

GREY COUNTY ADMINISTRATION GROUNDS – DRAFT PLANTING OPTIONS

Submitted by NeighbourWoods North

V 9 – Feb 22, 2022

Notes:

1. This paper is intended to accompany a proposal being prepared for Grey County Council by NeighbourWoods North. It concerns the landscaping of the property surrounding the Administration building on 9th Avenue East in Owen Sound. Possible agenda item at Council meeting in May 2022 The presentation will describe how landscape thinking is changing to promote health for humans, birds, wildlife, insects, soil micro-organisms etc, and outline some planting ideas.
2. This paper presents three main options for landscaping action on the grounds of the Grey County building.
 - i. Do Nothing
 - ii. Accept and action some of the following planting ideas starting in Fall 2022
 - iii. Accept and action (over time) all of the following planting ideas phasing them in over time.
3. Options ii and iii support the objectives outlined in the **Grey County Climate Change Action Plan** - Specifically:
Strategy #19: Reforestation / Afforestation, Habitat and Biodiversity Protection
4. The following six planting ideas have similar pros and cons:
 - a. The pros relate primarily to meeting environmental targets (e.g., emission reduction, supporting insect pollinators), providing outdoor pleasure and health benefits for visitors and staff, and possibly leading to long term savings.
 - b. The cons mostly concern the upfront cost of changing to this new, more environmentally sound type of landscaping, and the uncertainty around the requirements for ongoing maintenance.
5. Main messages
 - a. Current landscaping (almost all mown grass) does not support biodiversity or pollinators – nor does it provide a welcoming place for visitors and staff to be outside in the heat of the summer. Current landscaping also does nothing to preserve and protect water quality or help manage storm water run-off.
 - b. If action is approved, our overall suggestion would be to leave some ‘manicured lawn’ while naturalizing up to two thirds of the property with

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trees, shrubs and native pollinator planting and/or a wildflower meadow.

- c. Patience and ongoing monitoring will be required. New landscaping of this type will take time to look colourful and healthy. A brochure or handout could be developed to help residents and visitors understand the purpose of the new landscaping and its occasional 'messy' appearance.
- d. The matter of overall cost is complicated – this paper estimates cost for plants and labour for each new idea – but there will also be savings flowing from what would be discontinued (e.g., saving labour after the new landscaping is in place, dropping fertilizers and pesticides, possible heating/cooling savings for the building). This is harder to estimate. It would be important to start with an average baseline figure of annual spending on landscaping the property – as well as heating/cooling the building during the past two to three years (2019 to 2021).

OPTION A

EASIEST OPTION - Make no changes

- Leave the grounds as they are. The costs are known and already budgeted for.
- However, this option does not take advantage of 'natural infrastructure' to reduce impact of violent storms or reduce emissions as required under provincial policy. This option will also likely cost more money in the long run.

OPTION B

1. MAKE MINOR GROUNDSKEEPING CHANGES - under the oak trees and in current planting beds

- Add a few native plants to the existing garden beds at the two main entrances from the east parking lot
- Under the red oaks currently growing at the north side leave the fallen leaves on the ground – and create a 'soft landing' under these trees to increase biodiversity. A 'soft landing' is the planting of diverse native species under keystone trees (such as oaks) to provide critical shelter and habitat for one or more life cycle stages of moths, butterflies, and beneficial insects.
- Roping off this area for the first year or two may be necessary
- Estimated new cost - \$200 to \$500

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2. PLANT A GROUP OF SUGAR MAPLES ON THE PROPERTY

- Honour the heritage of Owen Sound by planting a zig-zag row of about 8 to 12 Sugar Maples along the sidewalk leading along 6th street to the building entrance.
- Plant about 3 larger trees, with the rest about 6-8 feet high.
- Consider no-mow, or reduced mow practices under these trees (as advised by Bee City Canada).
- Estimated new cost - \$2000

3. EDUCATE STAFF AND VISITORS AND PROVIDE A SHADED LUNCH AREA –Plant small- medium pollinator beds at entrances and at the New Staff Rec Area (East Side). Add a few shade trees near the Staff Rec Area.

- Plant (and tend) Pollinator native flower beds – about 12 x 15 feet – at the main entrances to the building (from the parking lot), and near the New Staff Rec Area on the south side of the building.
- Add signage on the public beds for educational purposes.
- Plant 4 shade trees near the Staff Rec Area to moderate the summer heat, and encourage staff to get outside during their breaks,
- Consider approaching county staff to take on maintenance of the pollinator bed near where staff sit outside as a wellness project.
- Estimated new cost - \$5000

4. MANAGE STORM WATER FLOW AND WATER POOLING AT THE NORTH WEST CORNER OF THE PROPERTY

- The soil in the section of the property ranges from moist to very wet
- Install a Rain Garden – a planted area that absorbs and slows the flow of excess storm water. Or consider another water retention system.
- Include the planting of about 30 to 40 small native seedlings that will tolerate this wet soil. As they grow, they will slow erosion from heavy rains.
- Estimated new cost - \$5000 to \$10000

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5. **EXTEND EXISTING FOREST HABITAT - Densely plant along the property's south boundary**

- Align with Grey Sauble Conservation Authority objectives
- Use small seedlings of native trees, berry shrubs and other perennials.
- Include seedlings of Ontario's arboreal emblem – the white pine – once common in this area and, at maturity, the tallest tree in the forest
- Plant along the diagonal from the south-west building corner out to 9th Ave E
- Estimated new cost - \$8000

6. **ENHANCE THE AREA AROUND THE FLAGS AND MEMORIAL PLAQUE**

- Plant low (mostly native and berry-producing) native shrubs in front of the signage, flags and monument... and consider establishing a native wildflower meadow closer to 9th Ave E.
- Possibly add a 'soft' path – mown grass - and a bench for people to walk from the building entrance to see the monument and sit for a rest
- Leave a manicured mown area as a buffer between building and plantings of low native ground covers
- Estimated new cost - \$6000 to \$8000

OPTION C

DO IT ALL! - Accept all (or most) planting ideas in Option B – but do the planting in stages possibly starting in the FALL of 2022

Options Paper prepared in January/February 2022

Respectfully submitted to the Grey County Council by representatives from NeighbourWoods North*: Shawna Macivor, Lloyd Lewis, Gord Edwards, Vicky Thompson

* *NeighbourWoods North* is a sub-group of the *Owen Sound Field Naturalists*