

City of Raleigh

Budget Note 03

* This note requires Council action.

INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

June 1, 2015

MEMO TO: Ruffin Hall, City Manager
FROM: Wayne W. Schindler, Superintendent of Parks
SUBJECT: Budget Note 03 – Invasive Plant Management

Background

A citizen request was made at the August 5, 2014, City Council meeting for increased funding related to maintenance of four open space parks, specifically in the areas of invasive plant species. This item was reviewed at the December 9, 2014, BED Committee. Staff brought forward a recommendation to identify 10-12 parks and greenway locations (including the four open space parks from the initial request) and initiate consultant services to identify invasive species, review best practices in management of the plants, develop an invasive species management plan and assess required resources while utilizing the existing Adopt-a-Park program. This recommendation had an estimated cost of \$125,000 to be considered for funding during the FY 2015-16 budget process.

This recommendation was brought to the City Council at the January 6, 2015, Council Meeting. Council members voiced concerns over the cost of the proposal and requested additional research be done in the areas of partnering with other organizations with specific knowledge in the area of invasive species management. Ultimately the Council requested a Budget Note be prepared outlining additional research and options for the management of invasive species.

Additional Research

PRCR staff has engaged with multiple local resources including experts from North Carolina State University, North Carolina Division of Environment and Natural Resources, Triangle Land Conservancy and Mecklenburg County Parks and Recreation (Division of Natural Resources). Additional meetings are planned with representatives of the North Carolina Botanical Garden, Wake Nature Preserve Partnership, the Native Plant Society and Duke University.

Findings from these meetings reinforce the use of volunteers as a best practice in the area of invasive species management. In order to develop a more coordinated effort for invasive species management, additional actions were proposed:

- The establishment of a departmental committee/local expert pool – Effective management of invasive species requires sustained collaboration from diverse resources. A committee made up of members from the department's natural resources section, parks division, and volunteer services unit will engage outside experts to formulate a department practice and program for invasive plant management.
- Prioritization System and Prescriptive Management – To better allocate available resources, a system to prioritize park properties for invasive management should be established. Prescriptive management plans will be developed for identified priority sites including threat assessment, evaluation of natural habitats and native plant communities, treatment methodology, etc.

- Public Education Effort – the management of invasives requires an awareness of the problem that extends beyond our park system. For example, neighbors adjacent to park properties can help reduce introduction of invasive species by knowing the appropriate plants to use and how to properly manage their yard waste. The department approach to educating the general public would include outreach to civic organizations, CAC's and other groups and the development of print and online educational materials.
- Implementation – Provide for coordinated implementation of the above plan of action through the creation of a new full-time position focused on the invasive plant management program. This staff would assist the departmental committee with the development of program elements and solicit, help train and schedule volunteers specific to invasive management.

Other solutions were discussed but not considered because of potential threats and damage to current native plant species and riparian buffers through their implementation. These include the use of one-time invasive plant removal clearing efforts and natural brush clearing using animal crews.

New Alternative Proposal

Staff's new alternative proposal is for the creation of a pilot program to address the invasive species management issue in the four open space parks identified in the initial citizen request, totaling 19.55 acres. The pilot program would address the citizen request for additional efforts to improve the aesthetics and potential loss of native plant species and natural habitat brought on by the invasive plant population at the sites. The alternative proposal has been shared with citizen stakeholders as part of the development process.

The pilot program would include a new full-time position focused on developing and implementing strategies for successful invasive plant management programs. The individual would work with the departmental committee to develop the program, including the identification of performance metrics and expected outcomes for a successful pilot. The new position would also liaise with volunteers in the application of herbicides. Under the supervision of licensed staff, these volunteers will increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the removal and control efforts.

The research has identified that an invasive species management program would require three to five years of staff and volunteer efforts to successfully mitigate existing invasive species and replace them with native flora and fauna. After initial program development, program staff may have capacity to engage in discussions of invasive plant management at other City sites, but efforts would be focused on the four identified locations. However, public education efforts will be available for wider citizen access, and will not be focused on one particular geographic area.

Funding for this coordinated effort to implement and sustain the pilot program annually is estimated:

- Invasive Plant Management Coordinator (PG 31) – salary, benefits, training - \$52,000
- Supplies - \$5,000
- Public Education Materials - \$500
- Plants for Restoration - \$5,000
- Total - \$62,500

As previously stated, performance metrics and expected outcomes will be developed and reviewed for the pilot program. Once the initial pilot period has been completed, a thorough review of the program and successes will be done to determine if a larger implementation of the

program is warranted and if the outcomes of the pilot program meet the needs for the City of Raleigh.

The FY16 Proposed Budget includes one-time funding of \$125,000 in professional services for development of an invasive plant management strategy. The alternative staff proposal would require resources totaling \$62,500, for FY 2015-2016 and similar amounts in subsequent years.

If council chooses to adopt the alternative proposal, \$62,500 will be reduced from professional services and appropriated for salaries and benefits, supplies, public education materials and plants.

