

Chief Financial Officer's Report to
Priorities and Finance Committee
2020 May 05

ISC: UNRESTRICTED
PFC2020-0318

Assessment and Tax Circumstances Report

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Council approval is required to cancel taxes accrued on individual tax accounts. This report includes the applicable 2018-2019 taxes accrued on property accounts that meet Administration's criteria for prior year tax cancellation. This report also includes the applicable 2016-2019 municipal property taxes for non-profit organizations that applied and qualified for tax cancellations under the *Non-Profit Tax Mitigation Policy*. In some cases, these tax cancellations address properties that were taxed in error due to issues that arose such as the timing of when information was received, incorrect data, technical and human error and timing of appeals. This report is presented to Council twice annually and this is the first report this year.

ADMINISTRATION RECOMMENDATION:

That the Priorities and Finance Committee recommend that Council under the authority of section 347 of the *Municipal Government Act*:

1. Cancel property taxes for the amounts listed in the Attachment 1.
2. Cancel municipal property taxes for the qualifying non-profit organizations for the amounts listed in Attachment 2.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL DIRECTION / POLICY

This report is presented to Council twice annually and the most recent report was presented at the 2019 October 21 Combined Meeting of Council.

BACKGROUND

Section 305 of the *Municipal Government Act* (MGA) does not allow assessors to change the property assessment value after the end of the tax year to which the assessment applies. In certain circumstances, Administration will recommend that Council considers exercising its discretionary taxation power under section 347 of the MGA to cancel taxes that correspond to property assessment rolls of prior tax years.

At the 2014 December 15 Regular Meeting of Council, through C2014-0919, Council adopted the *Non-Profit Tax Mitigation Policy* to cancel the property taxes of non-profit organizations that paid tax during the construction period of their facility and whose subsequent use of the property met the criteria for property tax exemption. The *Policy* is administered using the Assessment and Tax Circumstances Report for administrative efficiency.

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Tax Cancellations Related to Prior Years' Assessment Rolls

Section 305 of the MGA allows corrections or amendments to the property assessment roll during the current tax year. A current year amendment to an individual assessment triggers a corresponding adjustment to the current year taxes for that account.

Property owners have a responsibility to inform the municipality of assessment errors or changes to their property in a timely manner in order for Administration to make the relevant changes to the property assessment accounts within the current taxation year. Administration does not have the ability to alter property assessment rolls of prior years.

Inaccuracies in assessment rolls may result from a number of factors, including but not limited to: operational considerations associated with year-end assessment roll production, timing of communication between business units, and incorrect data or mailing address information.

Generally, valid cancellation requests are for tax amounts that were levied as a result of the following circumstances:

- an incorrect issuance of a property assessment
- a property assessment correction error
- a tax exemption processing error

Typically, the inaccuracy must be reported within two years after the inaccuracy occurred for the tax cancellation request to be considered for inclusion in this report. Manager approval is required for requests outside of this timeframe.

Exempt Organizations and the *Non-Profit Tax Mitigation Policy*

The *Non-Profit Tax Mitigation Policy* adopted by Council through C2014-0919 provides criteria for circumstances in which Administration may recommend Council to cancel municipal taxes that correspond to a period when an eligible non-profit property was under construction or under renovation.

Property tax exemptions are governed by the MGA and the *Community Organization Property Tax Exemption Regulation* (COPTER). Provisions in the legislation differ based on the use of the property and the nature of the organization which holds it. One of the differences is the tax treatment of non-profit-held property that is not in use because of construction or renovation. Property held by specific entities such as public institutions (e.g. hospitals, public colleges and universities) is exempt from property tax when it is under construction/renovation. Property that is held by non-profit organizations and societies and is to be used for an approved activity (e.g. places of worship, chambers of commerce, food banks, and under certain conditions, arts and cultural activities) is not property tax exempt until it is actually in use for these purposes.

To be considered for municipal property tax cancellation under the *Non-Profit Tax Mitigation Policy*, organizations must attain property tax exemption for the property under the provincial legislation. Until the property is completed and occupied, and being used for the exempt purpose, applicants pay municipal and provincial property taxes. Once the *Policy* criteria are met, up to four years of the municipal taxes paid over the construction period are subject to retroactive cancellation.

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For administrative efficiency/timeliness, the *Policy* has been implemented using the Assessment and Tax Circumstances Report as the mechanism to bring these to Council for approval.

INVESTIGATION: ALTERNATIVES AND ANALYSIS

Tax Cancellations Related to Prior Years' Assessment Rolls

Property owners are encouraged each year to review and ask questions about their property assessments before the end of the 67-day Customer Review Period that follows each assessment notice mailing. This self-reporting allows Administration to use its authority under MGA section 305 to amend the assessment roll for the current year.

Assessment sometimes receives requests for the cancellation of taxes from prior tax years; these may come from Assessment, directly from taxpayers, or from other City business units. The investigation of each request includes researching internal communications and records, speaking directly to the affected taxpayer and working with other relevant City staff.

Administration uses the following criteria to determine if the circumstances and corresponding property or business tax amounts should be brought forward to Council in this biannual report:

- typically, the inaccuracy was reported within two years of the occurrence; and
- Assessment was advised of the inaccuracy within the year the inaccuracy occurred, but the correction was either not processed or incorrectly processed; or,
- the taxpayer was not aware and/or was not notified of the change in assessment and was unable to bring the inaccuracy to the assessor's attention within the Customer Review Period; or,
- the property or business assessment account was set up in error, and the assessment notice was sent to the wrong party; or,
- another City department(s) was notified by the taxpayer of a change to the business and Assessment was not notified during the applicable taxation year.

The recommended adjustments to the property tax accounts due to assessment roll corrections would cancel or reduce both the municipal and provincial property taxes. Upon cancellation, the provincial portion of the property tax is a cost to The City as the provincial government does not refund its portion. It would be recovered through the provincial property taxes the following year.

Any tax cancellations in this report supported by Council will be funded through the 2019 tax cancellation budget. If Council chooses not to support the recommendation, the tax liabilities and amounts owed will remain as originally billed.

Individual requests for prior years' tax cancellation that met these criteria are listed in Attachment 1.

Tax Cancellations Related to the *Non-Profit Tax Mitigation Policy*

To assist non-profit organizations in applying for prior year tax-relief under the *Non-Profit Tax Mitigation Policy*, Administration provides information about the *Policy*, how to qualify and the application process on Calgary.ca, via email and by phone year-round.

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Requests for the cancellation of prior year municipal taxes related to exemptible property held during periods of construction or renovation come from non-profit organizations on an ongoing basis.

The *Policy* ensures that tax cancellations for properties and/or facilities that are under construction are conducted in an equitable and consistent manner through an open and transparent process. The following criteria are used to determine if the circumstances and corresponding municipal property tax amounts should be brought forward to Council:

- a building permit for the site was issued after 2013 January 01, the date established in the *Policy*; and
- the organization has filed the necessary application form to request tax cancellation under the *Policy* to Assessment; and
- the property and/or facility construction has been completed; and
- the property and/or facility is occupied by the organization and is being used for an exemptible purpose; and
- upon completion and occupancy, the organization has filed an application for property tax exemption under the MGA or COPTER to Assessment and the application has been approved.

The non-profit organization must meet all the above criteria to qualify for a tax cancellation under the *Policy*.

The value of the cancellation amount is based on the municipal tax levied during the eligible period the property was under construction and is retroactive to the organization attaining property tax exemption under provincial legislation. The eligible period begins the year that the required application is submitted to Assessment. If the application is submitted the same year the building permit is issued, the period begins as of the date the permit is issued. If the application is submitted at any point thereafter, the eligible period begins January 01 of the year in which the application is received by Assessment. The period ends either four years from the date that the eligible period begins or when the property becomes exempt from taxation, whichever is earlier.

At the time this report was prepared, three (3) properties held by non-profit organizations met the criteria for prior year tax cancellation under the *Policy*. Applicants that meet all requirements in the future will be brought forward to Council for tax cancellation consideration on future reports.

The recommended adjustments due to the *Non-Profit Tax Mitigation Policy* would cancel or reduce only the municipal property taxes in each organization's account. If Council chooses not to support the recommendation, the tax liabilities and amounts paid will remain as originally billed.

The individual tax amounts to be cancelled for each of the qualifying *Non-Profit Tax Mitigation* applicants are listed in Attachment 2.

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Stakeholder Engagement, Research and Communication

This report is a collaborative effort between Assessment and Finance. Throughout the circumstance report process, the business units are in communication, ensuring appropriate investigation and analyses are conducted for an accurate reflection of the tax cancellations proposed.

Taxpayers and non-profits are contacted by City staff subsequent to their initial inquiry if additional information is needed to establish whether individual circumstances meet the tax cancellation criteria.

For tax cancellation requests related to prior years' assessment rolls, Assessment advises property owners listed in Attachment 1 that their requests are included in the report. A second letter advises them of Council's decision.

For tax cancellations related to the *Non-Profit Tax Mitigation Policy*, non-profits are advised of eligibility during the application or circumstance report process and those listed in Attachment 2 will be advised of Council's decision.

The accounts of approved tax cancellations are then adjusted by Finance and a refund is issued when necessary.

Strategic Alignment

The recommendations are in alignment with One Calgary 2019-2022 Service Plans and Budgets and with the *Non-Profit Property Tax Mitigation Policy*.

Social, Environmental, Economic (External)

The taxpayers who own or hold the properties listed in Attachment 1 and 2 will receive tax cancellations or refunds if Council approves the recommendations in this report.

Financial Capacity

Current and Future Operating Budget:

The total taxes recommended for cancellation are \$616,624.25. Finance has confirmed that there are sufficient funds to accommodate the tax cancellations for the accounts proposed in Attachment 1 and 2. The total budget for the prior years' property tax cancellations is \$1,000,000. The total budget for municipal tax cancellations proposed in Attachment 2 under the *Non-Profit Tax Mitigation Policy* is an additional \$1,000,000. At this time, no adjustments to future budget allocations are required to meet the tax cancellation requests set out in this report.

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<i>Type of Tax</i>	<i>2020 Tax Cancellations (This Report)</i>
<i>Property Tax - Non-NPTM Related</i>	\$48,959.77
<i>Property Tax - NPTM Related</i>	\$567,664.48
Total	\$616,624.25

Current and Future Capital Budget:

There are no implications to the capital budget, as a result of this report.

Risk Assessment

No implications were identified.

REASON(S) FOR RECOMMENDATION(S):

Administration is prevented by legislative constraints from (1) making corrections to tax accounts relating to prior years' assessment and tax rolls, and (2) providing tax exemptions to otherwise eligible non-profit organizations whose properties are under construction. The accounts brought forward to Council were identified using the criteria within this report. The tax liabilities and amounts owed will remain as originally billed without Council approval.

ATTACHMENT(S)

1. Attachment 1 – List of Tax Cancellations Related to Prior Years' Assessment Rolls
2. Attachment 2 – List of Tax Cancellations Related to the *Non-Profit Tax Mitigation Policy*