

DATE OF MEETING October 16, 2024

AUTHORED BY CHRIS SHOLBERG, COMMUNITY/HERITAGE PLANNER

SUBJECT NEIGHBOURHOOD ASSOCIATION GRANT PROGRAM

OVERVIEW

Purpose of Report

To present recommended changes to the Neighbourhood Association Grant program, including streamlining the process and increasing the annual program budget to ensure funding aligns with anticipated needs.

Recommendation

That the Finance and Audit Committee recommend that Council:

1. add a decision point for Council consideration to the 2025 budget deliberations to increase the annual neighbourhood association grant program budget from \$10,000 to \$20,000 starting in 2025;
2. allow annual grant totals to exceed \$1,000 per neighbourhood association; and,
3. delegate annual grant approvals to the Director of Planning and Development for recognized neighbourhood associations when grant criteria is respected.

BACKGROUND

City Plan encourages supporting neighbourhood associations, and at its regular meeting held 2022-DEC-19, Council endorsed the creation of a Neighbourhood Association Grant Program with an annual program budget of \$10,000. At the 2023-DEC-18 meeting, Council approved \$10,755 to be allocated to the neighbourhood association grant program to allow several associations to receive the full \$1,000 for 2024. The purpose of the grant program is to provide funds that will assist with strengthening the organizational capacity of neighbourhood associations, increasing the frequency of community events, and building community identity and cohesion.

Recognized neighbourhood associations may use grant funds to cover costs related to operational needs (such as liability insurance, printing, online meeting platforms, organizational software, website development), and/or community events (such as space rental, equipment rental, food, supplies, and entertainment). The grant funds must be spent prior to the end of the year, and a brief, itemized report outlining how the money was spent (with copies of associated receipts/invoices) is required to be submitted to the City of Nanaimo. Applications for new funding will not be considered without receipt of a report outlining how previous funding was spent.

DISCUSSION

Given the growing popularity of the Neighbourhood Association Grant program, Staff are recommending updates to streamline the process and to increase the annual program budget.

Staff recommend an increase to the annual program budget from \$10,000 to \$20,000 to ensure funding aligns with anticipated needs starting in 2025. In 2023, nine neighbourhood associations received grant funding totaling \$8,662.47, and in 2024, eleven neighbourhood associations received grant funding totaling \$10,755. Currently there are 16 recognized neighbourhood associations in Nanaimo. Two new neighbourhood associations have formed since December 2022, and there is growing interest for more neighbourhood associations.

In 2023 and 2024, the maximum amount distributed to a neighbourhood association was \$1,000 annually. A 2024 priority request from the Departure Bay Neighbourhood Association is to:

“Increase the neighbourhood association grant program individual grant totals beyond \$1,000.00 per association and explore opportunities to extend City insurance to neighbourhood associations and their events to reduce those costs to grant expenditures.”

By increasing the total program budget to \$20,000, the amount distributed annually to each recognized neighbourhood association can be increased. The intent of the neighbourhood association grant is to cover expenses such as event insurance.

In addition, Staff recommend streamlining the neighbourhood association grant process by delegating approval to the Director of Planning and Development. Currently, the process is to obtain Council approval with a Staff report at the December Finance and Audit Committee meeting each year. With the proposed new approach, the neighbourhood association would still submit a grant application, each grant application would still be evaluated by Staff to ensure compliance with the grant criteria, however, an annual report to Council would not be required.

To date, the neighbourhood association grant funds have been used for costs related to flyer and newsletter printing, meeting/event room rentals, outreach equipment rental/purchase (e.g. tents, banners, tables), food and refreshments, Zoom licence accounts, website administration, social media fees, liability insurance, postage, audio/video equipment rental/purchase, administrative costs, and event materials. A number of the associations thanked the City for grant funding provided in 2023, noting that this funding was instrumental in allowing them to grow their capacity as organizations and to deliver events and outreach to their neighbourhoods that would not have been possible without the funding.

OPTIONS

1. That the Finance and Audit Committee recommend that Council:
 1. add a decision point for Council consideration to the 2025 budget deliberations to increase the annual neighbourhood association grant program budget from \$10,000 to \$20,000 starting in 2025;
 2. allow annual grant totals to exceed \$1,000 per neighbourhood association; and,
 3. delegate annual grant approvals to the Director of Planning and Development for recognized neighbourhood associations when grant criteria is respected.
- Advantages: This option will streamline the process, achieve a neighbourhood association priority request, and ensure sufficient funding capacity to meet anticipated future neighbourhood association grant needs (starting in 2025).

- Financial Implications: Funding for the grant program increase will be from property taxation.
2. That the Finance and Audit Committee recommend no changes to the Neighbourhood Association Grant program.
- Advantages: No change required to the existing grant program budget and process.
 - Disadvantages: If the total 2025 grant program budget is \$10,000, and if all 16 recognized neighbourhood associations apply for a grant, each neighbourhood association would only receive \$625 in 2025. In 2023 and 2024 they were eligible to receive \$1,000 annually.
 - Financial Implications: None identified. |

SUMMARY POINTS

- The purpose of the neighbourhood association grant program is to assist recognized neighbourhood associations with costs for operational needs and community events.
- Staff recommend that the total annual budget for the grant program be increased from \$10,000 to \$20,000 to ensure funding capacity aligns with projected needs over the coming years.
- A 2024 priority request from the Departure Bay Neighbourhood Association is to increase the annual amount allocated to each neighbourhood association.
- Staff recommend delegating annual neighbourhood association grant approvals to the Director of Planning and Development for recognized neighbourhood associations when grant criteria is respected.

ATTACHMENTS:

ATTACHMENT A – Guidelines and Criteria

Submitted by:

Lisa Brinkman
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Concurrence by:

Wendy Fulla
Director, Finance

Jeremy Holm
Director, Planning & Development |