



Date of Meeting June 8, 2022

Subject Foxtails and Grasshoppers Mitigation Plan

Submitted By Acting Mayor Crowson, Chair – Civic Works Standing Policy Committee

Recommendation from Civic Works Standing Policy Committee:

BE IT RESOLVED THAT Council Receive as information the report on Foxtails and Grasshoppers Mitigation.

Vote:

In Favour: 4-0 (Unanimous)

Public Speakers at the Meeting: [1 – June 8, 2022](#)

Public Submissions: [2 – June 8, 2022](#)

Submitted By Blair Richter, General Manager - Parks & Cemeteries

Purpose

To provide an update on the plan to mitigate foxtails and grasshoppers in the City of Lethbridge for 2022.

Recommendation(s)

That the Civic Works SPC recommends that Council:

1. Accept this as information.

Summary

In 2021 the City of Lethbridge experienced an increase in complaints regarding weeds and foxtail in various locations across the city. The number of 311 service requests increased by 41% in 2021 from 2020 and it became a very large issue.

Neighbourhoods on the west side of the city experienced an influx of grasshoppers due to the hot and dry summer. Neighbourhoods adjacent to farmland experienced the largest volumes, as the grasshoppers migrated from agricultural land into the city.

The intent of this report is to provide an update on the work the Parks and Cemeteries department has done and is planning to do, to mitigate foxtail and grasshopper issues in 2022.

Strategic Alignment

This aligns with the 2022 City Council Action Plan, striving to maintain the health and well-being of residents, while sustaining the natural environment. This also aligns with the customer service excellence strategic goal from the Corporate Strategic Plan.

Background and Prior Decisions

In 2021 the Parks and Cemeteries department struggled to keep up with mitigation efforts regarding foxtails and grasshoppers. There were a few factors that contributed to the issues in 2021.

Lethbridge faced one of the worst droughts in recent history. This lack of precipitation contributed to a significant increase of foxtails and grasshoppers in the community. Drought conditions can stress established turf grass and allow the opportunistic foxtail to encroach. Drought conditions also increase the survival rate of grasshoppers when hatching occurs in the spring.

The Parks and Cemeteries department also experienced staffing pressures related to operational adjustments and challenges with recruiting and retaining staff due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

On July 27, 2021 City Council passed a resolution for the City Manager to report back to Council in Spring 2022 on the general aesthetics of our parks and open spaces.

Analysis and Options

Foxtails

2022 is anticipated to have below average levels of precipitation, similar to 2021. This low level of precipitation will make it challenging to keep up with the weed populations.

In the fall of 2021, the Parks and Cemeteries department began pre-emergent spraying to help mitigate foxtails in 2022. Medians and planting beds were sprayed with chemical, with the intent of getting to each location by the end of the season.

A monitoring plan is also in place for 2022 which began in May. The monitoring program helps with population predictions which contribute to an effective management program moving forward.

Grasshoppers

2022 does have potential for high grasshopper numbers again. Early predictions indicate the numbers will likely be lower than 2021, but there is a chance environmental conditions could benefit the grasshoppers.

The City of Lethbridge has been working with Dan Johnson, who is currently a Professor of Environmental Science at the University of Lethbridge. Mr. Johnson has provided input into our grasshopper management plan for 2022 and is willing to assist with population monitoring and providing treatment recommendations throughout the year.

The City of Lethbridge has also connected with the County of Lethbridge to explore potential options.

Implications

Community/Citizen

The Parks and Cemeteries department will continue to notify the public when chemical spraying occurs to ensure the community avoids these areas. Citizens are encouraged to avoid areas where foxtail is growing to help keep pets safe. When foxtails or grasshoppers are identified, the public is encouraged to call 311. The public is not encouraged to use chemical products on grasshoppers as they can be very toxic in the urban environment.

Financial

A reallocation of operating funds has occurred for 2022 to properly staff the department to support this work. A budget initiative has been identified for the upcoming 2023-2026 operating budget to properly fund these activities moving forward.

Risk

Financial

These issues are largely based on environmental factors. Having extra resources available has the potential for funds to be underutilized if environmental factors are ideal and the City doesn't experience an influx of foxtail or grasshoppers.

The cost of chemicals used to mitigate these issues has increased recently. The price for glyphosate has risen by 179%. Providing this service will require the purchasing of more chemical, which can impact the operating budget.

Reputational

There is a significant reputational risk of not doing this initiative. 2021 was a clear indication that the City needs to have proper funding in place and to be prepared to handle these types of issues.

Corporate

Additional staffing has been hired for 2022. A budget initiative will be presented in the fall for the upcoming 2023-2026 operating budget discussions to support this.

Engagement

The City of Lethbridge has engaged with the County of Lethbridge and Dan Johnson from the University of Lethbridge to explore mitigation strategies for grasshoppers.

Implementation and Communication Plan

- Pre-emergent spraying for foxtails began in the fall of 2021, focusing on medians and planting beds in parks
- Grasshopper predictions were performed in the fall of 2021
- Will continue with pre-emergent spraying for foxtails in the spring of 2022 and regular spraying will continue throughout the season
- Communication to the public via social media and webpage updates to help inform citizens on how to identify these issues, what they can do and how to notify the City
- Grasshopper monitoring plan to begin in early June 2022
- If grasshopper populations increase, explore different treatment options by partnering with Dan Johnson
- Pre-emergent spraying for foxtails to occur in the fall of 2022

Attachment(s)

1. 2022 Foxtail Mitigation Plan
2. 2022 Grasshopper Mitigation Plan
3. Foxtail Information

Approvals

City Treasurer:	Darrell Mathews
City Solicitor:	Brian Loewen
Department Director:	Joel Sanchez
City Manager:	Lloyd Brierley