

CALGARY PARKS PROPOSED ENHANCED MAINTENANCE PROGRAM REVIEW

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Calgary Parks has offered a process for enhanced maintenance in Calgary communities since 1996. The program was formalized in 2002 and allows communities to generate operating funds that supplement the standard level of service in common open spaces within their neighbourhoods. Since the program inception, there have been changes in Council membership, civic population and demographics, as well as changes in the method to calculate unit rate costs. A review of the existing program will ensure that the program aligns with evolving corporate and community values. This review will include an assessment of current state and engagement with participating communities, prospective communities, Council, and partner business units. A report back on future state options will come forward to Council no later than Q1 2017.

ADMINISTRATION RECOMMENDATION(S)

That the SPC on Community and Protective Services recommend that Council:

1. Receive this report for information; and
2. Direct Administration to report back on the program review and future state options no later than Q1 2017.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL DIRECTION / POLICY

In 1996, Council approved Christie Estates Special Tax Bylaw as an alternative method to generate operating funds for the enhancement of community parks and green spaces.

BACKGROUND

Calgary is the only Canadian municipality to offer citizens a Special Tax Levy and Enhanced Maintenance Program. The process began in 1996 with Christie Estates requesting the ability to contribute funds to enhanced maintenance. The Special Tax Levy Program was formalized in 2002 following an increase in community interest and Council support. Council reviews and approves the annual reports provided by Administration.

Special tax levies are established at the request of an organized community group such as a community association or homeowner association. This process allows communities to generate sufficient operating funds to enhance the level of service in the common green spaces currently provided by Calgary Parks. A landscape maintenance agreement (LMA) or Pathway Snow Removal Agreement (PSRA) is established between The City and the participating community. The contract identifies the specific land involved in the agreement, defines mutual roles and responsibilities, and describes a set of maintenance guidelines.

There are two primary methods to secure funds to operate an enhanced green space maintenance program:

1. Public funds generated through a special tax levy and collected by The City of Calgary on behalf of the association (Attachment 1); and
2. Privately raised funds from an encumbrance or caveat on property title and collected by a residents or homeowner association (Attachment 2).

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Slightly more than half of the enhanced green space maintenance programs are managed by private resident or homeowner associations. The attachments include additional information on participating communities, the type of maintenance performed, and the service provider. Regardless of the funding method for enhanced green space maintenance, all participating communities and private associations are required to complete an agreement with The City of Calgary. These are legal agreements between The City and the Operator of the maintenance, (i.e. community or residents association) to facilitate enhanced landscape maintenance on a public park or road right-of-way within a single identifiable community.

In all cases, Calgary Parks provides the operating funds for base level maintenance to the association; the association then applies their funds to enhance the base level of maintenance. The operating funds are calculated by using current unit rates for primary activities such as turf mowing and trimming, garbage removal, and shrub bed maintenance. The operating funds transferred do not include maintenance and management funds attached to the urban forest, irrigation, or park infrastructure, such as playgrounds, sport field structures, signage, lighting, etc.

INVESTIGATION: ALTERNATIVES AND ANALYSIS

The program has been in operation for 14 years and was established in response to both citizen and Council requests, as well as the increasing trend of developers creating resident and homeowner associations in new communities. The original program principles were to facilitate a community-led process to encourage community involvement and increase community pride while improving visual aesthetics of neighbourhoods. A review of the existing program is timely and will ensure that the program aligns with evolving community and corporate values. Since the program inception, there have been changes in Council membership, civic population and demographics, as well as changes in the way unit rate data is collected and analyzed by Calgary Parks. A program review will allow a robust engagement process with Council, participating communities, prospective communities, as well as partner business units such as Calgary Neighbourhoods, Law and Roads. An initial framework for the program review would include the following:

1. Define Scope
 - Engage with Council.
 - Create project terms of reference.
 - Planning, initiation and project launch.
2. Assess current state:
 - Engage with participating communities for feedback on current program.
 - Internal assessment of strength and weaknesses of current program.
 - Review best practices.
 - Review current business model.
 - Review program principles.

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3. Develop program options:

- Reaffirm and/or update program principles.
- Evaluate results of current state assessment and consider program principles to create options for future state.
- Engage with Council on options.
- Engage with public on options (including participant communities, Federation of Calgary Communities, etc).
- Internal engagement with partner business units (Law, Roads, Calgary Neighbourhoods).
- Review operational cost implications of options.

4. Report back:

- Summarize results of engagement.
- Return to Council with options for the future state of the program, no later than Q1 2017.
- This will include implementation plans and timelines.

Stakeholder Engagement, Research and Communication

The program review will include engagement with participant communities, prospective communities, the Federation of Calgary Communities, Council, and internal business units including but not limited to: Calgary Neighbourhoods, Law and Roads.

Strategic Alignment

This report aligns with the Council approved Action Plan 2015-2018 outcomes: “Respond to the needs and aspirations of the citizens of Calgary” and “Systematically invest in established neighbourhoods as they evolve to accommodate changing community needs”. Further, the report also aligns with the goals and objectives of the following policy documents:

- 2020 Sustainability Direction
- Calgary Open Space Plan

Social, Environmental, Economic (External)

Social

Community based landscape maintenance programs enhance the liveability of neighbourhoods and encourage collaboration and community pride among residents.

Environmental

Landscape maintenance programs incorporate The City’s best practices of urban forestry, water management, integrated pest and turf management to support biodiversity within Calgary’s urban ecosystem.

Economic (external)

High quality park space favourably impacts the image and economy of Calgary and is associated with indirect benefits including increased land values and tax revenues. At the community’s discretion, externalizing the enhanced maintenance in communities could provide new employment opportunities for small local businesses.

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Financial Capacity

Current and Future Operating Budget:

The proposed program review will be conducted within the current operating budget.

Current and Future Capital Budget:

No budget implications.

Risk Assessment

The overall review of the program will provide opportunities for engagement and discussions on potential mitigation strategies and will allow for a review of program principles.

REASON(S) FOR RECOMMENDATION(S):

The Special Tax Levy Program has been in place for 14 years and should be reviewed to reflect changing community values and demographics, shifting Council priorities, and evolving Calgary Parks' maintenance practices.

ATTACHMENT(S)

1. Tax Levy Funded Enhanced Maintenance Communities
2. Self Funded Enhanced Park Maintenance Communities