

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

Date of Report: March 11, 2019

Date of Meeting: April 24, 2019

Report Number: PRCS-B012-2019

File: 68.32.1, 68.32.2

Subject: Recreation Subsidization Rates Framework – Pricing Policy Development Update

Recommendation

That Report PRCS-B012-2019 be received for information.

Summary

This report provides an update on the pricing policy development including the Brock University partnership, key components of the policy (Costing Formula, Subsidy Formula and Affordable Access to Recreation), next steps and anticipated timelines.

Background

On November 28, 2016, Councillor Haywood, through the Budget Standing Committee (BSC), requested a report on recreation subsidization rates.

At its July 17, 2017 meeting, the Budget Standing Committee received the [Recreation Subsidization Rates Framework report](#) from Parks, Recreation and Culture Services (PRCS) which outlined the Policy development plans and the BSC approved the following motion:

“That the Budget Standing Committee receive this report for information; and That the draft policy be received by the Budget Standing Committee by the Second Quarter in 2018.”

At its meeting on [April 16, 2018](#), PRCS provided the Budget Standing Committee with an update on the Pricing Policy Development. Although a draft policy is not yet developed, this report provides an interim update on the progress made to date.

Report

Brock University partnership a great success

There were five main objectives identified in the Project Charter with Brock University as outlined below. Items one through four are complete, and staff is currently using the findings and outcomes to draft the policy.

1. Municipal Recreation Pricing Research

Brock University will enhance and expand on the research that the City of St. Catharines has already composed for comparable municipalities' pricing practices. The purpose of the background research is to gain a better understanding of the current state of knowledge on municipal recreation pricing. The City will complete municipal outreach to gain a better understanding of current pricing strategies.

Status

Complete

2. Stakeholder Research

Brock will develop a proposal for the most productive stakeholder research for this purpose, based on a review of current literature methods of effective public consultation and City of St. Catharines' current practices.

Status

Complete

3. Focus Groups

Based on findings from stakeholder research, Brock will develop focus group approach and content and the City will lead them to increase insight into the communities' perspective on recreation pricing.

Status

Complete

4. Reporting

Brock will analyze and report on the findings of the pricing policy research and outcomes of the focus groups.

Status

Complete

5. Drafting of Pricing Policy

Using the research findings and outcomes, the City will draft a policy that includes:

- A costing formula (what costs are included – this varies across municipalities);
- A subsidy formula (how much is absorbed by the tax base, based on benefit to the community and what the market will bear); and
- An affordable access to recreation strategy (subsidies to provide financial support to those that require it).

Status

City staff is currently using the findings and outcomes to draft the policy.

Pricing Policy Key Timelines

Staff will proceed with the development of the draft policy and engage the community in additional consultation of that content to support a policy driven by community values. Staff anticipate the Pricing Policy to be presented to the Budget Standing Committee by Q4 2019. Pending the Pricing Policy approval, implementation would be for the 2021 Rates and Fees.

Pricing Policy development receiving provincial recognition

On March 28, 2019, the City and Brock University presented at [Parks and Recreation Ontario's](#) 2019 PRO Education Forum and Trade Show. The session description can be found below:

Building a Recreation Pricing Philosophy: An Evidence-Based Approach

The City of St. Catharines Department of Parks, Recreation, and Culture Services (PRCS) partnered with researchers in the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at Brock University to research residents' perspectives on parks, recreation, and culture services pricing. The goal of the research project was to gather information from residents regarding what people value, and use this information to develop an approach to setting parks, recreation and culture fees that aligns with the values and perspectives of our residents. Join this session to find out the pricing structure and benefits supported by residents and the implications of these findings on pricing policy development.

Financial Implications

There is no impact as a result of this report.

The development of a Pricing policy will support the strategic allocation of financial resources towards the subsidization of recreation programs and affordable access funding, such as Fee Assistance in Recreation (FAIR). Any financial impact resulting from a pricing policy would be presented with a policy draft as part of an overall implementation plan.

Relationship to Strategic Plan

The proposed approach to developing a pricing policy that includes subsidization levels for programs and services is aligned to action 4.1:

“Prioritize and implement recommendations from the Parks and Recreation Master Plan with a focus on balancing recreation services for all ages, demographics and abilities.”

Conclusion

Through the innovative partnership with Brock University, the City has been able to efficiently utilize staff resources and effectively engage the community for the purpose of developing a Pricing policy and fulfilling recommendation #80 within the Recreation Master Plan. Staff will proceed with the development of the policy draft and engage the community in additional consultation of that content to support a policy driven by community values.

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