

Summary of Engagement

Currently Involved Communities

Individual conversations were held with representatives from the various community organizations/operators involved with the program, to gain their perspective on the day-to-day functioning and administration of the program, benefits and challenges that have been realized, and suggestions for improvements.

Communities related a list of benefits they associated with the program. Beyond the obvious aesthetic uplift and curb appeal of green spaces, representatives also frequently spoke of a perceived increase in community pride and engagement, social networks, increased property values, reduced crime and increased use of green spaces since the program was introduced. A more extensive list of perceived benefits is included below. Special Tax Levy communities, in particular, related the immense amount of volunteer time, energy and resources that were contributed by community members to establish the program, and the enduring relationships and network that resulted from that effort.

Challenges to the current program discussed by the community representatives generally corresponded to three themes: communication, clarity and consistency. Despite the program working well overall, representatives felt that improvements such as better public information regarding the program, better communication between The City and communities, clearer parameters regarding eligible services, better defined protocols regarding petitions and votes, and more consistency in terms of how the program was administered would help to realize further efficiencies.

A more extensive list of commonly mentioned benefits raised by community representatives is listed below.

Identified Program Opponents

To try to understand the primary reasons for opposition to communities' involvement in the program, Calgary Parks also interviewed representatives from groups who have opposed it. Interviews were conducted with the Vice-Chair of the Edgemont RECALL group, as well as an individual who recently launched an 'anti-petition' in Edgemont. Calls placed to another individual who has launched an anti-petition in Scenic Acres were not returned.

It was acknowledged that there was some level of benefit with the program; however, opponents raised concerns they have with matters related to the program. These included the manner in which the petitioning process and reaffirmation votes are carried out, the need for more information from community operators in terms of how they allocate levy funds annually, concerns about affordability for some community members and concern about the sustainable nature of services that are contracted. The need for better communication was also mentioned as a frustration, with no clear source of information on the program being publicly available.

Internal Stakeholders

Calgary Parks' review also involved feedback from several internal stakeholders including representatives from Calgary Parks, Roads, Law, Calgary Neighbourhoods and Council for their insight into the program; Calgary Parks in service delivery and Roads and Law in terms of the petitioning process.

Engagement with Calgary Parks staff indicated that resourcing for standard level of maintenance can be more difficult in areas where they are also the provider of direct enhanced services.

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Regarding petitioning, internal stakeholders agree that past tensions surrounding petitions can partially be attributed to a lack of public understanding concerning petition collection and tabulation rules. A lack of program information regarding petition protocols has at times caused confusion amongst proponents, signatories and opponents. Internal parties tended to agree that a common, publicly accessible source of information and list of protocols would likely assist in preventing many of the misunderstandings that have arisen in the past.

Federation of Calgary Communities

Federation of Calgary Communities management and planners were consulted to gain perspective on the program on a community-wide scale. The Federation is supportive of the core principles and associated recommendations that have been developed. They did note that the program highlights the difficulties posed by a community representation system that includes both homeowner associations and community associations as community representatives, but acknowledged that the topic is being investigated separately through the Community Representation Framework review currently being undertaken.

What We Heard From the Enhanced Landscape Maintenance Community Representatives: *Benefits of the Program*

All of the community representatives interviewed indicated that the majority of their community greatly values the Enhanced Landscape Maintenance program and want it to continue. Representatives from tax levy communities, in particular, related the exceptional amount of work, perseverance and volunteer time that was associated with establishing and continuing the program in their community, the value that this effort had, and their desire that it not be lost.

As a result of the enhanced program being in place, representatives generally commented that they have observed that their community's involvement in the Enhanced Landscape Maintenance Program:

- generally makes their communities look much better;
- represents a good investment in communities by citizens;
- fosters pride in and showcases passion for the community;
- increases discourse and citizen engagement within the community;
- is perceived to have a positive effect on private property values and, ultimately, property tax revenue for The City;
- is perceived to reduce crime and vandalism;
- encourages park spaces and amenities to be used more frequently;
- encourages citizens to spend more of their time outdoors;
- inspires private property owners to further beautify and maintain their own yards;
- provides jobs for local citizens and students;
- allows The City to focus its resources in other areas of the community;
- lends to the protection and care of public assets, beyond what standard maintenance would normally provide;
- helps build citizen networks and social capacity with the community;
- fosters communication between communities.

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What We Heard From the Enhanced Landscape Maintenance Community Representatives: *Program Challenges*

Representatives were also asked about any challenges that their community faces, related to the program. While some of the challenges mentioned were unique to specific communities or directly related to service provision, ones that are common to most communities emerged. These generally related to three themes: communication, clarity and consistency. Based on these themes, the following most common challenges were raised:

Communication:

- A better source of public information related to the program is needed;
- Clearer and timelier communication regarding the program is needed from The City;
- There needs to be a more consistent/common point of contact with The City;
- There is concern regarding citizen petition information being released through FOIP requests (tax levy communities).

Clarity:

- More guidance from The City regarding petition collection and re-affirmation voting procedures and rules would be appreciated;
- Further clarification is needed regarding which park elements are eligible to be enhanced, to what extent and why;
- More information regarding City grant amounts and how they are determined;
- More clarity is needed regarding areas of responsibility - who provides service where within the community;
- It is sometimes frustrating to understand the jurisdiction and responsibilities of various City Business Units;
- The 're-affirmation' vote process needs to be reviewed (tax levy communities).

Consistency:

- Better consistency is needed in how the program is run amongst participating communities;
- The extent of The City's role becomes confused at times when they are hired as the service provider;
- It is sometimes difficult for communities with a small volunteer base to run the program and manage contracts;
- More precise, frequent and timely reporting/accounting are needed from The City when they are the service provider;
- It is awkward when parts of communities do not contribute to the program, but still benefit from it (other Residents Associations, condo developments, etc.);
- Service provision needs to be more consistent.