

**Report from:** Municipal Works, Parks

**Report Date:** May 22, 2020

**Meeting Date:** May 25, 2020

**Report Number:** MW-B017-2020

**File:** 68.31.4

**Subject:** Cul de Sac Grass Cutting Policy

## Recommendation

That the Budget Standing Committee provide direction to staff on reinstating the cul de sac grass cutting program for Council's consideration.

## Summary

Municipal Works was directed by Council on May 20, 2020 to bring forward a policy on reinstating the cul de sac grass cutting program. The program includes garbage pickup and grass cutting at cul de sac and boulevard locations, as well as additional cutting support for the noxious weed and long grass by-law. The policy was to address the cost, level of service and take into consideration the impacts to the environment and the declared climate emergency.

This report contains three options to consider based on the cost and required resources. The costs in Table 1 are based on using students and a level of service of one cut every two weeks. However, in 2020, the City would need to call back laid off employees prior to hiring students or casuals to complete this work. As there is a significant cost differential between full-time staff versus student rates, to meet these budget numbers, for 2020 the level of service would need to be reduced from one cut every two weeks to once per month.

In addition, by concentrating on the larger areas, staff can use larger equipment with higher cut rates making the operation more efficient. This efficiency is reflected in the number of staff required to complete the work and the associated budget impact.

Municipal Works will manage the equipment demands by creating shifts to share and maximize its use. No additional equipment will be required to implement the program.

**Table 1**

<b>Option</b>	<b>Annual Costs</b>
Cut 200 sq. m and above	\$65,100
Cut 300 sq. m and above	\$18,600
Cut 400 sq. m and above	\$9,300

In order to meet the timelines for this report, the policy document is not included and the environmental impacts were not evaluated; however, staff will implement this direction as soon as possible subject to Council Approval and prepare the policy document at a later date. In addition, staff will bring back a separate report in 2021 dealing with the environmental issues and the potential for making cul de sacs more environmentally friendly by requiring less maintenance.

## **Background**

As part of the 2020 budget deliberations staff were asked to provide options for reducing expenditures to limit the tax increase for 2020 (attached). Staff developed a list which indicated potential cost savings and the associated service level impact. One item included within the list was the reduction of seasonal staffing by 10 students in Municipal Works to save \$93,000. The reduction of that staffing meant reducing the level of service by eliminating the cul de sac grass cutting program and watering of plants outside the downtown core. Budget Standing Committee included this reduction in their recommendation to Council.

On December 16, 2019 this reduction was referred back to staff for a further report which was for discussed at the March 11, 2020 Budget Standing Committee. The direction at that committee meeting was to add two students back to the budget to reinstate the watering program but not reinstate the cul de sac program.

Shortly after that meeting the City activated the Municipal Emergency Control Group in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **Report**

Municipal Works was directed by Council on May 20, 2020 to bring forward a policy on reinstating the cul de sac grass cutting program which includes garbage pickup and grass cutting at cul de sac and boulevard locations, as well as additional cutting support for the noxious weed and long grass by-laws. The policy was to address the cost and level of service and take into consideration the impacts to the environment and the declared climate emergency.

## **Previous Program**

The cul de sac grass cutting program developed over time by additions to a grass cutting list based on requests from various sources. There was no standard used to evaluate these requests. The work was accomplished using students and casual staff at an annual cost of \$74,400 (2020 rates).

## Policy Guidelines

In requesting this policy, Council directed staff to apply a consistent approach to determining which areas would be cut by City staff. There are only two factors to be considered, ownership and size.

Since all cul de sacs and boulevards are City property, this factor was discounted.

There are approximately 300 Cul de sac locations within the City that range from 7 to 957 square metres of which the City traditionally cut 36. As discussed previously, there was no criteria applied to which areas were cut. Based on the discussion at Council, staff have prepared three options for consideration.

- Cut all cul de sac islands over 200 square metres (44 locations)
- Cut all cul de sac islands over 300 square metres (25 locations)
- Cut all cul de sac islands over 400 square metres (17 locations)

**Staff is looking for direction on which criteria to apply. It should be noted, regardless of which criteria is used, there will be 17 cul de sac islands that were cut in 2019 which will not be cut going forward as they are smaller than 200 square metres.**

## Level of Service

The proposed level of service will be one cut every two weeks going forward and use a combination of students and casual employees. Due to current circumstances for the remainder of the 2020 grass cutting season, the City will have to call back laid off employees prior to hiring students or casuals. To limit the impact to the budget, the level of service will be adjusted to one cut every month for 2020.

Further, by concentrating on the larger areas, staff can use larger equipment with higher cut rates making the operation more efficient and allowing us to meet the targeted level of service with fewer staff.

Municipal Works will manage the equipment demands by creating shifts to share and maximize its use. No additional equipment will be required to implement the program.

## Municipal Practices

Due to the tight timelines there was insufficient time to complete an analysis of practice by other municipalities. Staff were able to confirm that the City of Hamilton does not cut any cul de sac islands, it is completely the responsibility of the residents, however, the City of Guelph does have a formal program.

## Environmental Impact

Staff was asked to consider the environmental impact of this program and what could be done to lessen the impact of this program. Unfortunately, due to the tight timelines, we will not be able to include a detailed analysis.

At a high level, there are a number of options that exist which are more environmentally friendly than traditional lawns / turf grass. Typically, these fall into four broad categories:

- naturalized or unmowed turf grass that is left to grow wild;
- low-growing species of turf grasses that require little maintenance (e.g. various species of fescues);
- native or naturalized landscapes where turf is replaced with native and non-invasive plants; and
- edible plants such as vegetables and fruit-bearing trees and shrubs.

In addition to reduced maintenance requirements these alternatives also provide various other environmental benefits such as retaining stormwater, habitat for birds, pollinator areas and absorbing greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide. Not all of the above alternatives are appropriate in all locations. As well, proper planning and management of these areas is required in order to avoid negative effects such as being completely overtaken with weeds.

Staff will bring back a more complete report in 2021 to address this area.

## Financial Implications

Depending on the criteria used, there is a different financial impact. Table 2 below uses student rates to develop the cost.

Table 2		
Option	Required Staff	Annual Cost
Cut 200 sq. m and above (44 locations)	7	\$65,100
Cut 300 sq. m and above (25 locations)	2	\$18,600
Cut 400 sq. m and above (17 locations)	1	\$9,300

As stated previously we will not be able to hire students in 2020. To meet these budget numbers using recalled staff we will need to halve the staffing numbers and lower the level of service to cutting once per month.

Options being reviewed by staff to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19, including the use of the current unallocated balance of the Tax Stabilization Reserve which is \$313,000. If this reserve is used to fund this service, then the COVID-19 financial impact will further increase from the current forecasted amount to June 30, 2020 of \$2.9M.

## **Conclusion**

Based on Council direction, staff have developed a guideline to reinstate the cul de sac grass cutting program. Staff, using the criteria of size only, have presented three options for the consideration of the Budget Standing Committee.

In addition, there will be 17 cul de sac islands that were cut in 2019 which will not be cut going forward if any of these criteria are applied.

### **Prepared, Submitted and Approved by**

Darrell Smith, P. Eng.,  
Director of Municipal Works

## **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Final Revision to draft 2020 Operating Budget

City of St. Catharines  
List of BSC Revisions to 2020 Operating Budget

No.	Description	Reduction Amount	Comments
1	Garden City Arena Practice Rental Revenue	244,010	Revenues were overstated for 2020 and needed to be adjusted
2	Bill Burgoyne Arena Practice Rental Revenue	(35,990)	Revenues were understated for 2020 and needed to be adjusted
3	Street light maintenance	62,500	Council approved agreement with Alectra for \$250K
	<b>REQUIRED REVISIONS</b>	<b>270,520</b>	
	<b>BSC Approved REVISIONS</b>		
4	Additional Skate Attendant	16,297	Approved by BSC at its October 28th meeting (CRCS-B038-2019)
5	Installation of Rainbow Crosswalk in downtown	6,000	Approved by BSC at its Nov 13th meeting (EFES-B046-2019)
6	Increase SCCIP funding to \$400K (funded from CPF)	49,000	Approved by BSC at its Nov 20th Meeting (FMS-B059-2019)
7	Increase SCCIP funding to \$400K (funded from CPF)	(49,000)	Approved by BSC at its Nov 20th Meeting (FMS-B059-2019)
8	Fund Next Gen 911 one-time cost from Tax Stabilization Reserve in Fire Services	(165,000)	Approved by BSC at its Nov 20th Meeting (FMS-B059-2019)
9	Fund Transit Capital with debenture	(540,000)	Approved by BSC at its Nov 20th Meeting (FMS-B059-2019)
10	Transit - 2019 surplus/reserve allocated to 2020 budget	(328,000)	Approved by BSC at its Nov 20th Meeting (FMS-B059-2019)
11	Hold off the Diversity & Inclusion position in HR for one year	(51,650)	Approved by BSC at its Nov 20th Meeting (FMS-B059-2019)
12	Green Committee	(18,000)	In 2019, \$5,000 of the Green Committee was used for the Flower Pot program. In 2019, \$4,000 of the Green Committee budget has been spent on existing community gardens (plant materials, repairs, etc.) No applications to install a new garden were received in 2019. However, we are expecting two community garden applications in 2020 (Dunlop Drive and Catharine Street Park). The cost to install a new community garden in approx. \$5,000. As a result, recommend reducing the Green Committee account by \$18,000, thereby leaving \$20,000 to cover expenses related to new community gardens, upkeep of existing gardens, and the flower pot program.
13	City Hall - Burgoyne Woods Room Flooring	(25,000)	Asset Renewal project. Flooring near end of useful life.
14	Courthouse - Repairs	(3,000)	No current tenants therefore need for unexpected repairs is reduced.
15	Garden City Arena - Repairs	(16,600)	Maintain bare minimum repairs to facility
16	FOPAC - reduce outreach & audience development budget	(30,000)	Approved by BSC at its Nov 20th Meeting (FMS-B059-2019)
17	FOPAC - reduce board fundraising budget	(5,000)	Approved by BSC at its Nov 20th Meeting (FMS-B059-2019)
18	FOPAC - reduce human resources solution	(31,000)	Approved by BSC at its Nov 20th Meeting (FMS-B059-2019)
19	FOPAC - increase fee-for-service handling revenue	(10,000)	Approved by BSC at its Nov 20th Meeting (FMS-B059-2019)
20	No dog bags in parks	(10,000)	Dog owners should be responsible for providing their own bags
21	Rat Control Rebate Program	(10,000)	Brought on as a pilot. Significant less uptake in 2019 as 2018. Recommend to reduce investment based on low usage
22	Miscellaneous - general	(12,500)	This is the unforeseen expenditure account for the entire City's budget. This will reduce this to the 2019 Budget amount.
23	MW Cost recovery of watercourse tree removal	25,000	Forestry staff works together to find cost efficiency
24	FMS Office Supplies	(2,000)	Will monitor usage in 2020 to achieve this reduction
25	Tax Certificate Revenues	(10,000)	Based on review of actuals
26	Reg'n Costs - Tax Arrears	(10,000)	Based on review of actuals
27	Clerks Service Contracts	(20,000)	Remove offsite storage budget
28	MW Parks Operations - Special Recoverables	(20,000)	To increase revenue budget based on 2018-2019 actuals
29	MW Trees staff salary	(25,000)	Forestry staff works together to find cost efficiency
30	MW Chargeback of Watercourse Tree Removal Contract	(25,000)	Forestry staff works together to find cost efficiency
31	Other Benefits (Fire, Cemetery, Parks Op, CRCS Admin, Finance, IT, HR, Planning)	(35,000)	Based on review of actuals
32	IT Services Contracts	(60,000)	Microsoft Licensing contract changed to Cloud based; therefore annual licensing costs could be reduced.
33	Pensions (Fire, Cemetery, Parks Op, CRCS Admin, Finance, IT, HR, Planning)	(85,000)	Based on review of actuals
34	MW Reduce # of students by 10* - Cost reductions to be confirmed	(93,000)	Pots and Hanging Plants downtown core only; no cutting of circles or boulevards
35	MW Seasonal Supervisors	(103,600)	Reduce seasonal supervisors and backfilling. Direct benefit of MW consolidation
36	Close Municipal Golf Course	(200,000)	As the City is in the process of issuing an RFP for the Municipal Golf Course, it is recommended that this facility not open in 2020, as its future state is considered.
	<b>TOTAL BSC REVISIONS</b>	<b>(1,897,053)</b>	
	<b>TOTAL ALL REVISIONS</b>	<b>(1,626,533)</b>	