The Corporation of the City of Cornwall

Regular Meeting of Council

Report

Department:	Infrastructure and Municipal Works
Division:	Environment
Report Number:	2022-75-Infrastructure and Municipal Works
Prepared By:	Angela Parker, Sustainability Project Coordinator
Meeting Date:	June 27, 2022
Subject:	No Mow May 2022 Summary

Purpose

To provide Council with a summary of the inaugural No Mow May initiative within the City of Cornwall.

Recommendation

That Council receive report #2022-75-IMW for information purposes.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications.

Strategic Priority Implications

This initiative directly relates to Pillar 5: “Being leaders in sustainability and climate change impact.” Specifically, it demonstrates how the City is a leader in pollinator initiatives by supporting their ecosystem.

Background / Discussion

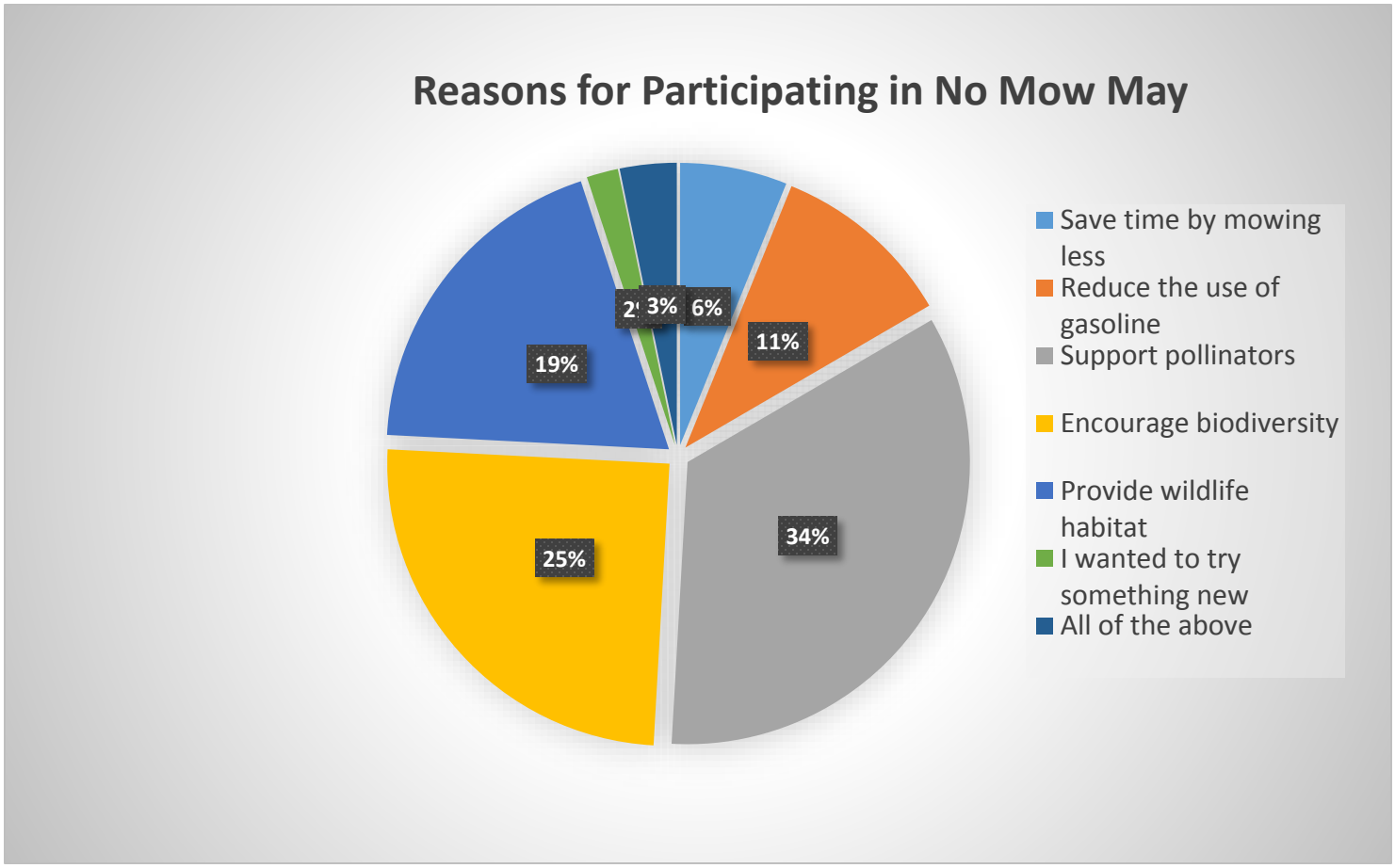
On April 11, 2022, Council approved No Mow May in the City of Cornwall from May 1 to May 31, 2022, to allow for residents the choice to mow or not mow their lawns during the month of May. The City’s By-Law Enforcement Officers did not enforce section 3 of the Yard Maintenance By-Law 2013-212 from May 1 to May 31, 2022.

Not mowing throughout the month of May increases food sources for pollinators and helps prevent disturbance of overwintering insects and amphibians that may be burrowed or hiding in leaves and lawns. The concept of No Mow May originated in the U.K., affirming that mowing your lawn once a month can lead to a 10-fold increase in the number of bees pollinating the area. Pollinators are essential for ecosystem health. Over 80 per cent of all flowering plants rely on pollinators to produce seeds. Without pollinators, humans and all of earth's terrestrial ecosystems would not survive. Lawns are one of the largest areas of vegetation that's within most urban areas and insects such as bees, butterflies and ants are busy pollinating during the month of May.

Residents who wanted to participate in No Mow May were invited to voluntarily register their property through the City's website. The first 100 to register their property had a No Mow May lawn sign delivered by City staff to their property. After the first 100 registered, more signs were ordered and delivered. Just over 150 signs were delivered by mid-May. Delays in distributing the signs were due to the time constraint of starting this initiative so close to May 1 and speculation that less than 100 participants would register. Consequently, not enough signs were ordered before May 1.

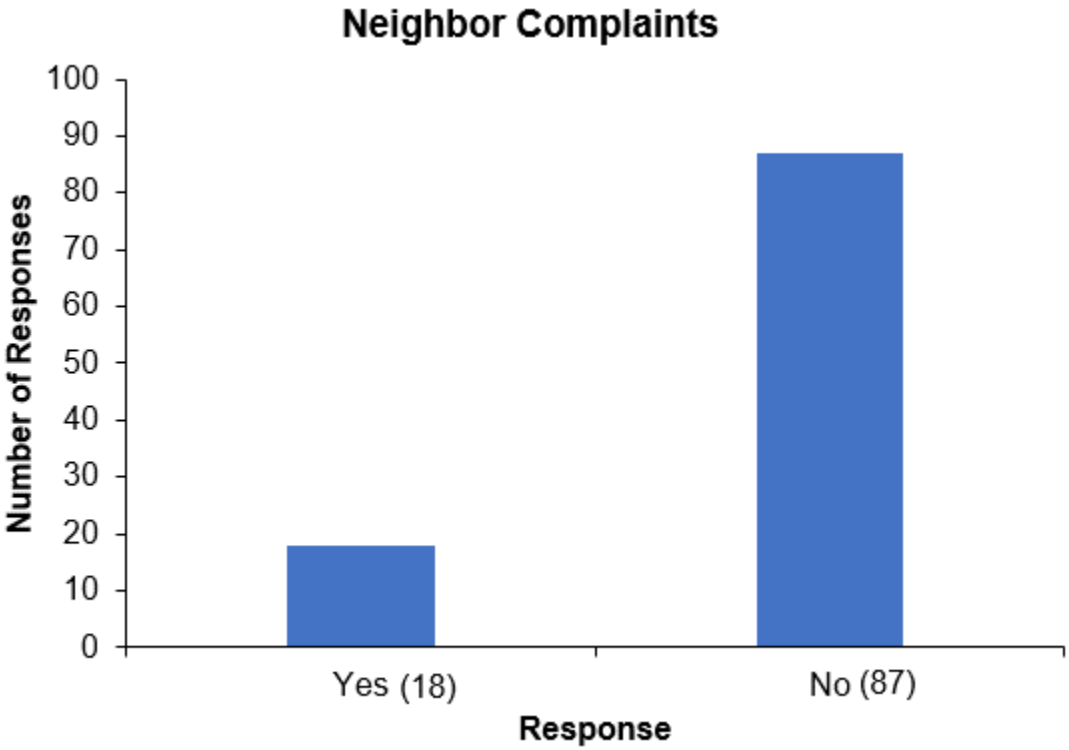
One-hundred and ninety-two properties were registered through the City website. Other residents may have participated but did not register as registration was voluntary. An online survey was sent out to all participants who included an email address with their registration. A phone survey was conducted by City staff for the participants who did not include an email address. One-hundred and five participants responded to the anonymous survey. The survey indicated that the majority of the properties were mowed during the last ten days of May. Several residents pointed out that they mowed their lawn early in the month because they did not think that they were receiving a sign; therefore, worried about complaints from neighbours or passers-by who may not have understood why their grass was long and did not want to be viewed as "lazy."

When registering their property, residents were asked why they are participating in No Mow May. The reasons varied with the majority of residents indicating that they were participating to help the pollinators, with many specifying bees. This question was also asked during the survey. Those results are displayed in the following chart:



The City's by-law department received "a handful" of complaints regarding tall grass on lawns throughout the month of May. Most of the complainants were understanding of the No Mow May and received direction from the By-law Department suggesting that if the grass was not mowed after the first weekend in June, to call back the Department to file a formal complaint. All of the complainants respected those who participated in No Mow May.

Out of the 105 residents who responded to the survey question: *Did you receive any negative feedback from neighbours while participating in No Mow May?* Eighteen people said that they did receive feedback. The following graph shows the distribution between those who did and those who did not receive complaints from neighbour.



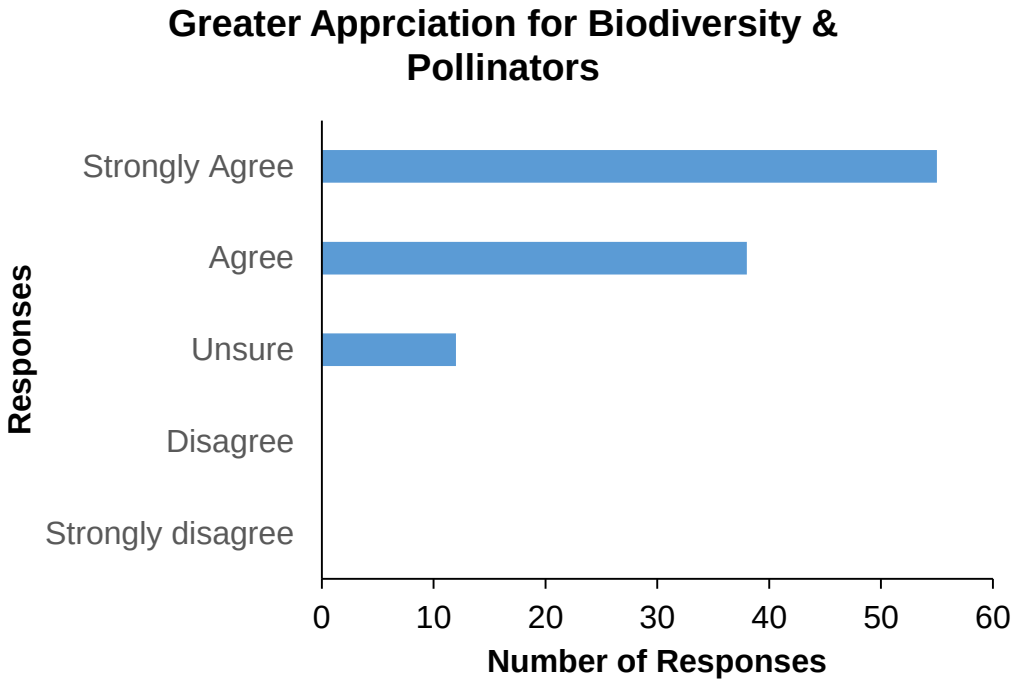
The concept of No Mow May is to encourage biodiversity as reduced biodiversity affects ecosystems at levels comparable to those of global warming and air pollution. While manicured lawns are void of biodiversity, they are perceived as tidy and as being connected to people who are “not lazy.” (Laziness was consistently used to described residents who participated in No Mow May in the City’s social media comments). Well-maintained lawns are also viewed as an indicator of socio-economic character, which according to Scientific America, “translates into property- and resale value.” The publication also states that a well-maintained lawn signifies that the homeowner has the time and/or money to support this attraction.” A manicured lawn has become the social norm throughout Canada and the United States. Breaking this social norm for the month of May to do what’s best for the planet was hard for some residents as they worried about what their neighbours would think of their properties during No Mow May. In the City’s No Mow May survey, one resident cut their lawn on May 20 because “Our next-door neighbour asked if we could cut it.” Another participant wrote that they cut their lawn on May 24 because their “neighbours all mowed on the same day” and they did not receive a No Mow May sign from the City. They indicated that if they had a No Mow May sign to inform their neighbours why their grass was long, that not mowing before May 31 would not have been “an issue.”

In the book *Interaction by Design: Bringing People and Plants Together for Health and Well-Being: An International Symposium*, the article entitled "Where the lawn mower stops: The social construction of alternative front yard ideologies," states that "people who adhere to societal norms do not typically justify their actions." Since having a manicured lawn is the norm, people do not have to brag about how green and weed-free their lawns are. However, someone who is allowing for biodiversity and longer grasses for No Mow May may feel the need to justify *why* their lawn does not look "well-maintained." And from the data collected from the City's No Mow May 2022 project, many who participated felt the need to defend their "flawed" lawns but felt that the City-provided signs assisted with that defense.

If No Mow May is approved for 2023, Administration will commence the property registration process earlier to ensure that all participants receive a lawn sign. One suggestion is to allow registration on April 22, 2023 during Eco Day where people can pick up a No Mow May sign.

As mentioned, the purpose of No Mow May is to encourage biodiversity and to support pollinators which are both essential for ecosystem health which is directly associated to human health. A healthy ecosystem contributes to a healthy human population. Locally, the Municipality of Russell Township was committed to protecting its local bee population in 2021 and encouraged residents to participate in its No Mow May project that year and this year as well. It states, in their 2021 news brief, that "it is vital for many flowers that we perceive as weeds, to be around when bees emerge from their nests in May."

City of Cornwall participants were asked if No Mow May gave them a greater appreciation for biodiversity and pollinators; 53% indicated that they "strongly agree." The following chart illustrates the findings:



There were some concerns in the City's social media comments and in an email received by the City's Sustainability Project Coordinator regarding the assumption that No Mow May attracted ticks and mosquitoes and contributed to increased airborne pollen.

Scientific literature says that mowing your lawn less often to provide native bees a better habitat will not lead to an increase in ticks. Studies show that No Mow May does not increase tick populations since lawns are probably too dry for the species. Blacklegged ticks require 100% humidity for at least part of the day to thrive. Moist leaf litter is a more suitable environment for their survival. The research argues that ticks found in lawns are typically associated with adjacent woodlands. Ticks are more attracted to "woodlands, particularly in urban and suburban areas, that consist of small forests with mature trees, understory shrubs and leaf litter […]." Of course, this does not mean that you will not find ticks on residential urban lawns (with short or long grass), and it is understandable that many community members would be opposed to long grasses in May due to their concerns of ticks and public health.

Milder weather is what has caused an increase in tick population and habitat spreading, because the species are now able to survive the winter. That is the main reason why people are tending to find them in more urban areas rather than just rural areas or trails. However, since ticks cannot jump, they climb onto people and other animals by using its back legs to hang onto low bushes or grass and stretching out its front legs and attaching onto whatever passes by.

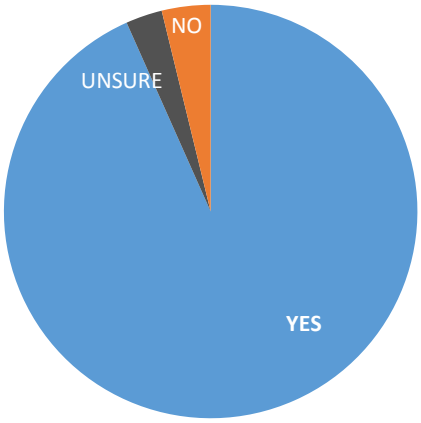
More outreach and positive learning experiences to promote the reality that humans need to learn to live with biodiversity, instead of against it. A biology professor at Carleton University said in a CTV News interview that people should not stop enjoying the outdoors because of ticks. He said that "the biggest thing we can do is to wear long pants, long sleeve clothing [and] look for the warmest places on your body, which tend to be places like our armpits, between our legs, areas that are generally warmer. That's where they like to bite."

The City received one email and a couple of social media comments regarding pollen – claiming that No Mow May was the cause of increased airborne pollen in the City. At the time this report was written, Administration did not find any scientific evidence to support this claim. Research did show that pollen was high in the Ottawa and Toronto areas as well as Cornwall. The vegetation that generated the most pollen was pine, fir and spruce; grass had a moderate count; and pollen from weeds and other plants was low or non-existent. There are studies that show that the pollen produced, per plant, is increasing and that is due to the increase of concentrated carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. Because of this, what is defined as "allergy seasons" will get longer. Although researchers have found that reducing the intensity of lawn mowing in urban spaces does lead to the "reduced presence of allergy-triggering weeds," such as ragweed since the species is able to "colonise disturbances caused by intense mowing."

Despite the small number of unofficial complaints (none of the tick or pollen comments were to the By-law Department), the City did receive a lot of positive feedback. Survey results showed that there were many instances of rabbits observed feeding on lawn plants (clover) and some people observed frogs and toads on their properties for the first time. Results also indicated that new bird species were spotted and/or new bird nests on the property. Participants were very appreciative of this. Out of the 105 survey respondents, 93% said that they would like to participate in No Mow May in 2023 if approved by Council. Through emails received by Administration, one resident wrote: "We loved the idea and hope it continues and expands." One commented: "Good initiative; happy that so

many were involved." Another participant stated that "We truly enjoyed to participate in No May Mow […] I commend City of Cornwall in this initiative." One resident commented on social media: "My lawn has never been more alive after No Mow May. Baby squirrels, brand new bird nests, hyacinths bloomed up where they hadn't before. Bees everywhere."

Participants for Next Year



People tend to have expectations for how things have been done the last 50 years, but with climate change, extreme weather events and biodiversity loss, we need to re-think how things are done. A recommendation to keep the public aware of the importance of balancing our everyday activities with the preservation and enhancement of biodiversity would be continual outreach and educational activities. Partnering with the Eastern Ontario Health Unit and Transition Cornwall+ and/or Raisin Region Conservation Authority and/or River Institute could be beneficial. No Mow May is not a new concept; it is just not a social norm, but there needs to be harmony amongst the people who live together in the City.

The City participated by continuing to allow the naturalized areas to grow. This included:

Second/Boundary – N/W corner
Ashwood Green Park – East end (section)
Snetsinger Park – (N/W side, hill)
Chevrier Park – South end
Menard Park – North west corner
Guindon Park – Exterior lands of Picnic areas plus other areas within park.

Pointe Maligne – East end
Silver Cross Park – North end, east to west.
Tim Horton: Pitt/Tollgate – Property North of store, along water

In addition to these naturalized areas, the lawn around the Municipal Works administration building was left to grow for the month of May. This location was chosen so that Administration could do an inventory of the species present for research purposes.

Due to feedback from the community, residents felt that the City should have had dedicated more areas for No Mow May. If No Mow May is approved for 2023 then the City will re-evaluate to determine if more areas can remain not mowed in May for this initiative.

The research paper "Mowing urban lawns less intensely increases biodiversity, saves money and reduces pests" demonstrates a case study of the city Trois-Rivières, Quebec. The study estimated a 36% reduction of public maintenance costs when mowing frequency was reduced from 15 to 10 times per year in high use lawn areas and 3 times to once a year in low use areas. This data was collected using mowing contractor costs.

If approved, the utilization of roundabouts and road verges (the strips of grass located between roadways and sidewalks) will be investigated for inclusion of No Mow May in 2023 – these areas were recommended in the aforementioned article. Including more areas will demonstrate the City's commitment to the ecologically important initiative as it strives to be a leader in sustainability and climate change impact.

No Mow May could lead to a re-evaluation of mowing practices within the City. There is strong evidence that increased mowing intensity of urban lawns has negative ecological effects, particularly on invertebrate and plant diversity. There is not enough evidence that No Mow May increases tick populations or pollen amount; however, Administration will be mindful of any new studies.

A report will be authored early next year requesting approval for No Mow May 2023.

Report Approval Details

Document Title:	No Mow May 2022 Summary - 2022-75-Infrastructure and Municipal Works.docx
Attachments:	
Final Approval Date:	Jun 22, 2022

This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:

Bill de Wit - Jun 22, 2022 - 8:57 AM

Maureen Adams - Jun 22, 2022 - 9:18 AM