

Date: February 9th, 2016

To: Parks and Environment Committee

Re: Bee City certification – Toronto to become the first Bee City in Canada

Dear Parks and Environment Committee Members,

Background:

Pollinators are vital to a healthy and resilient ecosystem. The conservation of pollinators is critical to the sustainability of Toronto's natural areas and urban gardens. Certain pollinator species have been determined to be in decline due to habitat loss, climate change, pesticide use, and disease/pests. The Toronto area is home to over 300 species of bees and hundreds more non-bee pollinator species, making it one of the most diverse areas for pollinators in Canada. A diverse and resilient pollinator community is a key component of a sustainable city for us all.

The City of Toronto is currently undertaking a number of programs and initiatives to support pollinator protection, including:

- Establishment and development of pollinator friendly habitat across the city, which engage local communities and provide educational opportunities through interpretive signage, community planting events, and tours. Examples include: Humber Bay Butterfly Habitat, Don Valley Brickworks, The Franklin Children's garden, and High Park's Black Oak Savannah restoration areas.
- Habitat restoration through our Community Stewardship program which engages community volunteers in planting native species and the ongoing maintenance and management of the watersheds across the Greater Toronto Area.
- Offering ongoing Children's Eco Programs in High Park which educate and engage children through environmental, nature, nutrition and garden programming, which includes pollinators.
- The Horticulture School of Excellence that provides ongoing staff training in pollinator friendly planting and ways to increase native plantings in City parks.

- Public education and promotion of native plantings on private land through the outreach efforts of Live Green Toronto and natural garden inspections conducted by Parks, Forestry and Recreation.
- Recognizing the contribution of citizens who demonstrate environmentally responsible gardening practices through our City of Toronto Garden awards program.
- Supporting and recognizing pollinator gardens that provide educational opportunities through school programming and that serve as demonstration gardens for their communities through our Live Green grants program.
- The naturalization of the Scarborough Centre Butterfly Trail - part of the larger Gattineau Hydro Corridor Revitalization project managed by the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority. The Scarborough Centre Butterfly Trail has involved a diverse set of partners and local community members that have worked together to plant a 40 hectare native wildflower butterfly habitat in the heart of Scarborough.

The City of Toronto was a leader in banning the use of pesticides through the Toronto Pesticide By-law in 2003, which contributed to protecting the health of pollinators in the city. But Toronto is not acting alone, the work of researchers at York University and the University of Toronto and non-profit organizations such as the David Suzuki Foundation, Canadian Wildlife Federation, Federation of Ontario Naturalists, Ontario Nature, Master Gardeners and others are essential to improving and sustaining pollinator health in the Toronto area. The Province of Ontario has recently developed a draft Pollinator Health Action Plan demonstrating their commitment to pollinator health. City staff is currently working towards preparing a draft Pollinator Protection Strategy for the City of Toronto. A staff report and draft strategy will be presented to the Parks and Environment Committee later this year.

As a next step, Toronto can show its commitment to pollinator protection by becoming the first city in Canada to achieve Bee City certification. The Bee City program endorses a set of commitments, (defined in the attached resolution) for creating sustainable habitats for pollinators. Cities, towns and communities across North America are invited to join in making these commitments and become certified as Bee City affiliates. Since the Bee City program was first launched in the United States in 2012, 15 American cities have achieved Bee City certification. The program has recently expanded enabling Canadian cities to become involved.

Toronto has the opportunity to lead by example and become the first Canadian city to obtain Bee City certification.

By becoming a certified Bee City, Toronto will be officially recognized as a community that supports healthy pollinator populations. Upon certification, Toronto will have formalized its commitment to pollinator conservation, and will serve as an example to other municipalities and organizations. In doing so, Toronto

will increase opportunities to collaborate with community partners, residents, and non-profit organizations in establishing pollinator protection initiatives in Toronto. Certifying Toronto as a Bee City will raise awareness about the importance of pollinator biodiversity, food production, native plants, and habitat protection.

Here's how Toronto can become the first Bee City in Canada:

1. Assign a committee, City division, and staff liaison to facilitate the Bee City Canada process.
2. Adopt a Resolution designating Toronto a Bee City.
3. Complete the Bee City Canada application form.

Once certified:

1. Celebrate Toronto's Bee City designation annually, with a proclamation and public awareness raising activities.
2. Publicly acknowledge Toronto's commitment through signage and web content.
3. Renew Toronto's commitment annually by completing a renewal application form with a summary of Toronto's pollinator protection accomplishments.

The newly formed Pollinator Working Group, consisting of representatives from multiple City Divisions, will serve as the municipal group responsible for overseeing the Bee City certification process. The City's Environment and Energy Division (EED) and a staff person from that Division will act as liaison, submit the Bee City application and facilitate the annual renewal process. Public awareness raising activities and annual events will be coordinated through the City's Live Green Toronto program, managed by the EED. There are no financial obligations incurred by Toronto becoming a certified Bee City.

Recommendations:

The Parks and Environment Committee recommends that:

1. City Council adopt the Resolution Designating City of Toronto a Bee City, contained as Attachment A, and request the Mayor (or designate) sign it.
2. City Council direct the Director of the Environment and Energy Division to submit the signed Resolution Designating City of Toronto a Bee City and completed Bee City application, contained as Attachment B, to the Bee City program to obtain official Bee City certification.

Communications:

List letters of support

Attachments:

A. Resolution Designating City of Toronto a Bee City Bee City application

B. Bee City Application

Sincerely,

Councillor Michelle Berardinetti
Ward 35, Scarborough Southwest
Chair, Parks and Environment Committee