

DATE OF MEETING SEPTEMBER 19, 2022

AUTHORED BY BILL SIMS, GENERAL MANAGER, ENGINEERING & PUBLIC WORKS

SUBJECT **UBCM ASSET MANAGEMENT PLANNING GRANT APPLICATION – ECOLOGICAL ACCOUNTING PROCESS PARTNERSHIP**

## **OVERVIEW**

### **Purpose of Report**

To seek a Council resolution endorsing an application to the Union of British Columbia’s Asset Management Planning Grant program in support of a partnership between three municipalities, the Partnership for Water Sustainability and the Mount Arrowsmith Biosphere Region Research Institute to embed ecological accounting expertise within Vancouver Island University. |

### **Recommendation**

That Council

1. Direct staff to submit a joint application with the Regional District of Nanaimo, Municipality of North Cowichan, the Partnership for Water Sustainability and the Mount Arrowsmith Biosphere Region Research Institute to the Union of British Columbia’s Asset Management Planning Grant program for a project to embed ecological accounting expertise within Vancouver Island University;
2. Direct staff to provide overall grant management; and
3. Add a project to the 2022 – 2026 Financial Plan for \$30,000 in 2023, 2024 and 2025, funded from the Strategic Infrastructure Reserve.

## **BACKGROUND**

The Ecological Accounting Process (EAP) is a methodology and set of metrics that help local governments make the business case to operationalize maintenance and management of natural assets, such as stream corridors. EAP aligns with and is an outcome of the Asset Management for Sustainable Service Delivery: A BC Framework, developed by Asset Management BC.

Stream systems are considered a natural commons asset in that they provide a range of uses or ecological services to the community. EAP informs communities about the condition of their natural commons, the investment that has been made, and the value of the land underlying these spaces.

This analysis takes the view that landowners adjacent to the stream corridor and setback zone (30 metres on both sides of the stream) and the community share responsibility for the condition of the stream as well as the financial value of the land it occupies. From an asset management point of view, the stream has value as a land use. Depending on its functioning and condition, it may enhance or degrade the social and financial values of land uses along its course.

The Ecological Accounting Process (EAP) was created by the Partnership for Water Sustainability in British Columbia (PWSBC) over the last couple decades. Over the past six years EAP has been piloted through nine trials with municipal partners (including RDN and City for the Millstone River) and is currently at a point where it has proven itself to be an effective and efficient measure for monetizing commitments to supporting riparian areas for ongoing maintenance and management. The Mount Arrowsmith Biosphere Region Research Institute (MABRRI), a Vancouver Island University (VIU) entity, has supported the last six pilot studies that the PWSBC has undertaken. The PWSBC has identified the need to embed the knowledge of the EAP process into a British Columbian University to ensure knowledge of EAP is perpetuated and the next generations of planners and municipal staff are trained.

To this end, the Partnership and MABRRI/VIU established relationships with three local governments in the mid Island: Regional District of Nanaimo, Municipality of North Cowichan and City of Nanaimo. This collaboration will help ensure that training and expertise is retained within the university, and can be continually developed. It also supports local governments with internal capacity, rather than exporting knowledge to consultants.

VIU students across disciplines including Master of Community Planning (MCP), Master of Geographic Information Systems (MGIS), Advanced Diploma in GIS (ADGIS), Biology, Geography, will be involved in future EAP studies advancing knowledge and understanding of EAP and bringing these skill sets into the local communities (often with local municipalities) through applied experiential learning and training. The plan is to work with three municipal partners over the next three years completing three studies each for a total of nine EAP studies. During this time, the PWSBC will directly support MABRRI to ensure all knowledge is passed over and the studies adhere to the standards of past studies through rigorous training in methodology. The end of the three years and nine EAP studies will result in MABRRI being fully trained to execute EAP studies across BC in the future, and students graduating from VIU with experience supporting EAP studies.

## **DISCUSSION**

The proposal is a three-year commitment to the EAP Partnership, with the City of Nanaimo (and each of the other partners) providing annual funding of \$30,000 and staff time to prioritize individual creek systems for analysis, develop research questions and support data generation. It is anticipated the City will apply for a \$15,000 grant each year of the partnership from UBCM's Asset Management Planning Grant program. MABRRI proposes to use the funding received for 0.33 FTE/yr GIS Technician salary, 0.75 FTE/yr Project Coordinator salary, student interns as needed, and travel and other research related costs.

The Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM) offers grant support through its Asset Management Planning Program. The intent of the program is to assist local governments (municipalities and regional districts) in delivering sustainable services by extending and deepening asset management practices within their organizations. The 2022 program deadline is September 30, 2022.

Staff seek Council's endorsement to commit to the EAP Partnership and to apply for the UBCM's Asset Management Planning Program. The commitment would see \$30,000 annually for three years, which would be reduced to \$15,000 per year with each successful grant application. Staff

recommend that Council's Strategic Infrastructure Reserve be the source of funding for the City's share.

The RDN Board committed funding and support to the EAP Partnership at its meeting of September 6, 2022. |

## **OPTIONS**

### 1. That Council

1. Direct staff to submit a joint application with the Regional District of Nanaimo, Municipality of North Cowichan, the Partnership for Water Sustainability and the Mount Arrowsmith Biosphere Region Research Institute to the Union of British Columbia's Asset Management Planning Grant program for a project to embed ecological accounting expertise within Vancouver Island University;
2. Direct Staff to provide overall grant management; and
3. Add a project to the 2022 – 2026 Financial Plan for \$30,000 in 2023, 2024 and 2025, funded from the Strategic Infrastructure Reserve.
  - The recommended option supports City Plan goals on several fronts, including
    - A Green Nanaimo: Resilient and Regenerative Ecosystems
    - Prioritizing protection and enhancement of a resilient environment
    - Enhancing natural diversity and protecting natural areas
    - Working with community partners in climate change adaptation
    - Sufficient capital and operating funds for resilient infrastructure
    - Recognition of the role of natural assets in stormwater systems
    - Training of the workforce to fill jobs of the future
  - Financial Implications: The 2022 – 2026 Financial Plan will be amended to include an annual project for 2023, 2024 and 2025 of \$30,000 funded from Council's Strategic Infrastructure Reserve (SIR). Upon a successful grant application, each year, the amount of funding from the SIR would be reduced to \$15,000.

### 2. That Council not endorse the application or commit funding to the EAP Partnership. |

## **SUMMARY POINTS**

- In Nanaimo's Asset Management Policy, natural assets are considered as part of the storm drainage system and provide broader community benefits.
- The Ecological Accounting Process is a means of valuing and demonstrating investment in natural assets.
- The proposal would see a partnership between the City of Nanaimo, Regional District of Nanaimo, Municipality of North Cowichan, Vancouver Island University and the Partnership of Water Sustainability to build capacity locally in our educational system in an established methodology, and advance science in natural asset management.

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