
City of Saskatoon Impound Lot Business Model

Recommendation

That the Standing Policy Committee on Transportation recommend to City Council:

1. That rate changes for the City-owned Impound Lot be brought forward as part of the 2020/2021 Multi-Year Business Plan and Budget Process; and
2. That the changes to Impound Lot Business Model, as outlined in this report, be approved.

Topic and Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide recommendations to Committee on the City of Saskatoon's current Impound Lot Business Model, based on recent changes to Provincial Legislation, as well as the Impound Lots recent financial performance.

Report Highlights

1. The City of Saskatoon's (City) impound lot has posted operating deficits in each of the past four years and relied on property tax funding to balance its budget. The impound lot is intended to be self-sustaining, and if this is to be achieved, changes to the current business model are required.
2. There have been significant legislative changes to the SGI Impoundment program since 2014.
3. In addition to the option of maintaining the status quo, which would not address current operating deficits and reliance on the property tax, a number of other business model options could be utilized including:
 - implement rate changes;
 - have vehicles impounded by Saskatoon Police Service (Police Service) under the SGI Impoundment Program directed to the City Impound lot; or
 - outsource the operations of an impound facility to a private enterprise with consideration for a royalty fee to offset the City's administration and traffic safety costs.
4. The Administration is recommending both the adjustment of current fees and expansion of the City's impound lot business to include SGI Impoundment vehicles.

Strategic Goal

This report supports the strategic goal of Asset and Financial Sustainability by considering and evaluating new non-property tax revenue sources to help pay for City projects, programs and services.

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Background

The City continues to deal with mature and declining non-tax revenue sources. City Council and the Administration have undergone several initiatives aimed at reducing the reliance on the property tax including the Hemson Report, the 30-Day Challenge and internal audit engagements amongst other efforts.

Report

Impound Lot Current Business Model

The City's Impound Lot is intended to be fully self-sufficient whereby enough revenues are generated so that there is no reliance on the property tax. Unfortunately, over the past several years, the Impound Lot has experienced deficits of \$30,000, \$83,000, \$54,000 and \$25,000 in 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018 respectively, primarily due to lower volumes of vehicles as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 – Vehicle Volumes – Saskatoon Impound Lot

Impounding Authority	2015	2016	2017	2018
Parking Enforcement	2100	2175	2079	1958
Saskatoon Police	659	603	591	453
TOTAL	2759	2778	2670	2411

In addition to the current operating deficits, there are two other unaccounted financial considerations in the long term operation of the impound lot:

- a) The impound lot is situated on a site owned by Saskatoon Land. This property is valued at approximately \$2.2 million and should be purchased by the City from Saskatoon Land as outlined in Policy No. C09-019, Properties (City-Owned) Required for Major Projects Policy, if the intent is to continue the impound operations at that location over the long term. The property could be purchased over the next 20 years via an internal loan which would add an additional \$157,000 in costs per year, pushing the program into further deficit and reliance on the property tax under the current model; and
- b) There is currently no capital or improvement reserve for the Impound Lot which will be required as assets begin to age (systems, fencing, gate, facility) and require replacement.

SGI Impoundment Program Changes

There have been changes to the Impound Lot Provincial Legislation and SGI Vehicle Impoundment Program (SGI Program) over the past several years that require consideration as part of the Business Model. An overview of the changes to provincial legislation which has affected vehicle impoundment since 2014 is provided below.

1. Prior to 2014, all vehicles impounded by the Police Service or Parking Enforcement were sent to the City Impound Lot. Typically, owners charged with impaired driving and other high risk offences had their vehicles impounded for 24 hours.

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2. In 2014, new SGI laws introduced stricter and longer impoundment rules for offences related to driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs, unauthorized drivers, and high risk driving behaviours. SGI also established a requirement that an impound lot operator be a Registered Garage Keeper to impound vehicles under the SGI Program. At that time, Always Towing had the contract for the City's towing services and, as a registered Garage Keeper, assumed impoundment responsibilities for the SGI Program.
3. In 2016, the towing contract was awarded to Astro Towing who continued the practice of storing vehicles impounded under the SGI Program at their impound facility.
4. In 2018, further significant changes were made to the SGI Impoundment Program including stricter and longer impoundment rules in comparison to the 2014 version of the plan, as well as fee increases. Vehicles may be impounded for up to 60 days for certain offences, and incur, among other charges, a storage fee of \$17.00 per day, and \$55.00 administration fee, payable to the Impound Lot Operator before the vehicle is released.
5. The current towing service contract is set to expire on June 30, 2019, and this provides an opportunity to revisit the Impound Lot Program Business Model in consideration of the significant legislative changes since 2014.

Since 2014, vehicles impounded under the SGI Program have been stored at the impound facility of the successful proponent to the Towing Contract, as they were a registered Garage Keeper. While the City is not currently a registered Garage Keeper, the approval process and operational requirements to do so can be readily implemented. The current Impound Lot meets all requirements for this designation.

The Request for Quotations and subsequent contracts to provide towing services for the City, to date have not specified that the successful towing contractor was entitled to these impoundments.

The volume of vehicles impounded under this program has increased significantly since 2014 as stricter legislation has been introduced as shown in in Table 2.

Table 2 - SGI Program Impoundment Volumes – 2016 – 2018

Type of Impoundment	Number of Vehicles Impounded*		
	2016	2017	2018
3 Day	10	10	216
7 Day	26	15	257
30 Day	230	257	741
60 Day	197	224	423
TOTAL	463	506	1637

NOTE: Vehicles may be released within an earlier timeframe than indicated, based on outcome of appeal.

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Options for future Impound Lot Business Model

The current impound lot business model has been under review by the Administration and a number of options are provided for Committee's consideration to establish a business model that is sustainable and balances the costs placed onto the property tax. Options include:

- maintain the status quo;
- increase Impound Lot Rates;
- expand the Impound Lot Operations to include the SGI Impoundment Program; or
- discontinue City Impound Lot Operations.

Details of these options are included in Attachment 1.

Recommendation

The Administration is recommending the following options be implemented to ensure a more sustainable business model:

1. Implement a rate change to current impound lot operations, to be brought forward as part of 2020 Business Plan and Budget Deliberations (Option 2), and;
2. Expand the Impound Lot program to intake vehicles under the SGI Impoundment Program (Option 3).

These proposed changes will result in benefits to the City as follows:

1. Ensure that the current City Impound Lot operations are self-sufficient;
2. Facilitate the ability to make full use of existing available vehicle storage capacity at the current City Impound Lot;
3. Make progress on City Council's Strategic Action to, "consider and evaluate new non-property tax revenues sources to help pay for City projects, programs and services"; and
4. Create the potential to shift funding of traffic safety initiatives and Police Service programs to violators and those creating an unsafe traffic environment, as opposed to funding from the property tax.

Options to the Recommendation

The options to this recommendation are outlined above and further detailed in Attachment 1 of this report.

Public and/or Stakeholder Involvement

The Administration has consulted with the Police Service regarding their requirements and ability to implement the recommendations. The Police Service does not have any significant concerns with their ability to implement the recommended change to direct vehicles to a specified Impound lot.

Communication Plan

Should changes to the impound process be enacted, communications will be provided to the public and stakeholders to advise of any changes.

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Policy Implications

Revisions to Bylaw No. 8640, The Impounding Bylaw, 2007, may be required depending on the selected option.

Financial Implications

For the past four years the City's Impound Lot has been operating at a deficit, and a change to the business model to ensure this program is self-sustaining is proposed. The recommended options of increasing fees, and making better use of available capacity by directing SGI Program impoundments to this lot, will provide the revenues needed to cover costs. Any surplus funds could be directed to offset costs associated with traffic safety and other related police or enforcement programs.

As a portion of the overall budgets, the City currently receives very little non-property tax revenue sources to fund items such as traffic safety, Vision Zero and overall Police Service programs. This requires the majority of these programs be either funded by property taxes or remain unfunded. Implementation of a program that directs vehicles under the SGI Impoundment Program to the City Impound Lot would also create an opportunity that would lessen the burden on the property tax while providing a closer linkage between those exhibiting unsafe traffic behaviour and those who pay for these programs.

This approach would be similar to the implementation of Automated Speed Enforcement and Red Light Camera programs, whereby program surpluses are directed to the Traffic Safety Reserve.

Other Considerations/Implications

There are no environmental, privacy, or CPTED implications or considerations.

Due Date for Follow-up and/or Project Completion

The current towing contract had been extended to June 30, 2019. The Community Standards Division will issue a request for quotations for towing services pending the direction on the future business model of the City's Impound Lot, with the successful proponent to be in place by July 1, 2019.

Public Notice

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

Attachment

1. Impound Lot Business Model Options

Report Approval

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