

Report from Parks, Recreation and Culture Services, Business Planning and Strategic Services

Date of Report: November 13, 2017

Date of Meeting: November 20, 2017

Report Number: PRCS-B040-2017

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Subject: Neighbourhood Pilot Project Report

Recommendation

That Budget Standing Committee (BSC) receive this report for information.

Summary

This report provides a review on the City's potential involvement in a Neighbourhood Organization Fund, through a proposed Neighbourhood Meeting Space Program, in response to the request from the Budget Standing Committee; and recommends the City's potential Neighbour award program that model's the City of Leduc, in response to Council's request. Both recommendations would form a Neighbourhood Pilot Project.

Background

On April 12th, 2017 Councillor Siscoe, through the Budget Standing Committee, requested a report on the potential of a Neighbourhood Organization Fund.

At the November 7, 2016 Council meeting, Councillor Siscoe requested that staff report back on the feasibility and details of a 'Good Neighbour' program similar to the program run in Leduc, Alberta.

This report provides information on the recommended approach to address each motion under a Neighbourhood Pilot Project.

Report

The City of St. Catharines takes pride in the community, encourages residents to give back, while being supportive of each other. The vision of the City's Recreation Master Plan is to be the city where everybody can play. In order to achieve this, we must align with one of our Strategic Plan's action items which has an action to be a city that embraces connectivity between people, places, and neighbourhoods. By achieving this, we will strengthen connection within our neighbourhoods, and the people who live, work and play in them. The City of St. Catharines has identified that a compassionate city provides dignity, respect and opportunity for all of its residents. A compassionate community is where we can all come together to do what we can to help support neighbours in need. Whether it is financial support, food or clothing donations,

volunteering your time, taking part in fundraisers or simply reaching out to the people around you to show friendship and care – we all have a role to play. It's about an attitude and a community lifestyle. In response to the motions above, staff recommend the City establish a Neighbourhood Pilot Project that has two components: provision of a neighbourhood meeting space and neighbour recognition awards.

Neighbourhood Meeting Space Program

One of the City's Recreation Master Plan's key focus areas is "Maximizing participation and the use of facilities". It has a goal to maximize the use of publicly-owned recreation facilities in order to derive the greatest social and physical benefits for the community.

The purpose of a Neighbourhood Meeting Space Program (Program) is to provide grassroots community groups support in the early stages of development due to the costs involved in renting meeting space. Through the program, eligible organizations would have the opportunity to host meeting(s) in a designated City facility without any rental fee. The neighbourhood organization would be required to sign an official permit for the space that agrees to the legal terms and conditions of use and pay for the corresponding insurance fees (offered through City) related to that permit, which is a requirement for use of any city space.

Impact on facility usage

The identified facility for the Program within the Neighbourhood Pilot Project is the Russell Avenue Community Centre. Staff have identified Wednesday evenings from 6-8 p.m. would have least impact to the facility's use and potential revenue generation.

What is a neighbourhood group?

For the purposes of this Pilot Project, a neighbourhood group will be defined as "a district or community within a town or city" (Oxford Dictionary).

A neighbourhood group is a group of neighbours who work together to improve their quality of place by:

- organizing social events
- monitoring development proposals
- community clean ups
- Protecting natural and built heritage
- Increasing safety
- Raising funds to improve parks, infrastructure, amenities, public art and more.

A neighbourhood group will also be defined as a neighbourhood within physical boundaries within the six identified St. Catharines wards:

- Ward 1 Merritton
- Ward 2 St. Andrew's

- Ward 3 St. George's
- Ward 4 St. Patrick's
- Ward 5 Grantham
- Ward 6 Port Dalhousie

To be eligible, a neighbourhood group must be based in St. Catharines, within its first three years of operation, non-partisan and inclusive and welcoming in membership.

Call for public interest

A call for interest was launched to the community exploring how we can help support emerging neighbourhood groups get off the ground. The proposal was to gauge interest in waiving of rental fees for groups who want to use a community room at the Russell Avenue Centre Community for meetings. The request for interest in the program was launched via media release and was picked up by the St. Catharines Standard and Municipal Information Network. It was further promoted through the City's social media channels.

The intake period was opened for one month with applications for interest being submitted through an online form. A summary of information is listed below:

Applications Submitted	Considered Neighbourhood Group	Interested in using the proposed community room for meetings
Fitzgerald Neighbours	Yes	Yes
Life with a Baby	No	No
Niagara Accessible Sport Council	No	Yes
Port Weller Resident Association	Yes	No

Proposed day/time met the needs of one of the two neighbourhood groups that applied. The Fitzgerald Neighbours are interested in using the proposed community room space as it is geographically located close to the Russell Avenue Community Centre. The Port Weller Resident Association is not interested in using the Russell Avenue Community Centre and would prefer to utilize a city facility that is geographically closer such as the Port Weller Community Centre.

Alternative funding opportunities for neighbourhood community events

A Neighbourhood Group would be eligible for the special events waiving of fees policy should they want to host a community event such as a fundraiser, carnival, community picnic, community presentation, festival, dinner dance, etc). As with all facility rentals, the group would be required to sign an official permit for the space that agrees to the legal terms and conditions of use and pay for the corresponding insurance fees (offered through City) related to that permit.

City of Leduc, Good Neighbours Program Overview

The City of Leduc has completed five years of their Good Neighbour Awards program. It is a recognition program where residents can nominate another resident as a good neighbour. The city hosts a special informal celebration for all nominees and those who nominated them.

What is a good neighbour?

Good neighbours are individuals, couples or families who make neighbourhoods great. Through their selfless efforts, they help create connected, friendly and safe communities. Nominate someone in your neighbourhood who makes that neighbourhood a great place. Someone who:

- Models community spirit
- Helps in times of need
- Improves feelings of safety and security
- Encourages time for neighbours to get together and connect

Residents can nominate their neighbour by completing an application form online, or by paper copy.

Proposed MyHoodSTC Recognition Awards

In order to achieve the Recreation Master plan goal: to be a city where everybody can play we must take an active role in encouraging resident connection and collaboration within our neighbourhoods. Staff are recommending that awards recognizing good neighbours be presented in conjunction with the City's Annual Volunteer Recognition Night. The awards will be determined by ward, with two categories suggested across all wards:

Youth Award: Given to an individual under the age of 25 who has shown a leadership role in their neighbourhood by improving the quality of life for residents.

Connection Award: Given to an individual who has initiated an activity that expresses a desire to do more to improve the quality of life for residents by designing an inclusive, diverse gathering in culture, age and ability.

The MyHoodSTC Recognition Awards is designed to foster a healthier St. Catharines by engaging and empowering residents to share what their neighbourhood means to them, working together, supporting each other, and celebrating their neighbourhood. If approved award details would be developed and modelled after existing similar awards.

Financial Implications

Staff resources are required to administer the Neighbourhood Meeting Room Program. The addition of MyHoodSTC awards to the Volunteer Recognition Night requires an anticipated increase of \$1000 to the Volunteer Recognition Night budget.

Relationship to Strategic Plan

The City's in-kind financial support of community initiated opportunities supports the economic, social and cultural sustainability goals of the Strategic Plan. This support provides the ability to support the planning and development of events in St. Catharines that draw the community together, encourages local engagement and investment as well as attracting new visitors to the community to enjoy, support, and grow our local economy.

The recommendations in this report support the following Strategic Plan Goals identified by Council:

- Economic Sustainability – develop partnerships to enhance the economic vitality of the community.
- Social Sustainability – connect people, places, and neighbourhoods.
- Cultural Sustainability – support cultural festivals and events that build civic pride, encourage local engagements and attract people to the community.

Conclusion

The City of St. Catharines recognizes the importance community groups and their initiatives as generators of economic and legacy benefit for the community. The Neighbourhood Meeting Space Program would be a structured format to support emerging neighbourhood groups within their first three years of operation. This opportunity will advance the City's goals related to economic and community development, healthy living, and resident engagement and cultural celebration. The City of St. Catharines has witnessed firsthand the power of uniting our community and inspiring our residents. The Neighbourhood Pilot project will allow us to further our compassionate city approach focused on action and cultural change. It will provide an opportunity to empower residents in our city to be a part of a positive future for our friends and neighbours in need. The opportunity to initiate and further develop the MyHoodSTC campaign will provide many partnership and community development opportunities that are well-aligned to the City's Strategic Plan creating positive economic, social, and cultural benefits for the community at large.

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