

**Report from** Office of the Chief Administrative Officer

**Date of Report:** October 31, 2019

**Date of Meeting:** November 13, 2019

**Report Number:** CAO-B045-2019

**File:** 10.4.99

**Subject:** Addressing Social Issues in the 2020 Operating Budget

## Recommendation

That report CAO-B045-2019, regarding Addressing Social Issues in the 2020 Operating Budget, be received for information.

## Summary

City staff have evaluated potential opportunities to address “social issues” outlined by the Budget Standing Committee (BSC) and Council through revenue generation and/or hiring additional resources (external or internal).

The result of the staff evaluation has determined that while additional funding from both the Provincial and Federal government is sparse, there are potential opportunities to partner with community oriented organizations such as Positive Living and the Region of Niagara that would allow the City to share the responsibility and cost associated with addressing social issues.

Additionally, staff have identified both external and internal options to help with security and clean up at City operated parks and facilities, complete with associated costs, as per the request from the BSC.

## Background

At the [October 16, 2019](#) BSC meeting, members put forward the following direction to staff:

That staff bring forward the following information:

- Memo regarding revenue sources for social issues
- Memo regarding security presence in downtown parks and city facilities
- Memo regarding the cost for additional hiring for needle issue and outreach to those in the parks

Due to the thematic similarities of these directions, staff have consolidated the memos into this report.

## Report

Social issues challenging the City of St. Catharines take many faces including; homelessness, drug-use, mental-health, and limited access to community services.

Addressing these issues has had an impact on City operations particularly in areas of clean-up, needle pick-up and involving police and security when issues arise. Although staff are supportive of these efforts as they assist in maintaining a clean and healthy city for all citizens, these tasks remove staff away from their core work function. Often, staff are unable to effectively complete work due to the volume of needles, waste, and other paraphernalia left on site. In some cases, staff have indicated a right to refuse work under the Ontario Health & Safety Act (OHSA) due to the unsafe working environment this waste causes.

The pressure placed on staff to deliver the same level of core service while having to navigate compromised workplaces has had a negative impact on morale. Over the past year, the City has seen an increase in employees leveraging the Employee Family Assistance Program (EFAP) in addition to taking leaves of absence and seeking medical treatment to help treat symptoms of stress related to the sites staff are working on.

In September 2019, as part of the Compassionate STC Speaker Series, Positive Living presented to City Staff how substance abuse affects our entire community. They have identified through their Harm Reduction Program, from 2017 to 2018 there was a 15% increase in Client Contacts and that an upward trend is continuing in 2019. This increasing trend has implications on the City's workforce.

Some options to address these challenges include; looking at revenue sources, having more of an overall security presence in various City parks and facilities and resources for needle pick-up and outreach services.

## Revenue Sources for Social Issues

Alternative funding for social issues can be achieved in two ways:

1. Applying to and receiving grants from the Regional, Provincial or Federal governments.
2. Finding and working with a partner in the community.

Over the past six months, the City has placed an increased focus on identifying funding through grants to supplement the operating and capital budgets in an effort to execute additional projects and initiatives. Specifically, the City continues to monitor all sources for funding made available to address social issues within municipalities.

In May of 2019, the Province announced that funding for mental health would be cut by close to two-thirds, from \$2.1B over four years to \$1.9B over 10 years. The lack of available grant opportunities likely stems from the cut in overall funding and as a result,

the City may find it difficult to find assistance for programs directly related to the social issues identified in this report.

As of October 21, 2019, staff have identified and is monitoring 85 active grants through various levels of government. Of the 85 available grants, only five loosely pertain to “social issues”, of which zero directly address addiction, homelessness or mental-health. Moving forward, staff can leverage the Government Relations position to maintain a dialogue with the Province and the Federal government regarding social issues in municipalities and, specifically, the need for funding to address addiction, homelessness, and mental-health.

Alternatively, the City can seek to partner with other community organizations to identify and implement solutions to various social issues. Staff continue to maintain a strong dialogue with organizations such as Positive Living in an effort to help address major concerns within the city. In addition, the Region of Niagara has the resources, expertise and infrastructure in place to provide a higher level of service with respect to some of the social issues outlined above. While it is unlikely the City will directly obtain funding by exploring these opportunities, the potential exists to share costs on reasonable and affordable solutions in the future.

## **Security Presence in Downtown Parks and City Facilities**

Staff have evaluated the feasibility of hiring an external security company to assist with managing residents who migrate to parks and facilities during and after hours, and alerting authorities when illegal activity is taking place.

A number of City related facilities already contract some type of security service, including City hall where a contract is set to expire in February 2020. Given the contract expiry, an opportunity exists to evaluate all security services currently employed by City facilities in an effort to identify efficiencies, service improvements and cost savings. The following facilities pay for security services:

| <b>Location</b>                          | <b>Vendor</b>           | <b>Cost (Projected 2019)</b>                                 |
|--|-------------------------|--|
| City Hall                                | CANTEC                  | \$46,500.00  |
| St. Catharines Library                   | CANTEC                  | \$177,131.00   |
| St. Catharines Transit<br>(Bus Terminal) | CANTEC                  | \$175,000.00   |
| Performing Arts Centre                   | Professional Protection | \$185,615.33<br>(\$165,615.33 through<br>salaried positions) |
| Jack Gatecliffe Arena                    | CANTEC                  | \$48,000.00  |
| <b>TOTAL (Downtown)</b>                  |                         | <b>\$632,246.33</b>  |
| Other City Facilities                    | CANTEC                  | \$351,927.00   |
| <b>GRAND TOTAL</b>                       |                         | <b>\$984,173.33</b>  |

Staff estimate that by pooling resources, downtown facilities would receive a more comprehensive service with better coverage for a similar or decreased total cost. In order to understand the magnitude of a City wide security contract, staff would need to initiate an RFP to review the in-depth proposals of potential applicants.

## **Cost for Additional Hiring for Needle Issue and Outreach in Parks**

Needle pick-up and the cleaning of parks and facilities prior to opening have increasingly required more effort and resources from the City's operational teams. The issue has compounded as staff assigned to these duties are often pulled away from providing core services throughout the City.

As a result, staff have evaluated the cost to hire an FTE dedicated to needle pick-up and safe handling/removal of paraphernalia and waste. The total cost for a dedicated FTE would be \$78,974.55 per year (\$55,504.08 in salary and \$23,470.47 in benefits). While the core focus of the FTE would be needle pick-up and clean up, it would be a flexible position that could complete other duties as required.

Hiring an FTE would directly address concerns regarding an influx of needles incorrectly disposed of, and free up resources to continue to focus on providing core services at an exceptional level.

Staff have estimated that in order for core service delivery to be un-impacted by addressing needle pick-up and clean up internally, the City would need to hire four FTE. The cost does not account for the specialized training or equipment required to safely execute the scope of work for this role.

Additionally, opportunity cost needs to be considered if the existing staff complement continues to share work related to needle pick-up and park clean up. In order to provide adequate core service delivery in addition to needle pick-up and park clean up, the following services would need to be cut or reduced:

- Watercourse Tree Removal
- Drainage Contracts
- Rentals (Snowmobiles, picnic tables, floats)
- Streetsweeping (No summer sweeping or fall leaf pickup)
- Golf Course Maintenance
- Dog Park Service (No bags, etc.)

Ultimately, not addressing the issue with additional resources (internal or external) will likely mean a reduction in the number and quality of service the City provides.

## **Financial Implications**

### **Security Presence in Downtown Parks and City Facilities:**

The City, inclusive of all related facilities downtown, spends \$632,246.33 annually on security services. Opportunity exists to review all security contracts and issue an RFP for a consolidated service that would both likely reduce expenses and increase the level of service provided.

### **Cost for Additional Hiring for Needle Issue and Outreach in Parks:**

The total cost for an FTE dedicated to needle pick-up and safe handling/removal of paraphernalia and waste is \$78,974.55 per year. Staff have estimated it would require four FTE to sufficiently complete needle pick-up and waste removal from parks and facilities. Therefore, the total approximate cost for service would be \$315,898.20 per year, exclusive of training and equipment costs required to execute the scope of work associated with the position.

## **Relationship to Strategic Plan**

While the purpose of this memo did not stem from a specific Strategic Plan item, the resulting actions would directly impact the Social Well-Being pillar. Social Well-being would be enhanced by improving the safety of the community and collaboratively working towards helping those in need access proper services.

## **Conclusion**

Social Issues, as identified by the BSC, are not going to be resolved without action. While direct funding from the Provincial and Federal governments seems unlikely, the City can implement a number of temporary solutions that will improve the lives of residents and make neighborhoods safer until a stronger focus is placed on homelessness, mental health and addiction, which are the root causes of the social issues identified.

In addition to exploring partnerships, the City already allocates a significant amount of money to security services that can potentially be reallocated more effectively. This reallocation could also help alleviate some of the cost associated with hiring FTE to focus on needle pick-up and general clean-up of parks and facilities.

Ultimately, a multi-faceted approach will be required to appropriately address many of the social issues identified by the BSC.

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