

Here are the highlights from the Lanark County Council meeting held Wednesday, Dec. 1.

Update on Vegetation Management Plan Received: Council received an update regarding the county's 2021 vegetation management and habitat restoration activities.

At the public works committee meeting last week, Climate Environmental Coordinator Michelle Vala provided an overview of the 2021 activities. Vala noted wild parsnip was declared a noxious weed in Ontario in 2015, and with the adoption of its Integrated Vegetation Management Plan in 2016, the county has taken a long-term, multi-faceted approach to managing vegetation in order to maintain safe roadsides. "The vision is to reduce reliance on mowing, brushing and spraying, while restoring pollinator habitat."

Vala indicated spraying for wild parsnip has decreased by 92 per cent since 2016, while hand removal has increased substantially to cover 268 kilometres of roadside, which is nearly half of the county road system. "Summer students spent about 40 per cent of their time hand pulling wild parsnip," she said. "Extra time was taken in hamlets where the risk of the public encountering wild parsnip is high, as well as along the Ottawa Valley Recreational Trail."

Vala highlighted the rise in reported cells of phragmites, another invasive plant that is difficult to control and poses a threat to wetlands and waterways. In 2021, 103 cells were reported on county roads. "The number continues to increase every year, with 19 new cells identified in 2021 surveys," she said. "This is a 75 per cent increase since 2018." In 2021, all new and young cells were spaded by hand, and all were regularly mowed to reduce spread and propagation.

The management plan is slated to be reviewed and revised early in the new year, including an update on control strategies and issues that have progressed since it was adopted.

Vala also shared news on restoration activities. A pilot project in partnership with the Canadian Wildlife Federation (CWF) on County Road 21 (Elm Grove Road) tested site preparation and seeding strategies for roadside pollinator habitat. A large 3-acre field near the county administration building is to be converted from mowed grass to a pollinator patch in phases, and it was seeded with a native seed mix for pollinators this fall. Native, pollinator-friendly plants were planted along the OVRT by county staff and along roadsides, thanks to volunteers from two enhanced Adopt-a-Road groups. Construction projects are being hydroseeded with a custom wildflower mix to promote desirable, pollinator-friendly plants and prevent the growth of invasive ones; over the last four years, 46 km of roadsides have been hydroseeded. Lastly, in partnership with CWF, a training workshop and road tour was hosted in September to showcase the restoration projects for staff from municipalities and conservation authorities in eastern Ontario.

"Pollinator habitat quality is tracked using the Rights-of-Ways as Habitat Working Group's scorecard," Vala said. "Most county roads have basic to moderate pollinator habitat quality."

Council passed a motion to send a letter to the Ministry of Transportation to encourage a more thorough phragmites control program on provincial highways to prevent its spread within Lanark

County and the region. For more information, contact Michelle Vala, Climate Environmental Coordinator, at 1-888-9-LANARK, ext. 3114.

Offering Support for Hwy. 15 Safety Concerns: Following a delegation by Calvary Christian Academy/Calvary Christian High School Principal Tom Bourne, council voted to write a letter of support to the Ministry of Transportation explaining the need for a community safety zone on Hwy. 15 near Franktown.

Bourne highlighted concerns expressed by staff and parents about the safety of a stretch of roadway near the school. The school's entrance is located on a bend in Hwy. 15 where the speed limit is 80 km/hour. "We don't understand why, at a school entrance, the speed is 80 km/hr," he said. "Each day when the 100 families and students leave at 3:30, we hold our breath with concern....We are all very concerned that there is going to be an accident before long and it could be fatal." He added efforts to resolve the issue with MTO have been unsuccessful so far.

For more information, contact Casey Whiticar, Deputy Clerk, at 1-888-9-LANARK, ext. 1102.

***Please note, a media release for the 2021 Inaugural Meeting has been issued separately.**

Upcoming Meetings: County Council, Wednesday, Dec. 8, 5 p.m.; Special Corporate Services (Budget), Dec. 8, (following County Council) Public Works, Dec. 8 (following Corporate Services); Economic Development, Dec. 8 (following Public Works). **County Council, Wednesday, Jan. 12, 5 p.m.;** Community Services, Jan. 12 (following County Council); Corporate Services, Jan. 12 (following Community Services). Watch for details about public access to meetings on agendas and through online notifications. For more information, contact 1-888-9-LANARK, ext. 1502. Like "LanarkCounty1" on Facebook and follow "@LanarkCounty1" on Twitter!

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