SUBJECT: Linc and RHVP Enhanced Roadside and Median Naturalization (PW08079) - (City Wide)

RECOMMENDATION:

(a) That staff be directed to review and assess the Lincoln Alexander and Red Hill Valley Parkway roadsides and medians to identify opportunities for enhanced Naturalization through reduced grass mowing and the introduction of ecologically appropriate native species to improve visual aesthetics; reporting findings and recommendations in advance of the 2009 budget process;

(b) That pending further consideration by Council, current service levels for roadside and median grass mowing shall be maintained with the exception of a median test plot for background assessment work required in the preparation of a staff report.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

At its meeting of May 26, 2008, Public Works Committee directed staff to respond to questions and concerns arising through discussion pertaining to a motion seeking to reduce roadside and median grass cutting on the Lincoln Alexander and the Red Hill Valley Parkways and enhance naturalization through the introduction of “wildflowers”. This report is intended to provide a preliminary response and scope direction to staff for investigation and follow up response.
BACKGROUND:
The information/recommendations contained within this report have city wide implications.

The medians and roadsides along the Lincoln Alexander and the Red Hill Valley Parkways reflect a naturalized landscape approach in their design and maintenance programs intended to support environmental sustainability and operational cost efficiency objectives. The Linc and RHVP facilities are distinct in terms of their geographic context, design, construction, median and roadside landscape maturity, and in their respective maintenance service levels; contributing to their respectively unique visual character and capacity to successfully sustain certain plant materials.

At its meeting of May 26, 2008, Public Works Committee directed staff to respond to questions and concerns arising through discussion pertaining to a motion to reduce roadside and median grass cutting on the Lincoln Alexander expressway and enhance naturalization through the introduction of wildflowers. This report is intended to provide a preliminary response and scope direction to staff for investigation and follow up response relative to the concerns raised by committee members including:

- Driver Safety (sightlines impacted at exit and on ramps)
- Police Patrol Officer Safety (on road visibility)
- Litter Management (entrapment and removal from tall unmown grasses and wildflower or other ecologically appropriate native plant materials)
- Weed Management (in the absence of cutting and a pesticide program)
- Visual Aesthetics (public opinion relative to current maintenance levels)
- Public Health Concerns (relative to airborne allergens - pollen)
- Sustainability and annual maintenance requirements required to establish wildflowers or ecologically appropriate native species in the long term

ANALYSIS/RATIONALE:
In responding to the direction, staff will research current best practices in ecologically appropriate native species highway naturalization, review existing management plans for each facility, conduct site assessments, consult with stakeholders and the general public, analyze findings and prepare a report with recommendations and associated resource impacts. To facilitate the performance of site assessment work, the suspension of grass cutting within a sample area is required to be determined by staff following further investigation.

A report to the November 3rd meeting of the Public Works Committee is considered feasible. In the interim, continuation of planned median/roadside programs to existing service levels is recommended with the exception of the median test plot as noted.

ALTERNATIVES FOR CONSIDERATION:
As alternatives to recommendation b) Council may choose to:

1. Suspend all mowing activities of the linc median and roadsides other than that which is required for safely purposes, or
2. Remove the test plot from recommendation b).

FINANCIAL/STAFFING/LEGAL IMPLICATIONS:
Financial

There are no financial, staffing, or legal implications related to the proposed recommendations. Costs for current median and mowing activities are approximately $15,000 per season.

Staffing

Staff from Public Works (Operations & Maintenance and Capital Planning & Implementation Divisions) will adjust their respective 2008 workplans to include investigating the feasibility of a naturalized/enhanced median and roadside program along the Linc and Red Hill Valley Parkways.

POLICIES AFFECTING PROPOSAL:

N/A

RELEVANT CONSULTATION:

Staff from the Capital Planning & Implementation Division and the Operations & Maintenance Division were consulted in the preparation of this report.

CITY STRATEGIC COMMITMENT:

By evaluating the “Triple Bottom Line”, (community, environment, economic implications) we can make choices that create value across all three bottom lines, moving us closer to our vision for a sustainable community, and Provincial interests.

Community Well-Being is enhanced. ☑ Yes ☐ No
By potentially reducing mowing and associated greenhouse gas submission.

Environmental Well-Being is enhanced. ☐ Yes ☑ No

Economic Well-Being is enhanced. ☐ Yes ☑ No

Does the option you are recommending create value across all three bottom lines? ☐ Yes ☑ No

Do the options you are recommending make Hamilton a City of choice for high performance public servants? ☐ Yes ☑ No