Minute No. 651
Report - Standing Policy Committee on Protection and Community Services – September 26, 2011

Item No. 2 Management of the Canada Goose Population at Retention Ponds

On October 5, 2011, the Executive Policy Committee referred the matter to the 2012 Operating Budget review process.

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DECISION MAKING HISTORY:

EXECUTIVE POLICY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

On October 5, 2011, the Executive Policy Committee referred the matter to the 2012 Operating Budget review process.

STANDING COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

On September 26, 2011, the Standing Policy Committee on Protection and Community Services concurred in the recommendation of the Winnipeg Public Service and submitted the matter to the Executive Policy Committee and Council.

Further on September 26, 2011, the Standing Policy Committee on Protection and Community Services requested that, subject to approval by Council of Recommendation 1, the Winnipeg Public Service report back to the Standing Policy Committee on Protection and Community Services on the findings and any proposed long term strategy on the matter.

On May 30, 2011, the Standing Policy Committee on Protection and Community Services granted an extension of time until September 2011 for the Winnipeg Public Service to report back to the appropriate committee of Council, as directed on January 31, 2011.

On April 4, 2011, the Standing Policy Committee on Protection and Community Services recommended that the Winnipeg Public Service report back in 60 days to the appropriate committee of Council, as directed on January 31, 2011.

On January 31, 2011, the Standing Policy Committee on Protection and Community Services passed the following motion:

WHEREAS the proliferation of geese and the resultant feces generated continues to produce serious health and safety concerns for all citizens of the City of Winnipeg;

AND WHEREAS there is a significant Canada goose population at City of Winnipeg retention ponds in or adjacent to public parks or school grounds;

AND WHEREAS on September 26, 2007, Council concurred in the recommendation of the Standing Policy Committee on Protection and Community Services to initiate a pilot project at Burland Park, west of Highbury Street, utilizing professionally handled herding dogs for goose dispersal;

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DECISION MAKING HISTORY (continued):

STANDING COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION (continued):

AND WHEREAS researchers in Atlanta are working with the United States Federal Aviation Administration to explore options for keeping birds away from retention ponds around airports including: experimenting with different dyes and plants, considering changing the shape of retention ponds, and using nets or covers;

AND WHEREAS it is desirable to explore any and all potential options for goose dispersal including, without limitation, alternate methods used by the public and the private sector to minimize the proliferation of geese at retention ponds;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the City of Winnipeg Public Service be directed to report back to the appropriate committee of Council in 90 days with:

(i) an overview of the relevant legislation governing the management of the Canada goose population at retention ponds;

(ii) an overview of best practices used by the public and private sectors to manage the Canada goose population at retention ponds; and

(iii) recommendations regarding the implementation of a pilot project based on best practices to minimize the proliferation of geese at City of Winnipeg retention ponds in or adjacent to public parks or school grounds.

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

Title: **Management of Canada Geese Populations**

Critical Path: **Standing Policy Committee on Protection and Community Services – EPC - Council**

AUTHORIZATION

Author	Department Head	CFO	CAO
D. Domke, Manager of Parks and Open Spaces	B.W. Sacher, P.Eng. Director of Public Works	Mike Ruta Chief Financial Officer	Phil Sheegl Chief Administrative Officer

RECOMMENDATIONS

That, through the 2012 budget process, the City of Winnipeg fund a seasonal position and associated resources to monitor goose populations, hold consultations with residents, develop education and awareness materials, and work with residents to form goose dissuading programs in community areas.

REASON FOR THE REPORT

The Standing Policy Committee on Protection and Community Services recommended that the City of Winnipeg Public Service be directed to report back to the appropriate committee of Council in 90 days with:

1. an overview of the relevant legislation governing the management of the Canada goose population at retention ponds;
2. an overview of best practices used by the public and private sectors to manage the Canada goose population at retention ponds; and
3. recommendations regarding the implementation of a pilot project based on best practices to minimize the proliferation of geese at City of Winnipeg retention ponds in or adjacent to public parks or school grounds.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- The proliferation of geese around retention basins is a difficult problem, and is not easily solved through any one single measure.
- Utilizing a variety of techniques is the most effective and widely acceptable approach to minimizing the proliferation of geese.
- Developing and enlisting the area residents requires an outreach component as well as the ability to give them the resources to do their part.
- Monitoring of goose populations across the city would be needed to determine the effectiveness of various deterrent techniques and would lead to better direction for a longer term strategy.
- Establishing a pilot project retention basin in a residential area with park land to test the effectiveness and difficulty of transitioning a turf lined pond to a more natural environment.
- A $49,127 budget estimate is proposed in the 2012 budget process to fund a seasonal employee (0.6 FTE), vehicle usage, printing costs, and related community consultation.

HISTORY

Concern about proliferation of Canada Geese within the City of Winnipeg has been growing for a number of years. The City of Winnipeg has been involved with the Urban Goose Working Group (UGWG) since 2000. The Urban Goose Working Group includes representation from Environment Canada, Manitoba Conservation, City of Winnipeg, Winnipeg Airport Authority and Transport Canada. The UGWG was first established in February 2000 due to growing concerns about the numbers of geese in Winnipeg.

Canada goose populations and the related concerns can be separated into two groups:

1. The Resident Population – these birds return each spring, breed in the city and leave in late fall.
2. The Migrant Population – these birds arrive in the city in large numbers in spring and fall, stay for a short amount of time and continue on their way.

The biology and habitat of Canada Geese makes the retention pond system of Winnipeg an ideal place for both the resident population and the migrant population. The rock lined basins surrounded by mowed turf grass are ideal for geese which like the unimpeded access to water and enjoy browsing on the tender green grass. These areas also provide the clear sight lines which allow them to see danger approaching. The Water and Waste Department is responsible for maintaining the rock revetment portion of the basin and the basin itself thus sharing in the management issues related to urban geese.

Past efforts to deal with geese in Winnipeg's public spaces have involved public education brochures and trained dogs. At Deacon Reservoir, goose deterrent measures include auditory and visual scaring devices and have included the use of trained raptors.

Recently, developers have chosen a more naturalized approach to retention pond development which includes taller wetland vegetation around the edges. The naturalized retention basin in Royalwood is an example of this. The vegetation may act as a deterrent to geese, and is also better for water quality and biodiversity. However, monitoring to determine the effectiveness of this vegetative barrier has not been conducted.

In spring 2011, the UGWG embarked on a pilot project to remove eggs from nests along Kenaston Blvd./Bishop Grandin Blvd. areas between Wilkes Ave. and Waverley St.. The purpose of this project is to reduce the numbers of geese crossing the roadway thereby improving public safety. Preliminary results from this pilot project suggest that it was a success.

Appendix A details the best management practices for Canada Geese.

Overview of Relevant Legislation

1. Government of Canada, Environment Canada, Canadian Wildlife Services: Migratory Birds Convention Act and Regulations – The Federal government has legal jurisdiction over Canada Geese and any activity which harms or harasses them (including noise makers and active scaring devices). Permits are required and can be issued under the authority of this Act for any activity to scare, move or harm geese by Environment Canada.
2. Province of Manitoba, Manitoba Conservation: The Wildlife Act – Manitoba Conservation has authority under this Act to set hunting areas, regulations and bag limits. The relevance of this Act is primarily only if hunting was a consideration.

As land owner, the City of Winnipeg can make an application to Environment Canada for the purposes of scaring or physically reducing goose populations. The City can only make application to affect geese on lands that it owns and not private property.

Certain City By-Laws also relate to Best Practices:

- City of Winnipeg: Neighbourhood Liveability By-Law – Certain noise making and scaring devices may contravene acceptable levels listed in the By-Law.
- City of Winnipeg: Firearms By-law 2890/81 – Restricts the use of firearms in the case that a hunt in city limits would be considered.
- City of Winnipeg: Pound By-law 2443/79 Section 20 – This By-Law restricts off-leash dogs in public areas and may be relevant if dogs were being considered as a means to scare geese in public spaces.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Financial Impact Statement **Date:** August 12, 2011

Project Name: **First Year of Program** **2012**

MANAGEMENT OF CANADA GEESE POPULATIONS

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Capital					
Capital Expenditures Required	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -
Less: Existing Budgeted Costs	-	-	-	-	-
Additional Capital Budget Required	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -
Funding Sources:					
Debt - Internal	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -
Debt - External	-	-	-	-	-
Grants (Enter Description Here)	-	-	-	-	-
Reserves, Equity, Surplus	-	-	-	-	-
Other - Enter Description Here	-	-	-	-	-
Total Funding	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -
Total Additional Capital Budget Required	$ -				
Total Additional Debt Required	$ -				
Current Expenditures/Revenues					
Direct Costs	$ -	$ 49,127	$ 49,468	$ 49,321	$ 50,037
Less: Incremental Revenue/Recovery	-	-	-	-	-
Net Cost/(Benefit)	$ -	$ 49,127	$ 49,468	$ 49,321	$ 50,037
Less: Existing Budget Amounts	-	-	-	-	-
Net Budget Adjustment Required	$ -	$ 49,127	$ 49,468	$ 49,321	$ 50,037

Additional Comments: Costs include geese dissuasion devices, and a seasonal position (0.6 FTE) to develop and implement the goose monitoring and deterrence program.

Original signed by H. Schoenfeld, CA
H. Schoenfeld CA
Acting Manager of Finance & Administration

CONSULTATION

In preparing this report there was consultation with:

Water & Waste Department

SUBMITTED BY

Department: Public Works
Division: Parks and Open Spaces
Prepared by: Rodney Penner, City Naturalist
Date: August 19, 2011
Attachments: Appendix A – Overview of Best Practices

Appendix A. Overview of Best Practices

1. Community Involvement and Education

Technique
Information provided to retention pond residents about lawn management techniques that discourage the use of the habitat by geese. Information about goose control techniques and the rationale behind their implementation. Education that discourages the feeding of geese and/or the implementation of a no-feeding by-law.

Rationale
- Public support may be required for the implementation and successful outcome of many goose control techniques.
- Some proposed goose control techniques may benefit from or require the involvement of the public.
- No feeding education/by-law may make geese less attracted to a sensitive area and reduce aggressive behaviour of geese seeking supplemental food.

Barriers
- Opposing opinions about goose control and feeding may result in conflicting opinion of the public.

2. Reproductive Control

Technique
Implementation of egging, the removal of goose eggs from nests after incubation, will reduce local goose proliferation. Using this technique, geese will not re-nest and will move away from sensitive areas.

Rationale
- Results in a short-term reduction in the resident goose population due to the immediate reduction in the gosling population.
- If practiced over 5 to 10 years a reduction in the goose population could be realized.
- May be particularly useful for areas where traffic safety is a concern.
- It is already supported as a control technique by the Urban Goose Working Group.

Barriers
- Long-term practice is required in order to reduce local resident goose populations.
- Requires support from landowners reporting nest sites and allowing access to the nest.
- Transient nature of geese may result in no noticeable difference in the goose population at retention ponds.
- Permits are required for all landowners.

3. Application of repellents

Technique
Chemical repellents make grass unpalatable to geese reducing feeding in sensitive locations. One chemical that has been approved by the Pest Management Regulatory Agency in Canada is Avigon 14.5, its active ingredient is methyl anthranilate.

Rationale
- In other jurisdictions, this practice is usually well-accepted by the public and is considered a non-lethal manner of controlling geese.
- Where feeding on grass is a problem, chemical repellents reduce this behaviour.

Barriers
- Re-application is often an issue and may be cost prohibitive.
- Geese may move to another sensitive area, shifting the problem elsewhere.
- Does not reduce the goose population.
- Reduces feeding but does not prevent defecation.
- Success is variable and cannot be guaranteed.
- Mowing of grass and precipitation reduces effectiveness.

4. Allow hunting on large private properties such as golf courses, vacant agricultural land, and closer to the city boundary

Technique
Allowing hunting in areas where risk to the public is minimized can reduce the local goose population.

Rationale
- Results in a reduction of the resident goose population and can help reduce the number of migrant birds.
- Long-lived geese can learn that urban areas are not a refuge from hunting.
- The use of hazing and scaring tactics in concert with hunting results in an enhancement of the effectiveness of these techniques.
- Regulatory approval is required from Manitoba Conservation to modify hunting areas.
- Cost effective and involves the use of a sustainable resource.

Barriers
- Public support may be problematic.
- Noise by-laws may prevent implementation.
- Requires support from Rural Municipalities surrounding the City of Winnipeg.
- Hunting in urban areas is limited by the lack of safe open areas.
- Requires approval under the Firearms By-law

5. Physical Barriers

Techniques
These techniques involve nets and fences that will exclude geese from sensitive public areas – retention ponds, athletic fields and school grounds. Both vertical fencing and horizontal fencing can be used.

Rationale
- Vertical fencing prevents moulting geese from accessing water.
- Horizontal wiring prevents geese from using a retention pond to land.
- Physical barriers are a non-lethal way of preventing geese from congregating at retention ponds.

Barriers
- All ponds in the vicinity will need to be wired.
- Does not reduce the goose population.
- Fencing restricts access and may interfere with recreation activities.
- Horizontal wiring raised to allow for recreation reduces effectiveness of the technique as geese will fly underneath the wire.
- There is a risk of injury and potential liability.
- The size of the pond dictates the tension of wire required and thus, the expense of the installation.
- Ice and snow can be damaging to the wires in the winter and continual maintenance would be required.
- Vandalism can be a problem in public areas.
- Requires compliance from property owners.

Additional Information
Communication with Margo Supplies in High River, Alberta indicates that urban retention ponds may not be ideal candidates for the installation of horizontal wires for the reasons listed above. The company installed horizontal wire for the Winnipeg Airport Authority on their glycol run-off pond. Based on the experience, a program of reproductive control that uses community and groups that assist by reporting nest locations and incubation was emphasized.

6. Habitat Modification

Technique
Habitat modification techniques can be used to control goose populations at retention basins. They can include allowing emergent vegetation to grow, allowing grass to grow to its maximum height, changing the species of grass planted, and planting shrub barriers.

Rationale

- Reduced mowing and species changes will reduce the abundance of new, green grass shoots that geese feed on.
- Incorporating emergent vegetation such as cattails reduces access to water and reduces the site lines that geese require to feel "safe".
- Shrubs can act as a barrier for geese and can be perceived as a location where predators can hide.

Barriers

- Naturalization is not as effective if the retention pond and the naturalized area is surrounded by short, green grass.
- Does not prevent nesting behaviour.
- Wariness of predators may be reduced in urban geese.
- Long-term solution dependant on plant survival and growth rate.
- Grass alternatives may not be suitable for athletic fields and park lawns.
- Requires compliance from homeowners.
- Does not reduce the goose population.

7. Hazing and Scaring

Techniques

Various methods are available for chasing or frightening geese away from a sensitive area. Eye spot balloons, scarecrows, predator decoys, dog silhouettes, reflective tape, distress calls, pyrotechnics, lasers, trained dogs and birds of prey, flags and radio control boats are some of the techniques.

Rationale

- Geese perceive the habitat as unsafe or unsuitable as habitat and move to a new location.

Barriers

- Limited success due to geese becoming familiar with the deterrent and losing their fear.
- To be effective, these methods require a sustained, daily effort.
- Techniques must be rotated and combined to increase effectiveness.
- Urban geese are less sensitive to hazing and scaring; they are adapted to an urban environment.
- In large areas, the techniques serve to move geese around but not remove them from an area.
- Should be in place before geese arrive.
- Some techniques may be disruptive to humans in residential areas.
- Does not reduce the goose population.

8. Goose Round-ups

Techniques
During the moulting period, when both adults and goslings are flightless, geese are netted and removed from an area. The captured geese could be relocated to a new area or euthanized.

Rationale
- Ensures an immediate decline in the residential goose population.
- Cost-effective.
- Requires approval and permit from Environment Canada and would require support from UGWG members.
- Effective as part of a long-term solution to reduce the residential goose population.

Barriers
- Pubic opinion.
- Relocation of geese may not be feasible due to the availability of land owners willing to take the captured geese.