

Staff Report



Community Services Department

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REPORT TO: Community and Infrastructure Services Committee

DATE OF MEETING: June 16, 2025

SUBMITTED BY: Mark Hildebrand, Director, Neighbourhood Programs and Services,
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PREPARED BY: Josh Joseph, Manager, Neighbourhood Development Office,
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WARD(S) INVOLVED: All

DATE OF REPORT: May 23, 2025

REPORT NO.: CSD-2025-261

SUBJECT: Reallocation of Capital Funding for Festival of Neighbourhoods

RECOMMENDATION:

That the City's annual Capital Budget allocation of \$40,000 for Festival of Neighbourhoods, be redirected to increase the City's support of resident-led neighbourhood initiatives through the LoveMyHood Grant.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS:

- The overall purpose of this report is to recommend the reallocation of \$40,000 in annual capital funding—previously awarded through the Festival of Neighbourhoods (FON)—to the City of Kitchener's LoveMyHood Grant program. FON partners are aware of this report, and agree with staff's recommendation.
- This recommendation follows a strategic shift by FON away from neighbourhood capacity building, including the capital improvement grants, towards a new focus on supporting neighbourhood connectors as builders of the social infrastructure.
- As a valuable tool for encouraging community participation, placemaking, and neighbourhood cohesion, staff suggest that the FON grant can continue to support this work through the LoveMyHood Grant.
- Over the last 3 years, the LoveMyHood Grant program has seen almost \$1.1M in funding requests, surpassing the available allocated amount of \$550,000. Eligible grant requests are consistently exceeding available funding amounts.
- This report supports the increased delivery of resident-led neighbourhood initiatives through the existing LoveMyHood Grant program.

BACKGROUND:

The Festival of Neighbourhoods (FON) was established in 1994 with the goal of encouraging Kitchener residents to host inclusive events—such as picnics, potlucks, and street parties—

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that welcomed all neighbours within a local area. The festival's early founders recognized the value of celebrating everyday community spirit, often overlooked in traditional civic recognition, and sought to "celebrate the ordinary" across Kitchener's diverse neighbourhoods. A collaborative initiative between John MacDonald Architect, the Social Development Centre Waterloo Region (SDC), and the City of Kitchener, FON provided practical resources, public recognition, and capital grants of up to \$20,000 to neighbourhoods that organized inclusive gatherings. Over the past three decades, FON has served as a vehicle for building social capital and fostering community bonds through informal, grassroots engagement.

REPORT:

In 2024, the Festival of Neighbourhoods marked its 30th anniversary, offering an opportunity to reflect on the program's evolution and its long-standing role in cultivating neighbour-to-neighbour connections throughout the city. In their 2024 Tier 1 Grant application, FON proposed a shift away from traditional outreach and event-based supports, opting instead to suggest and undertake a year-long research initiative focused on exploring broader social trends and their implications for community-building in Kitchener. A comprehensive report outlining the findings of this research, accompanied by a staff report, is anticipated in Q3/Q4 of 2025.

Preliminary recommendations from the FON research include a proposed redefinition of the program's mission—from a focus on supporting specific neighbourhood-led initiatives to a broader emphasis on individual capacity building of neighbourhood connectors. In alignment with this shift, FON has recommended the discontinuation of the annual \$40,000 in Neighbourhood Capital Improvement Grants, which have traditionally been awarded at the October Finale Celebration. These grants—two \$20,000 awards—were distributed by random draw to neighbourhoods that had hosted and registered qualifying gatherings and were present at the celebration. The funds supported physical infrastructure improvements, often serving as a visible symbol of community participation and pride. Completion of these projects in the past has proved challenging, given that neighbourhoods do not need a project idea to qualify for or receive the grant funding. Residents have expressed frustration with this process, and the resulting timelines for implementation, leaving awarded funding sometimes unspent for several years.

The recommendation to sunset the FON capital grants also acknowledges the ongoing success of the City's LoveMyHood Matching Grant (LMHMG) program, which supports resident-led initiatives citywide. Eligible grant requests in recent years have continued to surpass available funding with almost \$1.1M being requested over the past 3 years, exceeding an available amount of \$550,000. Since its adoption in 2017, LoveMyHood has encouraged residents to take the lead in shaping their communities, with the City acting as a supportive partner. The LMHMG, administered by the Neighbourhood Development Office (NDO), offers matching funding for new resident-led projects and serves as a one-stop point of contact to guide groups through internal approvals and city processes. Through the award of over 200 resident-led grants, the LMHMG has seen over \$1M in funding distributed towards supporting over 160 new resident groups.

Given the alignment between the original intent of the FON capital grants and the success of LoveMyHood in enabling resident-driven infrastructure improvements, staff recommend that the \$40,000 traditionally allocated to FON capital awards be reallocated to the LMHMG

program. This transition will preserve support of the original grant for grassroots capital projects while aligning with the City's broader strategy of empowering residents to lead change in their neighbourhoods through LoveMyHood.

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:

This report supports the delivery of core services.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

The proposed reallocation of the \$40,000 annual capital budget from the Festival of Neighbourhoods to the LoveMyHood Matching Grant program is cost-neutral and does not require any additional funding.

This funding shift maintains the City's existing investment in community-led capital projects, aligning it with, and enhancing the impact of the LoveMyHood program, which continues to experience high demand, with eligible requests exceeding available funding each year.

By consolidating capital support under the LoveMyHood framework, the City can leverage the administrative infrastructure and technical expertise of the Neighbourhood Development Office to efficiently and effectively deliver grassroots infrastructure improvements citywide.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:

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

CONSULT – This report has been shared with Festival of Neighbourhoods in advance of the council / committee meeting for awareness and alignment.

PREVIOUS REPORTS/AUTHORITIES:

There are no previous reports/authorities related to this matter.

APPROVED BY: Michael May, DCAO

ATTACHMENTS: N/A