

2018 Report from the Site Planning Committee

Staff

A grant was received from Canada Summer Jobs to hire 4 students for 9 weeks at 30 hour/week (total of 270 hours). The number of hours was reduced from last year when the grant was for 360 hours/person. The minimum wage salary paid by the grant was topped up with funds from a TD grant and students who completed the summer also received a bonus payment. The students started on May 22 under the supervision of Marilyn Latta. Braedon Walker, who worked as summer staff for 3 weeks at the end of the summer in 2017, was designated as the lead hand. Ezra Gordon, Chris Chang and Jay Patel were the remaining staff. Jay resigned in late June due to ongoing issues with his back and was replaced by Peter Kitz. Staff worked very well together and accomplished a lot during the summer.

Tree Planting

The Volunteer Tree Planting was held on June 9. Several of the summer staff assisted and Jay from the City's Natural Services Branch brought the water tanker and equipment to assist with the planting. NSB also contributed 100 trees and shrubs for naturalization efforts in the park. The planting area was along the river bank in the west end of the park. Twelve large Manitoba Maples were purchased from Jeffries Nursery for the planting and the remaining 50 trees and shrubs were from the HP nursery, or those plants donated by NSB, for a total of 62. Forty were planted by the river bank and the remainder along the north side of the wood chip path in the same area. Later on, summer staff augmented the river bank planting with an additional 20 Sand bar willows from the HP nursery.

The purchase of a pull trailer in late June allowed for additional planting along the south side of the trail in the south side of the park at the back. It had been impossible to plant in this area for about the last 10 years as it was too far from the river bank to water with hoses and the pump. A considerable area adjacent to the trail in the Fruit Tree Planting area, which had been covered in long grass and weeds, was mowed before the trees and shrubs could be planted. A total of 146 trees and shrubs were planted which included 7 Basswoods, 8 Nannyberry and 2 Downy Arrowood purchased from Ron Pauls Nursery. An additional 4 trees were planted on the north side of the park, 2 Basswoods and an Elm by the most westerly of stone benches and 1 Basswood to replace a tree that had died in the previous year's planting. As well 5 Saskatoon shrubs were planted near the table at the Interpretive Centre to replace the shrubs which has not survived there. In total 234 trees and shrubs were planted. Tree species were Basswood, Manitoba Maple and Elm while shrubs included Speckled alder, Downy Arrowood, Nannyberry, Red-osier dogwood, Riverbank Amorpha, Chokecherry, Saskatoon, Silver buffaloberry and Sandbar willow.

Maintenance

Staff maintained the Interpretive area at the front of the park, selectively mowed areas along the trail system and around the benches and signs, and other areas where mowing seemed warranted to deal with weed encroachment. In addition, staff mowed and whippers some of the previous tree planting areas 2 or 3 times during the summer to help prevent weeds from overtaking the planting areas. This is

a necessary part of the tree planting program as without mowing, the smaller trees and shrubs can be out-competed by the weeds. Once a planting is well established, mowing efforts can be reduced as the trees and shrubs grow larger although some weed control efforts will likely always be required.

The City continued with rough cuts of the areas between the road and the trails in the back part of the park and the area around where the planters are located in the front of the park. Two mowings were completed by the end of August.

Invasive Species

The main problem species in the park continue to be Canada thistle, Burdock, Tufted vetch, Reed Canary grass and Leafy Spurge. The Leafy Spurge infestation between the parking lot and the prairie restoration continues to expand. The City sprayed the Leafy Spurge in late June or early July which did top kill a number of the plants but not all plants were sprayed. This area will need constant monitoring and care in the future. Two other small sites in the park where leafy spurge had been spotted and pulled in the past showed no signs of top growth this year, but the sites should continue to be monitored yearly.

Canada Thistle continues to be a biggest problem in the park. Staff started mowing on the south side of the road at the front of the park opposite the interpretive area. This area had not been mowed previously but was beginning to be infested with thistle. Young trees and shrubs were flagged before mowing to allow for natural regrowth to continue in these areas. It is expected that in future years that additional area in the park will have to be mowed to deal with this aggressive and persistent weed.

The prairie restoration has particular problems with Canada thistle as it cannot be mowed to deal with the problem. Staff pulled thistle during the summer and especially during their last week of work as the thistle was going to seed at that time. NSB did some herbiciding for thistle in this area in September which should help considerably for next year, but thistle will always be a problem in the restoration and in the park as a whole. The other major problem in the restoration is Reed canary grass, a tall aggressive grass species which outcompetes the more desirable grasses and the flowering plants. The east end of the prairie restoration was whippers 3 times during the summer to help set back the Reed Canary Grass and keep it from going to seed. It remains to be seen if there is any long-term solution for this problem which is starting to take hold in other areas of the park as well.

Tufted vetch infestations are a problem particularly in the prairie restoration and some of the tree planting areas. Staff and volunteers have dealt with this both by hand pulling or whippers depending on the location.

Surprisingly, the amount of Burdock producing flowering stems this year was considerably lower (estimated at 30-40% of what it had been in previous years). It is uncertain whether the ongoing efforts to remove it from the park are having an impact or it was just not a good year for Burdock. It will be interesting to see what next year brings.

No new Buckthorn plants were spotted in the park this year although one of the old stems is sprouting and will need to be dealt with. Paul Mutch from NSB is aware of this location. No Lythrum was spotted in the park this year.

The Towering poplar grove in the back of the park continues to be both an eyesore and a hazard. A number of the mature trees are now dead which increases the risk of blow down in strong winds. Although mowing by the City around the grove has prevented the poplar suckers from advancing in the area between by path and the road, the poplars had spread considerably on the other side of the trail towards the south edge of the park. Marilyn worked with the summer staff to cut down a number of the smaller trees in that area. This is something that needs to be consistently carried out on a yearly basis although for various reasons had not been done for several years. Another location farther west along the park boundary was also selectively cut for the first time to prevent further encroachment of this species. A planting at the front of the park near the start of the prairie has been largely eradicated. City staff removed the larger trees last year (although one was missed), after one dead top blew down and damaged the fence, and smaller suckers are selectively removed each year.

One interesting thing to note in the large Towering poplar grove is that there is starting to be considerably regrowth of native species (mainly Manitoba Maple, Basswood, and Red-osier dogwood) among the dead poplar trunks. This provides the possibility that the poplar grove will eventually be naturalized with native trees and shrubs. Next year efforts should be made to remove some of the poplar suckers from the grove, as well as maintaining the perimeter, to further aid naturalization.

Trail System

Staff worked on replenishing the trails throughout the summer as time allowed or on days when the conditions were too wet for mowing or planting. The whole trail system was topped up except for the segment which runs through the little forest in the southwest corner of the park. All of the wood chip piles were used up except for the pile near the planters at the front of the park. Use of the park and the trail system continues to increase and there are almost always visitors to the park throughout the day.

Park Benches

One new park bench was installed through the City's donation program in the west end of the park in memory of Jack and Louise Haddrell. There is a possibility of another bench to be sited in the edge of the prairie restoration facing the river. Although these donated benches are no cost to the Foundation, it is suggested the careful consideration be given to the optimum number of benches and their placement before accepting new donations in the future. One thought to consider if there are future donations is to remove the two limestone benches, which get minimal use, and replace them with donated benches.

Volunteers

Alex Yablonski and Marielle Rowan Gervais participated in the Volunteer Tree Planting and indicated an interest in helping further in the park. They came one or two mornings a week and worked on weeding in the Interpretive area, the prairie, and the wildflower planters (which had received no maintenance last year). Their efforts are much appreciated.

Board members Saul Henteleff, Yude Henteleff, Gord Elvers, and Ian Keenan assisted with monitoring staff during the summer. Saul worked on getting equipment running and providing consumables. Ian took care of some of the equipment maintenance and also monitored and maintained the bluebird boxes previously installed in the park. Although Ian had spotted a Mountain Bluebird in the park in the spring, no bluebirds were observed nesting in the park. And Gord, Yude and Saul ensured that staff were promptly paid as well as other bills.

Goals for next year

- Plant an area along the river bank immediately west of this year's planting area at the Volunteer tree planting (tentatively June 8th).
- Plant remaining Sandbar willow in the nursery strategically along the riverbank to encourage colonization of this shrub to help with bank stabilization.
- Mow, clean up and plant additional areas along the south side of the trail in the back half of the park to further enhance naturalization efforts and to assist in screening the view of the Van Hull housing development.
- Start a mapping program in the park to identify areas which will be most impacted by the Emerald ash borer and the loss of ash trees. It is estimated that between 20% and 30% of the trees in the park are ash and will be lost within the next 5-10 years.

Submitted by Marilyn Latta

October 1, 2018