



Committee of the Whole Report For the Meeting of February 25, 2021

To: Committee of the Whole **Date:** February 17, 2021
From: Kerri Moore, Head of Business & Community Relations
Subject: Neighbourhood Association Coordinator Funding

RECOMMENDATION

1. Approve the criteria as outlined in this report, to be incorporated into a policy, for the neighbourhood coordinator pilot project in the identified neighbourhoods.
2. That prior to awarding of the grant, each neighbourhood submit a basic strategy for the use of the funds that is subject to staff review and approved by the City Manager.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Council directed staff to provide more information on the outcomes that would be achieved by funding coordinator positions for neighbourhood associations without community centres, and how a trial coordinator program would inform consideration for future funding.

Staff met with neighbourhood representatives to identify objectives that would be served by coordinators and to consider a framework for a trial program. Neighbourhood associations described their goals and the roles that they believed they would provide. These were consistent with the historical roles of the neighbourhood associations in broadly engaging with residents to understand and convey their interests, involve them in community life and work with the City to achieve common goals.

Staff have recommended terms for the purpose of the funding, the types of activities that coordinators would be expected to provide, and a planning and reporting framework for use of the funds.

PURPOSE

This report is to provide Council with requested further information for its budget considerations for funding coordinator positions for the North Park, Downtown, Rockland and Jubilee neighbourhoods.

In its referral to staff, Council expressed specific interest in (1) clarifying goals and outcomes to be achieved by the neighbourhood associations, and (2) ensuring that the trial project would serve to inform consideration for future ongoing City support of a neighbourhood coordinator program.

BACKGROUND

The City recognizes neighbourhood associations as designated organizations for the geographically defined neighbourhoods in the city. This was established in 1994 and was guided

by a Neighbourhood Development Policy. Neighbourhood development was defined as “...a shared process where the City and the neighbourhoods work together...to satisfy neighbourhood needs and aspirations in the context of overall City goals.”

Associations were provided with per capita “base” funding for their core functions in community engagement and organizing, as well as access to a matching grant program to fund specific projects and activities. It was required that base grant funding be used to:

1. (Maintain) ongoing access to a meeting space,
2. (Provide) some form of local coordination of activities (e.g. meetings), and
3. (Develop) an appropriate means of communication with its members.

Although these were the minimal requirements, the grant program reporting also requested that applicants indicate how the funding would enable the association to implement the Neighbourhood Development Policy Principles and Characteristics in place at the time. While the references to the policy are no longer retained, neighbourhood associations are required to submit a brief annual report prior to receiving the now directly awarded grants each year.

Information on the proposed 2021 neighbourhood funding was solicited from the identified associations and presented to Council at its January 25 Special Committee of the Whole meeting. Downtown and North Park neighbourhoods were clear on their need and have previously requested support. North Park has a coordinator (Executive Director) in place, who plays a key role in the activities of the organization. They feel that the coordinator is providing key support in the association’s contribution to the neighbourhood and in supporting the interests of the City in meeting residents’ needs. Due to the complexity of issues in the downtown, the Downtown Residents Association identified a strong need to connect and engage with residents in order to better serve their collective interests. They felt the services of a coordinator were necessary for the work needed.

The Rockland and Jubilee neighbourhoods had not contemplated funding for a coordinator and had concerns with their capacity to provide the required administrative support. Both believe that a coordinator position would benefit their organizations’ capacities to engage residents and strengthen their associations’ capacity.

NEIGHBOURHOOD COMMENTS

Staff met with representatives of the neighbourhood associations to further discuss the funding opportunity in the context of Council’s request for more information. The following benefits of the coordinator positions were identified:

- Support for the basic operations of the neighbourhood association to reduce volunteer fatigue
- An increase in capacity for broader engagement of residents to better understand issues, represent their interests, and involve them in community activities
- Support Council in achieving neighbourhood objectives in the City’s Strategic Plan and Neighbourhood Plans
- Support for identifying and applying for complementary grant funding
- Increased community awareness of the neighbourhood association through the activities undertaken by the coordinator

As previously reported, some neighbourhoods had concerns with supporting the administration of a coordinator position. It was recognized that a contracted position would be less demanding than hiring an employee. There was also consensus amongst the representatives that administration

would be more manageable if the selected coordinator were a self-starter with the capacity to provide leadership in helping the organization.

Neighbourhoods also felt that while the funding would support a sufficient number of coordinator hours to make a meaningful improvement, they were concerned that administration of the grant might encumber them with bureaucratic requirements that would negate the benefits. They therefore indicated their preference for the City to balance needs for accountability with reasonable requirements that focus on the providing useful information on the trial program.

ISSUES AND ANALYSIS

Discussions with the neighbourhood associations reflect that their proposed roles for a coordinator position are consistent with City's historic expectations and they fulfill recognized needs in the community. Neighbourhood associations are uniquely positioned to serve as an intermediary between City and the residents within their prescribed geographic areas. They engage directly with residents to better understand and represent the diversity of perspectives and undertake projects and programs that build community connections. The neighbourhood associations also recognize opportunities for collaboration with the City in achieving community development goals identified in the City's Strategic and Neighbourhood (Local Area) Plans. The associations are supportive of better providing these roles with the assistance of a coordinator.

The coordinator would also ensure that basic administrative support is in place to provide a solid foundation for the organization. The position would support the associations in establishing strategies and undertaking key initiatives of importance to the organization. The coordinators will be able to leverage their impact by applying for project grants and developing relationships with other organizations with complementary community development roles.

Should the funding be supported, use of the funds by neighbourhood associations should be considered in conjunction with the (per capita) base funding program in place. This funding is intended to provide general support for the organizations and has recently been doubled.

Neighbourhood	2021 Base Funding	Population	Growth (2011-2016)
Rockland	\$5,700	3,665	4.8%
Jubilee	\$8,600	5,525	5.2%
North Park	\$5,550	3,565	3.2%
Downtown Harris Green	\$8,550	5,660	14.3%

Neighbourhood associations will continue to have different capacities and priorities. The terms for the funding should provide a framework that captures the appropriate roles of a designated neighbourhood association, but that allows for the flexibility needed for each organization and context.

The two associations in the Jubilee neighbourhood may choose to share a common coordinator or secure their own. The process of securing a contracted coordinator would require some effort on the part of the organizations, however, North Park has undergone this process and has offered their approach as a possible model. All associations have acknowledged that they would seek terms for a coordinator that would minimize administrative burden.

OPTIONS AND IMPACTS

It is proposed that Council award funding to the identified neighbourhoods based on the following:

- 1) The purpose of the funding is to provide support for recognized neighbourhood associations (without community centres) to more effectively fulfill their unique roles in their geographically-defined neighbourhoods:
 - Engage with the diversity of residents in the neighbourhood to effectively understand and convey their interests to the City
 - Develop community connections and neighbour capacity through events, programs and activities
 - Champion initiatives to address neighbourhood needs and wants (e.g. art projects, community gardens)
 - Help achieve neighbourhood objectives and actions identified in the City's Strategic Plan and Neighbourhood Plans
- 2) Funding allocation would complement base funding already in place and specifically provide for the engagement of a coordinator to complement Board functions, including but not limited to:
 - Providing administrative support for meetings, finance, correspondence and Societies Act requirements
 - Providing a leadership role in helping the organization plan and fulfill its objectives
 - Coordinating initiatives, projects and community outreach
 - Identifying and applying for grants that support the neighbourhood association and its objectives
- 3) That prior to awarding of the grant, each neighbourhood submit a basic strategy for the use of the funds that:
 - Reflects organizational goals and objectives for the year
 - Is consistent with overall role and purposes of Neighbourhood Associations as above
- 4) That each neighbourhood will provide a report at the end of 2021 describing activities, outcomes and actual expenditures, as well as suggestions that would inform continued City support for a policy for funding the coordinator position.

Option 1. That (3) is subject to staff review and approval by the City Manager.

Option 2. That (3) is subject to Council's review prior to awarding the grants.

Option 3. That (3) above is not a condition for awarding of the grants.

ACCESSIBILITY IMPACT STATEMENT

There are no accessibility concerns directly related to the proposed recommendations in this report, however, accessibility may be considered an issue in one or more of the neighbourhoods which they choose to provide some focus.

2019 – 2022 STRATEGIC PLAN

The identified neighbourhoods have expressed interest in helping Council achieve neighbourhood-related objectives in the Strategic Plan. This can indirectly assist with many objectives, including outcomes for Strong, Liveable Neighbourhoods such as:

- Increase in number of opportunities for engagement with residents
- People feel listened to and consulted about what makes a neighbourhood distinctive
- All neighbourhoods are thriving, distinctive, appealing, viable and have amenities

IMPACTS TO FINANCIAL PLAN

Council has allocated \$80,000 in the 2021 Financial Plan to fund the coordinator grants for the four neighbourhoods.

OFFICIAL COMMUNITY PLAN CONSISTENCY STATEMENT

15. Community Well-being

The initiative supports the goal that “Victorians know their neighbours, are connected to communities of interest and have diverse opportunities for social interaction”, and broad objectives “that strong partnerships build the capacity of individuals and the community” and “that all citizens have the opportunity to participate in civic affairs.” The support will also contribute to specific objectives in the Community Development section of this chapter.

CONCLUSION

Staff believe that the interests of Council in providing funding for neighbourhood coordinators over a trial period will be achieved by the terms provided in this report, and that Neighbourhood staff can provide additional support in making this pilot program successful.

RECOMMENDATION

1. Approve the criteria as outlined in this report, to be incorporated into a policy, for the neighbourhood coordinator pilot project in the identified neighbourhoods.
2. That prior to awarding of the grant, each neighbourhood submit a basic strategy for the use of the funds that is subject to staff review and approved by the City Manager.

Respectfully submitted,

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Report accepted and recommended by the City Manager