

Supports for Toronto's Business Improvement Areas to Create Pollinator Habitat

Date: May 9, 2022

To: Economic and Community Development Committee

From: Interim General Manager, Economic Development and Culture

Wards: All

SUMMARY

This report responds to City Council direction on the establishment of supports and guidelines for Toronto's Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) to create pollinator habitat. The report outlines the initiatives that the City will be undertaking in order to help BIAs in Toronto adopt the guiding principles of the Pollinator Protection Strategy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Interim General Manager, Economic Development and Culture, recommends that:

1. The Economic and Community Development Committee receive this report for information.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There are no additional funding requirements associated with this initiative in current and future years.

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed this report and agrees with the information as presented in the Financial Impact Section.

DECISION HISTORY

On December 15, 16 and 17, 2021, City Council requested the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture, in consultation with the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation and the Executive Director, Municipal Licensing and Standards, to report back in the second quarter of 2022 on the establishment of

supports and guidelines for Toronto's Business Improvement Areas to follow the Toronto Pollinator Protection Strategy.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2021.EC26.15>

On April 24, 25, 26 and 27, 2018, City Council adopted the Pollinator Protection Strategy, including the following guiding principles:

- a. to prioritize actions that support and sustain native pollinator biodiversity in Toronto, recognizing that native bee species, for example, are more threatened than non-native honey bees, that they are ecologically important, and that once they are lost, they cannot be replaced;
- b. to create, enhance, and protect habitat in natural and urbanized areas – using native plants, trees, and shrubs as much as possible – recognizing that habitat loss is one of the greatest threats facing pollinators and that additional habitat will benefit all pollinators, both native and non-native; and
- c. to engage and support the community in taking action to help sustain Toronto's native pollinators.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2018.PE26.7>

COMMENTS

Background

BIA programs to address beautification and maintenance

City of Toronto BIAs invest more than \$7.0 million annually of their operational budgets on Streetscape and Beautification initiatives of municipally-owned land, buildings and structures beyond City standards levels. These budget allocations depend on members' input, and are approved at Annual General Meetings of the BIAs.

By investing levies raised from their members to improve public streets, parks and alleyways, BIAs create unique local streetscapes which provide amenity to customers, neighbourhood residents and visitors alike.

The City of Toronto BIA Office works with local BIAs to implement more than 80 capital streetscape projects a year that range in cost from \$10,000 to \$1.0 million, with an annual gross budget of \$3.5 million. Project costs are shared between the City and the BIA, typically on a 50/50 basis. Capital streetscape projects not only beautify the city, but provide economic benefits. Streetscape improvements create safe and attractive retail areas that help BIAs and their members sustain and grow businesses.

Pollinator Protection Strategy

In 2018, Toronto City Council unanimously adopted the Pollinator Protection Strategy. With the goal of protecting the more than 360 species of bees and more than 100 species of butterflies and other pollinators in the city, this comprehensive strategy laid out the guiding principles, priorities and actions that the city must take to protect our diverse native pollinator community.

The strategy recognizes the importance of building and maintaining relationships with key partners, such as BIAs, to advance pollinator protection initiatives. A key action included in the strategy is engaging with the Toronto Association of Business Improvement Areas (TABIA) to encourage the creation of pollinator habitats through native plantings.

Initiatives to support BIAs in following the Pollinator Protection Strategy

Education Materials

Parks, Forestry and Recreation, Transportation Services, and Economic Development and Culture will work collaboratively to develop communications material to educate BIA members, including property and business owners to better understand how to support and sustain native pollinator biodiversity.

The educational resources, which will to be provided to BIAs, include plant lists with recommendations for different planting conditions and biodiversity booklets. The guidelines in these educational materials will be clear and specific with health and safety as the priority. Aesthetics will also be a key consideration, since one of the major purposes of BIAs is to "oversee the improvement, beautification and maintenance of municipally owned land, buildings and structures" in the area. In addition, webinars will be made available to BIA Boards and staff on the following topics:

1. Key principles of Pollinator Protection Strategy
2. Best practices for pollinator habitat creation in urban settings, and
3. Support available through the PollinateTO grant program / City of Toronto Garden Contest

Annual Spring Education and Awareness Blitz

Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff will work with partners in other City divisions and work with the BIAs to coordinate distribution of educational materials during the blitz.

Engagement and Information Sharing with BIAs

Staff will also share information with BIAs through the bi-monthly Toronto Association of Business Improvement Areas (TABIA) meetings. One meeting every spring will focus on the topic of actions to sustain native pollinator biodiversity in the city of Toronto. At these meetings, there will be:

- 1) Questions posed to the group for discussion; and
- 2) Presentation by Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff to share best practices.

By creating a support system for BIAs to help them align their Streetscape and Beautification initiatives with the goals of the Pollinator Protection Strategy, we can ensure pollinator habitat continues to expand across Toronto.

CONTACT

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SIGNATURE

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