

Committee of the Whole Report For the Meeting of January 7, 2021

To: Committee of the Whole **Date:** January 4, 2021

From: Thomas Soulliere, Director of Parks, Recreation and Facilities

Subject: Emergency Social Services Grant – "Meegan Community Care Tent"

RECOMMENDATIONS

That Council direct staff on the preferred action for the Emergency Social Services grant.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to update Council on proposed changes to the Emergency Social Services grant for the "Meegan Community Care Tent".

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In response to the need for additional supports for vulnerable populations during the COVID-19 pandemic, Council introduced the Emergency Social Services (ESS) grant program in late 2020. Following a review of applications submitted by community organizations, Council approved three grants, including \$6,500 for a community care tent in James Bay, adjacent to Beacon Hill Park. The adopted Council motion specified that the James Bay United Church would be the lead organization for this grant award.

Over the past several weeks staff have been working with representatives of the community tent proposal, to review the various technical, legal and safety details relating to the proposed service. This review has highlighted the need for some adjustments to the original proposal, specific to the lead organization and proposed location of the service.

Lead Organization

On January 4, a representative from the James Bay United Church (JBUC) advised staff that the JBUC could not accept the responsibility as the lead organization and permit holder for the proposal, as approved by Council. As an alternative, the representatives identified the Red Cedar Café Society (RCCS) to oversee the proposed operation. Staff have confirmed with a representative of the RCCS that they would agree to take on this role, pending approval of Council for the change.

Should Council wish to amend the previous direction to staff and support the alternate lead organization, the following motion would be required:

That Council allocate an Emergency Social Services Grant of \$6,500 for the "Meegan Community Care Tent" to the Red Cedar Café Society as the grant recipient and permit holder.

Service Location

A further notable adjustment to the original proposal relates to the service location. In their application, the proponents included a site located within the boundary of Beacon Hill Park, given the focus on vulnerable residents sheltering in the west area of the park. However, staff concluded that the proposed infrastructure could not be accommodated within the park, due to a conflict with the Beacon Hill Trust and acceptable uses of the park associated with this legal requirement. Based on a rapid assessment of other potential locations in the area, a new site was identified on Avalon Street (as shown in Attachment A).

The new proposed location within an existing parallel parking area will meet the needs of the service provider and is next to a pedestrian crosswalk linking to Beacon Hill Park. The location, however, is not without challenges and siting the care tent will undoubtedly have impacts on the immediate neighbourhood. For example, to address traffic and pedestrian safety needs, a portion of Avalon Street near Douglas Street, will need to be closed to vehicle traffic while the care tent is operational. Driveways to private residences would be maintained, however, up to 13 "resident-only" parking spots will be temporarily removed, and additional signage will direct traffic from Douglas Street and Huntington Place. Staff have confirmed that all sidewalks would remain open and unobstructed.

Staff have progressed the planning work with the service providers based on the assumption that this new location can serve as a temporary site for the proposed service. Should Council not be supportive of this site, alternate direction would be required.

Accessibility Considerations

Providing services close to the sheltering community reduces barriers for those living with disabilities, and other mobility challenges. Staff and the applicant have continued to focus on options which will ensure safe access for those sheltering in the park while mitigating negative impacts to others who may be affected by the proposed temporary service.

Impacts to Financial Plan

The grant funds come from the Federal/Provincial COVID-19 Safe Restart Grant for Local Governments provided to municipalities for pandemic recovery and are currently factored into 2021 Financial Plan, no additional resources are required. Should Council approve RCCS as the grant recipient and permit holder, a one-time allocation of \$6,500 would be issued once the applicant has successfully met the conditions of the permit.

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CONCLUSIONS

The ESS grant program is intended to support community-based organizations with immediate assistance for vulnerable residents during the pandemic. Pending Council's direction on the matter described above, the City will continue to allocate staff resources on a priority basis to ensure the proposed service can be launched safely and in a timely manner to achieve the approved objectives.

Thomas Soulliere

Director

Respectfully submitted,

Derrick Newman Assistant Director

Report accepted and recommended by the City Manager

List of Attachments:

Attachment A - Location of Permit Area