

**FOREST PRESERVE ADVISORY BOARD  
REPORT TO COUNCIL**

**Report # 2020-02**

**SUBJECT:** Recommendation that Council accept the final report of A. Morton Thomas & Associates Regarding the Forest Preserve

**DATE:** February 2, 2020

**BACKGROUND:** In 2015, A. Morton Thomas & Associates was contracted to assess the Greenbelt Forest Preserve and review the relevant sections of the City Code as well as the Forest Preserve Maintenance Guidelines. An initial draft of a report, entitled “Forest Health Assessment Report for North Preserve & South Preserve of the Greenbelt Forest Preserve”, was received in April of 2016. After the initial draft was received, AMT attended a meeting of the FPAB, participated in a city council work session, and held a walk through the North Woods that was open to the public. The FPAB provided AMT extensive written feedback on the initial draft of the report. This feedback was communicated to the City Council in FPAB report 2017-01. AMT revised the report in August of 2018 and again in September of 2019.

**DISCUSSION:** As specified in the report to council, the FPAB felt that there were numerous shortcomings in the initial report. These included a lack of GPS coordinates for the forest assessment plots, unclear data collection methods, outdated standards used to map vegetation communities, incorrect plant identification, listing native plant species as invasive and insufficiently detailed management recommendations. The FPAB had anticipated receiving detailed recommendations for each forest stand, but instead received a table stating that all parts of the forest preserve were “high priority”.

The most recent update addresses some but not all of these concerns. GPS coordinates were provided for the forest assessment plots, native plants are no longer listed as invasive and some improvements have been made to the plant identification. Unfortunately, the vegetation communities are still identified using outdated standards and there are no stand specific management recommendations or priorities.

**RECOMMENDATION:** FPAB recommends that, despite the shortcomings of the report, Council should accept the final draft. While the board had hoped for a more detailed report, the work of AMT was helpful in drafting the new Stewardship Guidelines, and was particularly helpful in suggesting updates to City Code. The board feels that, given the passage of time and turnover in AMT staff, there is no reason to expect further improvements to the report, and that if AMT was capable of providing more detailed recommendations they would have already done so. We see no reason for additional city staff time to be spent pursuing additional revisions. Since AMT did not fulfill the contract, the city does not owe them any further compensation.