



---

**File #: IR-26-012, Version: 1**

---

**TAMRMS#: B05**

## **INFORMATION REQUEST (IR) Downtown Beautification Update**

Requested by: Councillor Korotash

Date of Request: March 17, 2026

Date Response Due: April 17, 2026

Confidential Response: No

### **QUESTION**

Please provide an update on what information is available and what efforts have been taken with respect to downtown beautification that may inform council motion or the preparation of a capital charter. This should include, but is not limited to:

- The current status of the program to place planters on spaces with dead trees (and photos if available),
- Any estimates that may have been prepared for the cost of installing proper tree wells to replace dead trees and promote long term tree health downtown,
- Status / opportunities and costs associated with potential expansion of current flower program to additional locations downtown,
- The uptake and effectiveness of the storefront improvement program,
- Any other initiatives that have been proposed or considered that could enhance the 'botanic arts' brand in our downtown.

### **RESPONSE**

#### **1. The current status of the program to place planters on spaces with dead trees (and photos if available)**

The current annual flower program consists of 53 extra-large planters (includes both the decorative Madison planters found at St. Albert Place front plaza and the extra-large black ones more commonly found at intersections), 99 regular planters, 5 balcony planters at St. Albert Place, 2 raised concrete planters, and 8 in-ground flowerbeds, provided by a contractor, at 55 locations. Please note that all of the in-ground flowerbed plantings (mainly at entrance features) have been replaced with an equivalent number of planters to ensure greater success.

Of the numbers above, the downtown area has:

- the large (Madison) planters located at St. Albert Place (5), St. Thomas Street (2), and Red Willow Place parking lot (1) that are changed out seasonally for different arrangements due to their prominent location (in front of St. Albert Place) and as aesthetically pleasing traffic control (St. Thomas and Red Willow Place parking lot)

- 2 in-ground/permanent planters at the Community Hall and adjacent to the Cenotaph
- 6 petunia planters by Cenotaph
- 6 petunia planters on east side of the rainbow crosswalk (St. Albert Place parking lot)
- 4 petunia planters at the St. Anne Street @ Sir Winston Churchill Avenue parking lot
- 4 petunia planters at the Community Recognition Plaza
- 6 petunia planters (3 at each end) on St. Thomas Street
- 4 petunia planters at the St. Albert Business Centre
- Added in 2024 - 12 petunia planters in empty tree wells on Perron & St. Thomas Streets, also 1 large and 3 smaller planters to the traffic circle island on Tache Street
- 4 large (Madison) planters in Victor Post Park (Clock Tower).

**2. Any estimates that may have been prepared for the cost of installing proper tree wells to replace dead trees and promote long term tree health downtown**

The long-term viability of trees in downtown St. Albert is limited by two primary factors: the urban design challenges associated with floodplain-based soil conditions, and the use of undersized tree wells during original construction that do not support healthy tree growth.

The area's fine-textured soils have been highly compacted through urban development. This compaction restricts drainage and contributes to elevated localized water tables, which reduce oxygen levels in the soil. Low soil oxygen creates stressful conditions for tree root systems and limits their ability to grow and function properly. Trees planted in undersized tree wells experience similar challenges, which are further worsened by these physical barriers that separate structural soils from the volume and quality of soil required for healthy tree development.

To reach their expected size and lifespan, trees require a sufficient volume of high-quality soil, typically about 20 cubic metres for a single tree and 30 cubic metres for two trees. Despite the challenges of urban environments, there are design and construction methods that can successfully support tree growth to maturity. Engineered systems are available that accommodate soil volume while allowing sidewalks and roadways to be constructed above them. The construction of Veteran's Way (formerly St. Anne Promenade) demonstrates the use of these systems, and photographs of this project have been included with this response.

Implementing these solutions on a single tree or isolated tree location is relatively costly. Construction would have notable impacts on adjacent sidewalks and roadways, and costs for replacing a single tree well could range from approximately \$30,000 to \$100,000, largely due to the related road and sidewalk remediation. The final cost would depend on site-specific factors such as location complexity and potential conflicts with underground utilities.

To date, these approaches have not been further pursued, as they are far more cost-effective when integrated into larger sidewalk or roadway renewal projects, where economies of scale can significantly reduce overall costs

**3. Status / opportunities and costs associated with potential expansion of current flower program to additional locations downtown**

Expansion: New planter costs are approximately \$705 per large planter and \$425 per small planter annually. In-ground flower beds are approximately \$75/m<sup>2</sup>. To upgrade any of the black planters

supplied by the contractor to Madison planters like at the entrance to St. Albert Place, the physical planter is purchased first (price is around \$800/planter) and then cost the same as a regular planter seasonally.

Year round planters: From a beautification perspective, winter planters could be quite impactful, but there are a few challenges to overcome:

- Outside of the contracted watering period from early June to mid-September, any planters are City responsibility for watering. The City has rental trucks with water tanks from early May to mid-October, but any additional watering required for the current off-season planters is done by hand by St. Albert Place maintenance staff. This can include fall until snow comes, as well as above freezing days throughout the winter. This would likely require additional casual staff hours and vehicle costs to meet this service level if there are additional planters
- In-ground planters at the Cenotaph and Community Hall are not candidates for winter planters, as they are not movable
- Winter planters at the Cenotaph would likely need to be placed after the November 11 Remembrance Ceremony, as this would interfere with the Legion's ceremony set-up
- The planters at each end of St. Thomas Street, as well as ones on the empty tree wells along St. Thomas and Perron Street might interfere with snow clearing operations either by the businesses themselves or City road clearing depending on snow volumes
- Planters that are used for summer petunias would have a maximum of two changes per year (fall/winter), as those planters need to be back at the greenhouse for planting of petunias in mid-spring.

Any of the locations aside from those listed above could have year-round planters located at them, but depending on how snow drifts or snow clearing operations are completed, they may not have the impact that is desired throughout the winter months.

Estimated pricing is as follows:

- Seasonal planter changeover costs: \$360/planter (difference in cost from above is because of no watering included).

If all downtown sites, excluding the two in-ground planters, receive two additional seasonal plantings, and the four Clock Tower Madison planters receive three, the additional cost would be estimated at:

- 46 planters x \$360/planter x 2 additional plantings per year = \$33,120
- 4 Madison planters x \$360/planter x 3 additional plantings per year = \$4,320
- Additional watering (casual staff) = \$6000
- Total = \$43,440

#### **4. The uptake and effectiveness of the storefront improvement program**

In regards to the Storefront Improvement Program (Previously known as Beautification) below is some high level reporting from the past 2 years:

##### **2025 Beautification Grant Funding:**

- 18 Applications received

- 17 Approved applications
- \$11,282.87 in total funds distributed
- \$23,221.86 in total private investment

**2024 Beautification Grant Funding:**

- 7 Applications received
- 7 Approved applications
- \$4,774.00 in total funds distributed
- \$5,322.75 in total private investment

In 2026, the Storefront Improvement guidelines were expanded to include seasonal patio equipment and furniture. The Downtown Patio Program supports local businesses in expanding outdoor dining and gathering spaces by streamlining approvals and providing flexibility for seasonal patios. This program enhances street-level activity, contributes to the overall downtown atmosphere, and encourages residents and visitors to spend more time in the core.

**5. Any other initiatives that have been proposed or considered that could enhance the 'botanic arts' brand in our downtown**

In 2024, in addition to the 12 new annual planters for the vacant tree wells and the additional 4 planters on Tache Street, an additional waste receptacle was installed, bringing the total waste receptacles in the greater downtown area to 28, including 2 in-ground red tubes.

Medium- to long-term possibilities for consideration could include:

- Identifying key beautification areas to place Madison planters like what are currently on the front plaza of City Hall
  - determine if they would be year round or just seasonal summer placements
  - Potential locations could include: St. Albert Place back plaza, Perron Street at the Community Hall
  - Purchase cost of the planters themselves is \$800, plus additional ongoing budget needs of approximately \$400/planter/season (so \$1200-\$1600 per year if they are out year-round)
- Year-round beautification (winter lighting)
  - ongoing funding would be required for additional lights (as trees grow or light strings wear out), as well as contracted services dollars for the installation/removal of the lights, as that is above what City staff resources can take on (approximately \$15,000 annually)
  - As DARP continues to evolve, consideration for the installation of tree well outlets to reduce/eliminate the need for extension cords from trees to light posts would provide a nicer aesthetic and reduced replacement costs.
- Downtown hanging baskets
  - As the Downtown Area Revitalization Plan (DARP) continues to evolve, consideration for the addition of hanging baskets into the plan
  - This would require irrigation lines to be run throughout the downtown area and up light posts to accommodate this
  - Cost to be determined - would require integration into DARP re-design of Perron

- and/or St. Anne Street and/or St. Thomas Street sidewalks
- Internal City resources to provide internal program support
  - 2 ton water truck and tank rental
  - Horticulture team lead year-round to manage contracts and plan program
  - Additional summer casual hires to cover off 7 days/week watering needed to maintain annual flowers.

Report Date: April 14, 2026

Author(s): Tim Saunders, Mike Erickson

Department: Public Operations, Economic Development

Department Director: Tim Saunders, Mike Erickson

Managing Director: Dinu Alex, Adryan Slaght

Chief Administrative Officer: William Fletcher

St. Thomas entrance



Downtown clock tower



Downtown 2



St. Thomas St west



Clock tower 2



Perron Street



St. Thomas Street



Downtown



Silva cell example photo (Deep Root)

