

DATE OF MEETING September 25, 2023

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**SUBJECT COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY PROJECT GRANT**

## **OVERVIEW**

### **Purpose of Report**

To provide for Council's consideration the Guidelines and Criteria for a Community Environmental Sustainability Project Grant.

### **Recommendation**

That Council endorse the Community Environmental Sustainability Project Grant Guidelines and Criteria as outlined in Attachment A of the Staff Report dated 2023-SEP-25.

## **BACKGROUND**

The City of Nanaimo offers a number of programs that provide support for specific environmental actions directly to residents such as CleanBC Better Homes Top-up Rebates; Electric Vehicle Charger Rebates; and, the Tree Voucher Program. The City also recently launched a Community Watershed Restoration Grant that is focused on watercourse restoration. There is currently no funding mechanism to support small environmental projects led by community groups and organizations on other focus areas. In recognizing this gap, and the potential to harness the energy of local volunteers and community groups, Council approved a Community Environmental Sustainability Project Grant as part of 2023.

A budget of \$20,000 for the proposed grant was added to the 2023-2027 Financial Plan as one of the proposed projects and initiatives to implement *City Plan* and will be financially supported by the provincial Local Government Climate Action Program.

In discussing the potential grant program with the current participants in the Acting for Climate Together (ACT) volunteer program and potential participating groups, it was discovered that funding for small-scale environmental and climate action projects is needed and desired. Small scale environmental project funding was seen as both a necessary tool to help implement projects and a major motivator for community action.

## **DISCUSSION**

A Community Environmental Sustainability Project Grant is intended to support the Green Goals of *City Plan*. "Establishing a Community Environmental Sustainability Project Grant Program" is included as an immediate program item within the *Integrated Action Plan* (Item reference C1.1.15).

The goal of the Community Environmental Sustainability Project Grant is to support small environmental sustainability and climate projects that aim to improve environmental health of natural systems, enhance residents' connections to nature, provide educational values, and contribute to climate mitigation and adaptation. The grant is intended to provide up to \$5,000 in funding per project and could support a minimum of four projects a year.

Establishing a broader environmental sustainability grant program not tied specifically to watercourse restoration will allow the City to be more flexible and nimble in supporting small and creative environmental projects not already covered by existing programs.

Examples of projects that would be eligible for the proposed funding include:

- Organizing and hosting a sustainable buildings tour
- Creating a “neighbours helping neighbours” program to support residents during an extreme weather event
- Create a tool library or other sharing resources to share items that would otherwise need to be individually owned
- Converting a public space into a pollinator friendly garden

### **Grant Criteria**

Grant guidelines and criteria will be used to inform prospective grant applicants of what the intent of the grant is, who is eligible to apply, how much funding is available, and how the applications will be evaluated. Proposed grant criteria (Attachment A) is strategically aligned with the Green Goals in *City Plan*. The criteria will support Staff in evaluating grant applications when making recommendations to Council.

After the first intake, Staff will re-evaluate the grant criteria before relaunching the grant program in subsequent years.

### **Grant Timeline**

The proposed grant timeline (Attachment B) will allow grant funding to be awarded in 2023 and align with the timing of other community grant applications. In 2024, Staff plan to align the grant time with the Community Watershed Restoration grant and award the grant in the spring. This will allow new ACT participants who will be recruited in late 2023 and early 2024 to prepare their applications for the grant intake in 2024.

### **Other Local Governments**

Several local governments in BC have established environmental and sustainability grants to support community-based sustainability and climate actions with funding ranging from \$500 to \$50,000 per project. Attachment C includes a summary of such grants in other BC communities.

## **OPTIONS**

1. That Council endorse the Community Environmental Sustainability Project Grant Guidelines and Criteria as outlined in Attachment A of the Staff Report dated 2023-SEP-25.
  - The advantages of this option: The proposed option is consistent with the *Integrated Action Plan* and budget allocation. Establishing a Community Environmental Sustainability Project Grant will harness the energy of local volunteers and community groups and reduce financial barriers to implement small-scale community environmental projects.
  - The disadvantages of this option: Limiting the individual grant amount to \$5,000 per project may mean the grant is unable to support larger projects.
  - Financial Implications: Funding for the grant has been approved and included in the 2023 – 2027 Financial Plan. If the grant timeline is endorsed as presented, the first intake could be considered and potentially be awarded in 2023.
  
2. That Council provide alternative direction. |

### **SUMMARY POINTS**

- A budget of \$20,000 was included in the 2023- 2027 Financial Plan to support an annual Community Environmental Sustainability Project Grant.
- Establishing a Community Environmental Sustainability Project Grant program is an immediate program item within the *Integrated Action Plan*.
- The grant will support small environmental sustainability and climate projects up to \$5,000 per project that aim to improve environmental health of natural systems, enhance residents' connections to nature, provide educational values, and contribute to climate mitigation and adaptation.
- If approved, the grant will launch in the fall with funding potentially awarded by the end of 2023.

### **ATTACHMENTS:**

ATTACHMENT A: Community Environmental Sustainability Project Grant – Guidelines and Criteria

ATTACHMENT B: Grant Timeline

ATTACHMENT C: Other Local Governments - Environmental Grants |

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