

South Saskatchewan River Watershed Stewards Update and SAW Membership Proposal

ISSUE

The South Saskatchewan River Watershed Stewards Inc. (SSRWS) has been part of a restructuring process led by the [Saskatchewan Association of Watersheds](#) (SAW). Administration committed to reporting back to City Council on representation and appointments to this organization upon completion of the restructuring initiative. As part of the restructuring, SAW has proposed reallocation of the annual membership fee toward an annual scholarship, explored in this report.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Governance and Priorities Committee recommend to City Council to pass a resolution to accept the Annual Scholarship proposal from SAW and pursue program development.

BACKGROUND

History

The SSRWS was a community driven, non-profit membership corporation working within the South Saskatchewan River watershed to implement stewardship initiatives and activities that protect the beauty, diversity, and integrity of the watershed.

The organization was provincially incorporated in 2007, as part of a provincial watershed planning initiative, which focused on developing water stewardship capacity at the local level. The organization was initially tasked with implementation of the 2007 *Source Water Protection Plan* for the watershed and later with support of the 2012 *25-Year Saskatchewan Water Security Plan*.

The City of Saskatoon (City) was a founding member of the organization and has maintained membership and representation on the SSRWS Board since 2007. From 2007 to 2018, there were two appointments to the SSRWS Board: one from City Council and one from the Administration. However, since 2018 there has been only a City Council appointment and no Administration appointments.

A response to a City Council inquiry about the possibility of having a member of the Administration appointed to the Board instead of a member of City Council, was submitted to the Governance & Priorities Committee (GPC) on [November 15, 2021](#), with a recommendation to maintain current practices for 2022 and a commitment to report back in Q3 of 2022.

In 2022, SAW submitted a restructuring proposal to the Water Security Agency that involved all 11 watershed organizations in the province. The proposal led to the establishment of one central administrative entity and consolidation of watershed activities. An information report was submitted to GPC on [August 22, 2022](#), advising that Administration would report to City Council on representation and appointments to SAW upon completion of the restructuring initiative.

Current Status

SAW has developed a restructuring framework that includes the creation of four District Advisory Committees. These Committees allow local watershed concerns and programs to be brought forward to SAW staff and Board members. The Northwest District Advisory Committee (NW DAC) was formed in 2023, with representation from South Saskatchewan River, North Saskatchewan River, Beaver Creek, and Eagle Creek Watersheds. The Charter for the DAC can be found in Appendix 1 and contains a map of the four watershed districts.

On June 13, 2024, at a Special Meeting of SSRWS, membership agreed to dissolve the SSRWS and transfer remaining assets to SAW. They signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) regarding the transfer indicating that remaining funds are to be used to support program delivery in the South Saskatchewan River Watershed, with approximately an equal split in focus on rural and urban projects. It is anticipated that the MOU will be formally approved in 2025. The SSRWS will be completely dissolved shortly thereafter.

The City's annual SSRWS membership of \$20,000, funded from the water utility, was not requested for 2025.

In lieu of a membership fee, SAW has submitted an Annual Scholarship Proposal that provides an opportunity to reallocate the \$20,000 SSRWS annual fee to continue to support watershed-based programming that will benefit the City. The proposal can be found in Appendix 2.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

Highlights of the Annual Scholarship Proposal from SAW are:

- The program will be a partnership between the City, Meewasin, and SAW.
- The vision is to create an annual scholarship opportunity for post-secondary students.
- Projects would propose a solution to an environmental problem within the City and implement a solution to that problem.
- In 2025-2026, SAW will work with community partners and educational institutions to develop the scholarship program. The proposed City contribution for the development of the program is \$15,000 in 2025.
- The program is anticipated to launch in September of 2026, and annually thereafter, with the award of up to three \$10,000 scholarships each year, with implementation to be completed by August 31 of the following year. The proposed City contribution for ongoing support of the program is \$20,000 annually (starting in 2026). SAW will match the City's contribution each year with \$20,000 in funding and in-kind support for program promotion.

Opportunity Assessment

The City currently works with community partners on several programs including: [Research Junction](#); [Environmental Grant](#), [Student Action for a Sustainable Future](#),

[Caring for our Watersheds](#), [Yellow Fish Road™ & Sanitary Sewer Program](#), [Community Engaged Projects](#), and the [kanātan nipīy program](#).

SAW is experienced with developing and delivering programs with a variety of funding sources. Examples include:

- [Saskatchewan Watershed Environmental Agriculture Program](#), supported by \$40 million dollars of funding from the Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada On-Farm Climate Action Fund.
- [Climate Change Adaptation Project](#), supported by Environment and Climate Change Canada.
- [Hydrologic Drought Response Planning](#), supported by the Water Security Agency.
- [Aquatic Invasive Species Monitoring](#), supported by the Invasive Species Center and the Ministry of Environment.
- [Caring for our Watersheds](#), supported by Nutrien.

The proposed program would be unique for the City in that it focuses on project development and implementation with on-the-ground outcomes like floating treatment wetlands, naturalized plantings, or weed management. It would build upon the success of Caring for our Watersheds by promoting skill development at the post-secondary level. Community partners may be involved in individual projects and benefit from the outcomes.

Benefits

Supporting the SAW proposal would provide the following benefits:

- Maintaining a strong relationship with SAW.
- Provide local post-secondary students opportunities to build skills in project development and implementation. Community partners may be involved in individual projects and benefit from the outcomes.
- Contribute to the employability of post-secondary students.
- Build partnerships with local post-secondary institutions such as the University of Saskatchewan, Sask Polytechnic, and/or the First Nations University of Canada.
- Allows the City to explore a different community stewardship model that involves young adults in caring for our green infrastructure.
- Allows the City to continue to benefit from the financial assets of the SSRWS.

Risks

There is a risk that student projects may fail because of lack of experience. This risk can be mitigated by ensuring that adequate oversight of the work is incorporated into program design. Boundaries would have to be set to limit the time spent by City staff; support for the program would have to be integrated into existing operational work or become the responsibility of community partners that benefit from the project. Project outcomes would have to enhance existing operations for the City or community partners and not lead to increased operational costs.

Conclusion

This Annual Scholarship proposal represents an opportunity to support skill development in post-secondary students and promotes stewardship of our local watershed. SAW and Meewasin are experienced and capable partners that can be relied upon to produce a viable program that minimises risks to the City.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

As outlined in the SAW proposal, accepting the proposal would cost the City \$15,000 for program development in 2025, with an expected ongoing operating cost of \$20,000 per year starting in 2026.

The current water utility operating budget includes \$20,000 for SSRWS membership which could be used to fund program development in 2025 (\$15,000) as well as the City's portion the scholarship beginning in 2026 (\$20,000). As this is a reallocation of existing utility funds, the recommendation, if approved, would not result in increased costs to the mill rate.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Councillor MacDonald is currently appointed to the Board of the SSRWS. Administration will alert City Council when the SSRWS is completely dissolved, and a City Council appointment will then no longer be needed.

Administration's Watershed Protection Manager has been attending meetings of the NW DAC when possible since 2022. The 2025 NW DAC Charter indicates there will be two representatives from each watershed. The South Saskatchewan positions are currently occupied by Meewasin and a Member at Large; there is no need for formal representation from the City currently. SAW may approach the City with an invitation in the future; this can be addressed by Administration.

NEXT STEPS

City Council's decision will be communicated to SAW and Administration will proceed as follows:

- If the proposal is not approved, Administration will return the funding to the utility for reallocation for other purposes.
- If the proposal is approved, Administration will begin the process of program development in partnership with SAW and Meewasin.

APPENDICES

1. District Advisory Committee Charter Version 2025 – April 9, 2025
2. SAW Annual Scholarship Proposal

Report Approval

Written by: Twyla Yobb, Watershed Protection Manager
Reviewed by: Amber Weckworth, Interim Director of Sustainability
Approved by: Angela Gardiner, General Manager, Utilities and Environment