Growing Pollinator Habitat in Abbotsford Action Plan

Langara APPL 5240

Environmental Planning Spring 2026

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Introduction

Pollinators are foundational to both the ecosystem, the economy, and human health of urban, suburban, and rural landscapes. The City of Abbotsford, a fast-growing municipality, surrounded by extensive tracts of Agriculture Land Reserve, is particularly reliant on the benefits these organisms provide. Abbotsford depends on healthy pollinator populations to pollinate crops, support biodiversity, and enhance the natural areas residents value. Despite this dependence, the City currently lacks a cohesive strategy to protect and support these organisms as human development and agriculture continue to destroy and fragment their habitats. In fact, many of the City's own practices and bylaws actively work against efforts to improve habitat for pollinators in residential areas. This action plan addresses that gap through three key goals: reducing mowing, converting underutilized land into wildflower meadows, and growing community participation in the creation and maintenance of pollinator gardens. These goals are supported by 11 actions that will provide a path towards creating and enhancing urban habitats for pollinators.

What Are Pollinators?

Pollinators play a key role in our ecosystems and provide countless ecosystem services. By transferring pollen as they move from plant to plant, they help plants produce seeds for the next generation. Insects are the primary animals responsible for pollination, though birds, bats, and other creatures also serve as key pollinators in many ecosystems. There are five main groups of insect pollinators: bees, butterflies and moths, wasps, flies, and beetles.[1] In Abbotsford and the Lower Mainland at large, bumble bees serve as our primary pollinators.[2] These insects are important not only for wild flowering plants, but also agricultural crops such as blueberries, raspberries, strawberries, squashes and gourds, and forage crops.[3] Unfortunately, 28% of North American bumble bees are facing some degree of extinction risk.[4] Primarily, they are threatened by:

- Habitat loss due to urban densification and agricultural intensification[5]
- Introduction of foreign disease which they have not built immunological response to[6]
- Over and improper use of pesticides causing ecological harm[7]
- Competition for resources from invasive species[8]

It is important to note that these threats are not specific to bumble bees and are a concern for most native pollinators which are the focus of this action plan.

Importance of Pollinators in Abbotsford

Pollinators are an important part of Abbotsford ecology and provide several benefits in three areas: physical, economic, and social.

Physical	• 72% of City land base located in Agricultural Land Reserve[9] • ~70% of housing is low-density which often features lawns and private green spaces • Experiencing rapid growth - fifth most populous municipality in B.C.[10]
Economic	• Integral for crop production within our agricultural industry such as pumpkins, broccoli, squash, and cabbage • Healthy and large pollinator populations can improve crop yield and quality[11]

[1] Xerces Society. 'Pollinator Conservation Program'. Accessed on April 12th, 2026.
[2] Pollinator Partnership Canada. 'Selecting Plants for Pollinators'. Accessed on April 12th, 2026.
[3] Pollinator Partnership Canada. 'Selecting Plants for Pollinators'. Accessed on April 12th, 2026.
[4] Xerces Society. Who are the Pollinators?. Accessed on April 12th, 2026.
[5] Earth Org. 'Beyond the Buzz: Why Pollinators Matter More than You Think'. 2025.
[6] Pollinator Partnership Canada. 'Selecting Plants for Pollinators'. Accessed on April 12th, 2026.
[7] Pollinator Partnership Canada. 'Selecting Plants for Pollinators'. Accessed on April 12th, 2026.
[8] Earth Org. 'Beyond the Buzz: Why Pollinators Matter More than You Think'. 2025.
[9] City of Abbotsford. Demographic Profiles. 2024.
[10] The Canadian Encyclopedia. Abbotsford. 2022.
[11] Pollinator Partnership Canada. 'Selecting Plants for Pollinators'. Accessed on April 12th, 2026.

	• Tourism Abbotsford highlights three categories of economic stimulation for the city: 'Farm Fresh', 'Outdoor Adventures', and 'Spirited Sips'. All are reliant on healthy pollinator population[12]
Social	• Help maintain the high quality outdoor experiences for residents to enjoy including the City-led Abbotsford Bloom Spots Tour and natural areas like Sumas Mountain • Local food production will become an even more essential part of food security as impacts from climate change and geo-politics affect our food supply chains. • Pollinators add unmeasurable benefits such as the pleasure of encountering butterflies or hummingbirds.
Ecological	• 90% of flowering plants are reliant on pollinators[13] • Essential to have diverse range of pollinator species in an ecosystem to mitigate the impact of catastrophic events that could disproportionately affect a specific species

Abbotsford Current Strategies and Policies

Currently, there is no specific biodiversity strategy for the City of Abbotsford. Protection and enhancement of biological diversity is generally incorporated into other strategies, plans and policies as seen in the table below:

Document	Purpose	Relevance
OCP & Natural Environment Development Permit	Intended to "To protect the natural environment, its ecosystems and biological diversity"	Primarily focused on trees and water courses. No reference to pollinators
Urban Forest Strategy	Preservation of ecosystems and biodiversity with Abbotsford forests and green spaces	Primarily focused on maintaining and improving tree diversity. No policies on pollinators
Wildlife Strategy	Formally under the provincial/federal jurisdiction that city works with to protect at risk or endangered species	Highlights protection of birds, mammals, amphibians, molluscs, fish, and some plants. No specific concerns for pollinators in the area

[12] Tourism Abbotsford. HomePage. Accessed on April 12th, 2026.
[13] Pollinator Partnership Canada. 'Selecting Plants for Pollinators'. Accessed on April 12th, 2026.

Good Neighbour Bylaw	Cannot have grass, weeds, or similar ground cover over 10 inches in height and grassed areas must be kept trimmed	Harmful to pollinators as they rely on long gross and plants for their food, shelter, and nesting

As can be seen, there is no direct mention of pollinators within the major documents for biological diversity and some bylaws are harmful to the protection of native pollinator habitats. This highlights the gap between the importance of pollinators to the city of Abbotsford and the threats they face which the city is not addressing.

The problem statement:

‘There is a lack of clear strategy to protect and increase native pollinator habitats in the City of Abbotsford.’

Areas of Constraints

Generally, there is a lack of a cohesive strategy or integration into existing policies to support pollinators. In particular, the biodiversity section of the Urban Forest Strategy fails to recognize the integral role of pollinators in maintaining biodiversity in the ecosystem. Potentially, the lack of acknowledgement is due to the limited data available that provides clear data on the pollinators that are most active with Abbotsfords boundaries.

Other concerns include the public perception of lawn, boulevard, and other green space maintenance. The best habitats for pollinators are often criticized as being ‘unkept’ or ‘rustic’ of which some residents may have a negative perception. Citizens might also not be equipped with the knowledge or tools necessary for larger annual cutbacks, as well as strategies to make spaces serve both pollinators and human aesthetic-preferences.

Areas of Opportunities

Abbotsford is a growing city that is experiencing relatively fast population growth. Currently, a large portion of the housing stock is low-density, single-family dwellings featuring lawns and other open spaces that are prime areas for pollinator habitats. Negative public perception of naturalized spaces can be improved using design choices that signal human-intention, such as paths mowed through unmowed areas, fallen leaves being left but contained within garden beds only, and incorporating flowers that bloom at staggered times to increase the season of colourful interest.

There is also an opportunity to conduct an education campaign that instructs homeowners on how to do annual or bi-annual cutbacks of longer grass that typical lawn mowers cannot cut.

Partnerships with local community groups and high school volunteers who need hours could help with larger annual cutbacks, garden creation and general maintenance. Creative solutions such as a tool library for needed gardening tools could also be explored.

For the City, reduced mowing results in more time available for other tasks such as garden and meadow maintenance, habitat improvement, and the leading of volunteer groups to create and maintain pollinator habitats. Should opposition still be strong, the City could explore a larger education campaign that leans into Abbotsford's identity as an agricultural hub that depends on pollinators for its business.

Finally, many of the plants best suited for pollinators are more drought resistant than traditional lawns providing additional benefit for water management. As Abbotsford faces earlier watering regulations from decreased snowpacks and summer river flowers as the climate changes, getting citizens to shift from turf to pollinator habitat has the additional benefit of water conservation.

As the dynamics of the city change, it provides opportunities to revisit existing plans and strategies such as the Urban Forest Strategy, the Climate Resilience Strategy that is underway, and the Cemetery and Agricultural plans. As these plans are evaluated, it is a natural point to implement the following strategy into action.

Strategy Overview

To pursue its goal of increasing pollinator habitat, the City of Abbotsford will take on three strategic actions: reduce mowing, convert underused land to wildflower meadows, and grow community public garden participation. Combined, these will result in significant increases and improvements in the necessary habitat, primarily the number of mature, suitable plants, for local pollinating species.

This first action of reducing mowing on public and private land will be accomplished by amending the Good Neighbour Bylaw to permit naturalized areas which will provide the necessary regulatory foundation needed for homeowners to allow lawns to grow tall and provide habitat. This will be supported by a No Mow May campaign measured by household participation and a reduction in routine park mowing which will be measured as a percentage of parkland left unmowed each season.

The second action converts underused land to wildflower meadow. Highway corridors, rail rights-of-way, and other underused or vacant public spaces will be seeded and tracked by percentage of identified sites sown. A citywide suitability analysis will map land suitable for future wildflower seed, and DPA guideline changes will require wildflower seeding within ALR buffers. This will be tracked by percentage of sites covered and total square footage covered.

The third direction grows pollinator garden participation across public and private land. Pilot sites in parks and cemeteries will serve as demonstration projects. Boulevard stewardship, plant sales, mulch coupons, a turf conversion rebate, and a community group grant program will collectively expand residential and community participation. These will be measured by square metres converted, households engaged, number of gardens started, and success of associated social media campaigns.

Action Plan Table

Goal	Action	Target	Metric
Reduce mowing	*Adjust 'Good Neighbour Bylaw'*	*Incorporate pollinator habitat guidelines into bylaw and remove counter-productive clauses*	Bylaw updated by April, 2027
	Organize 'No Mow May' campaign	*To have at least 15% of households register with the City to participate in No Mow May in the first year of the campaign and 20% in the second year*	Number of participant households signed up per year
	Allow for more natural growth in parklands	*Reduce mowing in 30% of public parks*	Percentage (%) of parkland left unmowed
Convert underutilized land to wildflower meadows	*Increase wildflower meadows on public lands*	*Wildflower meadows on 50% of highways, train tracks,and ROW*	Amount of land (Ha) converted to wildflower meadow The number of community-led meadow events in a year Number of meadow projects implemented in

			partnership with BC Hydro, Southern Railway of British Columbia, and Canadian National Railway
	Conduct a suitability analysis for future meadows based on a created inventory	*Create the inventory within a year, conduct the first suitability analysis, create at least one new pollinator meadow every year*	Existence of the inventory, number of new pollinator meadows planted
	Incorporate pollinator habitats into urban agricultural interface	*Incorporate Wildflower design guidelines into ALR DPA guidelines*	Wildflower Meadow Design Guidelines adoption by Council Percentage (%) of development applications adjacent to the ALR that apply the design guidelines
Grow community pollinator garden participation	*Start a pollinator garden pilot program*	*To have the City establish at least 2 pollinator garden pilot sites within 2 years*	Number of pollinator gardens created on park and cemetery land
	Subsidize cost of plant and mulch for residential gardens via a plant kit and mulch sale	*Have successful participation seeing all kits and mulch distributed*	Total number of kits sold Number of residents who take part in pickup day workshops
	Community	*To have the City*	Boulevard

	Stewardship for Boulevard Gardens	*adopt Boulevard Gardening Guidelines by 2027 and have at least 100 boulevard gardens registered with the City within 2 years of guideline adoption*	Gardening Guidelines adoption by Council Number of registered boulevard gardens per year
	Provide a rebate for replacing grass/turf to pollinator garden	*1 in 3 eligible households convert at least 50% of their grass/turf to pollinator garden*	Square meters of land converted to pollinator garden
	Launch a grant program for community pollinator garden groups	*Disburse three $5000 grants per year to eligible organizations pollinator gardens*	Number of applicants, number of grants disbursed, funding disbursed annually

Principles for Indigenous Knowledge and Collaboration

The present-day City of Abbotsford is located within the traditional territories of the Stó:lo Peoples. Semà:th (Sumas) First Nation, Mathxwí (Matsqui) First Nation, and Leq'á:mel First Nation hold Federal Indian Reserve lands adjacent to Abbotsford, but due to the longstanding importance of the Fraser River, many other Indigenous communities have interests in the area.[14] They have lived here since immemorial, and the land is an important living relative which deserves honour, protection, and humility.[15]

While this action plan addresses opportunities for increasing pollinator habitats in the City of Abbotsford, it is also an opportunity to collaborate and engage with Indigenous peoples whose lands these habitats are being created on.

Guiding Principles:

1. Recognition and Honour: We recognize that Indigenous peoples have cared for the lands where the current City of Abbotsford is located since time immemorial, and that pollinator initiatives must honour them as the original stewards. One way we will take action is including relevant Indigenous knowledge in all educational materials across policies and initiatives.

[14] City of Abbotsford. "Official Community Plan". 2025.
[15] Sumas First Nation. "Lands". Accessed on April 11, 2026.

2. Engagement: We will seek feedback from Indigenous communities on this action plan, and potentially on specific policies and initiatives as they are created.
3. Collaboration: We strive to build partnerships with any Indigenous organizations interested in the expansion of pollinator habitats in Abbotsford.
4. Future Generations: We will undertake initiatives which are committed to long-term success.
5. Integrity: We incorporate sound science, local ecological knowledge, and the experiences of those who live and work on the land into pollinator initiatives.
6. Rights and Consent: We will always seek free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) from the appropriate Indigenous communities before starting any project on their territories.

An invitation to collaborate

How do these guiding principles look in action? There are many opportunities, including an invitation to collaborate with First Nations to help integrate Indigenous ways of knowing into pollinator initiatives. For example, we could collaborate on creating an Indigenous-focused native plant garden and education program which combines learnings about pollinators and Indigenous land stewardship.

These principles, and this entire action plan, is a learning process. We will review what is working and what isn't on a regular basis, inviting feedback from Indigenous partners when relevant or requested. All feedback will be taken seriously.

This section drew significant inspiration from the draft "Indigenous Engagement at the Fraser Valley Conservancy" policy created in 2025.[16]

Actions and Policies

Adjust Language in Good Neighbour Bylaw

Related Objective: Reduce mowing and increase pollinator gardens

The City of Abbotsford's Good Neighbour Bylaw (No. 3068-2024) conflicts with the City's own pollinator and sustainability objectives, as outlined in its Community Sustainability Strategy. The bylaw requires that homeowners:

- Lawns, groundcovers, and weeds must not exceed 25 cm (10 inches) in height
- Adjacent property owners are required to mow vegetation within street right-of-way boulevards, but are not permitted to plant within them
- Dead or fallen leaves, dirt piles, cut branches, and uncontrolled vegetation growth must not accumulate on the property

This bylaw is also vague about its definition of what a weed is. It defers to the Weed Control Act, which defines noxious weeds (a set of invasive species that may reduce crop yield, native

[16] Fraser Valley Conservancy. "Announcing our Indigenous Engagement Policy". January 15, 2026.

species' habitat, harbour crop diseases, or be harmful to humans, livestock and wildlife), but many species, such as dandelions or even local wildflowers, are considered "weeds" by the public but still provide significant food sources for local pollinators.[17, 18] This vagueness allows residents to bring complaints against property owners attempting to establish pollinator habitat. Further, the 10inch height limit does not allow for many beneficial species such as Queen Anne's Lace, yarrow, and lupines, to arise from unmown spaces.

The bylaw not only directly limits what and how plants can grow on a site, but also key habitat-creation features such as not removing dead leaves or branches. Many insects lay their eggs on leaves and twigs that fall to the ground, and the resulting leaf litter also provides important overwintering shelter for a wide range of species. Removing these leaves from site thus reduces the population of pollinators overall. Further, exposed patches of dirt are the primarily habitat for many solitary bee species.

Finally, homeowners are required to mow street right-of-way boulevards to keep sightlines clear, despite them not being part of the site's property. If the city expects homeowners to care for publicly-owned property, then homeowners should be allowed to plant within these spaces, provided that the sightline is kept clear. Many low-growing groundcover species, such as clover or bearberry, remain under 10 inches and provide significant food sources for pollinators.

Targets:

- Remove the word "weed" and replace it specifically with "noxious weeds" to allow for non-noxious weed species to grow.
- Allow for residents to plant low-growning groundcovers within street right-of-way boulevards.
- Adjust wording of "the accumulation of dead/fallen leaves, dirt piles, etc" to allow for thoughtful habitat creation that avoids simple neglect.

Metrics:

- The adjustment of wording and removal of counter-productive terminology and clauses.
- A legal change in boulevard maintenance requirements.

Reduce Mowing in Public Parks

Related Objective: Reduce mowing

In 2024, the City of Abbotsford stated on its website that its Operations team mowed 60 hectares of parkland weekly and 10 hectares of boulevards twice per month.[19] The City also contracted out extra mowing to private companies to cover all publicly-owned lands.[20] One way to increase pollinator habitat while also reducing mowing-related emissions is to simply reduce the amount of

[17] Invasive Species Council of British Columbia. Fieldguide to Noxious Weeds and other Invasive Plants of British Columbia. Accessed April 12, 2026.
[18] City of Abbotsford. Community Sustainability Strategy. Accessed April 12, 2026.
[19] City of Abbotsford. "City Crews Preparing Abbotsford for Springtime." Accessed April 12, 2026.
[20] City of Abbotsford: Bids and Tenders. Bid No. RFP 1220-2025-3514A. Accessed April 12, 2026.

lawn mowed annually. This approach would work particularly well at park edges, especially in less-visited parks, provided that unmown sections are managed aesthetically to minimize public complaints. This could be accomplished by creating curving swaths of unmown areas to mimic the shape of garden beds, or by maintaining regularly mown pathways through unmowed areas to convey a sense of intentional care.

Noxious weeds will likely establish in some of these spaces, so monthly weeding or spot cutting of such species if present would be required. An additional consideration for this approach is that mowing in the fall, if needed, will require more powerful machinery than a typical lawn mower, such as a brush cutter or flail mower. Despite the required changes in maintenance, the City will save significantly on time and fuel expenditures spent on weekly/biweekly mowing while simultaneously prolonging the life of mowing equipment.

Targets:

- Reduce mowing on 30% of parklands
- Mow defined pathways and curving shapes around unmowed areas
- Pair with high education institutions to record increases in pollinators visiting these spaces

Metrics:

- Percentage of/hectares left unmowed
- (Social media campaign paired with higher education research findings of increased pollinators in these spaces)

“No Mow May” Event/Campaign

Related Objective: Reduce Mowing

No Mow May is a seasonal campaign that encourages residents to refrain from mowing their lawns throughout the month of May in order to create more continuous floral habitat for pollinators, such as bees, butterflies, birds, and insects emerging from winter hibernation.The ideas originated with conservation groups in the United Kingdom and has since been adopted by Canadian municipalities like the City of Cornwall, Ontario, where the city temporarily waives traditional lawn mowing bylaws for May to give residents the opportunity to let lawns grow and provide early session food and shelter for pollinators. No Mow May has helped raise awareness about the ecological value of lawns beyond manicured turf and has acted as a gateway for broader community engagement with pollinator-friendly practices.[21]

Organizing a No Mow May event in Abbotsford will be the City’s first such campaign and will provide an accessible way for residents to participate in supporting pollinators and biodiversity while learning about additional actions they can take to create more habitat on their properties.

[21] City of Cornwall. “No Mow May.” Accessed April 12, 2026.

The policy will waive the City of Abbotsford's Good Neighbour Bylaw (No. 3068-2024), section 7(f), from May 1 to May 31, 2026. This will allow property owners to let lawns, groundcovers, and weeds grow taller than 25 cm for the month of May.[22] As part of the Pollinator Strategy, a separate policy action proposes amending this bylaw to remove section 7(f) and revise other restrictive or counterproductive clauses that limit pollinator habitat. However, these amendments are not expected to be in place prior to the 2026 No Mow May period.

The City aims to:

- Develop outreach materials explaining the goals and benefits of No Mow May and how participation supports local pollinators
- Promote campaign through City communication channels, partner organizations and community groups
- Provide a registration tool and optional lawn signage for participants
- Offer educational resources about planting native plants and other long-term pollinator friendly practices

Targets:

- To have at least 15% of households register with the City to participate in No Mow May in the first year of the campaign and 20% in the second year

Metrics:

- Number of participating households

Wildflower Meadows on Highways, Train Tracks, Rights-of-Way

Related Objective: Convert low-use/underused public land to wildflower meadow

Roadsides and right-of-ways are often underutilized spaces, typically covered with grass or dirt. These areas in Abbotsford offer an opportunity to plant wildflower meadows. By taking advantage of these spaces, the City will turn these areas into thriving biodiverse hubs for a variety of pollinators and require little maintenance.

Other cities have implemented such programs, such as the City of Toronto's Meadoway, where an underutilized hydro corridor now acts as a native meadow habitat, spanning across 200 hectares of land, connecting watercourses, parks and greenways.[23] Furthermore, BC Hydro actively encourages pollinator planting on its right-of-ways to support biodiversity efforts.

The City of Vancouver and the District of North Vancouver are local municipalities that have pollinator meadow programs focused on underutilized spaces, which often include stewardship programs for maintenance and education.

[22] City of Abbotsford, "Good Neighbour Bylaw, 2014", Accessed April 12, 2026
[23] City of Toronto, "Meadoway" Accessed April 12, 2026.

Abbotsford has many opportunities to implement this policy, including along the Southern Railway of British Columbia and the Canadian Pacific Railway, next to Highway 1 and 11, and along the over 50km of BC Hydro Utility ROW located throughout the City. [24]

The City of Abbotsford will introduce a wildflower meadow program to guide the planning and implementation of meadow planting across various transportation and utility corridors. The program will identify priority locations and establish planting and maintenance (including safety) standards.

Targets:

- Establish formal partnerships with BC Hydro, Southern Railway of British Columbia, and Canadian National Railway for the use of land.
- Convert 30% of the suitable ROW land to wildflower meadows within 5 years
- Support one community-led meadow initiative annually

Metrics:

- Amount of land (Ha) converted to wildflower meadow
- Amount of community-led meadow events in a year
- Number of meadow projects implemented in partnership with BC Hydro, Southern Railway of British Columbia, and Canadian National Railway

Pollinator Meadow Inventory and Suitability Analysis

Related Objective: Convert low-use/underused public land to wildflower meadow

There are several factors which determine where a suitable new pollinator meadow could exist in Abbotsford, some of which are described in other sections of this action plan. For example, meadows in Abbotsford specifically can be located:

- Along the edges of publicly-owned cemeteries
- Along the edges of train tracks
- On unused publicly-owned tracts of land
- In public parks

This policy recommends a two-sided initiative using Geographic Information Systems as the primary tool:

1. Create and maintain a spatial inventory of existing pollinator meadows in Abbotsford
2. Conduct a suitability analysis for potential future pollinator meadow locations

Creating and maintaining a spatial inventory of existing meadows

[24] City of Abbostford "Right-of-ways. Open Data." Accessed April 12, 2026

City of Abbotsford planning and GIS staff will collaborate to create a spatial database which can be visualized as an interactive map. This will include a combination of online research, reviewing City records, and field surveys.

The map will include polygons of approximate existing pollinator meadow locations. Each polygon will include useful metadata attributes such as:

- Address or location description
- Land ownership
- Year established

Other attributes may be determined as valuable to add, but each must be evaluated as not to provide a barrier for maintaining accurate data in the future depending on staff capacity. Once created, a clear protocol will be established for how the inventory is maintained and updated, ensuring accuracy and value to the City and its relevant partners.

Conducting a suitability analysis for future meadows

After the creation of the inventory, this data can be included alongside other factors in a suitability analysis. This exercise will be repeated as needed to determine where future pollinator meadows would be most suitably located. That data will be used to guide City-led initiatives, and guide community groups/citizens applying to do similar initiatives.

The inventory data would be used to find places where there is the least proximity to existing meadows, promoting a more even distribution of pollinator habitats in the City. Other suitability factors will be input to the Geographic Information System to create the suitability map, which may include things like:

- Proximity to higher population density
- Public tracts of land
- Parks
- Within x metres of the inside boundary of a cemetery
- Within x and y metres of the edges of train tracks

A combination of factors like this, and others, will create the multi-layered GIS suitability analysis to determine areas which are most suitable for more pollinator meadows. It is key to note that these spatial factors do not definitely determine a suitable site, and other contexts like geology, topography, drainage, and public interest need to be considered.

Targets:

- Create the first iteration of the Pollinator Meadow Inventory by a certain date
- Conduct the first suitability analysis by a certain date
- At least one new pollinator meadow is created in Abbotsford every year from the creation of the suitability analysis protocol

Metrics:

- Existence of the inventory
- Number of new pollinator meadows planted

Adopt Wildflower Meadow Design Guidelines for ALR Edge Areas

Related Objective: Convert low-use/underused public land to wildflower meadow

As approximately 75% of Abbotsford is within the *Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR)*[25], there are many opportunities to incorporate wildflower meadows along the interface between urban lands and the ALR. As these *buffer areas* are meant to be untouched, encouraging wildflower planting along these areas will create thriving habitats for pollinator species while still protecting Abbotsford's valuable farmland.

The Agricultural Land Commission requires that adjacent parcels to farmland not negatively impact any agricultural operations[26], and although it does not specify design standards, many municipalities implement edge-planning practices in good faith to protect BC's agricultural land. [27]

Abbotsford currently has policies and recommendations mentioned in its Official Community Plan (OCP) and an Agricultural Strategy (AgRefresh) document about the best practices for implementing vegetative buffers on the urban-rural interface. However, those policies do not provide recommendations for native species selection or planting design for biodiverse habitats. [28]

The City of Surrey is a great example of a municipality that has implemented a more formal approach to its protection of edge planting areas through its Farm Protection Development Permit Guidelines (DP4). While these guidelines suggest setbacks and general landscaped buffers, they do not explicitly incorporate any biodiverse planting strategies. [29]

This policy will introduce a formal design guideline document with recommendations for wildflower meadow planting within the required edge areas between urban and agricultural lands.

The design guidelines will include:

- Recommended native species for sowing/planting.
- Suggested wildflower sowing density.
- Guidance on buffer width and configuration in line with existing Agricultural Land Reserve buffer regulations.
- Planting and maintenance standards for long-term meadow functioning.

[25] City of Abbostford "AgRefresh". Accessed April 12, 2026
[26] BC Ministry of Agriculture "Promoting Compatibility Along Agricultural - Urban Edges". Accessed April 12, 2016
[27] BC Ministry of Agriculture "Promoting Compatibility Along Agricultural - Urban Edges". Accessed April 12, 2016
[28] City of Abbotsford. "Official Community Plan". 2025.
[29] City of Surrey. "Development Permit Guidelines: Farming Protection". 2014.

Targets:

- To have Abbotsford adopt the Wildflower Meadow Design Guidelines by 2027.
- Incorporate wildflower meadow planting into at least 75% of the buffer zones of new
- developments adjacent to the ALR within 3 years of adoption.

Metrics:

- Wildflower Meadow Design Guidelines adoption by Council
- Percentage of development applications adjacent to the ALR that apply the design guidelines

Pollinator Garden Pilot Sites in Public Parks and Cemeteries

Related Objective: Grow Community Pollinator Garden Participation

Pollinator gardens are intentionally designed planting areas composed primarily of species selected to attract and support pollinators.[30]

The City of Abbotsford owns and maintains 192 parks covering 842.8 hectares, as well as four cemeteries: Hazelwood, Musselwhite, Aberdeen, and Mt. Lehman. These cemeteries are landscaped and maintained in park-like settings. This extensive publicly owned land base presents a significant opportunity to increase pollinator habitat. Currently, the City does not have any pollinator gardens within its parks or cemeteries.[31] *Note: The City's Cemetery Master Plan is being updated. This policy will include questions about pollinator gardens in cemetery sites as part of the consultation process.*[32]

The City of North Vancouver's Grand Boulevard Park Pollinator Gardens provides a strong example of a successful public park pollinator garden initiative. North Vancouver partnered with the David Suzuki Butterflyway Project and members of the Lynn Valley Garden Club to build the gardens, which are maintained by the Vancouver Master Gardeners through a cooperative project with the City.[33]

Building on Abbotsford's history of collaboration with non-profits and community organizations for its parks and recreation services and programming, this policy proposes the development of a pollinator garden pilot project at two selected park or cemetery sites.[34]

The City aims to:

- Identify and evaluate suitable park or cemetery locations

[30] Toronto Master Gardeners. "Pollinator Garden: A Toronto Master Gardeners Guide." Accessed April 12, 2026.
[31] City of Abbotsford. "Parks, Recreation & Culture - Master Plan". Accessed April 12, 2026.
[32] City of Abbotsford. "Cemetery Master Plan". Accessed April 12, 2026.
[33] City of North Vancouver. "Planting for Pollinators." Accessed April 12, 2026.
[34] City of Abbotsford. "Parks, Recreation & Culture - Master Plan". Accessed April 12, 2026.

- Establish partnerships with local organizations and volunteer groups to support garden installation and maintenance
- Develop planting designs using native, pollinator-friendly species
- Install pilot gardens
- Monitor and maintain sites through City and community collaboration

Targets:

- To have the City establish at least 2 pollinator garden pilot sites within 2 years
- To increase the total area of pollinator habitat within City parks and cemeteries

Metrics:

- Number of pollinator gardens created
- Total area (m^2) of pollinator habitat installed
- Number of community partnerships or volunteers involved

Private Lawn and Turf Conversion to Pollinator Gardens

Related Objective: Grow Community Pollinator Garden Participation

Single-detached homes in Abbotsford make up approximately 38% of the housing stock, presenting an opportunity to expand pollinator habitat by converting lawns and turf in private front and backyards into pollinator gardens.[35] This is particularly relevant in East Abbotsford, which is primarily made up of large single-family lots, as its proximity to Sumas Prairie farmland will provide crops with increased access to pollinators. Furthermore, converting existing lawns can significantly reduce water usage when compared to maintaining traditional grass lawns.

To support this conversion, the City will offer a rebate of $8 per square metre converted, up to a maximum of $2000.[36] The Native Pollinator Plant and Mulch Sale, outlined in this action plan, may be used in tandem with this rebate. Drawing inspiration from the Contra Costa Water District program in California, to be eligible for this rebate, residents must complete an online application and may not proceed with the conversion process until they receive an approval email from the City.[37] In some cases, the City may conduct a site inspection before approval. Once the conversion is complete, residents must submit a completion form to receive the rebate. The rebate will not be applied retroactively to projects that did not receive initial approval from the City.

Key requirements for the newly created pollinator garden include:

- The garden must be a minimum of 20 sq m
- Plants will support continuous bloom for the entirety of the year
- Plants are native to the region and are pollinator-friendly

[35] City of Abbotsford. “City of Abbotsford Official Community Plan”. Accessed on April 12, 2026.
[36] City of Glendale. “GWP's Turf Replacement Program”. Accessed April 12, 2026.
[37] Contra Costa Water District. “Lawn to Garden Rebate”. Accessed April 12, 2026.

- Must use mulch
- Must have access to a source of water to allow proper maintenance

Targets:

- 1 in 3 eligible households convert at least 50% of their grass/turf to pollinator garden
- 400 properties submit completion forms by the end of the program's second year

Metrics:

- Number of properties that apply to participate in the program
- Number of properties that receive approval to participate in the program
- Number of properties that submit a completion form
- Total rebate amount ($) issued
- Sq m of land converted to a pollinator garden under the rebate program

Community Stewardship for Boulevard Gardens

Related Objective: Grow Community Pollinator Garden Participation

Boulevards are the section of land between a property line and the edge of the street pavement and are owned by the City. Boulevard gardens can provide important environmental benefits by increasing ecological diversity and creating habitat for pollinators and other species. They can also enhance streetscapes, contribute to neighbourhood character, and foster community pride.[38]

The City of Abbotsford's Historic Downtown Streetscape Standards & Guidelines (2021) include a limited section on boulevard planting with a suggested plant list. However, these guidelines apply only to the historic downtown and do not address broader considerations such as site preparation, maintenance standards, or restrictions on structures and installations.[39]

The City of Victoria provides a strong precedent, having implemented a boulevard gardening program supported by comprehensive guidelines that enable residents to grow food, native plants, and pollinator habitat on City-owned land.[40]

This policy proposes the development of a city-wide Boulevard Gardening Guidelines document for Abbotsford to support and guide residents in gardening activities on public boulevards. The primary goal is to increase pollinator habitat, with secondary benefits including improved streetscape quality and strengthened community stewardship.

Residents will be required to register their garden location and contact information with the City to support program monitoring and evaluation; however, no formal application or approval process will be required.

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[38] City of Victoria. "Boulevard Gardening Guidelines." Accessed April 12, 2026.
[39] City of Abbotsford. "Historic Downtown Streetscape Standards & Guidelines, 2024." Accessed April 12, 2026
[40] City of Victoria. "Boulevard Gardening Guidelines." Accessed April 12, 2026.

The guidelines will include:

- Site preparation requirements (e.g., confirming underground utilities prior to digging)
- Recommended native and pollinator-friendly plant species
- Planting and maintenance standards (e.g., height of plants for site lines)
- Protection measures for boulevard trees and infrastructure
- Restrictions on structures and installations (e.g., no permanent irrigation systems)

Targets:

- To have Abbotsford adopt the Boulevard Gardening Guidelines by 2027
- To have at least 100 boulevard gardens registered with the City within 2 years of guideline adoption

Metrics:

- Boulevard Gardening Guidelines adoption by Council
- Number of registered boulevard gardens per year
- Estimated area (m^2) of new pollinator habitat created

Native Pollinator Plant and Mulch Sale

Related Objective: Grow Community Pollinator Garden Participation

To support the expansion of pollinator habitat on private land, the City will hold a Native Pollinator Plant and Mulch Sale with the goal of improving access to appropriate planting materials for Abbotsford residents. This sale will be held annually in the spring, aligning with the peak planting season to maximize uptake, particularly by beginner gardeners. Similar to the City of Vancouver's Tree Sale, pollinator garden starter kits will be made available for purchase online approximately one month in advance of the pickup date.[41] By offering curated kits, the sale reduces barriers for residents unfamiliar with pollinator plants. Each kit will include plants that will attract pollinators year-round and will be designed to cover a 4 ft by 8 ft area.[42] Residents will be able to purchase up to four kits based on their desired pollinator garden size. To ensure greater accessibility, the City will partner with two nurseries, one in East Abbotsford and one in West Abbotsford, on pickup day. The kits will be offered at a subsidized rate to reduce financial barriers and will also include complementary mulch to minimize maintenance for beginner gardeners.

In addition to increasing access to appropriate planting materials, the program will include a community engagement and education component. Optional workshops will be offered on pickup day, which will show residents how to plant and care for their pollinator gardens. Master gardeners and horticulturists will also be on site to answer questions and provide educational pamphlets.[43] This component of the sale is important, as proper installation and care are necessary to ensure that pollinator gardens deliver their intended benefits.

[41] City of Vancouver. "Fall Online Tree Sale". Accessed April 12, 2026.
[42] Conservation Halton. "Garden-In-A-Box". Accessed April 12, 2026.
[43] Earthwise Society. "Bee-Friendly Plant Sale". Accessed April 12, 2026.

Program Eligibility:

- Kits are only available to Abbotsford residents
- Kits must be planted on private properties in Abbotsford
- There is a maximum of four kits available for purchase per address

Targets:

- Hold an annual subsidized native pollinator plant kit and mulch sale
- Sell a minimum of 500 kits per sale

Metrics:

- Total number of kits sold
- Number of participating households
- Number of residents who take part in pickup day workshops
- Number of questions asked to on-site experts
- Number of informational pamphlets given out

Pollinate Abbotsford Community Grant

Related Objective: Grow community pollinator garden participation

Community non-profits have a strong operational foundation compared to individual residents. They will be key actors for achieving Abbotsford's pollinator goals. To support this, the Pollinate Abbotsford Community Grant provides funding on an annual basis for organization-led pollinator garden projects. Whether it is used to create new gardens, or to expand or enhance existing ones, the funding supports projects that create more pollinator habitat in the City. Projects must be in publicly-visible areas and be accessible for the group executing the work. Amongst these and other eligibility requirements, applicants must be registered non-profit organizations in good standing in British Columbia and with the Canada Revenue Agency. Applicants meet conditions of approval and provide required documentation, such as a project proposal which demonstrates proper knowledge of pollinator gardens and how they align with City of Abbotsford goals.

Areas eligible for creating pollinator gardens under this policy include lawns, boulevards, or hard surfaces. While they do not need to strictly be on public land, they need to be visible to the public (e.g. not in a concealed backyard). Additionally, grants will be prioritized for projects in areas without existing pollinators and areas with higher population density.

Grant recipients are required to integrate community education and engagement into their project, as to inspire other groups or individuals to extend the reach of pollinator stewardship locally. In the City of Toronto, the Pollinate TO Grant[44] has helped create over 500 gardens since 2019.

[44] City of Toronto. "PollinateTO Grants". Accessed on April 11, 2026.

Targets:

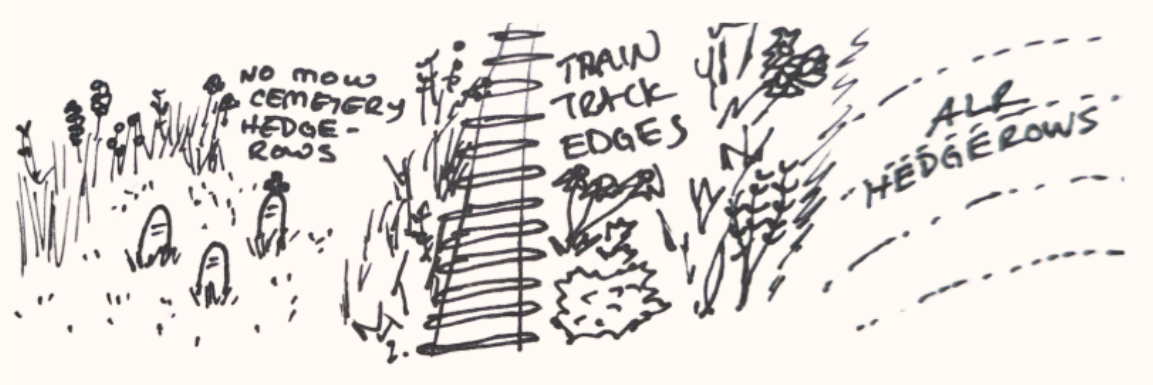
- Receive at least 5 applications per year within a defined window
- Disburse three maximum $5000 grants per year to eligible organizations
- All grant recipients successfully implement project within a calendar year of receiving funding
- All projects are thriving in subsequent years, checked annually by City Staff who check in with the recipient organizations (what “thriving” is must be defined)

Metrics:

- Number of applicants annually
- Number of grants disbursed annually
- Amount of funding disbursed annually
- Number of successfully implemented projects annually and cumulatively
- Time taken to implement successful projects
- Number of thriving projects each subsequent year

Other policies which were drawn on include Victoria, BC’s Growing in the City Grants[45] and Toronto’s Eco-Roof Incentive Program.[46]

[45] City of Victoria. “Growing in the City Grants”. Accessed on April 11, 2026.
[46] City of Toronto. “Eco-Roof Incentive Program”. Accessed on April 11, 2026.



Conclusion

The City of Abbotsford is an excellent candidate for pollinator habitat initiatives, such as the actions outlined in this plan. Abbotsford is a large suburban city in Western Canada's most populated region, and both its population and land development are increasing. This provides both opportunities and constraints for how native plants can be reintroduced into the landscape, delivering both ecological and social benefits. This action plan considers Abbotsford's unique environmental and geographic contexts, amongst other factors, to create a multi-faceted action plan. These actions and policies are inspired by case studies from across North America, where success has been seen on many occasions. While this report does not dive into specific implementation strategies and plans, it is a good starting point for how initiatives like these can be structured and how success can be measured.

Appendix

Definitions

Term	Definition
Agricultural Land Reserve	A collection of land, zoned by the Provincial Government, where agriculture is designated as the priority use.
Annual	A plant that completes its life cycle in one year.
Boulevard	The section of land between a property line and the edge of the street pavement.
Buffer Zones	A designated neutral area of land separating urban land use from the Agricultural Land Reserve.
Exotic Pollinator	Pollinators that have been introduced to an environment typically through human intervention, including impacts to migration.
Mulch	A protective layer of material applied to the soil surface that helps retain moisture, regulate temperature, and suppress weeds, thereby reducing maintenance.
Native plants	Plant species that occur naturally in a region without direct or indirect human introduction and have evolved within local ecosystems to develop ecological relationships with native insects and wildlife.
Native Pollinator	Pollinators that are native to the area and have evolved alongside native plants.
Noxious weed	A set of invasive species that may reduce crop yield, damage native habitat, harbour crop diseases, or harm humans, livestock, and wildlife.
Pollinator	Any animal that transfers pollen from one plant's flowers to another, typically in exchange for nectar or pollen (e.g., bees, butterflies, flies, moths, hummingbirds).

Pollinator garden	A man-made garden created to support pollinators using herbaceous and woody plants; typically higher maintenance than wildflower meadows.
Pollinator-friendly plants	Plants that attract pollinators through evolved relationships using scents, colours, and floral shapes to facilitate pollen transfer.
Right-of-way (ROW)	A legal agreement allowing use of a portion of land for access or utility lines.
Sumas Prairie	Low-lying, fertile, highly productive agricultural land between Abbotsford, Chilliwack, and Washington State.
Weed	Any plant considered undesirable in a specific location or context.
Wildflower meadow	A meadow created by sowing annual flower seed, typically on well-drained, low-nutrient soils.
Woody	Plants with persistent above-ground stems made of hardened woody tissue (trees, shrubs, vines).