

**Report from** Municipal Works**Date of Report:** September 3, 2019**Date of Meeting:** September 16, 2019**Report Number:** MW-B033-2019**File:** 68.31.192**Subject:** Hazardous Trees on Private Property - Special Assistance Program

## Recommendation

That the Budget Standing Committee approve the creation of the Special Assistance Pilot Program for the removal of hazardous trees on private property; and

That funding of \$25,000 for the implementation of the Special Assistance Pilot Program be referred to the 2020 operating budget deliberations; and

That staff monitor the program and report back on the success of the program at the end of 2020.

## Summary

The Municipal Works department wishes to offer a special assistance program to eligible residents with documented problems related to hazardous trees. The assistance program being proposed is designed to assist homeowners for eligible expenses up to a maximum of \$2,000, based on the annual household income.

Homeowners will be required to contact the Municipal Works department prior to commencing the work. Once they receive confirmation that they meet the criteria they can then make arrangements to have the tree removed. Once they have confirmed the work is complete they can submit their paid invoice to the City for the reimbursement through the assistance program.

The budget requested is \$25,000 for the initiation of this Special Assistance Program. Staff will monitor the program and report back to BSC and Council prior to the end of 2020 on the program, which will assist in determining future funding requirements.

## Background

July 15, 2019, Council passed the following motion:

“WHEREAS That staff be directed to submit to Budget Standing Committee a private tree removal grant program and the implementation of the enhanced growth canopy initiatives for consideration as part of the 2020 budget deliberations.”

## Report

The intention of this program is to assist residential property owners on a fixed income that experience difficulties with payment for the removal of trees that are dead, dying or diseased and are considered hazardous. The removal of a large tree can cost in the range of \$3,000 to \$5,000. This can be a substantial financial burden to many residents. It is recognized that there are many hardship cases in the community and this program is aimed at offering assistance to those who meet the established criteria.

## Eligibility for the Assistance

The assistance program allocation maximum of \$2,000 per property address, per year.

Household Annual Income	Percentage of Reimbursement (up to a maximum of \$2,000)
\$49,999 or less	100%
\$50,000 up to \$69,999	75%
\$70,000 up to \$119,999	50%
Over \$120,000	Does not qualify for the program

Eligibility will be determined through Canada Revenue Agency documentation, which will be collected for the purpose of the grant program only. Guidelines and policies for the protection and retention of the information associated with the application will need to be established in the Municipal Works department.

Only costs associated with the work listed below and those considered at the discretion of the Municipal Works department are eligible for assistance through the program.

1. The full removal of a tree that has been identified and confirmed as hazardous by the Municipal Works department.

## Conditions

- The tree or its branches are decayed, damaged or dangerous and poses a danger to persons or property; and
- The tree is located on residential property; and
- The homeowner must allow City staff to assess the tree on the property; and
- The household income falls within assistance program range guidelines; and
- There is still available funding in the program budget.

## Procedure to Obtain Assistance

1. Homeowners must contact the Municipal Works department at 905-688-5601 extension 2132 (Forestry Supervisor) to discuss the program.
2. A site visit will be scheduled for an assessment by a designated inspector.

3. If the tree is eligible for the assistance program the homeowner will then complete the application form and will need to obtain two firm estimates / quotes for the eligible work. It is the homeowner's responsibility to find suitable contractors. Only costs directly related to the program's scope of work will be eligible for the assistance program. The application and two estimates / quotes must be submitted to the Forestry Supervisor (or designate) for review.
4. The Forestry Supervisor (or designate) will complete an extensive review of the application and estimates / quotes. Then they will determine the assistance amount based on the annual household income and the work that will be completed. A confirmation or rejection letter will be sent to the homeowner.
5. Once the homeowner and the Forestry Supervisor (or designate) have discussed the costs and scope of work to be completed, the homeowner may proceed with contacting the contractor to schedule the tree removal.
6. The City will not supervise the work other than to inspect the job completion. The homeowner will oversee the work as is usual when private residence work is carried out, and the homeowner is ultimately responsible for its satisfactory completion.
7. Once the job commences the homeowner will pay the contractor and submit proof of payment to the Forestry Supervisor (or designate). The Forestry Supervisor (or designate) will schedule the final inspection. A designated inspector will visit the site to ensure all of the work agreed upon has been accomplished. The homeowner will then be reimbursed for their eligible amount of assistance.
8. Final determination of eligible work and the assistance amount will be at the discretion of the Forestry Supervisor (or designate). All eligible work must be completed in order for the assistance to be released. The assistance will be issued to the homeowner to a maximum of \$2,000 per home, per year. All efforts will be made to process forms and issue cheques in a timely manner.

## **Terms and Conditions**

Evaluation of eligible work and the final determination of assistance amount will be at the discretion of the Forestry Supervisor (or designate). Assistance shall not exceed \$2,000 per property address, per year or on one-time basis. Two contractor estimates will form the basis of the evaluation, with the lowest bid generally forming the basis for assistance payment. All materials and labour are covered by the contractor. The City will not be held responsible for any situations that may occur from having this work completed.

At no time throughout the process will the City of St. Catharines be subjected to the liability or risk of a tree on private property. In the situation a tree causes injuries, property damage or other losses the homeowner will be accountable for the incident and consequences.

## **Financial Implications**

The funding required for the grants in the pilot program is \$25,000, which will be considered as part of the 2020 operating budget deliberations. It is expected that staff time related to the review of applications, site visit and final inspection can be absorbed within the existing staff complement.

## **Relationship to Strategic Plan**

This report is related to the environmental sustainability goal to lead in the protection of our environment for future generations and the economic sustainability goal of being an affordable city for all.

## **Conclusion**

The Municipal Works department wishes to offer a special assistance program to eligible residents with documented problems related to hazardous trees. The assistance program being proposed is designed to assist homeowners for eligible expenses up to a maximum of \$2,000 per property address, per year, based on their annual household income. The intent of this program is to assist residential property owners on fixed incomes that experience difficulties with payment for the removal of trees that are dead, dying or diseased and are considered hazardous.

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