

To: **COUNCIL**

Meeting Date: **07/13/2021**

Subject: **Forestry Services Backlog – Additional Funding**

Submitted By: **Mike Hausser, P.Eng, Director of Operations**

Prepared By: **Mike Hausser, P.Eng, Director of Operations**

Report No.: **21-211(IFS)**

File No.: **C1101**

Recommendation(s)

THAT Council approve a transfer of \$136,000 from the Rate Stabilization Reserve, funded through the Provincial Safe Restart fund to the Forestry Professional Services Budget.

Executive Summary

Purpose

- Cost containment efforts in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic along with extreme weather events have created a significant backlog of work related to forestry.
- This report requests that the funding from the Provincial Safe Restart fund be utilized to enable the city to address this backlog.

Key Findings

- Work such as tree stumping, planting, and complaint driven tree maintenance items were substantially deferred from 2020. 2021 Operating funds are not able to address this backlog as well as keep up with complaint driven work and requests.

Financial Implications

- Funding of \$136,000 is requested from the Provincial Safe Restart fund to substantially address the 2020 backlog of Forestry work.

Background

The Forestry Division relies on Professional Services to deliver a significant amount of work related to tree maintenance and removals, hazard tree response, stumping, and new tree plantings.

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a cost containment strategy that limited spending on all contracted services. While immediate hazard trees continued to be removed in 2020, stump removal work was deferred. The City's tree planting program was also halted, as was any non-essential complaint driven tree maintenance work.

The demand for hazard tree removals, stumping, planting, and tree maintenance has continued throughout the pandemic and is ongoing. The 2021 operating budgets for forestry services are able to address re-active work within the year, however, it is not able to also support the backlog of work from 2020 and previous years.

Stumps that remain are in public spaces along boulevards or within park areas. Many of these stumps are a hazard, others, prevent the restoration of the landscaping in the area and need to be addressed.

We are receiving a growing number of complaints regarding the deferred plantings of trees and stump removals.

Analysis

Strategic Alignment

PLACE: To take care of, celebrate and share the great features in Cambridge that we love and mean the most to us.

Goal #5 - Parks and Recreation

Objective 4.1 Ensure that sustainability principles are a part of city decision-making processes.

The recommendation of this report addresses a backlog of work that is a positive step towards sustainability of services.

Comments

The backlogged work is not within current budget, nor, within regular operating budgets. As such, a one-time funding top-up to address the 2020 backlog is being requested.

There are no opportunities to re-allocate funds from other Operations programs without reducing service levels or creating backlogs in other areas.

There is not the capacity or means for internal staff to address the forestry work backlog as the City depends substantially on contracted services.

The additional funding will enable Forestry to continue issuing re-active tree maintenance work to contracted services as well catch-up with the accumulated backlog of stumping and tree planting via contracted services under existing contracts and annually issued tenders.

Without additional funding for forestry services, contracted services for non-priority re-active tree maintenance requests from the public will need to be substantially reduced and will be deferred and backlogged into 2022.

Existing Policy/By-Law

There is no existing policy/by-law.

Financial Impact

A one-time funding of \$136,000 from the Provincial Safe Re-start fund will enable the 2020 backlogged work associated with Tree Planting and Stumping as well as the 2021 work to be completed by the end of 2021.

Public Input

Posted publicly as part of the report process.

Internal/External Consultation

Discussion with Finance identified that the Provincial Safe Restart funding program is a suitable source of funding to address the backlog of work.

Conclusion

The backlog of forestry work was a result of COVID-19 cost containment measures. The work remains in a backlog position and other work cannot be deferred without perpetuating a significant backlog into 2022.

Some items, such as stumping pose a public hazard and need to be addressed along with addressing a growing number of complaints regarding deferred tree plantings will be considered the priority. Additional funding will enable contracted services to undertake those priority backlog items as well as substantially address the backlog of re-active tree maintenance items that are not currently considered a hazard.

Signature

Division Approval



Name: Michael Hausser
Title: Director of Operations

Reviewed by the CFO

Reviewed by Legal Services

Departmental Approval



Name: Yogesh Shah
Title: Deputy City Manager – Infrastructure Services

City Manager Approval



Name: David Calder
Title: City Manager

Attachments

N/A