



CITY OF HAMILTON
COMMUNITY & EMERGENCY SERVICES DEPARTMENT
Recreation Division

TO:	Chair and Members Emergency & Community Services Committee
COMMITTEE DATE:	April 10, 2017
SUBJECT/REPORT NO:	Recommendation for Program Changes to Recreation Affordable Access Strategy (CS10047(c)) (City Wide)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
PREPARED BY:	Courtney Groves 905-546-2424 ext. 1758 Laura Kerr 905-546-2424 ext. 5015
SUBMITTED BY:	Jack Brown Director, Recreation Division Community and Emergency Services Department
SIGNATURE:	

RECOMMENDATION

- (a) That the Recreation Access Program Policy attached as Appendix A to Report (CS10047(c)) be amended to include the following program changes;
 - (i) 90% subsidy to a maximum of \$150 per child per year for City operated recreation programs
 - (ii) Provide a discounted camp option
 - (iii) Provide a discounted pass option for Adults and Seniors without dependents;
- (b) That the General Manager of Community and Emergency Services, or designate, be authorized to implement spending caps, program changes, or other controls necessary to ensure costs are contained within the approved budget amounts.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Affordable Access Strategy (the Strategy) (Report CS100047(a)) was approved by Council in 2010. The Strategy identified a vision, objectives and strategic activities to overcome financial barriers for Hamilton residents to access recreation programs and services. The Recreation Division began to implement the fee assistance component of the Strategy in February 2011 with an approved budget of \$400,000.

Over the past five years, Recreation staff have had significant success in achieving the Strategy's objectives. Some of the initiatives in 2016 included;

- Implementation of the Recreation Fee Assistance Program: Approximately \$301,000 allocated to support children and youth accessing registered recreation programs.
- Free drop in programming city wide: A total of 5,348 hours of free programming was offered at 42 centres in 2016.
- 499 children and youth accessing local minor sports organizations in 2016
- 2,856 participation passes provided at a low cost/no cost
- Implementation of targeted initiatives in priority neighbourhoods, such as free fitness at the park, youth leadership scholarships and free basketball programming.

Since program inception, there has been significant growth, with a total of 9,937 current clients. The Strategy continues to meet the growing community demand for access, for example, direct outreach with 1,094 Syrian refugees in 2016. Due to the program growth, in 2015 and 2016, the Recreation Division experienced a small pressure to the approved budget.

This pressure was communicated in the Affordable Access Strategy 5 Year Update (CS10047(b)) received by Council in 2016. Staff committed to report back with recommendations to mitigate pressures while enhancing program benefits to meet our changing community needs. Throughout the year, staff conducted an evaluation of the Affordable Access to Recreation Strategy and the Recreation Access Program Policy, which included internal staff, community consultation and a program requirements review to prioritize strategic areas for growth within the current budget.

Based on the program review, staff are recommending that the Recreation Access Program Policy, approved by Council on September 22, 2010 as part of the Affordable Access to Recreation Strategy (CS10047(a)), be amended to include a parent pay portion for subsidized recreation, include a discounted camp benefit and discounted pass options for adults and seniors without dependents. It is also recommended that the General Manager of Community and Emergency Services, or designate, be authorized to approve program changes, implement spending caps, or cost controls to ensure program strategy operates within the approved budget amount annually.

Alternatives for Consideration – Not Applicable

FINANCIAL – STAFFING – LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Financial: There are no financial implications associated with Report CS10047(c).

Staffing: There are no staffing implications associated with Report CS10047(c).

Legal: There are no legal implications associated with Report CS10047(c).

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Affordable Access to Recreation Strategy aims to create easier access to the program and assist families to overcome financial barriers in order to increase participation in recreation and sport activities. Since 2011, staff have had great success in achieving the Strategy objectives, including the implementation of the Fee Assistance Program, free drop in programming, targeted program initiatives in identified neighbourhoods or underserved communities and increased partnerships with community organizations. In addition to the approved initiatives, the Recreation Division was able to further expand the Recreation Fee Assistance Program to include a discounted camp benefit and reduced passes for seniors and adults without dependents.

Over the past five years, there has been a steady increase in approvals for the program, the number of children accessing the reduced camp benefit, and adults/ seniors without dependents utilizing the program. Despite efforts to mitigate pressures through the securing grants to support initiatives, in 2015 and 2016, the Recreation Division experienced a slight pressure to the approved budget. Staff committed to conducting a review of the program to evaluate current initiatives, review the program structure, community feedback from current clients and partners and municipal benchmarking for a holistic evaluation of current initiatives.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND LEGISLATED REQUIREMENTS

Recommendations will amend the Recreation Access Program Policy, approved by Council on September 22, 2010 as part of the Affordable Access to Recreation Strategy (CS10047(a)).

RELEVANT CONSULTATION

Community Consultation: All current and former applicants were sent a survey to provide feedback on the Recreation Fee Assistance Program. Responses were received back from 278 families and used to formulate recommendations.

Staff Consultation: Staff responsible for monitoring and approving Recreation Fee Assistance clients provided feedback with regard to the application process and suggested areas where controls can be implemented to ensure the program is accessed by only those who are deemed eligible. Comments and recommendations from staff have been incorporated within this report.

Internal Consultation: Consultation took place with Community and Emergency Services staff from the Ontario Works Benefit Eligibility, Housing Services and the Childcare Subsidy Divisions to align means testing and effectiveness. Comments and recommendations have been incorporated within this report.

Recreation Business Support: Consultation was completed with Recreation's Business Support staff to ensure proposed program initiatives can be accommodated within the current and new business software. Comments and recommendations have been incorporated within this report.

ANALYSIS AND RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION

Amend Recreation Access Program Policy to Include Parent Portion

Program Activities for children consumes approximately 85% of the approved budget. As the recreation fee assistance program continues to increase with new clients every year, staff investigated options to maximize program activities while staying within the Council approved operating budget.

Formal community consultation took place through a survey of 278 current and former families of the program. Results of this survey show that majority of families are satisfied with the program benefits, however, many families are requesting more than the \$150/year per child allotment to register in programs. Some cite that cost of programs has increased each year, however the \$150 allotted has not increased since the program commenced in 2011. As such, the allotted amount per child no longer covers one program per session.

Municipal benchmarking of 15 subsidy programs was completed to evaluate areas of opportunity to improve the Hamilton Recreation subsidy program. The benchmarking compared program activities, income verification tools, and total value of services provided of the programs reviewed. Seven municipalities offer a percentage-off model, which encourages the family to pay a small portion of the course with an identified ceiling cap for each child; a model that Hamilton currently uses with great success in the Camp Kidaca Program and Affiliated Minor Sport benefit. The key advantages to requiring a small fee from the family is that it offers a level of commitment to attend registered courses and allows the allotted funds to last longer and be applied to more courses. A disadvantage to this model is that some families may experience hardship as they may not be able to afford the small fee per course. Survey results show that 65% of families would be willing to pay a small fee (under \$10) for registered programs.

Since it is not within the budget to increase the \$150 allotted per child, it is recommended that a percentage of each registered course be paid by the family. As such, clients in the fee assistance program will receive a 90% discount off of courses and pay the remaining 10% (currently \$3.06 for a one hour children's program or \$5.57 for swimming lessons). This will allow each client access to more programs throughout the year and encourage attendance in each program and not require an enhancement to the current operating budget.

OUR Vision: To be the best place to raise a child and age successfully.

OUR Mission: To provide high quality cost conscious public services that contribute to a healthy, safe and prosperous community, in a sustainable manner.

OUR Culture: Collective Ownership, Steadfast Integrity, Courageous Change, Sensational Service, Engaged Empowered Employees.

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Amend Recreation Access Program Policy to Include a Discounted Camp Option for Clients

As presented to Council in the Affordable Access Strategy 5 Year Update (CS10047(b)), staff evaluated the addition of discounted camp option for clients in the Recreation Fee Assistance Program. Offering the reduced rate camp option for current clients has been a service level piloted since 2011 with 277 children registering at a reduced camp rate in 2016. On average, each child registers in 2.1 weeks of camp for a total of 585 camper spaces. Of the families who used the reduced camp rate option, 72% of families answered that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the program benefit. Survey comments expressed that camp is expensive, especially with multiple children in the home, and that the Recreation Fee Assistance Program makes camp accessible for children who otherwise couldn't participate. Based on this feedback, it is proposed that the Recreation Division continue with the camp benefit within the approved budget. The Recreation Division will continue to seek alternative sources, such as community grants and corporate sponsorships, to ensure this benefit can be sustained as the program grows.

Amend Recreation Access Program Policy to Include a Discounted Pass Option for Adults and Seniors without Dependents

As presented to Council in the Affordable Access Strategy 5 Year Update (CS10047(b)), within the first year of implementation of the Strategy, the Recreation Division added the benefit of reduced passes for seniors/adults who were living under the low income cut off level. Those approved in the program have an option of a 75% discount off a participation pass or 50% discount off of a Waterfit pass.

Program review and client feedback confirms the need to continue with the discounted pass option in the program. In 2016, 965 adults/seniors were purchasing a reduced pass. Of the adults and seniors surveyed, 69% responded that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the benefits received.

Feedback received also indicated 47% of adults/seniors would like additional program benefits, such as program discounts or an option to purchase multiple passes. However, additional program benefits cannot be supported within the current fee assistance program operating budget. It is recommended to continue with the pass discount and investigate options for universal program discounts for seniors in Recreation's user fee structure.

Other Information for Consideration

Increase quality control measures within the Recreation Fee Assistance Program

Consultation took place with staff from Ontario Works Benefit Eligibility, Housing Services Division and the Childcare Subsidy Eligibility Services. Each division uses

various means testing measures to determine eligibility including proof of income, proof of address, assets, and other living conditions.

The current qualifications for approval in the Recreation Fee Assistance Program include the following;

- Proof of Address
- Proof of Income (current Notice of Assessment, receipt of Ontario Works or Ontario Disability)

To enhance the program accountability, ensure access is equitable, and to align with other division's means testing measures, staff will work with the other divisions and Legal Services to implement procedures that will enhance staff's abilities to correctly assess applications.

ALTERNATIVES FOR CONSIDERATION

None

Community Engagement & Participation

Hamilton has an open, transparent and accessible approach to City government that engages with and empowers all citizens to be involved in their community.

Healthy and Safe Communities

Hamilton is a safe and supportive city where people are active, healthy, and have a high quality of life.

Culture and Diversity

Hamilton is a thriving, vibrant place for arts, culture, and heritage where diversity and inclusivity are embraced and celebrated.

Our People and Performance

Hamiltonians have a high level of trust and confidence in their City government.

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

Appendix A to Report (CS10047(c)) - Affordable Access to Recreation Strategy Policy