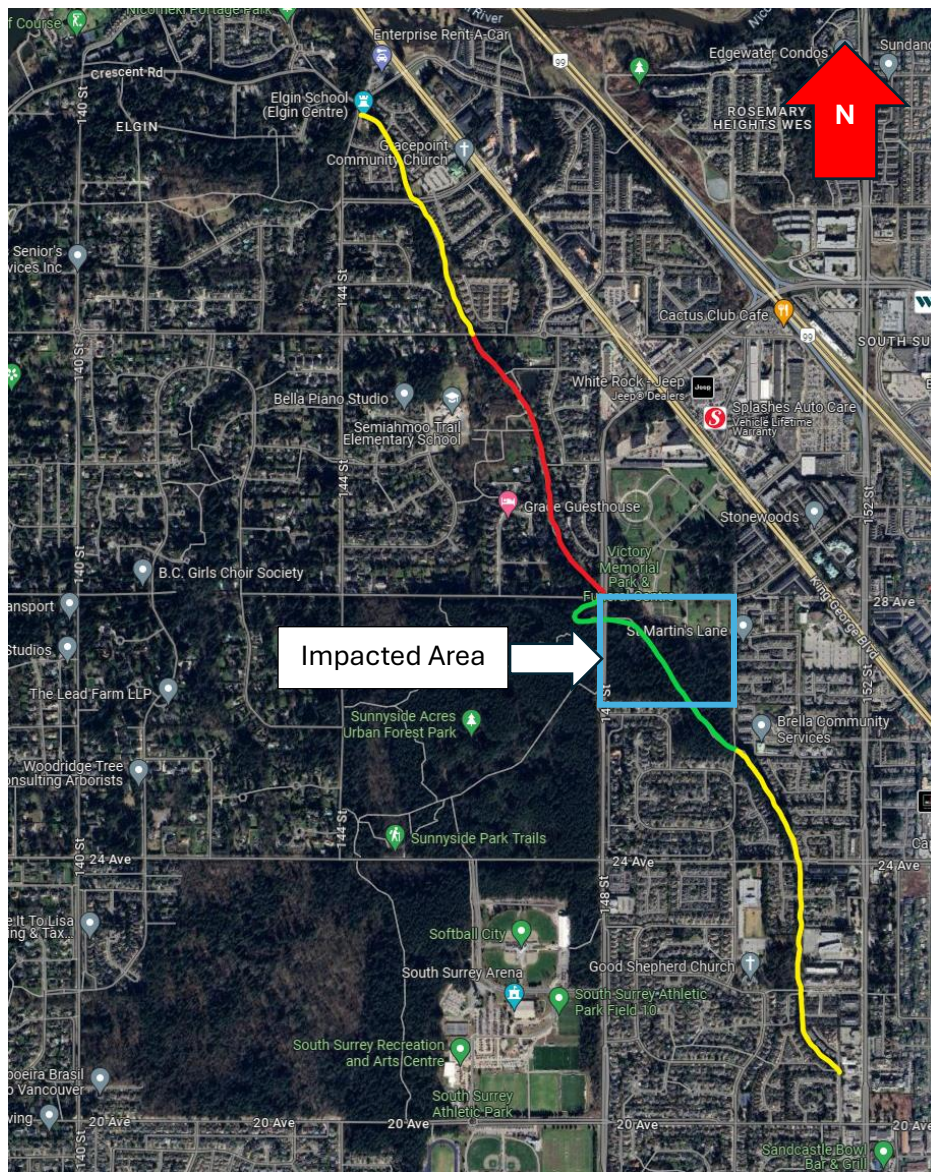


Figure 4 - Red is paved, Yellow is near structures, Green is still buffered by wide margin of mature forest (Google Maps)

The forest surrounding this short 0.8 km section of Semiahmoo Trail, illustrated in green in Figure 4, is owned by the City of Surrey's Sunnyside Lawn Cemetery. The area owned by the Sunnyside Lawn Cemetery is shown in blue.

The remaining forested section of Sunnyside Lawn Cemetery is directly adjacent of Sunnyside Acres Urban Forest Park to the west as outlined in blue in Figure 5 below.

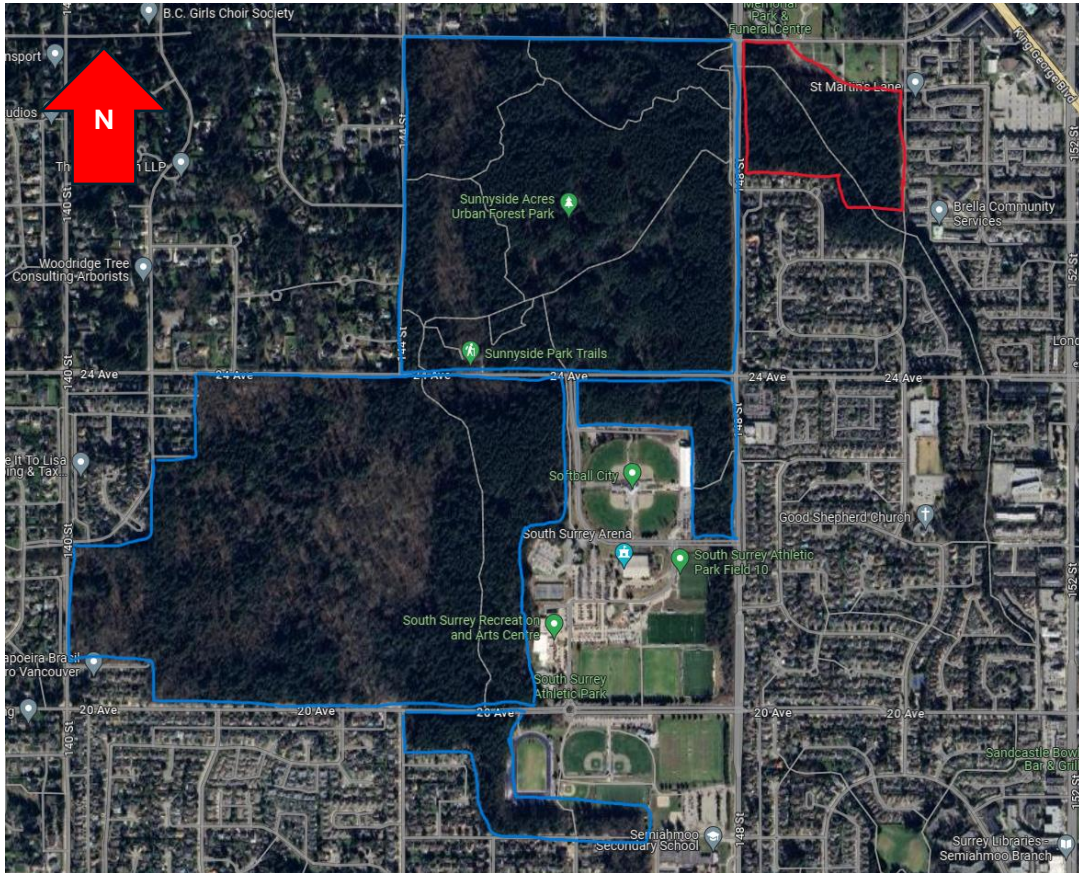


Figure 5 - Remaining forested section of Sunnyside Lawn Cemetery (City of Surrey Mapping Online System)

Sunnyside Acres Urban Forest Park was dedicated as the first urban forest park in Canada by the City of Surrey in 1988 after the residents of Surrey overwhelmingly voted to protect and preserve the remaining forests in Sunnyside Acres from further development. At the same time, the Sunnyside Acres Heritage Society (www.sunnysideacres.ca) was formed and has been working closely with the city's Urban Forestry team to protect and preserve the Sunnyside Acres Urban Forest Park and adjacent forested areas that provide a buffer zone around Sunnyside Acres Urban Forest Park.

This short 0.8km forested section of the Semiahmoo trail has a unique heritage to the area not just because of the history of the trail as an early transportation route but also because it passes through a beautiful second-growth forest that recovered naturally from logging in the late 1800's, showcasing Douglas-fir trees that are 120-140 years old. Today it serves as a frequently used trail for dog walkers, bikers, and people walking to school, shopping, and work. This part of the Semiahmoo Trail is also the main conduit into Sunnyside Acres Urban Forest. The forest is part of a wildlife corridor across the peninsula and is home to wildlife where you can encounter a pileated woodpecker, a barred owl, coyotes, and occasionally a deer. The animals (and us humans) are so lucky to still have such a tract of forest to enjoy within our community.



Figure 6 - Deer on Semiahmoo Trail (Jun 12, 2024) and a Barred Owl (Oct 16, 2022) as seen in the Forested Area of Sunnyside Lawn Cemetery

The Sunnyside Lawn Cemetery has been clearing parts of the remaining forest on their property as they have expanded the cemetery westward in the last couple of years. This expansion is encroaching on the last remaining part of the Semiahmoo Trail with the most authentic heritage characteristics. The City of Surrey recently closed a Request for Proposal process (https://www.surrey.ca/sites/default/files/media/tender_docs/rfp_2024-011-sunnyside_lawn_cemetery_master_plan.pdf) for professional services to develop a master plan for Sunnyside Lawn Cemetery with the intent of further expanding and develop the existing cemetery property.

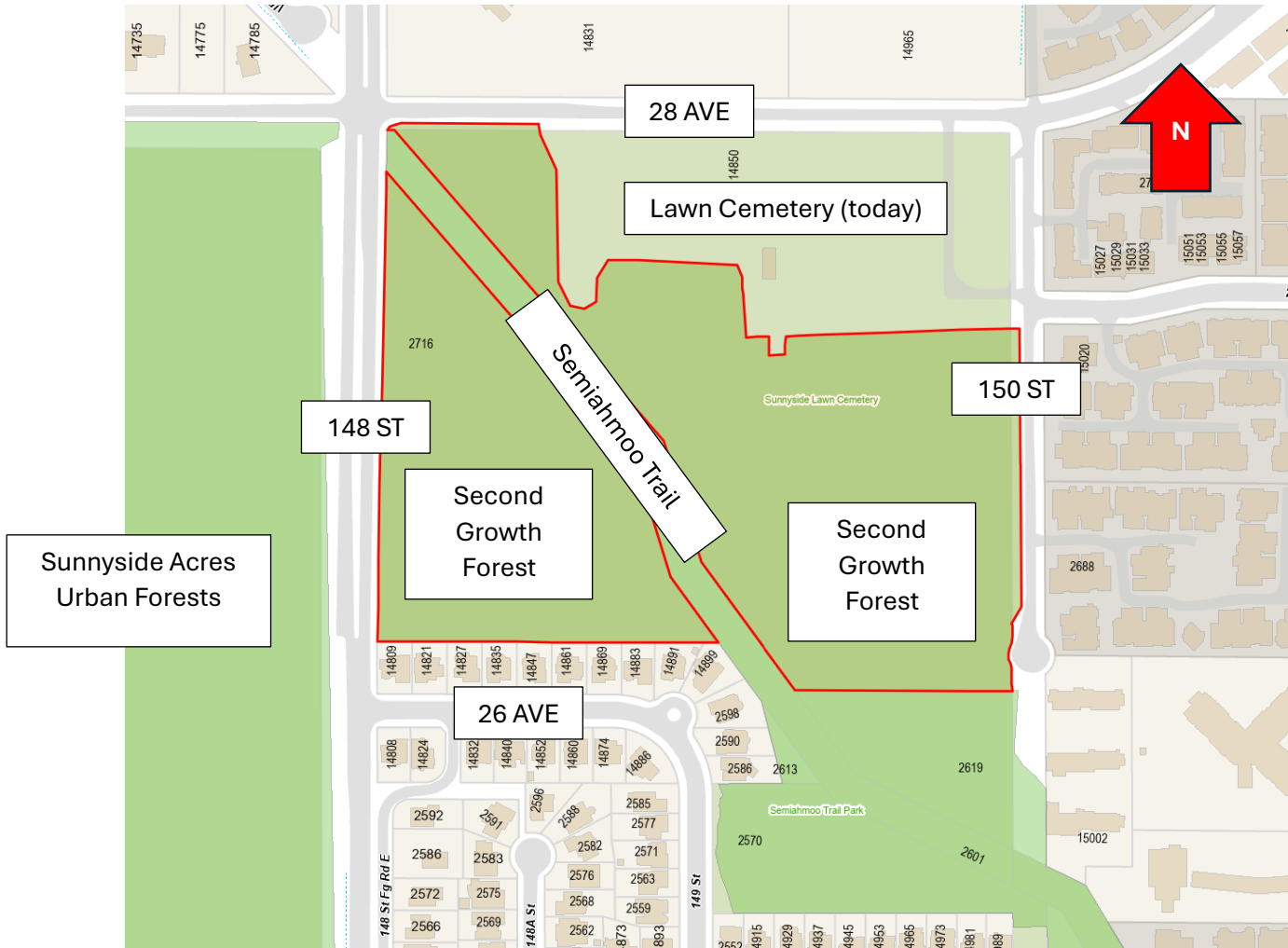


Figure 7 - Remaining forested section of Sunnyside Lawn Cemetery (City of Surrey Mapping Online System)

The remaining forested section of the Sunnyside Lawn Cemetery is outlined in red in Figure 7. The Request for Proposal states that the City of Surrey is looking at first developing the east flank (right highlighted area of Figure 7), then later the west flank (left highlighted area of Figure 7).

BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION STRATEGY

The forests in Surrey's Sunnyside Acres area, identified roughly as the land in South Surrey that is west of Hwy 99, are identified in the city's Biodiversity Conservation Strategy (<https://www.surrey.ca/renovating-building-development/land-planning-development/environmental-protection/biodiversity>) as one of the few significant habitat hubs in Surrey. Specifically, Sunnyside Acres Urban Forest Park, Semiahmoo Trail, and the forested section owned by the Sunnyside Lawn Cemetery are all part of a Green Infrastructure Network (GIN) identified in the city's Biodiversity Conservation Strategy.

The Biodiversity Conservation Strategy classifies the remaining forest at Sunnyside Lawn Cemetery as having roughly equal sections of "Mature Forest (80-240 year old trees)" and "Young Mixed Forest (5-80 years)". Mature Forests only make up 0.6% of total land area of Surrey and are irreplaceable. They have the highest ranking of species diversity according to Table 4 of the Biodiversity Conservation Strategy and simply can't be replaced by just planting trees elsewhere. They have taken over a human lifetime to fully grow into the diverse forest it is today.

The Green Infrastructure Network is the backbone for the city's biodiversity conservation strategy states that:

- 1) we should focus on developing and enhancing the Green Infrastructure Network and
- 2) we should focus on preserving high quality habitats

The fundamental principles of biodiversity conservation, again as pointed out in the city's own Biodiversity Conservation Strategy, is to:

- 1) protect critical habitat and features,
- 2) enhance habitat connectivity and corridors between habitats, and
- 3) maximize the core of natural areas rather than have fragmented ones.

ABOUT SUNNYSIDE ACRES HERITAGE SOCIETY

About Sunnyside Acres Heritage Society

We work cooperatively with the City of Surrey to protect and manage the 130 hectares of mature second-growth forest known today as Sunnyside Acres Urban Forest. We are committed to sustaining the forest and its flora and fauna in as natural a state as possible for the benefit of current and future generations, and to promote public use, enjoyment and knowledge of the heritage represented by Sunnyside Acres Urban Forest.

Who We Are

Sunnyside Acres Heritage Society is a volunteer group of local citizens who are the stewards of Sunnyside Acres Urban Forest on 24th Avenue in South Surrey.

The Sunnyside Acres Heritage Society is a registered charity and not-for-profit organization. Our board is composed of local residents and community members. We work to ensure the preservation of the Sunnyside acres Urban Forest for the benefit of our present and future generations. Anybody can join Sunnyside Acres Heritage Society as a member at any time ([here](#)) or join the Board of Directors during the Annual General Meeting ([here](#))

Our Mission

The purpose of the Society is to:

- develop, foster, and encourage public knowledge, use and enjoyment of forest, in urban areas;
- protect and conserve the natural flora and fauna in the area of South Surrey known as Sunnyside Acres
- promote public interest and knowledge of the heritage represented by the Sunnyside Acres area of South Surrey.
- collaborate with Surrey's Parks and Recreation Commission and with Surrey's Parks and Recreation Department and their agents to ensure the continuing integrity of Sunnyside Acres.