



SUBJECT: Little free libraries

TO: Environment, Infrastructure & Community Services Cttee.

FROM: Recreation Services Department

Report Number: RS-08-20

Wards Affected: all

File Numbers: 901-01

Date to Committee: October 5, 2020

Date to Council: October 19, 2020

Recommendation:

Receive and file recreation services report RS-08-20 regarding an update on free little libraries.

PURPOSE:

Vision to Focus Alignment:

- Building more citizen engagement, community health and culture

Background and Discussion:

On November 15, 2019 staff received the following staff direction:

Direct the Director of Recreation Services to work with roads, parks and forestry department staff to develop a policy for the installation and upkeep of 'Little Free Libraries' and to report back to the Environment, Infrastructure and Community Services Committee in 2020 with the proposed policy. The policy will address possible installations on private properties and city-owned parkland/open space, and the use of the Neighbourhood Community Matching Fund (SD-30-19); and

Invite interested members of the community to apply to the Neighbourhood Community Matching Fund in the short term while a policy is being developed.

Recently many communities have seen an increase interest in [Little Free Library](#). Typically, a little library is an enclosed case located in an accessible space that functions as a passive library. Residents can drop off and/or pick up books to read and share. It is very popular around the world.

Burlington has also seen interest in this movement. According to the Little Free Library website there are 18 little free libraries in Burlington. Of the 18 two are on public property.

Little Free Libraries that are on private property have little to no involvement of City staff. In private property situations the property owner welcomes people to their property and it is the home owner's insurance that covers liability on those lands.

However, the City has been approached by residents to install Little Free Libraries on City property – in parks, on boulevards or near bus stops. The installation on public land does require the City's involvement.

Committee may be familiar with the [Community Investment Fund Policy](#) and the Neighbourhood Community Matching Fund Program. This program encourages empowered residents to work with their neighbours to enhance public spaces. As the residents rally together on a project by donating volunteer labour, materials, money etc., they apply to the City to match the community's, "sweat equity," with green dollars. To date, the City has seen some great initiatives, from the refurbishment of the baseball diamond at Lakeshore public school, to the butterfly garden on the Centennial bike path, to a number of community gardens.

The community matching fund program lends itself perfectly to supporting the Little Free Libraries on public lands. Through an annual intake process, staff from every department in the corporation review all of the applications to determine feasibility of the project and the action steps/requirements that are needed to see a resident's vision come to fruition.

In addition, the applicant must submit a maintenance and sustainability program for staff's approval. If the group of residents are not able to meet the expectations set out in the agreement, then staff can remove the project. This brings accountability to the resident group to maintain the project.

Since all departments are at the table, staff feel that encouraging residents who want to install and maintain a Little Free Library on public lands to follow the existing Community Matching Fund process will lead to a number of successful projects.

Strategy/process

As there is an existing program/process to install community projects on City land, with stakeholders from every department at the table, staff feel that linking into the

Neighbourhood Community Matching Fund is an effective and efficient use of staff resources.

Options Considered

To have a separate stand-alone program/policy that focuses on Little Free Libraries. This was not an effective and efficient use of staff time to focus on one initiative when an existing policy exists.

To create a program on private property. Staff feel that if a property owner wishes to have a Little Free Library on their own property, they can take the initiative to install one as long as it does not impede city services (ex. snow clearing).

Financial Matters:

The Community Investment program has an annual operating budget of \$80,000. Based on the previous years' actual spending operating allotment will be able to support community interest in Little Free Libraries.

Total Financial Impact

Not applicable

Source of Funding

Operating budget

Other Resource Impacts

No additional resources will be required since a cross department team already meets annually to review all Neighbourhood Community Matching Fund applications.

Climate Implications

Since Little Free Libraries are exposed to all weather, staff will review the construction materials used, and the installation process to ensure that it will be able to withstand the elements.

The concept of the Little Free Library encourages reuse and sharing to limit the impacts of printed materials.

Engagement Matters:

Some members of the community have already used the Neighbourhood Community Matching Fund program for a Little Free Library. Although it can be a challenging and sometimes lengthy process, residents note that they are re-assured that they have met all of the City's requirements.

Conclusion:

The Little Free Library concept on public lands is a fit to the existing Community Investment Policy and the Neighbourhood Community Matching Fund program and process. In an effort to be efficient and effective for staff and residents promoting the existing Neighbourhood Community Matching Fund program benefits everyone.

Respectfully submitted,

Denise Beard

Manager of Community Development

Report Approval:

All reports are reviewed and/or approved by Department Director, the Chief Financial Officer and the Executive Director of Legal Services & Corporation Council.