

City Greenhouse Operating Model Update

ISSUE

The City of Saskatoon's (City) Greenhouse facility, built in 1958, has escalating structural concerns and needs to be vacated soon. To maintain service levels, public procurement for private sector provision of seasonal plant material has been initiated for the 2023 season. Plant material from the former Civic Conservatory with sentimental and/or community value will be re-located to other City facilities, where possible.

BACKGROUND

The Parks Department has operated the Greenhouse at the Vic Rempel Yards since 1958. After an addition in 1976, the total size of the Greenhouse was expanded to approximately 10,000 sq ft. While, the facility is on the heritage registry, noting that these greenhouses are representative of the City's social and aesthetic history, the Facility is not a designated heritage building. It is used to grow and prepare plants for the City's flowerpot program, for flower beds in parks, and for indoor displays, such as at City Hall. Structural assessments on the Greenhouse are conducted at regular intervals, with the previous (from early 2021) showing some items of attention, but no cause for concern. Of note, there has been an unfunded capital project to replace the Greenhouse since 2016. It is also important to note the Greenhouse, given the age of the facility requires replacement, not renewal, and Civic Buildings Comprehensive Maintenance funding would not be applicable in this situation.

CURRENT STATUS

In September 2022, the Facilities Management Department received the latest engineering assessment that indicated increasing issues with the Greenhouse structure. These findings include concerns about rotting wood components, cracking, and falling glass, and snow loads in the winter. A Safe Operating Procedure was immediately put in place outlining Personal Protective Equipment requirements, signage, and related procedures to ensure safety of staff.

The building assessment report recommended the Greenhouse be vacated in the short-term and alternate arrangements be made. While not condemned, risk is increasing and an order to vacate immediately could occur at any time, including when the Greenhouse is fully stocked with seasonal material. A replacement Greenhouse of similar size is estimated to cost between \$2.5 to \$6 million, depending on replacement size, complexity, and options included.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

To mitigate risk and ensure continued service delivery, the City has secured a competitive bid for 2023 seasonal plant requirements that is in line with wholesale pricing. Under this approach, the service level for flowerpots and bedding plants would not change. The cost of this procurement in 2023 will be primarily offset by savings in other operational areas. Monitoring and season end review of the deliverables

associated with the procurement of plant materials from an external provider, will be conducted.

Throughout the development of the response plan, in altering the delivery model for the greenhouse program for 2023, safety for all staff has been top of mind, and there has been open lines of communication with all staff involved.

Approaches in Other Cities

Saskatoon, SK, and Edmonton, AB, are the only major prairie cities that grow most of its seasonal plant material at a civic Greenhouse:

- Regina, SK: Approximately 20 years ago, the City of Regina closed their Greenhouse as it became too expensive to maintain and replacement cost was prohibitive. Bedding plants are directly sourced from the Provincial Capital Commission, who plant for the Legislative grounds.
- Calgary, AB: The City of Calgary procures all bedding plant material from multiple private sector bidders. Quality concerns have been minimal as the contract is very important to growers and they ensure the best product is delivered.
- Edmonton, AB: The City of Edmonton has a mixed model with majority of growing in-house, but also order from several private greenhouses due to the size of the city.
- Winnipeg, MB: The City of Winnipeg sources 100% of their plant material via 4-year public tender from growers, which tends to be split evenly between bidders.

Remaining Civic Conservatory Plant Material

When the Civic Conservatory closed in 2017, operating reductions of staff and plant inventory began to be implemented, and high value and unique plants were transferred to the Greenhouse and have been maintained and propagated since that time. City Council has previously approved a proposal to renovate and modernize the Conservatory at its existing location; however, the approximately \$6 million in funding has not been secured.

The City was unsuccessful in the first round of Green and Inclusive Community Buildings funding for the Conservatory, with a second round of applications expected in February 2023. The unique plants currently in maintenance include plants that are difficult to procure and items of community importance, such as the banana tree and the fat pork plant.

It is proposed that stored Conservatory plant material, which is of sentimental and/or community value be transferred to suitable City spaces with adequate sunlight and ease of maintenance. It should be noted that outside of a greenhouse environment some plant material will be at a higher risk of decline and potentially death. For reference, if the Conservatory were to re-open in the future, it is estimated the cost to purchase suitable plant material is approximately \$100,000; this expenditure would be included within a capital project to renovate and modernize the Conservatory. Through preservation of the remaining inventory, these costs could be partially offset, but given

we will not have access to a greenhouse we expect some of the plant material may decline in quality.

Plant Display Services

In addition to providing and preparing plants for flowerpots, park flower beds and the Civic Conservatory, the greenhouse and its staff provide and maintain indoor plants in publicly accessible City Facilities, such as City Hall. This service will continue in the short term; however, as greenhouse space becomes unavailable, adjustments to the service delivery for civic plant displays will be required. Options associated with service delivery adjustments continue to be explored and will be brought forward for City Council's information in future reporting.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The cost to procure plants from the private sector is estimated to be primarily offset in 2023 by other savings in the Greenhouse program. Over the long term, if continued, savings of \$2.5-6 million in capital greenhouse replacement costs and ongoing operational costs of a permanent, heated Greenhouse will be realized.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

There is a risk that plant material procured from private providers could be a different quality than what is currently produced at the Greenhouse; contracts and processes have been put in place to mitigate these risks.

Through procurement of materials and supplies from a private vendor, the opportunity exists to increase the size of the flowerpot program more easily in the future, as the current Greenhouse has space limitations, and therefore unable to expand beyond existing production levels.

NEXT STEPS

In Q3 2023, a report will be provided outlining the results of the plant procurement from external providers and will outline longer-term recommendations for the future of the Greenhouse program and operations.

Report Approval

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