

CALGARY PARKS ENHANCED HORTICULTURE EVALUATION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Calgary Parks has offered communities a process to request enhanced landscape maintenance in their parks and green spaces since 1996. While several have chosen to become part of that program, a majority of Calgary communities have not. At the 2016 March 14 meeting of Council, the following Motion Arising was moved by Councillor Pincott: *"Council direct Administration as part of the Mid-Cycle budget review, to review our city-wide Parks standards and bring options and associated costs back to Council."* Calgary Parks has undertaken a review of city-wide local Parks standards, as well as potential alternatives and associated costs. The Council discussion on 2016 March 14 hypothesized that perhaps, a modest increase in costs to all households in Calgary could yield a maintenance level closer to the Enhanced Landscape Maintenance program.

Following a detailed investigation, the notable difference between standard city maintenance levels versus enhanced maintenance levels is most obvious around the horticultural program. All enhanced communities spend a significant percentage of their additional enhancement funds on flowers. There is a ten-fold difference in cost and investment between the two levels of maintenance. As such, a different strategy is required.

Rather than bring forward a budget ask at Mid-Cycle Adjustments as per the Motion Arising, Calgary Parks proposes to expand the current Canada 150 banner / flower pilot program with a focus on community horticulture for an additional two years. Following completion of the pilot program, Calgary Parks will perform analysis of the costs and successes to determine potential future application city-wide.

ADMINISTRATION RECOMMENDATION(S)

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

1. Receive this report as an item of urgent business at the 2016 November 7 Council meeting; and
2. Direct Administration to continue the banner / flower pilot program to further explore modest floral horticultural improvements in local parks and open spaces city-wide.

RECOMMENDATION OF THE SPC ON COMMUNITY AND PROTECTIVE SERVICES, DATED 2016 NOVEMBER 02:

That Council direct Administration to continue the banner / flower pilot program to further explore modest floral horticultural improvements in local parks and open spaces city-wide.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL DIRECTION / POLICY

On 1996 February 26, Council approved Christie Estates Special Tax Bylaw as an alternative method to generate operating funds for the enhancement of community parks and green spaces.

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On 2016 March 14, Council received CPS2016-0198 (Calgary Parks Proposed Enhanced Maintenance Program Review) for information and directed Administration to report back on the program review and future state options no later than Q1 2017.

On 2016 March 14, Council adopted the recommendation in CPS2016-0199 (Proposed 2016 Special Tax Bylaw) and gave three readings to the 2016 Special Tax Bylaw (19M2016) and voted for the following MOTION ARISING (moved by Councillor Pincott, seconded by Councillor Chabot): *"that with respect to Report CPS2016-0199, Council direct Administration as part of the Mid-Cycle budget review, to review our city-wide Parks standards and bring options and associated costs back to Council."*

BACKGROUND

Calgary Parks has offered a process for the enhanced landscape maintenance of park spaces and boulevards in Calgary communities since 1996. The program was formalized in 2002, following an increase in community interest and Council support. The Enhanced Landscape Maintenance program allows 'operators,' usually Community Associations (CA) or Residents' Associations (RA), to generate sufficient operating funds to enhance the level of service in parks and boulevards in their community beyond the standard level currently provided by Calgary Parks (for example: perennial and annual flower planting, increased mowing and trimming, shrub bed maintenance and litter control).

At the 2016 March 14 meeting of Council, Administration was directed to conduct a review of the program and report back with findings and recommendations no later than Q1 2017. At the same meeting, the Motion Arising directed Calgary Parks to review our current standards and consider the viability of a modest increase making an appreciable difference.

INVESTIGATION: ALTERNATIVES AND ANALYSIS

Cost Analysis

Calgary Parks reviewed the costs and feasibility of extending enhanced maintenance of local parks and green spaces city-wide, so that it would be available to all Calgarians. This included cost analysis of our current maintenance standards, the Enhanced Landscape Maintenance program, as well as the cost and community impacts of a summer 2016 Canada 150 pilot project that saw colourful banners, flower beds and/or flower pots added in community open spaces or key entrance locations in 16 communities in Calgary.

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Typical enhanced maintenance in the communities that opt into the Enhanced Landscape Maintenance program includes uplift in the frequency and/or intensity of the following services within parks (to varying degrees):

- Flower / shrub bed establishment and care
- Turf mowing / trimming / cleanup
- Irrigation
- Weed management
- Turf aeration / fertilization / top dressing
- Pathway snow clearing

By far the most frequent request is around floral horticulture: both seasonal and year round. When Calgary Parks evaluated the cost within both programs; the Enhanced Landscape Maintenance communities spent ten-fold the costs of regular communities. Typically 50% or more is spent on floral horticultural.

The cost for enhanced maintenance in Enhanced Landscape Maintenance communities ranges from a \$39 to \$219 levy per dwelling. A \$5 city-wide tax levy per door (based on 2016 census data counts of residential dwellings in Calgary) would only generate approximately \$2.35 million in funding. This amount would address only a fraction of the funding required to uplift maintenance levels of community parks and open space city-wide based on the six bullets noted above.

Proposed Community Banner / Flower Pilot Program

City-wide enhanced landscape maintenance would likely be appreciated by citizens, however the associated cost is significant and likely to produce low overall benefit relative to the cost. Given the current economic climate, as well as a 96% satisfaction rating with Calgary's parks system in the 2015 Citizen Satisfaction, Calgary Parks is proposing to explore a less costly course of action.

As flowers are the primary focus of the Enhanced Landscape Maintenance program, Calgary Parks will undertake a modest, two-year community banner / flower pilot program to introduce colourful flower beds and pots, and street light banners at select locations in each community including local open spaces, community entrances, or prominent intersections. The program would expand upon a banner / flower program that was initiated in summer 2016 in order to gauge interest and support for an expanded program for Canada's 150th birthday celebration. To date, the 16 community pilot has been well-received by citizens; the proposed pilot program could complement this effort and serve as a natural extension of it.

The pilot program can be achieved through existing resources. The pilot would be implemented across the city, including communities from the *This Is My Neighbourhood* program. Calgary Parks anticipates adding up to 20 communities per year to gauge the impact, costs and options across a variety of communities. Costs, public feedback, and other learning's collected during the pilot will inform possible expansion to all Calgary communities in Action Plan 3. As the program matures, initiatives such as the replacement of non-native annual flowers with native species, and educational partnerships with local horticultural groups and Community Associations could be explored.

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Future Report on Enhanced Maintenance Program

In addition to the proposed banner / flower pilot program as described above, Calgary Parks continues to engage stakeholders, review best practices and analyze the current state of the Enhanced Landscape Maintenance Program and will return to Council in Q1 2017 with a proposed course of action around the program as per Council direction (CPS2016-0198).

Stakeholder Engagement, Research and Communication

No citizen engagement or communication was warranted for the purposes of this review. Research was limited to an analysis of current operating costs to provide a community with enhanced green space maintenance and costs associated with extending key associated services city-wide.

Strategic Alignment

The proposed pilot program proposal aligns with the following Council priorities:

- **A City of Inspiring Neighbourhoods:** The proposed pilot program would lend to the aesthetics and social fabric of a neighbourhood.
- **A Healthy and Green City:** Healthy green spaces assist in achieving better overall air quality within the city, provide attractive and well-kept places for residents to recreate and relax, and lend to the establishment of a healthy ecosystem.

Social, Environmental, Economic (External)

Social

The proposed program would encourage community pride and identity through involvement in selecting or proposing beautification projects. The program would also assist in fostering community engagement and build leadership.

Environmental

Environmental benefits of the pilot program may include introduction of native plant species and increased vegetation which positively affect biodiversity, air quality and water preservation.

Economic

The proposed pilot program would enhance the overall beauty of communities and our city, having a potential effect on tourism and commerce both locally and city-wide.

Financial Capacity

Current and Future Operating Budget:

The proposed banner / flower pilot program can be executed with existing budget and resources. Further analysis of the program in 2018 will determine if it should be expanded city-wide and if an operating budget increase is required.

Future Capital Budget:

No impacts to current capital budget are anticipated. Future capital budget considerations would be included in the pilot evaluation report.

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Risk Assessment

The two-year pilot program is low risk, as it would draw upon existing resources, best practices and relationships that already exist between Calgary Parks and local communities. The pilot would build upon the learning's realized during the Canada 150 banner / flower pilot program of 2016.

REASON(S) FOR RECOMMENDATION(S):

Understanding a key piece of the Enhanced Landscape Maintenance program is a desire for flowers; Calgary Parks would like to explore opportunities to fulfill this wish in a fiscally responsible manner. Expanding the current Canada 150 banner / flower pilot program around horticulture to additional communities, including the *This Is My Neighbourhood* program, will allow for further analysis of the pilot program. Lessons learned, public feedback and costs collected during the additional two year pilot will inform decisions around possible expansion to all Calgary communities in the future.

ATTACHMENT(S)

None.