
Park Maintenance and Design – Service Level

Recommendation

That the Standing Policy Committee on Planning, Development and Community Services recommend to City Council:

1. That the current service level for the Park Maintenance and Design service line be approved; and
2. That the service level and budget allocation be rationalized during the 2018 Business Plan and Budget Review, by considering options outlined in this report.

Topic and Purpose

The purpose of this report is to seek City Council approval of the current service level provided under the Park Maintenance and Design service line. The report also presents options should City Council wish to adjust service levels for 2018.

Report Highlights

1. The Park Maintenance and Design service line delivers core services to citizens that consists of six program components that contribute directly to the quality of life for citizens.
2. Options are presented to adjust the current service level, by increasing or decreasing the level of service provided, and associated budget costs.

Strategic Goals

This report supports the Strategic Goals of Quality of Life, Continuous Improvement, Environmental Leadership, and Asset and Financial Sustainability. Defined service levels ensure the City of Saskatoon (City) is making informed financial decisions and investing in services that matter to citizens. As part of the Continuous Improvement Strategic Goal, work to define service levels and attach a unit cost for informed decision making has been a priority of the Administration for the last three years.

Background

At its May 15, 2017 meeting of the Governance and Priorities Committee, the Administration committed to bring forward a series of service level documents on core services. Park Maintenance and Design was identified as one of the core service lines to bring forward for consideration prior to the 2018 Business Plan and Budget deliberations.

At the August 28, 2017 meeting of City Council, administration was requested to report to the Standing Policy Committee on Planning, Development and Community Services on the 30-day challenge savings proposal that suggested less water be applied to the City's Parks and Open Space areas.

Report

Formal Service Level Template

As part of the Continuous Improvement Strategic Goal and the four-year priority “opportunities to modernize civic government”, work to define service levels and attach unit costs for informed decision making has been a priority of the Administration for the last three years. In early 2017, a multi-division internal process review team developed a template to outline service level information at the service line level.

The template for formal service level documents communicates two key messages:

1. Information for citizens, Committees, and City Council about “what we do”, “why we do it”, and “how much it costs” for each service line; and
2. Viable options to the current state of service levels, entitled “what else is possible”.

Moving to defined service levels supports Service Saskatoon by focusing on citizen-centric service and clearly defining “what you can expect from us”. It also supports the shift to multi-year budgeting by having well understood service levels and costs to ensure accurate budgeting in the future.

Park Maintenance and Design Service Line

Maintaining our City Parks and Open Spaces is a core function of the City. The Parks Division is responsible for providing the services included in the Parks Maintenance and Design service line, which they do through six main programs. These programs provide opportunities for citizens to participate in a variety of both passive and active outdoor recreational activities within the City; they connect our active transportation corridors; they provide habitat for urban wildlife and contribute to the biodiversity in our city; they are comprised of both built and natural environments, and therefore, require a range of care and management techniques.

Currently the service line consists of six programs:

- a) Park and Open Space Maintenance;
- b) Sport Field Maintenance;
- c) Irrigation Services;
- d) Naturalized Area Management;
- e) Park Design Services; and
- f) Civic Conservatory and Greenhouse.

Attachment 1 provides additional detail on each of the programs’ guiding service attributes and customer values, intended outcomes, and customer performance measures.

Unit Costing and Municipal Benchmarking Network Canada (MBNCanada)

MBNCanada originated in Ontario in 1998 and currently includes six provinces represented by 16 municipalities: Calgary, Regina, Winnipeg, Thunder Bay, Windsor, London, Hamilton, Waterloo, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, Halifax; as well as the Regions of Durham, York, Halton, and Niagara. Municipalities within MBNCanada collect and share data related to standard service areas in order to measure comparable performance.

Performance is measured annually in 37 service areas through 670 metrics. The Parks Service Area provides information on three metrics in its public report. One of these metrics is the “Operating Cost of Parks per Person”. In 2015, 11 municipalities reported on this metric resulting in an average total cost of \$68.21 per person. Reported values ranged from a low of \$28.58 in London to a high of \$100.16 in Thunder Bay. Regina came in at \$71.63 and Winnipeg at \$41.25. In Saskatoon using the 2017 forecast costs and a population estimate of 265,300 at the end of 2016 we have a unit cost of \$52.07 per person. The difference between the City’s operating cost per person and that of the municipalities within the MBNCanada metric can, in part, be attributed to varied service levels. Reporting for MBNCanada metrics include capital funding, operating funding, and costs for support services like human resources, fleet services, and finance. The Parks Division is not including capital costs in the service level at this point.

MBNCanada also reports publicly on “Operating Cost per hectare – Maintained and Natural Parkland”. An average cost of \$11,242 per hectare was reported in 2015 with a low of \$5,776 in Thunder Bay and a high of \$30,227 in Montreal. In Saskatoon using the 2017 forecast costs, and a value of 2110 hectares as reported in the 2017 Municipal Manual, a derived unit cost of \$6,549 per hectare is calculated. The range of variability in this measure can be attributed to the costing methodology differences as described above and also to the differences between municipalities in how they apply park land classifications in their area.

Service Level Improvements and Budget Pressures

Since 2014, the Parks Maintenance and Design programs have undergone extensive improvements to meet citizen expectations, and also to produce operational efficiencies.

Examples include:

- a) 2014 Parks Maintenance and Design Civic Service Review;
- b) New operating model of integrated maintenance teams that “own” their service areas;
- c) New Satellite Maintenance Building Model;
- d) Improved citizen “call-in” and webform service response;
- e) Greater emphasis on lifecycle costs in the park design process;
- f) Identification and updates to service levels;
- g) Optimization of the watering program in the Civic Greenhouse;
- h) Deployment of new trail groomer in Naturalized parks;
- i) Participation in the 2016 Special Events Internal Process Review; and
- j) Renewed focus on asset management for irrigation, pathways and drainage systems.

Budgetary pressures have also accompanied these improvements. Since 2014, the Parks Maintenance and Design service line has had an unfavourable staffing budget variance averaging about \$400,000/year. Prior to 2017, this unfavourable variance has been largely off- set by a variety of favourable variances in fuel and water costs, private service contracts, as well as transfers from the Parks Maintenance Stabilization Reserve. For 2017, the service line has a total unfavourable variance estimated at \$400,000. No material offsetting variances are forecast at this point, but options are presented to mitigate future budget gaps between service levels and budget allocations.

Service Level Options

Attachment 1 provides options to adjust the Park Maintenance and Design Service level if so desired by City Council. Optional scenarios include status quo, and those that increase or decrease the current service level to varying degrees. Nine option scenarios are presented:

1. **Status Quo – No Change to Service Level, Additional Budget Required**

In 2017, the Parks Maintenance and Design Service Line is forecasting to be over budget by approximately \$400,000. The anticipated overspending is primarily attributable to staffing levels required to maintain expected service levels. Over the years, increases to the budget have not kept pace with the amount of green space requiring maintenance at expected service levels. Efficiencies, as noted previously, have been continuously implemented, and have mitigated the impact of the deficiency. This effort continues.

2. **Resolve Overspend - Savings While Maintaining the Current Service Level**

Additional investigation into Parks Maintenance and Design has indicated that a portion of over the spend can be attributed to incorrect allocations of employee pay elements between capital and operating budgets in the Landscape Design Section. Correcting this practice has already re-allocated approximately \$40,000 of operating costs to appropriate capital programs in 2017.

Ongoing continuous improvement efforts will seek to reduce persistent overtime charges in the irrigation program for a reduction of an additional \$40,000 in 2018.

In 2018, the Parks Division will begin utilizing the satellite maintenance facilities that were approved in the Civic Service Review in October, 2015. These facilities will support the provision of safe, efficient and effective localized park maintenance within the neighbourhoods they are located. It is expected that the six facilities will provide \$120,000 of incremental savings. Savings are associated with a reduction in travel time for staff and equipment, reduced fuel consumption, reduced equipment repair, and increased staff productivity.

With these actions the base funding deficiency is estimated to be \$240,000 in 2018. The Parks Division remains committed to moving forward with continuous improvement initiatives to better define its business and increase the accuracy of unit costing, budgeting, and cost control.

Additional service level options are presented to decrease or increase service in specific areas as follows:

3. **Estimated Cost Reduction of Service Level – Eliminate Side Boulevard Mowing - \$50,000**

In this option, the current historical practice of mowing side boulevards would be eliminated. Currently, property owners are responsible for mowing and maintaining the boulevard in front of their property while the City provides a minimal mowing service where side boulevards exist. This creates confusion amongst property owners regarding the service level difference between front and side boulevards. Some

property owners already care for their side boulevards; this option will provide consistency and clarity for property owners across the city.

4. **Estimated Cost Reduction of Service Level – Eliminate Centre Median Flower Pots - \$50,000**

In this option, the 256 flower pots currently deployed in centre medians along transportation corridors would be eliminated. The 734 flower pots located in BID corridors would remain, these pots are planted and deployed by the Parks Division, but are maintained throughout their display period by BID staff.

5. **Estimated Cost Reduction of Service Level – Use Less Water in Selected Park Turf Areas - \$100,000**

In this option the water delivery target to non-sport field park areas would be decreased by 20%. Current service level targets of 25mm per week would be revised to 20mm per week and still include a combination of precipitation and irrigation. Decreasing water usage only impacts that portion of costs that are variable; over 50% of irrigation costs are fixed based on the number of meters installed on our system. Decreasing irrigation applications particularly during periods of low precipitation will impact turf conditions as additional weed encroachment will occur. Trees and shrubs planted in parks will be impacted as well with increased accumulation of deadwood and tree loss particularly in trees already under stress from cottony ash psyllid and forest tent caterpillar.

6. **Estimated Cost Increase of Service Level – Improved Turf Cultural Practices + \$55,000**

Dedicated resources are required to establish and maintain consistent and improved city wide service levels for important turf cultural practices such as aeration, topdressing and overseeding. Planned annual application of these cultural practices will increase turf health, and function to help protect the turf grass asset from further weed encroachment. Current service levels are only able provide these practices on a reactive basis when existing operating resources can be redeployed to apply which has resulted in inconsistency across the city. The addition of a seasonal staff member in each park maintenance district would provide the required dedicated resource who will be able to plan and deliver the required cultural practices in a consistent manner.

7. **Estimated Cost Increase of Service Level – Weed Surveillance and Control in Natural Areas Management + \$35,000**

The FTE resources in Natural Area Management are currently insufficient to provide an effective level of naturalized resource management activities such as buffer management, weed control, and resource assessments. An additional 0.5 FTE would provide the field level technical expertise necessary to improve the health, safety, biodiversity and aesthetic appeal of the 120 ha of naturalized areas we currently maintain.

8. **Estimated Cost Increase of Service Level – Park Access Additional Resource + \$33,000**

The park access program currently administers requests on a seasonal basis by homeowners, contractors and utilities to enter park space to provide material deliveries,

landscaping work, and utility maintenance work. The position is also an important liaison between Parks and other Divisions to ensure a co-ordinated approach to park and open space access is taken. Often times access involves moving heavy equipment through parks and open spaces which can damage pathways, turf areas, and plantings if appropriate mitigation practices are not applied. Through communication, inspections and documentation a seasonal position currently minimizes the damage and associated repair costs that Parks incurs. Shifting this position from seasonal to permanent will allow for further development of the Park Access program into a proactive program that can address stakeholders before damages occur and leverage those relationships to improve cost recovery when damages do occur.

9. Estimated Cost Increase of Service Level – Additional Mowing of Highway Connectors + \$65,000

The Circle Drive mowing contract currently includes one full cut and two litter picks (Spring and Fall) that covers approximately 140 hectares of grassed area adjacent to the major highway connectors (within Saskatoon's city limits). A service level that achieved one additional cut and two additional litter picks would provide increased consistency with established mowing service levels adjacent to connecting highways outside of city limits and similar grass areas adjacent to major arterials (including the Circle Drive corridor) within the city.

Options to the Recommendation

The Standing Policy Committee on Planning, Development and Community Services may direct the Administration to investigate further options to reduce or increase the Parks service level and budget prior to making a recommendation to City Council for the 2018 Business Plan and Budget deliberations.

Communication Plan

The approved service levels will be communicated using the Service Saskatoon citizen centric simple language model, so citizens know what services they can expect. Service Levels provide an opportunity for the public to learn more about the City's operations and the costs to deliver the services, enabling them to provide feedback and input into how the City can deliver services more efficiently.

Financial Implications

Depending on which service level option(s) are selected for 2018, a change in funding may be required as per the options outlined in Attachment 1.

Environmental Implications

Environmental considerations of the health and biodiversity of parks and open spaces are greatly impacted by the frequency with which maintenance services are provided to our assets. Less frequent maintenance service delivery will decrease the health and resiliency of the open space environment.

Other Considerations/Implications

There are no policy, public and/or stakeholder involvement, privacy, or CPTED implications or considerations.

Due Date for Follow-up

Parks Division will continue to provide annual status reports to Committee. Further direction may be provided by City Council during the 2018 Budget review process.

Public Notice

Public notice, pursuant to Section 3 of Public Notice Policy No. C01-021, is not required.

Attachment

1. Service Level for Park Maintenance and Design

Report Approval

Written by: Tanya Bell, Performance Improvement Coordinator, Employee Experience and Performance

Reviewed by: Darren Crilly, Director of Parks

Approved by: Randy Grauer, General Manager Community Services

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