

City of Mississauga

Memorandum



Date: August 22, 2025

To: Chair and Members of Environmental Action Committee

From: Georgios Fthenos, Director, Enforcement

Meeting date: September 2, 2025

Subject: Nuisance Weed and Tall Grass Control By-law 0125-2017 – Response to Recommended Amendments

Background

On May 6, 2025, Blooming Boulevards raised concerns, in their deputation, about the clarity of the [Nuisance Weed and Tall Grass Control By-law 0125-2017](#) (Weed & Tall Grass By-law) and its potential to undermine ecological functions and habitat benefits. In response, the Environmental Action Committee (EAC) directed staff to complete a comprehensive review of the by-law, which included conducting a jurisdictional scan of comparable municipalities and presenting the findings back to EAC.

Context

Regulatory Framework

The Weed & Tall Grass By-law outlines the responsibilities of private property owners to cut and maintain tall grass and to remove and destroy nuisance weeds from their lawns. Sections 5 to 8 under Requirements in the By-law state:

- 5. Every Owner of Land shall cut and maintain tall grass to a height not exceeding 20 centimetres.*
- 6. Every Owner of Land shall destroy and remove all Nuisance Weeds and Nuisance Weed Seeds on their Lands.*
- 7. Every Owner of Land shall maintain the adjoining Boulevard at their expense, and shall cut and maintain tall grass to a height not exceeding 20 centimetres.*
- 8. Every Owner of Land who is served with a Notice of Contravention pursuant to the provisions of this By-law shall comply with the terms of the Notice within the time set out therein.*

Provision 5, which establishes a maximum grass height of 20 cm, was reduced from 30 cm in 2017 following a staff report that recommended regulatory enhancements. This recommendation was based on a jurisdictional scan of comparable jurisdictions, all of which had adopted a 20 cm height limit at that time.

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The Weed & Tall Grass By-law defines ‘Tall Grass’ as “any grasses which exceed 20 centimetres in height” and ‘Nuisance Weed’ as “any of the noxious weeds designated under the *Weed Control Act*, R.S.O. 1990 c. W.5 as set out in Schedule “A” attached hereto, and includes any other weed designated as a local noxious weed under a by-law of the City passed under that act” (see Appendixes 1 and 2). The 2017 staff report also expanded the definition for ‘Nuisance Weed’ to be more comprehensive and increased the number of listed nuisance weeds in the by-law from 12 to 25 species.

Enforcement and Complaint Data

Most complaints related to the Weed & Tall Grass By-law are received from May to September. In 2024, Property Standards, Investigations and Enforcement (PSIE) actioned a total of 2,526 tall grass and weeds complaints. Of these, 1,735 resulted in the issuance of a Notice of Contravention (NOC), and 317 properties underwent remediation. For 2025, the number of complaints is projected to be comparable to or exceed last year’s number, assuming the number of complaints remain constant for the remainder of the year.

When a Municipal Law Enforcement Officer (MLEO) receives a complaint, they attend the location and conduct an inspection of the subject property.

- If no violation is observed, the MLEO documents their investigation notes in the complaint file, and the file is considered rectified.
- If a violation is identified, the MLEO records their findings in the complaint file, including photographic evidence of the infraction. A NOC is then issued to both the owner of the property in question and their home address.

The NOC provides the property owner with a seven-day compliance period to address the violation. If, upon re-inspection, the violation has not been rectified, the MLEO initiates remedial action through a contracted subcontractor. The cost of the remediation, along with an administrative fee of \$430 or 15% of the total cost of the invoice (plus HST), whichever is greater, is applied to the property’s tax roll. A Part I penalty of \$305 can be issued under the *Provincial Offences Act* for violations.

Jurisdictional Research

Across Ontario, municipalities have established yard maintenance by-laws as a common regulatory tool to address tall grass and nuisance weeds (see Appendix 3). Brampton and Toronto have both replaced “weed” language with terms like “prohibited plants” and removed exemption processes for naturalized gardens. Brampton’s 2025 by-law introduced specific definitions (e.g., “ground cover” and “cultivate”), while Toronto promotes pollinator gardens and maintains an online list of prohibited species to support compliance. London’s 2024 by-law similarly aligns with its Climate Emergency Action Plan, allowing naturalized planting while enforcing sightline and safety provisions.

Hamilton and Ottawa adopt more flexible or context-based approaches. Hamilton permits ornamental and edible plants over 21 cm but requires removal of noxious weeds. Ottawa’s by-law avoids fixed height limits, instead relying on contextual evaluation, and includes formal recognition of Naturalized Areas with specific maintenance, intent, and species requirements.

Across jurisdictions, attempts are being made to integrate ecological goals into property standards, often supported by educational tools and clearly defined prohibited species lists.

Comments

One of Blooming Boulevards' objective is to promote naturalized gardens that support native pollinators, and thereby the environment. During their deputation, the organization expressed concerns that the Weed & Tall Grass By-law undermines ecological functions and habitat benefits due to the lack of clarity in distinguishing between grasses, the imposition of height limits to natural grasses, and a restrictive nuisance weeds list. Furthermore, they argued the absence of narrative illustrations, unclear enforcement policies and appeal procedures, and insufficient complaint screening are contributing to the problem.

Nuisance Weed and Tall Grass Control By-law 0125-2017

The Weed & Tall Grass By-law is consistent with other jurisdictions in regulating grass height, requiring it not to exceed 20 cm. It also aligns in its recognition of nuisance weeds as those listed under the *Weed Control Act*. However, unlike other municipalities, the Weed & Tall Grass By-law does not prescribe any further prohibited or invasive plant species beyond those identified provincially. The City's by-law is, therefore, less restrictive when compared to other municipalities, while still in alignment with the health and safety goals of the *Weed Control Act*.

Notably, the City is the only jurisdiction to use the term "tall grass", whereas others use more specific terms such as "ground cover," "turfgrass," or "lawn." The use of these terms refers to perennial grasses grown for traditional lawns. Other jurisdictions also incorporate terms like "garden," "ornamental plant," and "vegetation" to encourage naturalized or pollinator gardens in support of environmental and ecological benefits. While Mississauga's by-law uses broader terminology, PSIE's enforcement procedures and practices ensure a balance between maintaining property standards and respecting the ecological benefits derived from naturalized gardens.

Public Education and Support for Naturalization

Through the Forestry Department, the City provides public education and actively supports naturalization by offering a range of community outreach and education programs to promote the preservation and enhancement of natural areas and heritage features. For example, the [Naturalize Your Yard](#) program provides residents with resources and encouragement to establish naturalized landscapes on their properties. In addition, residents can register their yards with the Mississauga Nature Steward at Home initiative, which formally recognizes individual contributions to biodiversity and environmental sustainability.

These initiatives demonstrate the City's commitment to supporting naturalization while ensuring that the enforcement of the Weed & Tall Grass By-law remains focused on addressing health, safety, and property standards concerns. Together, these approaches strike a balance between enabling ecological benefits and maintaining community standards.

Blooming Boulevards' Recommended Amendments

In consultation with Forestry, PSIE reviewed and summarized comments on the recommended amendments presented at the May 6, 2025, EAC meeting (see Appendix 4).

Amendments related to the regulatory framework of the Weed & Tall Grass By-law – specifically those proposing to restrict height limits to “turfgrass” only, introduce additional definitions with narrative descriptions, or remove species from the nuisance weed list – are not recommended by PSIE at this time.

While other municipalities have updated their by-laws by adopting more specific terminology to improve clarity, Mississauga’s existing by-law, supported by established enforcement procedures and practices, is sufficient to achieve the same objectives. The current by-law ensures that height limits are applied only to nuisance weeds and tall grass, while avoiding negative impacts on naturalized gardens or ecological benefits that residents may be trying to achieve. During the weed and tall grass season, MLEOs conduct thorough investigations to enforce the 20 cm height limit and the prohibition of nuisance weeds. This approach of applying the height limit to a wide range of ground vegetation species and grass, including turfgrass, ensures that issues are comprehensively addressed. Where necessary, MLEOs also consult with Forestry staff to ensure accurate identification and informed enforcement decisions, particularly in sensitive or complex cases.

Recommendations related to operational practices – such as officer training, standard operating procedures, complaint screening, and appeal processes – pertain to existing practices and require collaboration with internal partners. PSIE reviews and updates its standard operating procedures and training materials ahead of each weed and tall grass season and communicates these updates to all MLEOs. In partnership with Strategic Communications & Initiatives, PSIE will explore opportunities to enhance public educational content, including the use of narrative examples and clearer explanations of enforcement and appeal processes on the City’s webpages related to the Weed & Tall Grass By-law.

Conclusion

Given the existing by-law is sufficient, enforcement procedures exist to address the concerns raised, and operational enhancements can be made without regulatory amendments (e.g., updates to educational materials), PSIE is not recommending any amendments to the Weed & Tall Grass By-law at this time. However, the recommended amendments presented to EAC may be considered further as part of the broader Property Standards By-law review currently underway by Enforcement. Any proposed changes arising from this review will be brought forward for Council’s consideration.

Attachments

Appendix 1: Nuisance Weed and Tall Grass Control By-law 0125-2017, Schedule A

Appendix 2: Weed Control Act – General – Schedule Noxious Weeds

Appendix 3: Nuisance Weed and Tall Grass Control By-law 0125-2017 Jurisdictional Scan

Appendix 4: Summary of Recommended Amendments



Prepared by: Georgios Fthenos, Director, Enforcement