

# HALIFAX

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**Item No. 5**  
**Halifax Regional Council**  
**December 15, 2020**

**TO:** Mayor Savage and Members of Halifax Regional Council

**SUBMITTED BY:**

Original Signed by 

Jacques Dubé, Chief Administrative Officer

**DATE:** November 18, 2020

**SUBJECT:** Right of Way Wildflower Pilot Project at Akerley Boulevard

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## INFORMATION REPORT

### ORIGIN

August 18, 2020 Halifax Regional Council Special Meeting, moved by Councillor Mancini, seconded by Councillor Whitman:

That Halifax Regional Council request a staff report to outline the costs and benefits of a pilot project to replace grass with wildflowers in the Right-of-Way at Akerley Boulevard. Council requested that consideration be given to storm water management, types of wildflowers planted and sightlines.

**Motion put and passed unanimously**

### LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

*Halifax Regional Municipality Charter* Section 70(1)(a) Area improvement and promotion  
The Municipality may

...

(a) beautify, improve and maintain property owned or leased by the Municipality.

*Halifax Regional Municipality Charter* Section 79(1)(ai) Powers to expend money  
The Council may expend money required by the Municipality for

...

(ai) public grounds, squares, halls, museums, parks, tourist information centres and community centres.

### BACKGROUND

There is a growing trend towards increasing and diversifying plantings in urban areas to provide food and habitat for wildlife, opportunities for people to connect with nature, environmental benefits and to improve aesthetics. On January 29, 2019, Regional Council approved a staff report which outlined naturalization

initiatives to expand naturalization efforts in parks and right of ways. The naturalization process defines a strategy of establishing native landscapes, such as woodland, wetland and meadow like areas to selected lands using minimum maintenance intervention.

Also, in May of this year, Regional Council gave direction for staff to amend the Streets By-Law and develop an Administrative Order (AO) permitting the placement of boulevard gardens in the HRM public right of way (ROW). The changes will allow abutting property owners to plant species other than grass in front of their properties.

With the approval of these initiatives, Regional Council subsequently requested a report on the costs and benefits of a pilot project to replace the grass with wildflowers along Akerley Boulevard. The two programs noted above were used as a resource to evaluate the motion along with costs associated with replacing the grass with wildflowers and the maintenance associated with the change.

## **DISCUSSION**

Akerley Boulevard is classified as an arterial street and stretches from Windmill Road to the last median beyond John Savage Avenue, approximately 2.87 kilometers in length. An arterial street is typically designed for unobstructed free flowing traffic at higher speeds than local streets with no parking permitted, which is generally indicative of Akerley Boulevard. Akerley Boulevard contains approximately 6,600 square meters (sqm) of ROW which is mowed by contractors and managed by HRM Parks and Recreation. The grass ROW is mowed on a cycle of once every 2 weeks at a cost of \$1,400 per season and includes a spring clean up of mowing sites. This is a typical level of maintenance for this type of street and has generated only two 311 service calls over the last 3 years.

To convert the right of way of Akerley Boulevard to wildflowers would require excavation of the existing grass in the right of way, adding topsoil and hydroseed with a wildflower mixture. The approximate cost of this change would be \$48,000.

The maintenance of the wildflowers would be more extensive than the current grass. It would include weeding twice per season to prevent invasive species such as Knotweed, Wild Parsnip, Horsetail and Goat Weed that currently exist in proximity to the street. With the current grass mowing schedule, those invasive species are generally kept at bay but would infiltrate naturalized wildflowers. As well, due to the nature of the street and volume of traffic, clear sight lines are an important safety consideration. Therefore, additional trimming may be required to ensure sight lines are maintained. Along with the weeding and sight line trimming, a cutback and clean-up of the area would be required in the fall season. Due to the nature of the street, lane drops and other traffic control measures would be required to ensure safety of staff as well as drivers during the maintenance tasks. While some lower height species could be selected to reduce the need for some trimming for sight line purposes, the other maintenance duties would still be required. These maintenance tasks would be at a cost of approximately \$8,400 per season.

Wildflowers would have similar impact on stormwater management as existing grass as there would be minimal difference in stormwater absorption. Maintenance requirements for wildflowers would also need to ensure that the flowers are kept in a state as to not fall into gutter areas and impede the flow of stormwater. Depending on the growth pattern of any wildflower mixture, additional maintenance to address areas of concern may be needed. However, similar to sightline concerns, expected spread and size of wildflowers could be explored in a proposed mixture.

Although ROW wildflowers do align with the fundamental principles underpinning both programs, which is to enhance biodiversity and ecological resilience as well as provide beautification in urban areas, the addition of wildflowers in an industrial park arterial right of way setting would achieve fewer benefits than other areas intended under the programs. Therefore, converting to wildflowers along Akerley Boulevard would not be characterized as true concepts of either the naturalization or boulevard gardening programs.

Taking this into consideration, along with the significant additional costs associated with converting and maintaining Akerley Boulevard ROW from grass to wildflowers, the current level and type of service is the most appropriate for the location.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no financial implications to consider with this report. However, should Council choose to approve the wildflower pilot project on Akerley Boulevard, there will be a cost of \$48,000 for capital work and an annual maintenance cost of \$8,400.

### **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

There has been no community engagement related to the preparation of this report.

### **ATTACHMENTS**

None.

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A copy of this report can be obtained online at [halifax.ca](http://halifax.ca) or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210.

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