

Staff Report for Decision

DATE OF MEETING October 21, 2020

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SUBJECT 2021 SOCIAL PLANNING GRANT INCREASE

OVERVIEW

Purpose of Report

To advise the Finance and Audit Committee of an additional \$30,000 of available social grant funding and obtain approval to make changes to the Social Response and Community Vitality Grant applications in order to provide this additional funding for community wellness and addiction response programs.

Recommendation

That the Finance and Audit Committee recommend that Council authorize Staff to advertise that an additional \$30,000 of Social Response Grant funding is available for projects that specifically address community wellness or addictions response.

BACKGROUND

Each year since 2001, the City of Nanaimo has allocated a total of \$85,000 for social planning grants to non-profit societies and/or recognised faith groups to address social issues affecting Nanaimo residents. Currently, a total of \$60,000 of funding is directed toward Social Response Grants with the remaining \$25,000 dedicated to Community Vitality Grants. Social Response Grants are generally intended to support larger scale projects, whereas Community Vitality Grants are targeted towards smaller initiatives.

As part of all Cannabis Retail Store (CRS) rezoning applications, the City of Nanaimo requests a \$10,000 Community Amenity Contribution (CAC). As part of the CAC process, the applicant is asked to submit a proposal on where they would like their contribution to be directed. The proposal is reviewed and either accepted or rejected by Staff and, subsequently, referred to Council for final approval. Since 2018, the City has secured a total of \$30,000 that is directed to be used to support social programs, mental health and addiction treatment from the following CACs:

- Unit 105- 510 Fifth Street (RA417): \$10,000 towards social planning grant and development programs that focus on addictions and mental health;
- 52 Victoria Crescent (RA418): \$10,000 towards a community grant to support substance and addictions treatment programs; and,
- 111 Terminal Avenue (RA422): \$10,000 towards a community planning social development grant to support social programs.

While all three of the community contributions are worded slightly differently, they can all be used to support grants relating to addressing mental health, community wellness and substance use disorder (addictions) response.

DISCUSSION

In the past, applications for social planning grants were asked to respond to one or more of the following categories:

- Social Equity (projects that address issues related to poverty or social exclusion)
- Community Diversity (projects that support multiculturalism and the integration of newcomers)
- Community Wellness (projects that address social determinants of health)
- Vibrant Neighbourhoods (projects that build community by enhancing social connectivity)

The existing application criteria and guidelines for the City's social planning grants are included as Attachment A. Applicants may apply for all or a portion of the available funding. Typically, the Social Response Grant funds support multiple projects per year.

Given the specific criteria of the CAC contributions, the \$30,000 available must provide financial assistance to new or ongoing programs that provide support to individuals with or who are overcoming drug or alcohol addiction. Programs may include:

- Detox and treatment programs
- Counselling and support
- Peer support and employment programs
- Harm reduction/overdose prevention including:
 - needle exchange services (with Island Health approval);
 - education and outreach programs that inform users how to reduce the risks associated with using drugs and/or alcohol; and,
 - safe ride programs.

The *Nanaimo Action Plan to End Homelessness* supports programs which will increase capacity to intervene early in the pathways to addiction. Action 3 of *Nanaimo's Response to Homelessness Action Plan* encourages programs to integrate harm reduction with other supports. The additional \$30,000 currently available would allow further opportunity for the City to work toward these goals by financially supporting innovative community wellness programs that provide individuals with addiction treatments.

If approved, Staff are proposing to distribute the CAC funding by adding the \$30,000 amount to the 2021 Social Planning Grants program. This would increase the funding available for community wellness and addiction response programs applied for under the Social Response Grant to \$90,000 total. Programs that meet the current Social Response Grant criteria but are not a response to addictions would remain able to access up to \$60,000 under the current guidelines. Combining the funds in this way would provide a timely and consistent evaluation process for all social grant applicants; as well, the larger allotment of funds would allow for additional or larger-scale programs related to addiction response to be supported through the City's social grant program.

OPTIONS

1. That the Finance and Audit Committee recommend that Council authorize Staff to advertise that an additional \$30,000 of Social Response Grant funding is available for projects that specifically address community wellness or addictions response.
 - The advantages of this option: Adding the additional \$30,000 CAC funding to the existing Social Response Grant for 2021 will allow more flexibility in awarding grant money by allowing an applicant to access both funding sources should they meet both the general criteria for the existing Social Response Grants as well as the specific community wellness and addiction response criteria. Combining the funds eliminates the need to create an additional one-time grant in order to distribute the CAC funds.
 - The disadvantages of this option: The \$30,000 secured through CAC is tied to very specific criteria that may not appear to be directly related to the more general Social Planning Grant criteria; additionally, while social planning grants are awarded annually the CAC is one-time funding that varies annually. Combining the \$30,000 with the existing \$60,000 Social Response Grant for 2021 could potentially create confusion among grant applicants and result in a single grant with two different sets of criteria depending on funding. Clear communication would be needed to avoid to ensure that applicants who don't meet the community wellness and addictions criteria know that they are still potentially eligible for either the Social Response Grants or Community Vitality Grants.
 - Financial Implications: The additional \$30,000 was secured through rezoning Community Amenity Contributions and must be dedicated towards social grant programs that focus on addictions and mental health. This change will be incorporated into the Draft 2021-2025 Financial Plan. No additional municipal funds will be required.
2. That the Finance and Audit Committee recommend that Council fund \$30,000 of the \$85,000 allocated to Social Planning Grants in 2021 from the Community Amenity Contribution.
 - The advantages of this option: The recommendation will not increase the grant total beyond the budgeted \$85,000 awarded in previous years, as and such will free \$30,000 of previously budgeted funds for other purposes.
 - The disadvantages of this option: This option is not consistent with the direction Council provided when the Community Amenity Contributions were secured or consistent with the intent of the rezoning applicant's contributions. All three applicants provided the contribution as additional grant funding to support community wellness. The Province's *Community Amenity Contributions: Balancing Community Planning, Public Benefits and Housing Affordability Guide* notes community amenity contributions should not be used to fund annual operating costs or general revenue. By not providing the additional funding as intended, Council will miss an opportunity to provide additional support to local service agencies working to support individuals with or overcoming a substance use disorder. Given the \$30,000 CAC contribution must be directed towards community wellness and substance use response, the recommendation will decrease the amount of funding available for other social planning grant application.
 - Financial Implications: Directing the CAC funding towards the Social Planning Grant cost centre and not increasing the amount will save the City \$30,000 in the 2021- 2025 Financial Plan.

3. That the Finance and Audit Committee provide alternate direction regarding the use of the \$30,000 secured through Community Amenity Contributions.

SUMMARY POINTS

- The *Nanaimo Action Plan to End Homelessness* supports programs which will increase capacity to intervene early in the pathways to addiction.
- The City has provided up to \$85,000 annually in funding to support Social Response Grants (\$60,000) and Community Vitality Grants (\$25,000).
- The City has secured a total of \$30,000 as Community Amenity Contributions from three separate Cannabis Retail Store rezoning applications to support community wellness and addiction response programs.

ATTACHMENTS:

ATTACHMENT A: Social Planning Grant Guidelines

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