

HALIFAX

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Item No. 14.2
Halifax Regional Council
July 12, 2022
August 9, 2022

TO: Mayor Savage and Members of Halifax Regional Council

Original Signed by 

SUBMITTED BY:

Jacques Dubé, Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: May 25, 2022

SUBJECT: Guidelines for Grass Cutting and Tree Trimming

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

November 23, 2021 Regional Council motion (Item 16.4)

MOVED by Councillor Russell, seconded by Councillor Blackburn

THAT Halifax Regional Council request a staff report to:

1. Define service standards and maintenance guidelines for grass cutting and tree trimming for all Halifax Regional Municipality assets, including parks, playgrounds, roadsides and sidewalks, facilities, Halifax Regional Municipality right of way areas, and parking lots, and;
2. Have these service standards and maintenance guidelines published and accessible on the Halifax Regional Municipality website. This should be in a format similar to the snow clearing standards that we already have.

MOTION AS AMENDED PUT AND PASSED

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Halifax Regional Municipality Charter

Section 35(1) The Chief Administrative Officer shall (a) coordinate and direct the preparation of plans and programs to be submitted to the Council for the construction, rehabilitation and maintenance of all municipal property and facilities; ...

Section 77(1) The Municipality May:

- (a) remove dead, dying or diseased trees on public and private property.
- (b) recommend and encourage
 - (i) the proper pruning, protection, and repair of privately-owned trees in the Municipality,
 - (ii) the planting of trees of suitable species at desirable sites within the Municipality.

By-law P-600, *Respecting Municipal Parks*

By-law T-600, *Respecting Trees on Public Lands*

BACKGROUND

In 2007, grass cutting for parks and recreation assets was tendered and set up as three separate asset contracts: parks and green spaces, all HRCE (formerly HRSB) schools, and athletic fields. Once this cycle of contracts expired, it was apparent that there was geographical redundancy since as many as three contractors could conceivably be working on the same parcel at the same time: one mowing a playground, one mowing a school property and one mowing an athletic field. From 2011 forward, all contracts were grouped geographically by electoral District. All works within a district boundary or a group of districts was included in the tender inventory. The current grass cutting guidelines were created as part of these contracts.

The current size of inventory totals approximately 6.2M square metres which consist of Parks, HRCE properties, cemeteries, HRM facilities, and rights of way. The service is delivered through contractors, community partnerships and in-house resources on selected sites. There are facilities that operate on a separate Service Level Agreement to maintain their own grass cutting. Grass cutting commences during the second week of May and continues to the last week of October.

Vegetation in the right of way (ROW) is overseen by Public Works Infrastructure Maintenance & Operations (IMO) and is managed either proactively or reactively, the latter having two classifications of work priorities, Priority 1 & Priority 2. Priority 1 standards are determined by immediate threat to public or property subject to ability to complete the work due to weather or other prohibiting conditions. Priority 2 standards are routine preventative maintenance identified by proactive patrol and assessment of assets or reactive to a resident inquiry. Proactive vegetation maintenance in the ROW is limited to the pruning of the ornamental street tree inventory (i.e. planted street trees) and is delivered through an annually reoccurring contract.

DISCUSSION

Grass Cutting Standards

The current grass cutting guidelines for parks have three classifications: A, B and C, and are based on frequency of cuts and/or number of cuts per season which is a best practice in the industry. Table 1.0 details the HRM Grass Cutting Guidelines and Table 1.1 for Municipal Grass Cutting Guidelines Jurisdictional Comparison.

The sites included in the grass cutting program include parks, athletic fields, schools, and ROW. The guidelines were determined based on park classifications and maintaining the optimal athletic field playing conditions for ball diamonds and sport fields. Parks also delivers mowing services to HRCE school sites on a cost recovery agreement, and Public Works for ROW grass cutting services.

As part of its grass cutting contracts, Parks can implement additional cuts to a given classification during high growth periods. The implementation of the additional cuts can increase the number of cuts by six cuts over a six-week period. Traditionally, these additional cuts start during the first week of June.

Table 1.0 HRM Grass Cutting Guidelines

Classification	Site Criteria	Service Guideline *	Additional Cuts Period *
A	Regional Parks, Athletic Fields	1 cut per 7 Days +6 additional cuts per additional cut period	Mowing frequency becomes 2 cuts per 7 days for a 6-week period
B	Community, Neighborhood & District Parks / HRCE School / HRM Facilities**	1 cut per 14 Days + 6 additional cuts per additional cut period	Mowing frequency becomes 1 cut per 7 days for a 12-week period
C	ROW	1 cut per 14 Days	No additional mowing

*Exceptions to service guidelines may apply due to, but not limited to, weather, special events, and other unexpected daytime use.

**Example: Findlay Rec Centre and Gordon R. Snow Rec Centre

Table 1.1 Municipal Grass Cutting Guidelines Jurisdictional Comparison

Municipality	Standards	Assets Maintained
HRM	A, B, C A= 1 cut per 7 days, B = 1 cut per 14 days, plus 6 additional cuts June to August C = 1 cut per 14 days	Parks, ROW, school, athletic fields
Toronto	1, 2, 3 1= everything cut 1 per 5 days until July 2= everything cut 1 per 10 days until September 3= everything cut 1 per 7 days to end of Oct	Parks athletic fields and traffic islands
Ottawa	A, B, C A=1 cut per 5-7 days, B= 1 cut per 10-14 days C = ROW 1 cut per 14 days until July then 1 cut per month for urban ROW 2 cuts per year for rural ROW	Parks athletic fields and ROW
Moncton	Number of cuts per season and height. A parks and fields 20 cuts per season B parks and fields 16 cuts per season C parks and fields 12 cuts per season	Parks and athletic fields
Windsor	1 cut per 7 days, 1 cut per 10 days, 1 cut per 14 days based on the time of season	Parks and some ROW
Winnipeg	every 10-14 days or 8 to 12 cuts per season	Parks

Management and Communication

The grass cutting contracts consist of 2500 locations across HRM and on average 50,000-100,000 sq m of inventory is added annually. They are managed by HRM Staff inspections, user group reporting and general inquiries through 311. In addition, HRM grass contractors are required to submit weekly reports to the Parks Contract Supervisors outlining any deficiencies in their mowing schedule due to such factors as weather, site usage or condition of the site.

As part of the 2022-23 Business Plan, Parks and Recreation have committed to develop and implement a communication strategy regarding all aspects of the grass cutting service including an educational and informative social media campaign that includes HRM and private landowner responsibilities. In conjunction with the communication strategy, all grass cutting service levels, guidelines, and mapping will be added to the municipality's webpage. See attachment A for an example of the Grass Cutting Guidelines Map.

Service Increase

Parks will be implementing some inventory changes for the 2022 mowing season to align inventory to its classification to improve service delivery. Some of these changes will be made to the ROWs within the Enhanced Maintenance Areas (EMA), which are in the downtown core of both Halifax and Dartmouth, and Business Improvement Districts (BID). These areas will be moved from a C Classification to a B Classification based on service request patterns and the ongoing beautification of HRM assets in high volume settings.

Grass Cutting Outside HRM Responsibility

Each season, Parks receives service requests and complaints regarding grass cutting that are not the responsibility of the parks grass cutting program; this has been especially evident over the last two years. These can be complaints regarding private property residential owners, landlords, commercial properties, and sometimes other orders of government. These service requests are investigated to validate property ownership and are then transferred to the appropriate business unit. By-law Standards Compliance Officers respond to complaints for unsightly issues on private property including the abutment property between the sidewalk and the curb.

All property owners are expected to maintain and regularly cut the grass on their property and in the right of way that abuts their property. When a complaint is received stating that the grass has not been cut, a Compliance Officer attends to the property to conduct a site inspection. If there is a violation, the Compliance Officer issues an Order providing a date by which the grass must be cut. If a property owner does not comply by the specified date in the Order, HRM will complete the work by hiring a contractor to cut the grass. The costs incurred by HRM are billed back to the property owner and form a lien against the property.

Tree Trimming and Forestry Work

Urban Forestry work activities such as tree trimming, pruning, removals and planting are linked to service standards and are prioritized based on assessments. These can be found on the HRM website and are outlined in Table 1.3 below.

Urban Forestry service standards are currently under review. To inform this review, a survey was circulated to the public through several mediums in an effort gain a better understanding of the priorities of the public, as well as the satisfaction of our residents with current Urban Forestry services provided by HRM. The survey was open to the public for a month, ending May 15, 2022. Weighted information from this survey will be used along with information from an internal compliance audit conducted in 2021 to guide updates to the Urban Forestry Service Standards.

Table 1.3 Tree Trimming Guidelines

Scope of work	Assessment /Priority
Tree Assessment	3 business day assessment, no priority 1 standard, priority 2 repair within 12 months
Tree Chipping/Brush Removal	3 business day assessment, 1 business day to repair priority 1, priority 2 repair within 12 months
**Tree Pruning/Trimming	3 business day assessment, 1 business day to repair priority 1, priority 2 repair within 12 months
Tree Stump Removal	3 business day assessment, 1 business day to repair priority 1, priority 2 repair within 36 months
Tree Removal	3 business day assessment, 1 business day to repair priority 1, priority 2 repair within 36 months
Tree Replacement	3 business day assessment, no priority 1 standard, priority 2 repair within 36 months
Tree Miscellaneous	3 business day assessment, no priority 1 standard, priority 2 repair within 36 months

Tree New Planting	5 business day assessment, no priority 1 standard, priority 2 repair is included in working backlog
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**tree pruning program operates according to best practices regarding tree health and infrastructure clearances (e.g., considerations relating to roads, sidewalks, power lines and signage). Municipal trees are assessed for maintenance and removal on an individual basis. If removal is deemed necessary, a new tree will be planted in its place.

Further to the above Urban Forestry services, through the adoption of the Urban Forest Master Plan in 2013, a program to proactively prune street trees was created. Based on industry Best Management Practices, the goal of this program is to prune every planted street tree on a seven-year cycle to ensure the best possible form, structure and health of the tree, thus reducing conflicts with utilities, users of the roadway or adjacent property owners.

More information on the Tree Trimming program and a list of frequently asked questions, is posted on the HRM website: [Urban Forestry | Streets and Sidewalks | Halifax](#) and [FAQ | Halifax's Urban Forest | Halifax](#)

Other Vegetation

The management of vegetation in the ROW impacting sightlines, guide rails or other infrastructure is performed by Infrastructure Maintenance & Operations (IMO). For managing vegetation growing in and around park assets such as playgrounds, sport fields, trails and parking areas, Parks has adopted a similar approach. Vegetation management is identified through annual inspection or reported through 311. An inspection is performed on the site to determine the priority of the remediation.

- Priority 1 Standard – determined when there is an immediate threat to the public, to property or to park assets. These work orders are recorded in a plan and addressed within five (5) business days.
- Priority 2 Standard – determined through routine preventative maintenance and recorded in a plan for removal during the season after all Priority 1 work orders are completed.

In 2022, Council approved an increase to the IMO budget for a total of \$200,000 to address roadside vegetation across HRM and including the new areas received through the NSTIR Road Transfer. With the exception of our Priority 1 Vegetation issues (including our responsibilities under the Railway Safety Act to maintain vegetation clearances around rail crossings), the remainder of these funds will be used to address the backlog of Priority 2 roadside vegetation maintenance requests.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

No financial implications at this time.

RISK CONSIDERATION

No risk considerations were identified.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

No community engagement was required.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

No environmental implications were identified.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A - Grass Cutting Guidelines Map Example

A copy of this report can be obtained online at halifax.ca or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210.

Report Prepared by: Rob Mullane, Superintendent Parks East, 902.490.5819

Attachment A

Legend

HRM Grass Cutting Guidelines (Disclaimer: Peak growth period may vary depending on environmental conditions)

A Class - 1 cut per 7 days - Mowing frequency increases during peak growth period to 2 cuts per 7 days starting at the beginning of June

B Class - 1 cut per 14 days - Mowing frequency increases during peak growth period to 2 cuts per 7 days starting at the beginning of June

C Class - 1 cut per 14 days - No additional mowing during peak growth period

Other

HRM Parks

(1 of 2)

Grass Contracts

Contract Type	Parks/OpenSpace
Specification Type	Grass
Service Classification	A Class

Zoom to

