

Directed to: Mayor Joe Preston and Members of City Council

Meeting Date:
April 7, 2025

Department: Parks, Recreation & Facilities

Attachment

Prepared By: Adrienne Lacey Griffin, Manager of Parks and Forestry
Matthew Vriens, Manager of Transportation and Bylaw

Subject: Naturalized Parkland and By-Law 92-2022 Review

Recommendation:

THAT: Report PRF-03-25 relating to Naturalized Parkland and By-Law 92-2022 Review be received for information.

Background:

At the September 9th 2024, Council meeting members expressed concern about unsightly areas where natural gardens may have been planted and left naturalized and requested a review of the natural gardens provision of the Lot Maintenance By-law.

Analysis:

By-law 92-2022 - Lot Maintenance Amendment

The City’s Lot Maintenance By-law was amended through By-law 92-2022 to encourage homeowners to create and care for intentional, eco-friendly natural gardens, while ensuring neighborhood standards are maintained.

A naturalized area or natural garden is not an area that has simply not been maintained. Within amending By-law 92-2022, a “Natural Garden means a defined area of vegetation that has been deliberately planted or cultivated with species of wildflowers, shrubs, perennials, ornamental grasses, or a combination of them consistent with a maintained and natural landscape other than regularly mown grass.”

Additionally, under Section 5.1 of the amending By-law, all natural gardens must be in accordance with the following requirements:

- a) Shall not be left in an unmaintained state
- b) Does not encroach above or onto any adjacent property
- c) Where a natural garden is located within a daylight corner, as defined by the Zoning By-law, such natural garden must comply with all provisions in the By-law.

Summary of E11 Service Requests Related to Naturalized Areas (Jan 2023 – Jan 2025)

Staff have received a total of 39 E11 service requests related to naturalized areas. These requests pertain to areas that were claimed or considered to be naturalized and do not include frequent complaints about overgrown lawns. A breakdown of the 39 service requests is provided below:

- **11** requests related to a resident cutting City-owned naturalized areas.
 - These requests were addressed through Parks and Recreation By-law 96-2019.
- **16** requests related to City-owned naturalized areas.
 - These areas are maintained as per the City’s Naturalized Parkland guidelines and the Recreational Trail Standard
- **12** requests related to Bylaw 92-2022 Lot Maintenance.
 - 9 were deemed in compliance with the Lot Maintenance Bylaw.
 - 3 were resolved through bylaw enforcement intervention.

Since the inclusion of naturalized areas in the Lot Maintenance Bylaw, staff have observed minimal issue of non-compliance. The bylaw is designed with guiding principles to permit these additional options for yard styles, while ensuring the necessary tools are in place to maintain neighborhood standards.

Naturalized Parklands and Open Spaces

Over the past three years, Parks staff have worked together with Ontario NativeScape to establish carefully planned naturalized spaces within less active parks and along recreational trails. The purpose of these efforts is to protect the environment while improving how resources are managed.

Goldenrod is often mistaken for ragweed. While ragweed’s wind-borne pollen causes allergies, goldenrod’s heavy pollen is not airborne. Goldenrod is vital for pollinators, as nectar-rich late fall bloomer helping bees

produce strong queens and fueling monarch butterflies for their migration to Mexico. Establishing naturalized areas takes time, as prairie grasses and native plants need a few years to take root, but they're designed to thrive and evolve.

Park staff work to remove invasive species and engage the community through interpretive signage and the *Wild Wisdom* series; an interactive event celebrating the connection between parks, nature, and seasonal changes. These efforts create essential habitats for pollinators and wildlife, addressing habitat loss caused by urban development. Using hardy native plants reduces water use, decreases maintenance needs, and deters geese by disrupting their nesting behaviors.

Supporting naturalized spaces aligns with St. Thomas' Bee City status and Council's Strategic Plan Priority #6. In spring 2024, the Parks Department updated its maintenance standards to limit mowing in less active areas and prioritize invasive species removal, encouraging native plant growth.

These naturalization projects reflect St. Thomas' commitment to biodiversity, efficient operations, and community involvement. By balancing ecological care with urban needs, the City is shaping healthier ecosystems and vibrant parklands for everyone to enjoy now and into the future.

Strategic Priority:

Strategic Pillar: Excellence in All We Do - Priority #6: Environmental Stewardship

Financial Impact:

None

Respectfully,

Adrienne Lacey Griffin
Manager of Parks and Forestry

Matthew Vriens
Manager of Transportation & Bylaw

Reviewed By:

PRF

City Engineer

Approved By:

City Manager