



STAFF REPORT TO COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

DATE OF REPORT November 28, 2023
MEETING TYPE & DATE Committee of the Whole of December 13, 2023
FROM: Finance Division
Corporate Services
SUBJECT: Regional Grants in Aid
FILE:

PURPOSE/INTRODUCTION

Following the receipt of several recent requests from the community for significant grant funding, staff was directed to provide the Committee with the history of the Regional Grants in Aid (RGIA) program and policy at the CVRD.

RECOMMENDED RESOLUTION

For information.

BACKGROUND

The Cowichan Valley Regional District first established the practice of providing RGIA in 1998. The policy has been amended four times over the years (1999, 2008, 2014, 2017), each time reflecting new Boards' wishes, and attempting to meet concerns raised by the public. Initially this policy was fairly generous, giving the Board the latitude to provide grants to various organizations that they felt provided the greatest amount of benefit to Cowichan Valley residents. The current policy (Attachments A and B), which is the result of work done by a subcommittee comprised of Board members at the time, was adopted by the Board on November 23, 2017. It includes principles that applicants should meet, eligibility criteria, and financial limits (both for the RGIA overall and individual applications). In addition, there is a public process to be followed, concluding with the applicants making a presentation to the Board at Committee of the Whole.

Over the years, as the total dollar amount increased from \$30,000 to \$625,550, the policy has been amended to add clarity, as well as inserting restrictions on the types of organization that were eligible, how often they could apply, what the funds could be used for, as well as the amount granted. A limit was also set for the overall amount granted in any given year. The current policy has the limit set at \$150,000, and annual individual grants are limited to \$50,000 for capital projects and \$10,000 for events/services.

As the total funding increased so did the number of applicants. This program grew to such a point that it became very time consuming for staff to manage as well as a very difficult process for the Board to work through and to ultimately adjudicate. On two different occasions the Board created subcommittees in an attempt to improve the program.

Surveys of other Regional Districts, both on the Island as well as the entire province have been conducted over the years in attempts to identify best practices. The results were that no consistent best practices were found – each Regional District defines its own process and there is a variety of approaches. In 2020, staff found that among 27 of BC's Regional Districts, 12 had Electoral Area only programs, 6 had Regional only grant programs, 3 had both Regional and Electoral Area programs, and 6 had no program at all.

There have been many concerns expressed over the years, from both Board members as well as the public, on different aspects of RGIA. The majority have reflected departures from the very principles of the RGIA Policy:

- Recipients become dependent, instead of leveraging the funds to become self-sustainable
- Most requests are not regional in nature
- The Board struggles to follow its own policy
- Funds get awarded to compensate for lack of appropriate funding from other levels of government (accepting downloading)

With the increase in the amount awarded over the years, additional concerns arose;

- The increase in total RGIA amount over the years is not sustainable
- There has been no public approval to award such a high dollar total
- Accountability for use of funds can be difficult and costly to verify and administer

In an attempt to solve some of the difficulty the Board has established two separate grant programs each with rating criteria administered by a subcommittee.

In 2014 the Board established a sport tourism mandate under the Economic Development authority. The Sport Tourism Event Grant subcommittee has 2 application intakes per year. The 2023 budget for grants in this program is \$40,000. For example, this year Intake 1 supported 13 sporting events in the community with a total of \$17,450 of grant funding awarded. Intake 2 has just been awarded the remainder.

In 2015 the Board went through a public approval process to establish a Regional Arts and Culture service. This new function was approved by the public and has been operating successfully. Part of this service provides grants-in-aid. The 2023 budget for grants in this service is \$30,700 and this year 11 events or organizations received funding.

Both of these programs have subcommittees that make recommendations to the Board.

While the current policy was used for the 2018 and 2019 years, the evaluation criteria was not fully utilized. In 2019 the Board again reviewed the creation of a separate service function, however in light of the costs to establish the new service, which would require public assent, the Board resolved to leave Regional Grants in Aid in General Government.

During the 2020 budget process the Board passed a motion to reduce the line item that funded this program to zero, and has maintained this level for the last four years. Offsetting the elimination of the program, \$75,000 was instead put into the Strategic Investment line item in General Government in order to continue to satisfy Principle # 6 in the RGIA Policy – to allow the Board to be flexible and responsible to emerging needs or unique opportunities.

In each of 2021, 2022, and 2023 \$10,000 was granted to the Agrarians Foundation. In 2023, \$10,000 was granted to the Island Agricultural Show. Also in 2023, approximately \$46,000 was

used for the Workforce Housing Strategy and \$75,000 was committed to the Area E Roadside Pathway project. The budget for 2023 was \$200,000 and after the aforementioned commitments and spending, the balance is approximately \$59,000 at the time of writing.

ANALYSIS

N/A

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

If the Board made the decision to restore funding to the line item for the Regional Grant in Aid program, the General Government budget would be impacted. In addition, staff time to set this program back up and to administer the process would not be insignificant. Both these expenditures would increase the requisition.

COMMUNICATION CONSIDERATIONS

Restoring the Regional Grant in Aid funding program would require an update to the CVRD's website and the existing policy would require amendment to accommodate the changes required surrounding timing of this program. The current policy would see advertising taking place in August of each year with applications due into the Regional District by November 30.

STRATEGIC/BUSINESS PLAN CONSIDERATIONS

While there is no specific reference to an RGIA program in the Draft Strategic Plan, the program gives the Board the flexibility to support non-profit registered societies to forward any of the identified strategic objectives in the plan.

Referred to (upon completion):

- ☐ Community Services (*Cowichan Community Centre, Cowichan Lake Recreation, South Cowichan Recreation, Arts & Culture, Facilities & Transit*)
- ☐ Corporate Services (*Finance, Human Resources, Information Technology, Legislative Services*)
- ☐ Operations (*Utilities, Parks & Trails, Recycling & Waste Management*)
- ☐ Land Use Services (*Community Planning, Strategic Initiatives, Development Services, Building Inspection & Bylaw Enforcement*)
- ☐ Strategic Services (*Communications & Engagement, Economic Development, Emergency Management, Environmental Services*)

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Reviewed for form and content and approved for submission to the Committee:

Resolution:

☒ Corporate Officer

Financial Considerations:

☒ Chief Financial Officer

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment A – Regional Grant-in-Aid Policy

Attachment B – Regional Grants-in-Aid Evaluation Criteria