



## **Staff Report for Council Meeting**

**Date of Meeting:** October 28, 2020

**Report Number:** SRCS.20.28

**Department:** Community Services  
**Division:** Public Works Operation

**Subject:** **SRCS.20.28 – Boulevard grass replacement  
pilot at 1 & 2 Debonair Street**

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### **Purpose:**

To provide Council with an evaluation of options for the replacement of grass on City boulevards located at 1 and 2 Debonair Street.

### **Recommendation(s):**

- a) That Staff Report SRCS.20.28 be received, and
- b) That staff be directed not to pursue a pilot project to replace the grass on the City boulevard with another type of low growing plant at 1 and 2 Debonair Street.

### **Contact Person:**

Grant Taylor, Director of Public Works Operations, ext. 2966

### **Report Approval:**

**Submitted by:** Darlene Joslin, Commissioner of Community Services

**Approved by:** Mary-Anne Dempster, City Manager

All reports are electronically reviewed and/or approved by the Division Director, Treasurer (as required), City Solicitor (as required), Commissioner and City Manager. Details of the reports approval are attached.

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### Background:

In March of 2019, the City enacted a new Grass and Weed By-law No. 31-19, which sets minimum standards for the maintenance of grass and weeds in Richmond Hill. Boulevard mowing requirements of the By-law were a response to operational issues, benchmarking and public survey results.

After enactment of the By-law, the City received a number of inquiries and concerns regarding the new requirement to maintain the grass and weeds on municipal boulevards. To date, all of these concerns have been addressed, with the exception of the concerns from the owners of 1 and 2 Debonair Street (the Owners) who submitted an exemption request for Council's consideration on July 6, 2020.

At the Council meeting held on September 9, 2020, Council received staff report SRCS.20.26 – Grass and Weeds By-law 31-19 – Exemption Request. Based on staff's recommendation the exemption request made by the Owners was denied. In addition, the following recommendation was approved:

c) That staff report back at the October 28, 2020 Council meeting on the options available for the City to replace the grass in the boulevard with some other type of low growing plant that does not need to be mowed as permitted pursuant to the City's Highway Obstruction By-law, as a pilot project that might be able to be applied to this location.

As directed, staff have completed a review of several low growing plant options that do not require mowing for the boulevards located at 1 and 2 Debonair Street.

### Discussion

The four most suited low growing grass alternatives that were evaluated for the proposed pilot project included, Micro clover, creeping thyme, white Dutch clover and Eco-lawn. The evaluation considered the upfront costs to establish the plants, the short and long-term maintenance requirements (particularly mowing) as well as other factors that would potentially influence the success of the project.

### Costs

*Upfront costs to establish* - All four-plant options are available in seed format can be sourced locally and would cost the City between \$50-450 depending on the species. In addition, approximately \$1000 of top soil would be required for top dressing. With respect to labour and work effort, a crew of three staff over a 2 to 3 day period would be required to prepare the area and plant the seeds in the boulevard (4200 square feet).

*Short and long-term maintenance requirements* – During the first weeks of seed establishment, one person with a water truck would be required to water approximately 3 hours a day for three weeks until seed germination. Additional watering would be required, depending on the weather, during the first year until the plants are well-

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establish. Micro clover and white Dutch clover also require over seeding and watering every 2 to 3 years, which would be an additional long-term cost and maintenance commitment for this type of boulevard treatment.

### Other Factors

While the upfront costs and effort to implement the pilot project would be considered a challenge especially over the coming year given the City's Covid-related budget and resources constraints, the following additional issues would likely limit the pilot's success:

1. Required mowing and weeding – 1 and 2 Debonair Street are located just east of Debonair Parkette (located on the north side of Canyon Hill Ave) and Toll Bar Park (on the south). In addition, the lands to the immediate south and south-east are not developed and in a natural state. These natural areas will inevitably be a seed source for weeds and other plants that will compete with the new plants being established. Infestations of weeds in grassed boulevards is typical, however with regular mowing the appearance and growth are kept to an acceptable level. In this case, without mowing and regular weeding, it is expected that area will be overrun with other plants that will exceed By-law maintenance requirements. As such, the need for mowing at this location will continue to be necessary.
2. Size – At 4200 square feet, the proposed pilot project area is very large for a test scenario. While there are many reasons to test alternatives to grass (environmental, potential time/effort/cost savings), the ideal approach would be to start with a small area to determine the best product and application before it is rolled out to a large area such as this.
3. Salt and other stresses – Any type of physical damage (for example from sidewalk plows), exposure to salt during winter maintenance or drought during the summer will impact the growth and success of the plants. Without ongoing over seeding, watering and weeding the boulevard will be susceptible to plant/weed competition (described above). In addition, the effort to repair the boulevard from damage would be more onerous and costly if establishing from seed compared to applying new sod, which is normal practice.

Based on the preceding review, staff are recommending that a pilot project **not** be pursued at this location.

### Impact of not pursuing a pilot

Should Council support the recommendation to not pursue the pilot project at this site the owners of 1 and 2 Debonair Street have the following options available to them, as outlined in SRCS.20.26:

1. Maintain the existing boulevard; or

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2. Do not maintain the existing boulevard in which case the City will mow the grass when it exceeds 20 cm in length (typically 3 times per year) and the Owners will be charged the cost of mowing (currently \$87.50) plus an administrative fee (\$115, as set out in the Tariff of Fees) each time mowing is required; or
3. Replant and/or over seed, the boulevard with a different type of plant material to potentially reduce the amount of maintenance and mowing required.

### **Financial/Staffing/Other Implications:**

The recommendations of this report have no staffing or financial implications.

### **Relationship to the Strategic Plan:**

The recommendation of this report are consistent with the Strategic Plan action item of maintaining a clean and safe community through education, community involvement and enforcement.

### **Conclusion:**

On September 9, an exemption request was made to the City by the homeowners at 1 and 2 Debonair Street from the Grass and Weed By-law No. 31-19 requirement to maintain adjoining municipal boulevards. Based on staff's recommendation (outlined in SRCS.20.26) the exemption request was denied and staff were directed to evaluate plant options that do not require mowing for this area. Based on the review staff have recommended that a pilot project **not** be pursued at this location.

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### Report Approval Details

Document Title:	SRCS.20.28 – Boulevard grass replacement pilot at 1 and 2 Debonair Street.docx
Attachments:	
Final Approval Date:	Oct 15, 2020

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

**Tracey Steele - Oct 14, 2020 - 11:32 AM**

**Grant Taylor - Oct 14, 2020 - 12:08 PM**

**Darlene Joslin - Oct 14, 2020 - 1:28 PM**

**MaryAnne Dempster - Oct 15, 2020 - 8:46 AM**