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TO: Chair and members of the Standing Committee on Environmental Protection, Water and Waste Management

DESTINATAIRE : Président et membres du Comité permanent de la protection de l'environnement, de l'eau et de la gestion des déchets

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SUBJECT: Update on Pollinator Initiatives

OBJET: Le point sur les initiatives relatives aux pollinisateurs

PURPOSE

The purpose of this memo is to update the Standing Committee on Environmental Protection, Water and Waste Management on the status of several pollinator initiatives that staff were directed to undertake by Committee and Council beginning in April 2019.

BACKGROUND

In April 2019, staff presented a [report](#) to Committee and Council in response to the Committee's Bee City Motion (September 2018). That report summarized the ways in which the City already supports pollinators and recommended several short-term and longer-term actions that the City could take to further improve pollinator health in Ottawa. Committee members directed staff to undertake several additional actions. The report also recommended that staff provide an update to the Committee in 2020, which is the purpose of this memo.

Staff from the Natural Systems and Rural Affairs team in Planning, Infrastructure and Economic Development have worked with colleagues from Public Works and Environmental Services and from Recreation, Cultural and Facilities Services to implement the recommended actions and prepare this update. Members of Council, the Mayor's Office, and Public Information and Media Relations were also instrumental in supporting several initiatives.

DISCUSSION

At the time of preparing this memo, the short-term actions identified by staff or directed by Committee members are underway or have been completed:

- Legal Services has advised members of Council that they can make use of Cash in Lieu of Parkland funding to support the installation of new pollinator gardens on City property in their wards, provided that such are anticipated to last for a number of years. Such funds cannot be used to maintain or operate existing gardens.
- On April 26, 2019, the City hosted a Wildlife Speaker Series event on native bees and pollinating flies, titled "Pollinators: Secret Superheroes". The event featured guest speakers from the University of Ottawa and Agriculture Canada, as well as displays by local environmental groups, and was well-attended.
- The City's [website](#) was updated to include more information about the importance of native pollinators and how the City and its residents can support pollinator health.

- On June 7, 2019, the Mayor proclaimed Ottawa's first annual Pollinator Appreciation Day and accepted a donation of native perennial plants from the Fletcher Wildlife Garden, for use in the new City Hall Pollinator Garden.
- The City Hall Pollinator Garden was established in an existing garden bed located near the Lisgar Street entrance. The garden includes a variety of locally-sourced native perennials, wooden stepping stones to facilitate maintenance and monitoring, and a [bee hotel](#) for native bees to lay eggs in. The garden was monitored throughout the remainder of the growing season by City staff, volunteers and students from the University of Ottawa. Over 40 species of wildlife, including 34 different pollinators, were observed using the garden in its first year. This information was added to the City's website as part of a [year-end summary](#) for the garden.
- Natural Systems and Rural Affairs staff worked with partner agencies to promote pollinator projects and provided advice and information to staff in other departments about timing of maintenance activities, naturalisation and pollinator garden projects, along with the identification of pollinator-friendly wildflowers.
- Staff participated in workshops hosted by the Wild Pollinator Partners and the Canadian Wildlife Federation to build capacity among local agencies and other groups interested in supporting naturalisation and pollinator-friendly projects.

As a direct result of staff's outreach to local partners such as Ottawa Hydro, the Power South Nepean project will now include approximately five hectares of pollinator meadow beside its new transformer station on Cambrian Road. The meadow is being installed by the Rideau Valley Conservation Authority in partnership with the Canadian Wildlife Federation. Trees will be planted on the remainder of the site to compensate for the project's removal of City-owned trees elsewhere along Cambrian Road. The pollinator meadow will greatly increase the biodiversity of the site and will not require much ongoing maintenance apart from infrequent mowing. While the site is not publicly accessible, a joint communications campaign will provide information about the habitat restoration work, and signage will be installed facing Highway 416.

The Canadian Wildlife Federation is also engaged in ongoing discussions with Public Works and Environmental Services and Councillors' offices regarding other potential naturalisation projects in the urban area of the city. The Wild Pollinator Partners have also been working with Councillors and residents to support pollinator gardens and naturalisation at various City-owned properties. Natural Systems and Rural Affairs staff continue to facilitate and support these discussions.

The longer-term actions recommended by staff are still in progress:

- The review of the maintenance quality standards for roadsides is scheduled to occur this year. The standards for parklands will be reviewed once the roadside standards are approved. While the maintenance quality standards do direct that naturalisation areas should be mowed only once per year, they do not specify the timing of such mowing. Timing windows and other mitigation measures should be identified in the standards to avoid inadvertent impacts to pollinators and other wildlife, including migratory birds, during sensitive periods such as nesting season. Natural Systems and Rural Affairs staff will work with colleagues in Public Works and Environmental Services to ensure that these changes are made during the review of the standards.
- The Community Environmental Projects Grant Program is currently undergoing a review, which will include consideration of whether additional funds are needed to support pollinator gardens and similar projects. As in previous years, the current round of applications to this grant program included numerous proposals for projects to benefit pollinators and biodiversity in general. Recommendations from the review will be brought forward to Committee and Council later this year.
- Staff in Public Works and Environmental Services are making improvements to the intake process for residents and community groups who want to propose beautification projects on City-owned property, including the establishment of new gardens for pollinator habitat purposes.

The April 2019 report also provided information on urban beekeeping as a related issue, although it was not requested as part of the original motion. Staff note that in December 2019, the Province of Ontario approved Bill 132, which included a provision to enable the repeal of the *Bees Act*. That provision has not yet come into force; therefore, the *Bees Act* remains in effect, along with its requirements regarding setbacks for beehives from property boundaries and public highways. It is likely that the *Bees Act* may not be repealed until appropriate regulations have been enacted under the *Animal Health Act* to safeguard the health of domestic honeybees and other managed bee species. Staff will continue to monitor these provincial changes and any potential implications for the City.

CONCLUSION

Staff continue working to implement the outstanding action items, and to support initiatives that promote pollinator health in Ottawa. From an environmental perspective, the Natural Systems and Rural Affairs team recommends that the City continue to prioritize support for native pollinators due to their benefits to biodiversity and their contributions to sustainable farming. While domestic honeybees are valued for their honey and other products, they do not provide the same ecological benefits as the hundreds of naturally occurring pollinating species found in our area. Up to one-third of the world's food supply relies on pollinators, but many types of bees and other pollinators are vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, pollution, and habitat loss. By continuing our efforts to reduce and offset these impacts, we can help promote greater ecological resilience and protect our food supply.

Original signed by

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