

River Use Boating Safety Program - Update

ISSUE

This report is to update Council on the data collected under the temporary Saskatoon Fire Department (the SFD) program promoting boating safety on the South Saskatchewan River (the River) for motorized and non-motorized watercraft.

BACKGROUND

The Governance and Priorities Committee, at its meeting held on July 19, 2021, considered a report from the Administration on funding received from Transport Canada (TC) to support the River Use Boating Safety Program (the Program).

Administration was directed as follows:

“That the Administration report back in Q1 2022 on the results of the River Use Boating Safety Program and any data collected on river use incidents and data from partners relating to river safety enforcement; that this report include recommendations for future safety education, strategic opportunities for improved signage, and enforcement demands.”

CURRENT STATUS

The Program ran from July 19 to October 15, 2021 and focused on providing education on respectful and safe use of watercraft on the River within Saskatoon municipal boundaries.

A summary report was sent to TC, as per their funding requirements, outlining expenses and outcomes of the Program.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

The focus of the Program was the promotion of safe boat operation through river use education. The Program created an opportunity to engage river users and discuss their perception on river safety and gather information related to safety concerns. This also provided the opportunity to educate the general public and river users.

The SFD, with assistance of TC funding, hired four temporary Community Relations Coordinators (CRCs) to represent the City of Saskatoon (the City) and patrol along the River.

CRCs patrolled common River access locations, by bike, to explain to river users the TC vessel operator safety requirements, Vessel Operator Restriction Regulations (VORR), Appendix 1, and the importance of respectful shared river use between powered and non-powered vessels.

The River access points in the City are:

- Public Boat Launch near Kiwanis Park,
- Victoria Park Boathouse,
- Diefenbaker Park,
- Gabriel Dumont Park, and
- Rotary Park.

Organized presentations were conducted with recreational clubs and commercial operators.

During the three-month Program, CRCs engaged in many conversations with the general public and had 322 documented contact points, involving approximately 625 river users that included:

- 104 Personal Watercrafts,
- 24 Motorboats,
- 24 Water skiing,
- 67 Stand-up Paddleboards,
- 50 Kayaks – (separate from organized clubs),
- 35 Canoes – (separate from organized clubs), and
- 18 Swimmers.

CRC Key Observations:

- There are core groups of regular users, both recreational and organized, and as such, the CRCs would interact with the same people on a regular basis,
- The public was generally unaware of the rules and regulations that govern a federal waterway and the legal requirements for onboard safety items required for vessel operations,
- The public was receptive to the information and education, and
- There were no formal complaints regarding on-water safety brought forward to the CRCs.

At the end of the Program term, the SFD requested feedback from commercial and recreational user groups as they were recognized as key stakeholders. Two submissions were received (Appendix 2).

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) had expressed an intent to have an on-water presence in 2021, in and around Saskatoon. In a follow up conversation with the detachment in January 2022, the RCMP indicated that pandemic impacts and low water levels had an affect on their ability to have their boat on the water and as such, presence was limited. Plans for 2022 have not been decided yet.

In preparations for the upcoming river use season, the SFD has:

- Increased river safety information on the City website, and
- Began a river safety education campaign as of March 2022.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

TC funding covered 75% of the Program which totaled \$81,521. The City's contribution was in-kind expenditures of Community Relations' staff time and equipment use that was included in the 2021 budget.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

The City is working with the Meewasin Valley Authority and other stakeholders in their exploration of becoming an Urban National Park. River safety is a segment of this parallel conversation.

NEXT STEPS

- Review and improve signage at river access points and on the Senator Sid Buckwold and Gordie Howe Bridges,
- Continue engaging partners and stakeholders, through annual River User meetings, to discuss river use issues, and
- Further explore joint river patrols with Saskatoon Police Service.

APPENDICES

1. River VORR Map
2. Feedback Letters – Boat Safe Report

Report Approval

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