

Staff Report



Development Services Department

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REPORT TO: Planning and Strategic Initiatives Committee

DATE OF MEETING: October 30, 2023

SUBMITTED BY: Rosa Bustamante, Director of Planning, 519-741-2200 ext. 7319

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

WARD(S) INVOLVED: All Wards

DATE OF REPORT: October 18, 2023

REPORT NO.: DSD-2023-431

SUBJECT: Environmental Improvement Grant Funding Consolidation

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Environmental Stewardship Capital Account currently allocated to the Community Environmental Improvement Grant program be reallocated to the Neighbourhood Development Office to be consolidated with the funding offered through the LoveMyHood Matching Grant, as outlined in Development Services Department report DSD-2023-431; and,

That Council Policy I-590 (Grant Program – Community Environmental Improvement) be repealed; and further,

That Council Policy FIN-GRA-525 (Community Investment) be amended to remove Section 8.1 Community Environmental Improvement Grants (CEIG).

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS:

- The purpose of this report is to seek Council approval to transfer the Community Environmental Improvement Grant funding to the Neighbourhood Development Office.
- The key findings of this report are that residents now have several grants available that closely align and, in some cases, overlap with the Community Environmental Improvement Grant (CEIG). Additionally, since the launch of the CEIG the City has established the Neighbourhood Development Office who can more effectively administer grants.
- There are no financial implications to the recommendations in this report.
- Community engagement included the report posted online as part of the Committee agenda and consultation with the Climate Change and Environment Committee at its September 2023 meeting.
- This report supports Environmental Leadership and Great Customer Service.

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Program – Community Environmental Improvement) (Attachment A) was established in 2001 and amended in 2004, 2008 and repealed and replaced in 2012.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 grant 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,
- 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 2021, the grant was paused pending its review.

CEIG Review - Is the policy current and relevant?

Residents now 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, Ontario Community Environment Fund, and Federal EcoAction Community Funding Program.

Attachment B provides an overview of the grants outlined above.

Additionally, the City now offers the LoveMyHood Matching Grant through the Neighbourhood Development Office. The LoveMyHood Matching Grant includes projects of an environmental nature such as community gardens, food hedges, pollinator gardens, tree planting and more. Since 2016, the LoveMyHood program has funded 44 of the 66 greening related applications received.

CEIG Review - Is the policy having the desired effect?

Both in 2008 and 2012 staff reviewed the program and implemented changes to improve the program. Following these program improvements, applications submitted continued to be suboptimal, and as such, funds were not able to be fully dispersed. Additionally, 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 LoveMyHood 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. Between 2004 and 2020, the CEIG supported 65 grants and dispersed approximately a total of \$109,400 to organizations (i.e., neighbourhood associations, non-profits, schools) that operate within the city. While the grants that have been dispersed have been well utilized, the total number of applications received has remained relatively low. A total of 88 applications have been received since 2007 and CEIG was able to fund only 53% mainly due to applications not meeting minimum grant requirements. As outlined above, efforts have been made through various CEIG improvements since the grant's inception. Below is an annual breakdown from 2016-2020 of the number of applications received and funded and a description of what was applied for. In 2021 the CEIG was paused pending this review.

Year	# of applications received	# of applications funded	Description of projects funded	Amount of funds dispersed
2016	8	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Edible Forest Heights for the Forest Heights Community Centre (FHCC) Food Forest Enhancement Project - Community Access bikeshare / The Working Centre for a Bikeshare Education Project 	\$4,025 Remaining balance - \$975
2018*	5	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Busking for Change for a local fundraising campaign piloting "text-to-donate" software - Waterloo-Wellington Science & Engineering Fair – DEAR: Developing Environmental Advocates and Researchers for a CO2 Simulation Group Activity - K-W Working Centre – for a Sustainable Gardening Workshop Series - KW Habilitation and Rockway Mennonite Collegiate for an inclusive agricultural-based in class and hands on learning opportunity - Trinity Village / Lutheran Homes for a berm revitalization and naturalization project. 	\$8,000* Remaining balance – \$2,975

Year	# of applications received	# of applications funded	Description of projects funded	Amount of funds dispersed
2019	4	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Kitchener Master Gardeners for room rentals - Divest Waterloo for a Resiliency and Regeneration Climate Conversation Event for Faith Communities - Sunshine Montessori School (SMS) to purchase terra-cycle boxes. - Transition Kitchener-Waterloo for room rentals and workshop supplies for Neighbourhood Climate Change Adaptation / Mitigation Workshops 	<p>\$5,000 + \$620 from carry forward funds.</p> <p>Remaining balance - \$2,355</p>
2020	5	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Acting Now for the Environment, for an education / information sharing / motivation event - Arctic Sea Ice Memorial, for installing a public art and environmental education display on the Duke and Ontario Parking Garage - Homer Watson Friends of the Environment, to make the three acres of land surrounding the Homer Watson House & Gallery an environmentally friendly and enjoyable space 	<p>\$5,000 + \$1,008 from carry forward funds.</p> <p>Remaining balance - \$1,347</p>

*In 2017 CEIG was not able to be run due to limited staff resources. The 2017 funds were carried forward to 2018 for a total amount available in 2018 of \$10,000 plus the existing balance in the account.

In comparison, the City's LoveMyHood Matching Grant has a value of approximately \$150,000 annually. The LoveMyHood Matching Grant started in 2020. Prior to that, it had four grant streams (Neighbourhood Matching Grant, Placemaking Challenge Grant, the Community Garden Grant, and a Tree Planting Pilot Grant), that were amalgamated into the LoveMyHood Matching Grant. 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. Since 2016, the LoveMyHood program has received 66 greening related project applications totaling \$589,475 and were able to fund 44 projects, amounting to \$300,892 being awarded.

CEIG Review – Recommendation

The City has undergone many changes since CIEG was first introduced including the establishment of the Neighbourhood Development and Volunteer Engagement Office 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 LoveMyHood Matching Grant,

and be fiscally responsible, policies and procedures need to grow and adapt. Therefore, it is recommended that funds currently allocated to CEIG be reallocated to the Neighbourhood Development Office and Council Policy I-590 (Grant Program – Community Environmental Improvement) be repealed.

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:

This report supports Environmental Leadership and Great Customer Service.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

Capital Budget – The Environmental Stewardship Capital Account currently allocated to the CEIG program will be reallocated to the Neighbourhood Development Office to be consolidated with the funding offered through the Love My Hood Matching Grant.

Operating Budget – The recommendation has no impact on the Operating Budget.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:

INFORM – This report has been posted to the City’s website with the agenda in advance of the council / committee meeting.

CONSULT – Staff consulted with the Climate Change and Environment Committee at the September 21, 2023, meeting. During committee discussion it was mentioned that there is a lack of grants for individuals. Staff have relayed this information onto the Neighbourhood Development and Volunteer Engagement Office. The committee supports the staff recommendation outlined in this report.

PREVIOUS REPORTS/AUTHORITIES:

- DSD-2023-381 - Council Policy I-590 (Grant Program – Community Environmental Improvement) Repeal
- 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: Mark Hildebrand, Director Neighbourhood Programs and Services
Natalie Goss, Manager Policy & Research

APPROVED BY: Justin Readman - General Manager, Development Services

ATTACHMENTS:

- Attachment A – Council Policy I-590 (Grant Program – Community Environmental Improvement)
- Attachment B – Environmental grants available to residents
- Attachment C – Proposed amendments to Council Policy FIN-GRA-525 (Community Investment)