

Report from: Municipal Works, Parks

Report Date: February 10, 2020

Meeting Date: March 11, 2020

Report Number: MW-B006-2020

File: 68.31.4

Subject: Grass Cutting of Cul-de-Sacs and Boulevards

Recommendation

That Report MW-B006-2020, regarding Grass Cutting of Cul-de-Sacs and Boulevards, be received for information.

Background

On November 20, 2019, the Budget Standing Committee (BSC) eliminated ten student positions from the Draft 2020 Municipal Works Operating Budget.

This \$93,000 reduction was initially presented to the Committee through the 'Level A Revisions' list from report [FMS-B050-2019](#) on November 13, 2019. It was noted in the report that reducing the number of students from Municipal Works, Parks Division by ten meant that pots and hanging plants would be located in the downtown core only and there would be no cutting of circles or boulevards.

On December 16, 2019, Council referred the following motion, made by Councillor Dodge, to staff for a report:

That \$93,000 for cutting of cul-de-sacs and boulevards be added back into the 2020 budget.

...

That the request to add cutting of cul-de-sacs and boulevards be referred to staff for a report.

There is information provided in this report that speaks to the reduction of the 2020 hanging basket program. Although it was clarified at Council on December 16, 2019, that only grass cutting, not the watering program, would be referred back to staff for a report, at the request of Councillor Garcia this report includes information on the costs associated with re-adding the hanging baskets (the \$93,000 referenced in the December 16, 2019 motion includes funding for eight parks maintenance students and two horticultural students).

Procedurally, when this report is provided to Council, the Council's motion from December 16, 2019, being "That \$93,000 for cutting of cul-de-sacs and boulevards be added back into the 2020 budget", will need to be placed on the floor for a decision by Council.

Report

Cul-de-Sac and Boulevard Cutting

Up until 1994 Recreation and Community Services followed a department policy to cut and maintain 270 boulevards and cul-de-sacs across the city. As part of a service level review to reduce costs this policy was removed and grass cutting responsibilities were passed along to residents. The result was that although boulevard property throughout St. Catharines remained City-owned (as part of the road allowance) it was now to be maintained by the adjacent property owner. The same policy change similarly affected the mowing and trimming of neighbourhood cul-de-sacs which nearby residents were also now required to upkeep.

When it was noticed that various sites across the city were not being maintained, exceptions to these revised services levels emerged. Site examples include boulevards that were isolated from nearby residents, boulevards that were adjacent to City property and larger islands where grass cutting was onerous for nearby residents. Over the years it became a department initiative to care for these locations as well as walkways, paths, guardrails and ditches that were regularly neglected. This informal maintenance list currently consists of 115 city-wide locations.

Eight of the ten student reductions to Municipal Works were maintenance positions that supported staff with the upkeep of the aforementioned 115 locations. Specific duties included mowing, trimming and litter pick-up. In addition to these pre-arranged duties, the eight students also supported staff by completing by-law enforced grass cuts. This work is carried out on a complaint basis and varies in frequency throughout the summer months; between May to September 2019, 82 cuts were completed and in May to September 2018, 84 cuts were completed.

While specific portions of this workload can be absorbed by our current staff complement, much of it cannot. At this time, Municipal Works is developing a plan with Communications to notify residents of these changes and that there will be a reduction in their previously received service.

It is anticipated that the majority of residents will comply. In cases where maintenance standards are not met, the height of the grass may exceed the height required of property owners through the City's By-law for the Maintenance of Grasses and Weeds (height of grasses and weeds on the private property and abutting boulevards not to exceed 20 centimetres). It is staff's intention to deal with these developments using current resources, however time-sensitive situations will lead to an increase in overtime costs.

Establishing a Grass Cutting Program

The feasibility of reinstating a grass cutting program was considered by Council in 2006. It was decided that service levels would remain unchanged and it was not unreasonable to expect residents maintain their adjacent boulevard or cul-de-sac island.

To provide an insight into what reintroducing this policy would mean, there are currently 305 cul-de-sacs, at approximately 175 square metres in size throughout the City. Each location would require maintenance every two-three weeks in an average 31-week season. Implementing a comprehensive, city-wide program would require two crews; one crew to maintain circles and another to maintain boulevards and walkways. To perform these duties, staff require the use of a blower, line trimmer, stand-on mower, trailer and pickup truck. Some of which the City has in stock, however to supply both crews would involve the purchase of additional equipment. Please see Table 1 below for a further cost breakdown.

Table 1

<u>Weekly Costs</u>	
Labour Costs including Overhead	\$6,081.60
Equipment Usage including Overhead	\$2,156.08
Weekly Total:	<u>\$8,237.68</u>
31 Week Season Total:	<u>\$255,368.08</u>
<u>Additional Equipment</u>	
Mower	\$8,500.00
Trailer	15,000.00
Pickup Truck	25,000.00
Sub-Total:	<u>\$48,500.00</u>
Total Program Cost:	<u>\$303,868.08</u>

Hanging Baskets

The hanging basket program in the City previously used public funding to place flowers in the downtown core, Merritton and Port Dalhousie areas of the city. When the ten operations students were eliminated from the budget, this included two horticultural positions that assisted with watering duties. This reduction means that staffing levels cannot maintain baskets city-wide and staff will water hanging baskets in the downtown core only.

Financial Implications

Should Council recall the eight maintenance positions, at a cost of \$74,400 (see Table 2 for further breakdown), Municipal Works anticipates that staff can be hired in time for

the summer season. If the positions remain eliminated, the necessity to complete time-sensitive by-law cuts will result in an increase in overtime costs.

To re-add the two horticultural positions at a cost of \$18,600 Municipal Works also anticipates the necessary staff can be hired in time to perform the required duties. It must be noted that by reinstating these two positions the hanging baskets for Merritton and Port Dalhousie would have to be purchased at an additional cost of approximately \$2,500. This item was removed from the 2020 Operating Budget on November 20, 2019, and was not formally moved to return.

Table 2

Position	Hours	Number Required	Total Compensation
Summer Student – Parks Maintenance	600	8	\$74,400
Summer Student – Horticultural	600	2	\$18,600
Total		10	<u>\$93,000</u>

Should Council approve all or a part of the \$93,000 as an operating cost for 2020, that the motion should indicate the funding source; the City Treasurer has confirmed that there are sufficient funds in the Tax Stabilization Reserve.

Conclusion

Ten student positions were eliminated from the Municipal Works, Parks Division complement for 2020. Their workload consisted of supporting staff with parks maintenance and watering duties. While portions of this work can be absorbed by other crews, many of the previously maintained locations will require residents to undertake responsibility and could lead to an increase in overgrowth and by-law infractions.

Prepared and Submitted by

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