



Staff Report C2026-04

Committee 2026-04-20

Council 2026-05-04

Amendments

Submitted To: Committee of the Whole | Council
Submitted By: Sara Almas, Director of Legislative Services/Clerk
Prepared By: Adam Harrod, Manager, By-law Services Division
Wendy Martin, Manager, Greenspace
Subject: New Long Grass & Nuisance Weeds By-law

Recommendation

THAT Staff Report C2026-04, New Long Grass & Nuisance Weeds By-law, be received;

AND THAT the proposed Long Grass and Nuisance Weeds By-law, attached as Appendix A, be enacted.

Amendments

None.

1. Executive Summary

The Town's existing Long Grass and Weeds By-law (By-law 03-18) is over 20 years old and no longer reflects current expectations for public safety, environmental stewardship, and effective enforcement. Complaints have increased substantially, highlighting the limitations of outdated definitions, vague standards, and enforcement tools.

With input and collaboration from our local Pollinate Collingwood organization, the proposed Long Grass and Nuisance Weeds By-law modernizes the regulatory framework by establishing clear vegetation standards, recognizing naturalized and ecological landscaping, improving enforcement efficiency through seasonal Orders and AMPS, enabling full cost recovery, and clarifying maintenance responsibilities for private

property and boulevards. Together, these updates create a clear, balanced, and enforceable by-law that strengthens the Town’s ability to address property maintenance concerns while supporting public health, safety, and environmental objectives.

2. Analysis

Background

Since 2003, the Town’s property maintenance landscape has evolved substantially. The current by-law no longer reflects operational realities or community expectations and does not:

- regulate boulevard vegetation;
- permit modern methods for the service of Orders (e.g., electronic service);
- reflect the increased use of naturalization and native species;
- require maintenance of boulevard vegetation, including vegetation planted by property owners;
- clearly define vegetation types; or
- incorporate the Town’s Administrative Monetary Penalty System (AMPS), now standard in many Ontario municipalities.

Complaint volumes have increased significantly (see Table 1), reflecting both evolving community expectations and the limitations in the current by-law’s clarity and enforceability. Updating the by-law is necessary to provide objective standards, support fair and consistent enforcement, and reflect contemporary municipal best practices.

Table 1: Calls for Service – Long Grass & Weeds (2013–2025)

Year	Number of Occurrences
2013	58
2014	61
2015	61
2016	47
2017	44
2018	65

2019	31
2020	46
2021	39
2022	93
2023	91
2024	238*
2025	274*

*Some of the recent increases are due to multiple reports from single individuals.

In addition, the current by-law does not adequately address situations where boulevards have been altered or landscaped, nor does it impose clear and enforceable maintenance responsibilities for such areas. This has contributed to inconsistent upkeep and increased reliance on Town resources for remediation and enforcement.

A review of by-laws in neighbouring and comparable municipalities, including Wasaga Beach, Owen Sound, Barrie, Midland and Innisfil, shows a consistent shift toward clearer vegetation standards, updated definitions, exemptions for naturalized areas and gardens, and strengthened enforcement frameworks. These municipalities commonly establish height limits for grass, maintain exemptions for gardens and natural growth areas, and incorporate seasonal or policy-based approaches such as “No Mow May,” to balance environmental objectives with operational and public safety considerations. Collectively, these approaches reflect broader municipal trends toward modern, enforceable yard maintenance standards that promote consistency, clarity, and effectiveness in municipal enforcement practices.

Legislative Findings and Evidentiary Basis

Staff undertook a detailed analysis to ensure the proposed by-law is evidence-based and represents a proportionate response to legitimate public-interest objectives.

Unmanaged or excessively tall vegetation can pose several risks, including:

- impaired sightlines at intersections and driveways;
- increased fire risk during dry conditions;

- the creation of habitats for mosquitoes, rodents, and other insects or animals;
and
- contributions to neighbourhood blight where vegetation is left unmanaged.

These risks apply to both private land and boulevards, particularly where vegetation has been planted, altered, or left unmanaged. Unmanaged boulevard vegetation may also obstruct pedestrian access and interfere with the safe use of sidewalks and roadways.

Grass and Ground Cover

Neighbourhood blight associated with long grass most commonly arises where grass and ground cover are left unmanaged for extended periods, creating a visible appearance of neglect that may detract from the character and enjoyment of surrounding properties and the public realm. This impact is distinct from intentional gardens or naturalized plantings, which are designed, established, and maintained for specific ecological or aesthetic purposes.

Nuisance Weeds

As part of this review, staff also considered whether to rely on the Weed Control Act or to identify a limited list of nuisance weeds specific to municipal public-health and safety objectives. The Weed Control Act applies primarily where weeds interfere with agriculture or horticulture and does not address many of the risks posed by certain plant species in residential and urban settings.

Accordingly, the proposed by-law identifies a narrow list of Nuisance Weeds based on demonstrable risks to human health and safety, including toxicity, severe allergic reactions, chemical burns, or airborne health impacts, particularly affecting children, pets, and vulnerable populations.

Identified Nuisance Weeds

Common Name	Scientific Name	Basis for Inclusion
Giant Hogweed	<i>Heracleum mantegazzianum</i>	Sap causes severe burns, blistering, and potential permanent eye injury when exposed to sunlight
Poison Hemlock	<i>Conium maculatum</i>	Highly toxic if ingested; poses serious risk to children and pets
Wild Parsnip	<i>Pastinaca sativa</i>	Sap causes chemical burns following skin contact and sunlight exposure
Poison Ivy	<i>Toxicodendron radicans</i>	Causes severe allergic dermatitis; airborne toxins released if burned
Ragweed species	<i>Ambrosia</i> spp.	Major source of allergenic pollen contributing to asthma and respiratory illness

Proportionality and Balancing

To ensure a proportionate approach that limits impacts on residents' expressive and ecological landscaping choices, the proposed by-law includes:

- a height standard that applies only to non-exempt grass and ground cover;
- broad exemptions for gardens, naturalized areas, and natural growth areas;
- reverse-onus and inference provisions to distinguish intentional planting from neglect; and
- clear obligations for property owners to maintain any boulevard vegetation, regardless of whether it was planted by the current or previous owner.

The resulting framework is rational, proportionate, and operationally effective, and appropriately balances individual property rights with the Town's responsibility to protect public health, safety, and community standards.

Key Changes/Enhancements in the Proposed By-law

Clear Height and Maintenance Standards

The current by-law relies on subjective descriptors such as long, overgrown, unkempt, and unsightly, which are open to interpretation and may expose the by-law to challenges on the basis of vagueness or uncertainty. The proposed by-law replaces these subjective terms with an objective maximum vegetation height of 20 centimetres for grass and ground cover on both private property and adjoining boulevards. It also reflects operational realities, as vegetation maintained below this threshold is generally easier to manage using typical residential equipment and helps prevent conditions associated with safety concerns or neighbourhood blight.

The height standard is intended to establish a minimum property maintenance benchmark that distinguishes unmanaged grass and ground cover from intentional landscaping, rather than to regulate individual aesthetic preferences.

In determining an appropriate height threshold, staff considered alternative standards, including a maximum grass height of 30 centimetres. Staff concluded that a higher threshold would be less effective in addressing the safety, nuisance, and appearance-based concerns associated with unmanaged long grass. Vegetation approaching or exceeding 30 centimetres is more likely to harbour pests and contribute to neighbourhood blight, particularly in residential areas.

Based on this analysis, staff identified 20 centimetres as a height threshold that more effectively addresses the identified risks while remaining objective, measurable, and straightforward to apply. This threshold supports:

- a clear and easily understood standard;
- reduced reliance on subjective assessments of condition or appearance; and,
- consistent application across properties and neighbourhoods.

Municipal best practices recognize that intentional naturalization, when properly maintained, supports biodiversity and pollinator habitats. In contrast, unmanaged grass provides minimal ecological benefit and may facilitate the spread of weeds. This

distinction supports regulating unmanaged overgrowth while accommodating intentional ecological landscaping practices. The proposed height standard is not intended to regulate landscaping aesthetics or expressive planting choices. The by-law distinguishes unmanaged grass and ground cover from gardens, naturalized areas, and natural growth areas that are intentionally established and maintained, which are exempt from the height requirement where they do not create safety concerns or other conditions addressed by the by-law.

Seasonal Enforcement Framework

The proposed by-law introduces a structured seasonal enforcement framework whereby height-based standards for grass and ground cover apply from June 1 to November 15, while all other provisions apply from May 1 to November 15, except for safety-related provisions addressing sightlines, obstructions, and interference with the safe use of highways and sidewalks, which apply at all times.

This approach enables earlier intervention for public health and safety concerns while allowing residents to participate in early-season pollinator protection initiatives, such as “No Mow May,” without contravening height standards. The framework balances environmental objectives with the Town’s responsibility to address safety, access, and visibility issues on both private property and adjoining boulevards.

Exemptions for Gardens, Naturalized Areas, and Natural Growth Areas

The current by-law does not include exemptions for intentional or environmentally beneficial landscaping. The proposed by-law introduces clear, structured exemptions for gardens, naturalized areas, and natural growth areas, reflecting the ecological and community benefits of native plantings and managed naturalization.

These exemptions apply where vegetation is intentionally established, actively maintained, and does not obstruct sidewalks, driveways, or sightlines. This approach encourages meaningful ecological landscaping while continuing to regulate unmanaged overgrowth and nuisance weeds.

Boulevard Maintenance Requirement

Historically, Collingwood, like many Ontario municipalities, has expected adjacent property owners to maintain boulevard areas. However, by-law 03-18 does not clearly articulate this expectation or establish an enforceable standard, resulting in inconsistent upkeep and increased reliance on Town resources for routine boulevard maintenance.

The proposed by-law clarifies and strengthens this long-standing responsibility by expressly requiring adjacent property owners to maintain boulevard grass and ground cover to the same 20-centimetre standard applied to private property, except where environmental or structural constraints make maintenance impractical. This update aligns with contemporary municipal approaches, in which owners are responsible for maintaining adjacent boulevard vegetation. It also improves the streetscape appearance, promotes consistent property maintenance standards, and reduces unnecessary maintenance demands on Town operations.

Boulevard Plantings and Reinstatement Authority

The proposed By-law clarifies that property owners are responsible for maintaining vegetation or landscaping located on any boulevard contiguous with their property, regardless of whether the vegetation was planted by the current owner, a previous owner, or installed pursuant to Town authorization.

The proposed by-law does not authorize any person to place, install, alter, landscape, excavate, or otherwise undertake works on a boulevard or other municipal property except where expressly authorized by the Town. Any permit, approval, or authorization required under another Town by-law, such as the Road Occupancy By-law, continues to apply.

Where boulevard vegetation becomes unmanaged, hazardous, obstructive, or otherwise fails to comply with the proposed By-law, the Town is authorized to remove such vegetation and reinstate the boulevard to a standard condition at the owner's expense. This authority ensures that altered boulevards do not result in ongoing maintenance issues or public safety concerns and that municipal lands are maintained in a safe and consistent manner.

Modernized Service of Orders

The current by-law restricts the service of Orders to regular mail, registered mail, or in-person delivery, which can result in delays and inconsistent receipt. The proposed by-law modernizes service provisions by allowing Orders to be served by email, personal service, posting, courier, traditional mail, or any combination of these methods with clear deemed-service rules. These improvements support timely, reliable, and legally robust communication with property owners, enhancing both fairness and administrative efficiency.

Improved Service Delivery

A significant operational enhancement in the proposed by-law is the adoption of a seasonal Order model, which replaces the repetitive notice-issuance cycle required under the current framework. Under this model, once a complaint is received and a violation is confirmed, a single Order is issued for the property and remains in effect for the duration of the enforcement season.

Any subsequent instances of non-compliance during that season will result in the immediate issuance of a penalty notice and/or the scheduling of contractor-performed remedial work, without the need to issue a new Order for each subsequent violation. This approach reflects the Town's commitment to clear, fair, and proportionate enforcement and directly addresses administrative inefficiencies identified in the current by-law.

The seasonal Order model reduces staff time spent issuing, tracking, and serving duplicate Orders for recurring non-compliance, improves the timeliness of enforcement actions, and enhances consistency across all properties. It also provides greater clarity to residents by establishing clear expectations for ongoing compliance for the remainder of the season.

When paired with the by-law's modernized service provisions, enhanced inspection authorities, and full cost-recovery tools, this model materially strengthens the By-law Services Division's ability to manage increasing complaint volumes and deliver streamlined and equitable enforcement outcomes for the community. Collectively, these

improvements align with contemporary municipal best practices and support the Town's broader objectives of service excellence, operational efficiency, and regulatory fairness.

Proposed Enforcement Process

- 1. Complaint Received:** A service request or complaint is received and assigned to a Municipal Law Enforcement Officer (MLEO) for investigation.
- 2. Order Issued:** If a violation is confirmed and does not qualify for an exemption under the proposed by-law, the Officer issues an Order requiring the property owner to bring the property into compliance within 7-10 days. Reasonable extensions may be granted based on weather conditions, contractor availability, or other mitigating factors.
- 3. Follow-Up Inspection:** At the end of the compliance period, the Officer conducts a follow-up inspection to verify whether the property has been brought into compliance and that the required corrective actions have been completed.
- 4. Penalty and Remedial Action (if non-compliant):** If the property remains non-compliant following the follow-up inspection, the Officer will issue a penalty notice and/or arrange for a contractor to perform remedial work to cut or remove grass, ground cover, nuisance weeds, other vegetation, and to remove non-compliant boulevard plantings and reinstate the boulevard surface, as required.
- 5. Cost Recovery:** All costs associated with contractor-performed remedial work are invoiced to the property owner. Any unpaid amounts will be added to the property tax roll and may accrue interest in accordance with Town policy.

Under the seasonal Order model, only one Order is issued per property per season. Any subsequent non-compliance during the same enforcement season will result in the issuance of additional penalty notices and/or remedial action without the need for issuing further Orders. This framework supports consistent enforcement, reduces administrative duplication, improves clarity for property owners, and enhances the Town's overall effectiveness in managing vegetation-related complaints.

Financial Impacts

Contracted remedial work undertaken by the Town will be fully cost-recovered through invoicing to the property owner. Any unpaid amounts will be added to the property tax roll in accordance with the *Municipal Act, 2001*, and may accrue interest thereafter.

The introduction of a seasonal Order model and the integration of AMPS are expected to reduce the number of repeat complaints and decrease the overall staff time required to manage the ongoing non-compliance. These changes are anticipated to improve operational efficiency over time by reducing repeat inspections, duplicate Orders, and administrative workload per file.

For clarity, the proposed by-law does not apply to Town-owned naturalization areas, unmowed sections of parks, or other municipally managed lands intentionally maintained for ecological, environmental, or carbon-reduction purposes. Its implementation also supports Council's broader environmental and climate-responsibility objectives.

Conclusion

The proposed Long Grass and Nuisance Weeds By-law modernizes Collingwood's approach to property maintenance by addressing operational gaps, updating definitions and standards, and incorporating contemporary enforcement tools. By clearly defining property owner responsibilities, recognizing naturalized landscaping, and supporting efficient, fully recoverable enforcement, the proposed by-law improves consistency, fairness, and service delivery. Staff therefore recommend approval of the proposed Long Grass and Nuisance Weeds By-law and repealing By-law 03-18.

3. Input from Other Sources

- Internal discussions with staff from Parks, Facilities, and Public Works.
- A review was conducted of comparable long grass and weeds by-laws from Barrie, Wasaga Beach, Owen Sound, Midland, and Innisfil to identify prevailing municipal approaches and best practices.

- Department Heads reviewed the draft By-law and Staff Report on March 17, 2026, and March 24, 2026, and provided feedback.
- Staff met with the Pollinate Collingwood Group to review the draft by-law and staff report. Feedback received through these discussions was considered, and where appropriate, incorporated into the proposed by-law and this report.
- The draft by-law was also reviewed by legal counsel from Miller Thomson LLP.

4. Applicable Policy or Legislation

The proposed by-law is authorized under the *Municipal Act, 2001*, including the Town's authority respecting:

- Health, safety, and well-being of persons (s. 11);
- Cleaning and clearing of land (s. 127);
- Public nuisances (s. 128);
- Enforcement, inspection, Orders, and penalties (ss. 425–446); and
- Administrative Monetary Penalties (s. 434.1).

Staff reviewed the Weed Control Act and propose to include a limited list of Nuisance Weeds based on demonstrated risks to human health and safety.

The proposed by-law supports Pillar #4 – Responsible of the Town of Collingwood's 2024–2028 Community-Based Strategic Plan by enhancing service excellence through clearly defined and consistently applied vegetation standards, strengthening accountability through transparent enforcement processes, and promoting fiscal responsibility by enabling full cost recovery for municipal remedial work.

5. Considerations

2024-2028 Community Based Strategic Plan: Advances pillar(s) below:

Sustainable Connected Vibrant Responsible

Services adjusted if any

Community Standards

Climate Change / Sustainability:

Positive impact on climate

change/sustainability (decreases GHG emissions) - the by-law supports

municipal climate objectives by reducing unnecessary mowing, enabling intentional naturalization, and placing responsibility for boulevard plantings on adjacent owners.

- Communication / Engagement: Advertisement/Notice will be provided
- Accessibility / Equity, Diversity, Inclusion: Not Applicable
- Registered Lobbyist(s) relating to content: Not Applicable
- Rights of Indigenous Peoples ([UNDRIP](#)): Not Applicable

Next steps and future action required following endorsement: Following Council's enactment of the by-law, the By-law Services Division will implement the updated framework by posting the enacted by-law, coordinating internal communications and training for enforcement staff, updating public-facing information on the Town's website, and initiating a seasonal communications plan to ensure residents are aware of the new standards, exemptions, and enforcement timelines.

6. Appendices and Other Resources

Appendix A: Long Grass and Nuisance Weeds By-law 2026-XXX

Resource 1: Long Grass and Weeds By-law 03-18 (<https://www.collingwood.ca/town-services/documents/law-03-18-long-grass-and-weeds>)

7. Approval

Prepared By:

Adam Harrod, Manager, By-law Services Division

Amanda Fone, Licensing Program and Compliance Officer

Reviewed By:

Sara Almas, Director of Legislative Services/Clerk

CAO Comments:

- Endorsed by CAO Skinner on April 15, 2026 to proceed to COW.