

Bees and butterflies get southeast sanctuary thanks to Calgary pollinator program

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The bees are coming back, and they're bringing some butterflies with them.

That's what *The Calgary Eyeopener's* Angela Knight discovered recently, when she travelled to southeast Calgary to check out the city's new pollinator beds.

Knight spoke to City of Calgary's Chris McGeachy, who explained the thinking behind the pilot project.

"We actually have beds on the south end of Canyon Meadows Drive all the way along, that people will be able to stop in and look at — and they've been planted with natural plants that will feed the pollinators throughout the season," McGeachy said.

City promotes biodiversity, reduces costs

"We want to recognize biodiversity and the city has actually taken more of an initiative to try and promote biodiversity. We have a biodiversity council, and this project is approved by that — and it actually benefits roads because it decreases the amount of maintenance we need to do on these boulevards, because all the plants are naturally-occurring plants," he said.



Students' from St. Philip's School await planting instructions in southeast Calgary, where they participated in new City of Calgary pollinator program designed to promote biodiversity. (Angela Knight/CBC)

Teaching kids

The city also reached out to area schools to see if any students wanted to help with some planting — and maybe learn something at the same time.

As a result, Knight found herself surrounded by children the day she spoke to McGeachy.

"They were really great — they were onboard with us," McGeachy said.

"Today they're planting milkweed, which is actually important for the butterflies. And they're going to learn a little bit about the importance of providing habitats for our pollinators."

Expansion plans

So far, the Canyon Meadows Drive location is the only one in the city. McGeachy says that could change, depending on what the data reveals.

"We're hoping we can expand the program in the future," he said.

"This space made sense due to the challenges we had with Canyon Meadow Drive and due to its proximity to Fish Creek Park.

"We're actually partnered with University of Calgary and Mount Royal," he said. "They're going to be doing data collections, so they'll basically be coming out, and counting the pollinator species, to see if this has an impact."

"Over the next couple years, we'll be able to take that data, evaluate whether it's working — and hopefully we'll be able to implement this kind of thing in new spots."