



Governance and Priorities Committee Report

Date: February 20, 2014 **From:** Christopher Paine, Manager-Revenue
Subject: Utility eBilling Partnership with Scouts Canada

Executive Summary

In 2012, Council endorsed a new Customer Service Action Plan. Consistent with many goals in the action plan, the City plans to introduce electronic utility billing (ebilling) in May of 2014. Ebilling enables customers to opt for receiving utility invoices electronically. Additionally, this service provides customers with more accessible and convenient access to their current and historical billing information through the City's MyCity online portal.

Shifting to ebilling will reduce printing and postage costs, and reduce the amount of paper being used, consistent with the City's commitment to sustainability.

To raise awareness of this new option and encourage behavioural change from receiving paper invoices to electronic invoices, a partnership is proposed with the local chapter of Scouts Canada. The partnership proposes that for the first 1,000 customers that sign up for ebilling a tree will be planted by Scouts in Greater Victoria. 250 trees will be planted within the City of Victoria. To facilitate this partnership, a grant is required.

Approximately 58,000 utility bills are mailed out annually to 18,000 customers. The savings associated with reduced printing and mailing costs will offset: (1) the grant, (2) the 19% increase in postage effective March 31, 2014, and (3) the annual MyCity IT support costs. A corresponding communications strategy will be utilized to raise awareness and encourage behavioural change among City utility customers.

A grant of \$2,000 to Scouts Canada is recommended to fund planting a tree for the first 1,000 customers who register for electronic billing.

Recommendation:

That Council approve a grant in the amount of \$2,000 to Scouts Canada.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Chris Paine".

Christopher Paine
Manager-Revenue

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Brenda Warner".

Brenda Warner
Director of Finance

Report accepted and recommended by the City Manager: _____

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be a stylized "M".

February 20, 2014

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to seek Committee approval of a grant in the amount of \$2,000 to Scouts Canada to proceed with the City's eBilling promotion.

Background

In 2012, Council endorsed a new Customer Service Action Plan. Consistent with many goals in the action plan, the City plans to introduce electronic utility billing (ebilling) in May of 2014. Ebilling enables customers to opt for receiving utility invoices electronically. Additionally, this service provides customers with more accessible and convenient access to their current and historical billing information through the City's MyCity online portal.

For many years, the City has offered online services through its MyCity portal. This portal allows customers to logon and view business licensing, property tax and utility billing balances and transactions. The eBilling service will be integrated with the online portal and eBills will now be displayed in the portal.

The City is proposing to partner with Scouts Canada to promote the launch of the service. For each donation of \$2, Scouts Canada will plant one tree throughout Greater Victoria; 250 of those trees will be planted in the City of Victoria. To encourage customers to sign up for the service, staff are recommending a grant of \$2,000 to Scouts Canada to fund planting a tree for the first 1,000 customers who sign on to the service.

The recommendation to partner with Scouts Canada originated in the following way:

- A revenue employee suggested the tree planting eBilling promotion
- I asked her to research organizations that provide this service and present the costing and logistical information to me when complete
- She presented three programs: (1) TreeCanada, (2) TreeOntario and (3) ScoutsTrees
- TreeOntario was eliminated from consideration since the program would not likely have a local impact
- TreeCanada and ScoutTrees provided informal quotes. ScoutTrees quoted \$2/tree and Tree Canada quoted \$4/tree for our desired volume.
- Additionally TreeCanada was unable to provide an assurance that the trees would be planted locally
- Consequently a partnership with Scout Trees is recommended

Issues & Analysis

Scouts Canada has agreed to the following parameters:

- Maximum of \$2,000/1,000 trees
- 250 trees will be planted in the City of Victoria in locations determined by the Parks Department
- 750 trees will be planted elsewhere in Greater Victoria
- The trees are to be planted within two years of the launch of the program
- Trees will be supplied by Scouts Canada
- The tree species will be approved by the Parks Department
- The grant will be paid upon completion of the planting

Approximately 58,000 utility bills are mailed out annually to 18,000 customers. The savings associated with reduced printing and mailing costs will offset: (1) the grant, (2) the 19% increase in postage effective March 31, 2014, and (3) the annual MyCity IT support costs. The City incurs additional incremental costs of \$9,000 annually in order to implement the eBilling service. Printing and postage costs are approximately \$2.58 per customer per year and therefore the incremental annual costs are completely offset once approximately 3,500 customers register for eBilling. A corresponding communications strategy will be utilized to raise awareness and encourage behavioural change among City utility customers.

Communications

The City will utilize a variety of established communications tools to communicate the ebilling option and include information within utility bills mail outs. Partnering with Scouts Canada, the City will also organize a tree planting to raise awareness of the new service and demonstrate the shift from paper invoices to trees being planted.

Recommendations

That Council approve a grant in the amount of \$2,000 to Scouts Canada.