

Staff Report



Development Services Department

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REPORT TO: Climate Change and Environment Committee

DATE OF MEETING: September 21, 2023

SUBMITTED BY: Natalie Goss, Manager Policy & Research,
519-741-2200 ext. 7648

PREPARED BY: Carrie Musselman, Senior Environmental Planner,
519-741-2200 ext. 7068

WARD(S) INVOLVED: All Wards

DATE OF REPORT: September 6, 2023

REPORT NO.: DSD-2023-381

SUBJECT: Council Policy I-590 (Grant Program – Community
Environmental Improvement) Repeal

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Climate Change and Environment Committee supports the repeal of Council Policy I-590 (Grant Program – Community Environmental Improvement).

BACKGROUND:

Council Policy I-590 (Grant Program – Community Environmental Improvement) (Attachment A) was established in 2001 and amended in 2004, 2008 and repealed and replaced in 2012. In 2015, as part of the corporate Policy Review it was recommended that to ensure policies are up-to-date and still relevant, they should be reviewed every 3-5 years and that each policy have a review date identified on the document.

REPORT:

When the Community Environment Improvement Grant (CEIG) program was created it was one of the first environmental grants available to residents.

The aim of the CEIG program has been to encourage residents to actively participate in environmental initiatives, by undertaking projects that meet the following objectives:

- increase awareness of how residents view and treat the air, water, and land resources.
- foster a sense of environmental stewardship.
- promote community environmental awareness.
- promote and initiate the development of community based environmental projects; and,

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- support environmental research.

The grants approved have varied in nature but have primarily been environmental projects such as school yard greening or tree planting or for environmentally focused community awareness events.

In 2020, the program was suspended pending its review.

CEIG Review - Is the policy current and relevant?

Residents are now fortunate to have several environmental grants available, such as, the Region of Waterloo Community Environmental Fund, the Grand River Conservation Authority Community Conservation Grants, and the TD Friends of the Environment Foundation Grant. A chart with additional information for each of the grants mentioned has been included as Attachment B.

Additionally, the city now offers the Love My Hood Matching Grant through the Neighbourhood Development Office. This grant has a similar mandate that focuses on promoting neighbourhood greening initiatives such as community gardens, food hedges, pollinator gardens, tree planting and more.

CEIG Review - Is the policy having the desired effect?

Both in 2008 and 2012 staff reviewed the program and implemented changes to try and improve the program. Following these program improvements, applications submitted continued to be suboptimal, and as such, funds were not able to be fully dispersed.

For those grants approved, funding is often not adequate to complete projects. In a number of instances, the recipient has used the grant to leverage funding from other sources.

CEIG Review – Are staff resources used efficiently?

CEIG has one staff resource (a Senior Environmental Planner) who has the grant program included among their duties. Throughout the year they may answer calls or emails as they arise, once a year they would work with communications staff to advertise the program, update the city's website to receive applications, work with the former Environment Committee to review applications and select recipients, and work with finance staff to disperse the funds.

In comparison, under the Manager of Neighbourhood Development and Volunteer Engagement the city has a dedicated team of staff who champion the Love My Hood neighbourhood strategy and support the 'resident-led, city-supported' vision through grants, capital projects and other activities with a focus on building capacity, sense of belonging and ensuring equitable distribution of resident-led initiatives in neighbourhoods across the city.

For grants and resident-led projects the Neighbourhood Development Office has established a grant selection committee and internal circulation process that gathers feedback from 15 internal divisions within 5 business days. Staff in the Neighbourhood Development Office develop agreements, letters of understanding, and insurance packages

that serves as a project's road map to success that clearly outlines roles and responsibilities and creates accountability for residents and staff.

The staff in the Neighbourhood Development Office provide strong customer service through a dedicated phone line and email, as well as working closely with resident groups as a single point of contact, being available as a support on a project from start to finish.

CEIG Review – Are funds used efficiently?

Currently, \$5,000 is budgeted annually to facilitate CEIG with a maximum grant allocation of \$3,000 for any one project. For much of the time CEIG has been available, funds have not been fully utilized in each given year and therefore carried over to the next.

Up to 2020, the CEIG has supported 65 grants and dispersed approximately \$109,400 to organizations (i.e., neighbourhood associations, non-profits, schools) that operate within the city.

In comparison, the city's Love My Hood Matching Grant has a value of approximately \$150,000 annually. Applicants (i.e., informal neighbourhood-based community groups) may request amounts up to \$30,000. Projects occurring on non-city land are eligible to receive up to \$10,000 and events are eligible to receive up to \$2,000.

CEIG Review – Recommendation

The city has undergone many changes since CIEG was established including new departments whose role is to facilitate new neighbourhood grants.

To continue to provide the best grant opportunities to the community, make efficient use of staff resources, leverage other grant opportunities including Kitchener's Love My Hood Matching Grant, and be fiscally responsible, policies and procedures need to grow and adapt; therefore, it is recommended that the Council Policy I-590 (Grant Program – Community Environmental Improvement) be repealed and residents be encouraged to utilize the other grants available.

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:

This report supports Environmental Leadership and Great Customer Service.

PREVIOUS REPORTS/AUTHORITIES:

- DTS-04-095 Environmental Stewardship Grant Program
- CRPS-08-151 Environmental Committee Recommendation: Revised Community Environmental Improvement Grant Criteria & Submission Process
- CSD-12-041 Environmental Committee Recommendation: Revised Council Policy I-590 (Grant Program - Community Environmental Improvement)

REVIEWED BY: Josh Joseph, Manager Neighbourhood Development & Volunteer Engagement

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment A – Council Policy I-590 (Grant Program – Community Environmental Improvement)

Attachment B – Environmental grants available to residents