

## BIODIVERSITY STRATEGIC PLAN

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City of Calgary's 10-year biodiversity strategic plan - *Our BiodiverCity*, provides a local context plan for the conservation of biodiversity in Calgary. The strategic plan is one of the milestones in The City of Calgary Parks' Council-approved biodiversity work program, which includes the signing of the Durban Commitment for Biodiversity. The plan was created with input from a wide variety of experts, citizens and City staff. It contains policy and principles for the protection and management of biodiversity in Calgary parks and neighbourhoods and sets out targets to measure The City's success. The strategic plan aims to help foster more resilient, biologically diverse open spaces and neighbourhoods for the benefit of Calgarians. Through the development of the Strategic Plan, a Biodiversity Policy is recommended for approval.

### ADMINISTRATION RECOMMENDATION(S)

That the SPC on Community and Protective Services recommends that Council:

1. Receive for information *The City of Calgary Biodiversity Report 2014*; and
2. Receive for information *Our BiodiverCity*, and
3. Approve the proposed Biodiversity Council Policy.

### PREVIOUS COUNCIL DIRECTION / POLICY

In 2011, Council directed the Mayor or delegate to sign the *Durban Commitment: Local Governments for Biodiversity* (UE2011-19, Biodiversity Strategic Initiative).

In January 2015, ALT directed Community Services & Protective Services to move the "*Biodiversity Council Policy*" forward to the 2015 March 04 SPC on Community & Protective Services and then to Council for approval (ALT2015-0132).

### BACKGROUND

Council long-range plans, targets and visions are articulated in plans such as the *Municipal Development Plan* "MDP" (2009), the *Calgary Transportation Plan* "CTP" (2009), *imagineCALGARY* (2006), *Action Plan 2015-2018* and forthcoming *imagineParks* plan. These plans commit to protecting Calgary's nature and significant habitats, which are building blocks for biodiversity.

In 2014, "Parks Zero-Based Review: Final Report and Administration's Response" went to the Priorities and Finance Committee (PFC2014-0470). One of the recommendations in the report was to seek "the potential increase of naturalization in selected park spaces. In addition to the potential cost savings, environmental benefits are expected from increased naturalization." Naturalizing and restoring under-used park space is one of the key focus areas for conserving biodiversity in Calgary.

The City of Calgary Parks (Parks) joined the Local Action for Biodiversity (LAB) program as a part of implementing a strategy for biodiversity conservation. LAB is a world-wide partnership of conservation organizations and local governments that are committed to working towards effective policy and action to protect biodiversity. As a part of the LAB program, Council directed the Mayor or delegate to sign the *Durban Commitment: Local Governments for Biodiversity* as a demonstration of Calgary's continuing commitment to conserve urban biodiversity and to integrate biodiversity considerations into governance and planning (UE2011-19, Biodiversity

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Strategic Initiative). The signing of the *Durban Commitment* is scheduled to occur this year; Parks is currently working with the Mayor's office on timing and procedure for signing the *Durban Commitment*.

Parks is currently carrying out the LAB work program:

- a. Develop a biodiversity report documenting the current state of biodiversity and its management in Calgary (*The City of Calgary Biodiversity Report 2014*, Attachment 1);
- b. Ensure long-term commitment by Council to sustainable biodiversity management through the Local Action for Biodiversity (LAB) program. Cities that join, formally sign a local government biodiversity declaration, *The Durban Commitment: Local Governments for Biodiversity* (UE2011-19);
- c. Develop a 10-year biodiversity strategic plan that includes commitments to biodiversity implementation plans and integration within broader city plans. (*Our BiodiverCity*, Attachment 2);
- d. Formal acceptance by Council of the Biodiversity Council Policy (Attachment 3), which is contained within the strategic plan; and
- e. Implement three new biodiversity projects by the end of the 10-year program (outlined in *Our BiodiverCity*, Attachment 2, pg 34).

Ultimately it is anticipated that this work program will engage Calgarians in biodiversity awareness and conservation, aid in the protection of Calgary's vital natural environments, restore degraded parks and ecosystems and provide direction on the use of green infrastructure to advance The City's broad environmental commitments.

### INVESTIGATION: ALTERNATIVES AND ANALYSIS

In 2011, an internal Parks working group with expertise in the fields of biology, planning, integrated pest management and park design was formed. In consultation with internal and external subject matter experts, direction was provided on the overall approach to both biodiversity conservation and the strategic plan itself. Consultation with internal business units and external stakeholders began in 2012 and continued into 2014.

In accordance with the LAB work program, *The City of Calgary Biodiversity Report 2014* (Attachment 1) provides an environmental scan of biodiversity in Calgary. The report reviews the current state and management of wildlife and plants in Calgary. Historical factors that led to the current state of biodiversity in Calgary, as well as partnerships, current conservation tools and biodiversity-oriented programs were also reviewed.

Based on the environmental scan provided in the Biodiversity Report, *Our BiodiverCity*, *Calgary's 10-year biodiversity strategic plan* (Attachment 2) provides a more detailed course of action cascading from higher-order policies in the MDP and CTP such as incorporating biodiversity principles into the protection, development and management of Calgary's natural and built environments.

*Our BiodiverCity* is one of the key strategic plans directed by *imagineParks*, a long term vision of Calgary's public parks and open space. *Our BiodiverCity* aligns with the vision, mission, principles and goals of *imagineParks*.

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Based on best-practice and research, as well as stakeholder and internal engagement, a number of key issues in local biodiversity conservation were identified in developing the strategic plan. These are:

- Awareness and understanding of biodiversity;
- Legislative gaps and conflicts for the conservation of biodiversity;
- Budgetary and resource allocation challenges;
- Physical loss and/or degradation of habitat; and
- Restoring natural processes in Calgary neighbourhoods.

Acting on these key issues formed the basis of the vision, principles, commitments and procedures contained within *Our BiodiverCity*. The principles, commitments and procedures are based on:

- Ecological literacy;
- Ecological resilience;
- Collaboration; and
- Integration.

Collectively these aim to meet the vision prescribed by *Our BiodiverCity*:

- Calgarians value their city's diversity and richness in wildlife, vegetation and landscapes; The City of Calgary and citizens work to integrate their actions and the built environment with an ecological network that is healthy, connected and well managed.

Contained within the strategic plan is "Biodiversity Council Policy" (Attachment 3), which contains the vision, principles, commitments and procedures of *Our BiodiverCity*. This policy is a separate document in order to be brought forward to Council for approval, as per the LAB program requiring that Council formally accept the plan. The strategic plan itself is being brought forward for information. The strategic plan commits to regular monitoring, reporting and acting on the state of biodiversity in Calgary. The strategic plan establishes clear and comprehensive principles to consider biodiversity in all aspects of local planning from land-use, mobility to social and economic development. The strategic plan commits The City to continue raising awareness of the value of biodiversity, and to ongoing engagement with stakeholders to ensure participation and involvement in biodiversity conservation.

### Stakeholder Engagement, Research and Communication

External and internal stakeholders were involved in planning, developing and finalizing *Our BiodiverCity*. A list of the stakeholders is attached to this report (Attachment 4). Engagement through small format exploration sessions with stakeholders was used to launch the project. Stakeholders and interested participants were provided with the opportunity to review and comment on an outline and two drafts of the document. Stakeholder feedback was insightful, in-depth and positive.

### Strategic Alignment

*Our BiodiverCity*, Calgary's 10-year biodiversity strategic plan is consistent and supportive of direction provided in *Action Plan 2015-2018*, *imagineCalgary*, the *Municipal Development Plan*,

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the *Calgary Transportation Plan*, *imagineParks* (forthcoming), business unit level plans such as the *Riparian Strategy* (2014) and numerous Parks policy documents, including the *Open Space Plan* (2003) and the *Wetland Conservation Plan* (2004).

Diverse landscapes and biodiversity are also a key section of the province's *South Saskatchewan Regional Plan* (2014), which requires City support and compliance.

Through the *Durban Commitment*, the strategic plan is aligned with the direction taken by numerous cities throughout the globe that are actively planning and managing for biodiversity protection.

### **Social, Environmental, Economic (External)**

#### **Social**

Literacy programs that encourage Calgarians to understand and protect biodiversity can enable social inclusion. Increasing the understanding of nature encourages Calgarians to feel comfortable and safe in natural outdoor spaces, which can have an overall impact on decreasing social isolation.

#### **Environmental**

Principles in the strategic plan support appropriate land stewardship, protection of water resources and reduction of Calgary's environmental footprint.

#### **Economic (external)**

The services provided by biodiversity have numerous direct and indirect economic benefits such as providing recreational spaces, mitigating flood impacts, pest and disease control and improved water quality.

#### **Financial Capacity**

##### **Current and Future Operating Budget:**

Any operating budget changes based on the biodiversity strategic plan will be incorporated within existing business plans and budgets. It is expected that the implementation of the strategic plan will lead to a clearer focus on the effective allocation of resources for the management of urban ecosystems. It is intended that restoring undervalued park spaces and naturalizing them to native and locally-adapted, non-invasive species will reduce future landscaping costs such as lessening the requirements of watering and mowing.

##### **Current and Future Capital Budget:**

Any future capital budget changes will be identified and added to the Culture, Parks and Recreation Infrastructure Investment Plan (CPRIP) list reviewed by Council annually.

#### **Risk Assessment**

*Our BiodiverCity*, Calgary's 10-year biodiversity strategic plan, mitigates three distinct risks:

- a) Financial: Parks and open space management costs are expected to rise from increasing pressures of human use and invasive species. The plan provides direction for prioritizing budget towards optimal use of resources for conservation and sustainability;

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- b) Legislative: Current City and Provincial legislation requires biodiversity conservation measures. The plan identifies actions required to ensure concordance with legislation; and
- c) Reputational: Advancing biodiversity protection in Calgary helps ensure municipal leadership in global innovation and sustainability.

### REASON(S) FOR RECOMMENDATION(S):

Council has adopted broad policy and legislation to conserve Calgary's biodiversity. *Our BiodiverCity* is aligned with Council direction and Provincial policy to conserve biodiversity. The Strategic Plan (Attachment 2) and Council Policy (Attachment 3) within the strategic plan aim to foster more resilient, biologically diverse open space and neighbourhoods that nurture economic, social, environmental and personal benefits to Calgarians and visitors.

### ATTACHMENT(S)

1. *The City of Calgary Biodiversity Report 2014*
2. *Our BiodiverCity, Calgary's 10-year biodiversity strategic plan*
3. Proposed "Biodiversity Council Policy"
4. Biodiversity Stakeholder Engagement