



**The Corporation of the Municipality of Wawa  
Staff Report**

**Office of the Director of Community Services and Tourism**

|   |                               |
|---|-------------------------------|
| <b>Prepared For: Corporate Planning Cmte.</b> | <b>Report No.: AP 2023-10</b> |
| <b>Agenda Date: September 19, 2023</b>        | <b>File No.: C11</b>          |

**Subject**

This report concerns maintenance standards along the Highway 101 corridor in front of the Wawa Tourist Information Centre (TIC).

**Summary of the Recommendation**


THAT the Corporation of the Municipality of Wawa request that the Ontario Ministry of Transportation maintain their property along the Highway 101 corridor to a minimum standard.

**Summary of the Issues**

This report concerns a recent Council request to maintain the Highway 101 corridor in front of the Wawa Tourist Information Centre. The property in question is owned by the MTO and its maintenance is subject to some conditions outlined herein. The corridor is at the entrance to our community, and therefore the perception that this first impression provides is not only important to tourists and visitors, but also for resident's pride and sense of place in our community. Therefore, staff have investigated the requirements to ensure that this property is beautified and welcoming to all.

**List of Stakeholders**

- Municipal Council
- Ontario Ministry of Transportation
- Ratepayers
- Tourists and Visitors
- Municipal Staff

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Respectfully Submitted By:</b><br> | <b>Prepared By:</b><br><b>Alex Patterson, Director,</b><br><b>Community Services and Tourism</b> |
|--|--|

## Purpose of Report

This report originates from a Councillor request; Councillor Hoffman brought the maintenance standards of the corridor to the CAO during the summer of 2023, and to Council for staff review at the August council meeting. Staff have reviewed the issues surrounding corridor maintenance to recommend a direction forward with the following considerations:

- Community beautification
- Property ownership
- Health and Safety
- Operational considerations

This report seeks to provide Council with solutions to beautify the entrance to our community. There are several options to ensure that Council's direction through the strategic plan can be met.

## Analysis

### Property Ownership and History

The "highway corridor" is located between the intersection of Highway 17 and 101 and the intersection of 101/Mission Road and Chris Simon Drive. The roadway and ditches along this section are the property of the MTO. In particular for this report, the section of the ditch as well as property located to the South of the TIC is the property of the MTO.

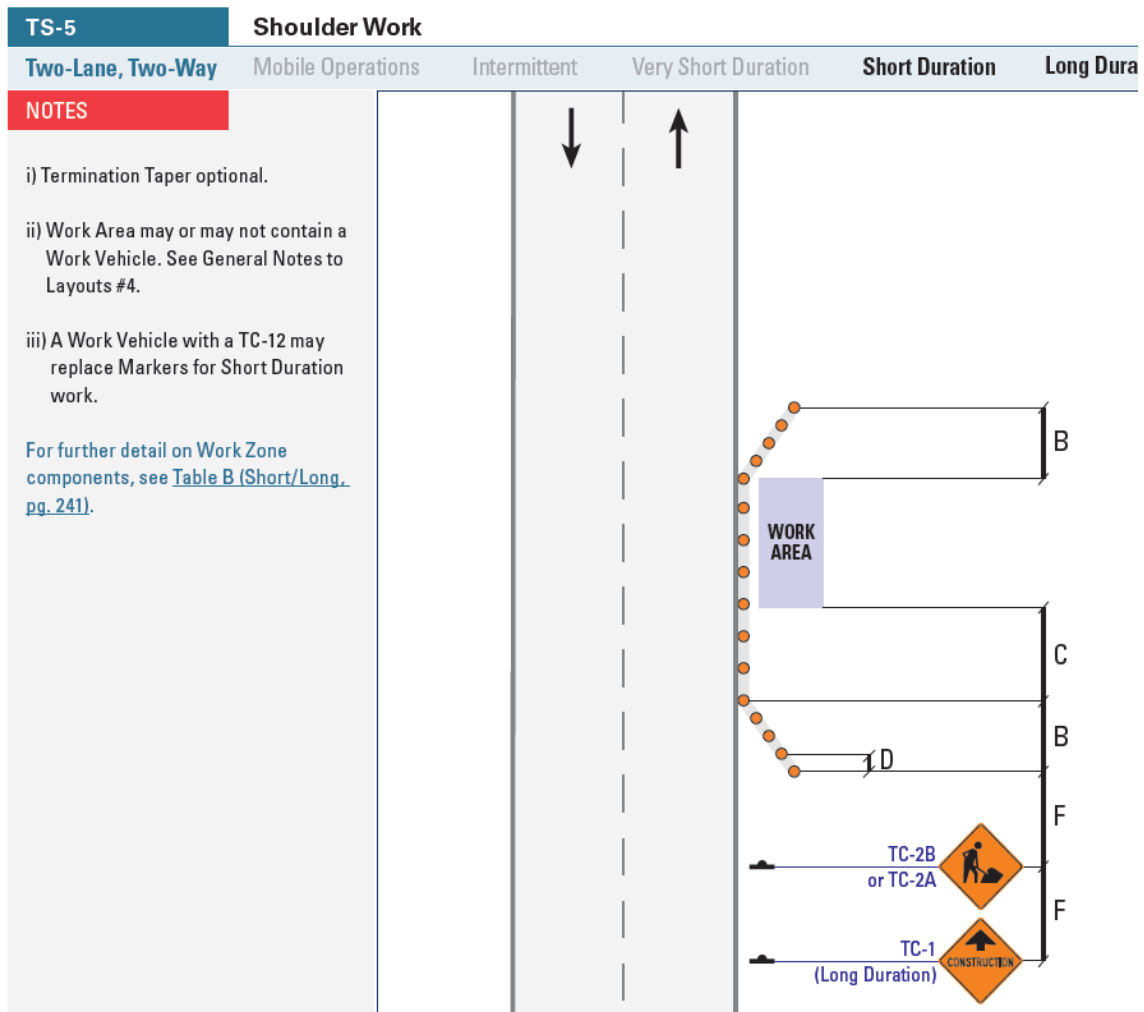
Before the installation of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Wawa Goose in 2017, staff had been maintaining the entire property as had been past practice for many years. When the new Goose was installed, staff reviewed property lines for the purposes of tree removal and discovered that the TIC property did not extend far past the Goose, and all surrounding property was part of the highway and owned by the Province under MTO jurisdiction. A map of the property is included as **Appendix A** for reference.

During the Goose project, staff contacted the MTO requesting maintenance work be completed as well as completed permitting for tree removal along the bottom of the Goose Hill. After 6 months of permitting work staff were granted one-time permission to remove 150m of trees along the bottom of the hill, and the MTO was not able to provide any maintenance along the right of way. At that time staff discontinued maintenance of the ditches along the corridor as several reasons including safety, time spent, and ownership became an issue.

### Health and Safety Considerations

Maintaining the corridor typically involved summer students and on occasion full time staff using string trimmers to cut along the ditch from the TIC to the highway. This places these staff at risk of both vehicles and debris coming off the roadway, as well as holds additional setup requirements as per the Ontario Traffic Manual Book 7 (Book 7).

The setup required has been a subject of discussion, therefore staff have included the relevant diagram for the work required:



The requirement to use this diagram for setup has been confirmed by Workplace Safety North, who provided staff with training. For the section between the TIC driveway and Highway 101, it will require the setup of 54 cones at the prescribed spacing in the diagram, and the completion of a Traffic Protection Plan as per SOP-005 Traffic Control. Staff working in and around the area will require training to these standards, including all summer students.

### Operational Considerations

There are several other options that do not require putting students alongside a provincial highway to accomplish the goals of maintaining the corridor:

- Wildflower Seeding

The Municipality could seek permission from the MTO to undertake a wildflower seeding program along both sides. Currently, lupins grow in the off-ramp grassland, and these and many other flowers can work along the entire corridor for little expense and some staff time to order and “seed bomb” the areas. This has the added benefit of increasing pollinator habitat.

- Ditch Mowing

Staff also investigated the possibility of a ditch mowing attachment. There are several market options for existing municipal units including the trackless, mini-excavator, and the New Holland operated by the department that could be used here and in other locations around the Municipality. A ditch mower was quoted to the Municipality for the New Holland at under \$10,000 and is pictured below:



**MTO Service Request and Permitting**

Staff have also contacted the MTO as well as the new contractor, LEDCOR, to discuss the possibilities of the MTO servicing our community. As the property in question is MTO, it is their responsibility to maintain the corridor. The MTO expressed willingness to work with the Municipality on the subject, and a proposed monthly maintenance of the area seemed acceptable to both the Corridor Management Officer as well as the local LEDCOR Supervisor. It was noted that the current contract stipulates an annual corridor grass cutting of all embankments and this may be able to be changed by the MTO.

Staff are awaiting a formal response from the MTO contract administrator as to what is required to add monthly corridor grass maintenance into the contracts.

As the southern portion of the TIC is also MTO property, staff suggested an exchange where the Municipality can continue to maintain this area in exchange for additional corridor maintenance by the contractor. This would be subject to a permitting agreement between the Municipality and MTO.

### **Beautification**

It is important to our community that a good first impression and a best foot forward be presented to visitors as they enter Wawa. This area is critically important to look and feel like a welcoming, well-kept, and beautiful community. Conventionally, this means trimmed greenspaces and flowers. Recent trends seek to challenge these ideals with pollinator gardens and wild growth gaining popularity as a new form of beauty. Of course, this is in the eye of the beholder and important for Council to consider what image the community wishes to portray to visitors.

## **Financial/Staffing Implications**

### **Capital Budget**

For the purchase of a ditch mower attachment, a budget of \$7,500+HST was provided to staff by ESM farm equipment, a preferred supplier. An RFQ process would be required for a final cost estimate. Other options including trackless and mini-excavator mowers would have greater power and range, with a budget estimate ranging from \$10,000 to \$15,000 and would be subject to capital purchasing in the 2024 budget. There are currently no funds set aside for additional attachments.

### **Personnel Costs**

The time it takes to manually cut the ditch is approx. 1 day with a team of 4 summer students. Additional time to setup and takedown pylons would add a half day to this work, for a total of 1.5 days per month with existing students and staff. An additional 2-day training per summer would be required, with an additional trainer expense as there are no in-house qualified trainers, averaging \$3,000 per course.

### MTO Maintenance

Should the Municipality be successful in lobbying the MTO to maintain the corridor, there would be no additional costs to the Municipality.

## Policies Affecting Proposal

### Municipal Strategic Plan

The Municipal Strategic Plan includes provisions for beautification of downtown, but this can be extended to the entire Broadway/Mission corridor as the main thoroughfare of the community. Therefore, when selecting a recommendation, staff kept in mind that all solutions must promote beautification of our community and a positive first impression.

## Comments from Relevant Departments/Community and Corporate Partners

### Workplace Safety North

WSN confirmed that the traffic diagram was correct to use in the location as presented.

### Ministry of Transportation

The MTO were open to working with staff on maintaining their property, and the Corridor Management Staff and contractor agreed to work with Staff on this issue.

## Alternatives

### Option 1: Do Nothing

This option would see the Municipality continue to leave the corridor unmaintained. This would not meet the beautification needs of the community nor the direction of Council, and therefore this option is **Not Recommended**.

### Option 2: Maintain corridor manually

This option would see the Municipality commit our summer workforce to regular maintenance of the MTO corridor. Due to the property concerns, health and safety requirements and time needed, this option is **Not Recommended**.

### Option 3: Alternative landscaping

This option would see the Municipality pursue an alternative beautification approach. Options include wildflower seeding, using cobblestone along the ditch (as seen near the 101/Michipicoten bridge towards Chapleau) or other options that eliminate the need to cut grass. As these options can either be controversial, expensive, or a combination of the two, this option is **Not Recommended**.

**Option 4: Purchase an attachment for a piece of equipment**

This option would see the Municipality purchase a ditch mower for a piece of equipment as part of the 2024 Capital budget. While this option has other benefits possible throughout the operations area, it is also costly and still requires permitting from the MTO to ensure that all known issues are resolved along the corridor. As the MTO has expressed willingness to work with the Municipality, this option is **Not Recommended** but a strong backup option.

**Option 5: Request the MTO maintain their property along the corridor**

This option would see the Municipality formally request that the MTO maintain their corridor to a minimum maintenance standard along the Hwy 101 corridor. This option will still require some work from staff to complete an agreement and ensure that cutting still occurs along the southern portion of land as currently maintained, however it is the most cost and labour efficient approach while still meeting the goals of having the corridor maintained. As the MTO has expressed willingness to work with our local contractor on the issue, this option is **Recommended**

**Conclusion**

By approving this recommendation, Council is ensuring that the entrance to our community is beautified, partnering with provincial authorities to ensure that Wawa presents a positive image to visitors and residents alike. Council is doing so while also being fiscally and staffing efficient, and maintaining the safety of all staff involved.

**Recommendation**

THAT the Corporation of the Municipality of Wawa request that the Ontario Ministry of Transportation maintain their property along the Highway 101 corridor to a minimum standard.

**Attachments**

**Attachment A: Property map of Wawa TIC**

**End of Report.**

