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**Item No. 9.1.1**  
**Grants Committee**  
**December 2, 2024**

**TO:** Chair and Members of the Grants Committee

**FROM:** Cathie O'Toole, Chief Administrative Officer

**DATE:** October 3, 2024

**SUBJECT:** **Proposed Amendments to Administrative Order 2022-005-ADM Respecting the Community Grants Program**

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**ORIGIN**

This is a staff-initiated report.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The provision, expansion, or repeal of municipal grants programs requires monitoring to reduce the risk of overlap or duplication, to realize administrative efficiencies, or to reflect any change in legislation or municipal funding priorities. This report recommends non-substantive changes to policy for clarification and to consolidate access to funding targeting a specific nonprofit sector or a defined type of program or service.

The proposed consolidation of funding for registered heritage property, affordable housing, and rural transit is intended to enhance “navigation” through a single-point-of-entry for prospective grant applicants and realize efficiencies for both HRM and eligible organizations seeking municipal assistance. None of the amendments proposed reduce existing grant program budgets. With respect to the Community Grants Program, any savings will be redistributed to address an anticipated increase in requests for accessibility, energy efficiency projects, assistance for the homeless, or chronically over-subscribed/high priority program elements.

**RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that the Grants Committee recommend that Halifax Regional Council adopt the amendments to Administrative Order 2022-005-ADM, the *Community Grants Program Administrative Order*, as set out in Attachment 2 to this report.

**BACKGROUND**

Because municipal grant programs are discretionary, expenditures can fluctuate due to budget capacity, emerging priorities, legislative amendments, or strategic intergovernmental opportunities. Hence,

Administrative Order 2022-005-ADM Respecting the Community Grants Program requires a review at regular intervals in relation to the Municipality's strategic priorities and other municipal grant programs or practices. In response to the development of new municipal funding programs, an evaluation of or amendments to existing programs, the changes to the Community Grants Program proposed in this report are intended to (i) consolidate funding, (ii) enhance efficiencies, and (iii) provide clarification to prospective applicants.

In accordance with Administrative Order 54 Respecting the Procedures for Developing Administrative Orders, all Administrative Orders, amendments to Administrative Orders, and repeal of Administrative Orders require at least seven (7) days' notice to all the Council Members in accordance with subsection 59 (1) of the Halifax Regional Municipality Charter.

## **DISCUSSION**

The aim of the Community Grants Program is to support the volunteer participation of residents of the Municipality in local nonprofit and charitable organizations that develop or deliver a project, program, service, or amenity to the benefit of members of the public. The program is region-wide and unlike most municipal grant programs is multi-sectoral. The current program has eight (8) funding categories.

The recommendation to repeal the Affordable Housing category is based on the following:

- a significant increase in financial assistance from all levels of government that has significantly greater impact on increasing the construction or availability of rental housing units;
- a significant increase in municipal operating assistance through the redesign of the tax relief program for nonprofit and charities that own and operate, shelters, housing for persons with special needs, and affordable rental accommodations within HRM;
- a single source of municipal funding for affordable housing will realize efficiencies by providing prospective applicants with a standardized application format and timeline and consistency with respect to a staff contact and policy; and
- consolidating affordable housing in one program enables a consistent evaluation of comparable applications and their relative impact on housing availability, suitability, and affordability.

Likewise, the recommendation to consolidate funding for municipally registered heritage property under the Heritage Incentives Grants Program and community-based transit grants under the Rural Transit Grants Program are intended to realize efficiencies for prospective applicants through a single-point-of-entry.

### **Recommendations to Amend Policy – Schedule 1.**

In accordance with Section 9 of Administrative Order 2022-005-ADM "The funding categories listed in Schedule 1 of this Administrative Order shall be reviewed regularly in relation to the Municipality's 5-Year Strategic Priorities Plan and other municipal assistance programs and practices. Upon review, the Council may amend Schedule 1 to continue, amend, or discontinue funding categories". The following are recommended changes to the program's funding categories listed in Schedule 1 and as such are policy amendments.

#### **(i) Amend Section 1 (a) of Schedule 1 – Repeal Affordable Housing Funding Category**

Municipal funding for nonprofit housing was restrained until the introduction of a National Homelessness Strategy and a subsequent Federal/Provincial Bilateral Agreement on Affordable Housing both of which exerted pressure on municipalities to participate at the local level. HRM's Council requested staff make provision within existing programs which resulted in the addition of an Affordable Housing category under the Community Grants Program and a new category added to the Tax Relief for Non-Profit Organizations

Program (Schedule 30)<sup>1</sup>. With a maximum funding threshold of \$25,000 for capital projects, the Community Grants Program has had a nominal impact on the creation of additional rental housing units; most applications and awards have been for deferred maintenance or energy efficiency.

In recent years an acute shortfall in housing availability has prompted a significant increase in government assistance, including the development of HRM's designated Affordable Housing Grants Program (AHGP) which is administered by Planning and Development. The program serves non-profit housing providers and includes acquisitions, new construction, repairs, renovation, and property/building assessments. Planning and Development staff are currently reviewing the AHGP under HRM's Housing Accelerator Fund action plan with the objective of expanding the program and refining its eligibility criteria through engagement with local non-profit housing providers. The scale of the AHGPs budget, in combination with federal or provincial loans or loan guarantees and comparatively large-scale cash grants, has resulted in a decrease in housing-related applications to the Community Grants Program.

**Note: The Community Grants Program will continue to provide project-specific grants to non-profit and charitable organizations under the Emergency Assistance & Public Safety category.** This category's funding priorities include programs and services for individuals and families unable to meet their need for safety, food, shelter or basic household items. For example, temporary shelter for the homeless, youth, or victims of violence, transitional accommodations with on-site supports for addictions recovery or release from incarceration/probationary supervision, food banks, and feeding programs for the homeless. Arguably, when compared to new rental housing construction costs, the modest level of funding available under the Community Grants Program has a larger impact for this sector. Examples of past awards include the purchase of kitchen appliances, food storage equipment, the installation of showers, laundry appliances, a facility security system, and funds towards the purchase of a vehicle for food collection and distribution.

**(ii) Amend Section 1 (d) – Rename Diversity & Inclusion to Diversity & Accessibility**

Specific to the Community Grants Program, the term "inclusion" has resulted in a disproportionate number of ineligible applications under the Diversity & Inclusion category. In effect, this category has been used as a default by some applicants for projects otherwise ineligible for consideration, such as but not limited to school-based programs, medical/health or counselling programs. As proposed, the term "inclusion" will be replaced by the term "accessibility". The latter is commonly used to describe the process to enhance access for persons with a disability<sup>2</sup>. The amendment is intended to make the purpose of these grants easier for the public to understand, align terminology with HRM's practice (HRM Accessibility Advisory Committee and HRM Accessibility Strategy), other government funding programs or grant-giving foundations.

It is intended that eligibility for accessibility grants be limited to those organizations whose programs and services are eligible for consideration under one of the program's other funding categories listed in Schedule 1. This is not an amendment to the Administrative Order; funding priorities are published in an annual guidebook in accordance with Sections 9 through 13 of the program's policy. Preference may also be given to applicants who have completed and submitted an accessibility audit by a qualified service provider. Professional fees for an accessibility audit can be funded under a Project Grant.

**Recommendations to Amend Funding Priorities – Proposed Consolidation or Clarification**

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<sup>1</sup> Under the redesigned Tax Relief Program Administrative Order 2014-001-ADM a distinction is made between "affordable" rental accommodations (Schedule D) and shelters and supportive housing (Schedule A).

<sup>2</sup> The term "access" refers to the ability to use or take advantage of an opportunity that might reasonably be available to members of the public but is not specific to a physical or cognitive disability. For example, income, transportation, geographic or social isolation may be a barrier but not a function of a disability.

The following are recommended changes to the program's funding priorities that may be established by HRM's Chief Financial Officer under Section 11 of Administrative Order 2022-005-ADM that states: "The CFO may set priority outcomes within the funding categories, which may change annually". Consequently, the proposed changes are not an amendment to policy. However, Section 12 of Administrative Order 2022-005-ADM states: "The funding categories and priority outcomes shall be published in the program's guidelines and be made available to the public".

- **Consolidate Capital Grants for Registered Heritage Property in the HRM Heritage Incentives Program – Effective Fiscal 2026/27**

Adopted in January 2024, HRM's Culture and Heritage Priorities Plan (CHPP) is a comprehensive strategy aimed at promoting and preserving the diverse, cultural heritage of HRM. The Plan outlines a set of 44 actions that will help to build more inclusive, diverse, and vibrant cultural communities through focused investment, program development, service delivery and ongoing community engagement. Action 4.10 seeks to "consider the consolidation of all heritage grant programs under a single incentives program". The Municipality currently has three grant programs that support heritage conservation: a general Heritage Incentives Program for residential and commercial heritage properties (does not deal with non-profits), an incentive program for properties within a Heritage Conservation District, and the Community Grants Program that serves non-profits.

Although the terms "heritage" and "history" may be used interchangeably the Community Grants Program intentionally places a priority on collecting, interpreting, and presenting accounts of people, places, and events that have cultural and historical significance to a geographic or interest-based community. Hence, the Community Histories category uses the plural to acknowledge diverse perspectives and different interpretations of what is valued. Program eligibility is limited to registered non-profit and charitable organizations. To be eligible for funding towards the acquisition, expansion, restoration or substantive repairs to real property, including registered heritage buildings or sites, the applicant must be the property owner. Applications for repairs, alterations, or substantive changes to a registered heritage property must also include written approval from an HRM Heritage Planner (Planning and Development). The maximum funding threshold for a Capital Grant (up to \$25,000), does not require matching funds, and successive applications are accepted. Likewise, eligibility for funding towards the conservation of a registered heritage property under HRM's Grants to Community Museums Program has a funding threshold of up to \$25,000, the applicant must be the property owner, and funding requests for capital improvements to a municipally registered heritage property must include Heritage Planner approval.

In contrast, the Heritage Incentives Program has focused on privately-owned, municipally registered heritage property (buildings outbuildings, and landscape features) used for a residential or commercial purpose. These grants emphasize standards of authentic restoration and are issued on a cost-shared basis. Under a separate but related program, funding is also available to property owners, including non-profit property owners, located within a municipally designated Heritage Conservation District<sup>3</sup>. HRM's receipt of funding under the federal government's Housing Accelerator Fund might also enhance some heritage property initiatives by expediting heritage development agreements and/or the conversion of heritage properties for residential use. However, the latter is one-time funding over a 3-year period and focuses on the Regional Centre and suburban areas.

As proposed, funding for heritage property conservation, irrespective of private or non-profit ownership, will be consolidated under the Heritage Incentives Grant Program. This approach provides a single-point-of-entry to aid navigation for prospective applicants and enhances efficiencies with respect to heritage registration, project approvals including substantial alterations, and coordination among different funding

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<sup>3</sup> To date, three heritage conservation districts have been established (Barrington Street, Schmidville, and the Old South Suburb).

sources. A consolidated program might also enhance the inclusion of rural and suburban geographic communities or interest-based communities<sup>4</sup>.

A reduction in requests for Capital Grants for registered heritage property could increase the Community Grants Program's capacity to support groups across the region undertaking a history project. For example, community-based research, interpretation, commemoration (monuments, markers, signage), wayfinding, or communications. The Community Grants Program would also continue to assist nonprofit heritage property owners through Project Grants (up to \$5,000) for professional fees to support an application for heritage registration (title or document search, plan of survey) or conservation project planning such as a building condition assessment, building conservation plan, or feasibility study.

A review of these programs and consolidation of heritage programs under a single program will provide efficiency and prevent overlap between existing and proposed programs. If supported by Council, staff will prepare a report to Regional Council with recommendations on the creation of a new single heritage incentive program in the fall of 2025. A consolidation of heritage property grants is being targeted to be effective for fiscal 2026/27.

**Note: The Community Museums Grants Program will not be administered by Planning and Development; only Capital Grants for registered heritage property conservation would be considered under the Heritage Incentives Grant Program.**

- **Consolidate Grants for Rural Transit in the HRM Rural Transit Grant Program – Effective 2026/27**

The purpose of the Rural Transit Grants Program is to assist community organizations to operate a community-based transit service in rural communities. To date, the program provides financial assistance; a lump sum based on the scale/frequency of routes and a quarterly flat rate per kilometer for transit services (not charters). As of 2024, there are four (4) operators located within HRM. Since the program's initiation, the Community Grants Program has received requests for additional funding, specifically in relation to Capital or Project Grants. Although the number and value of awards granted is modest, the Community Grants Program does not have a designated category for such a small number of service providers compared with other funding categories. Consequently, awards have been considered under Diversity & Inclusion or Environment & Climate Change. As proposed, funding for community rural transit would be consolidated under the Rural Transit Grant Program. In part, this approach will realize efficiencies but also recognizes that Capital Grants for expansion of fleet or related assets could have an impact on Operating Grants. Likewise, any increase in the number of community transit operators or routes would have a financial impact.

To allow for amendments to the Rural Transit Grants Program, the consolidation of transit grants would be effective for fiscal 2026/27.

- **Community Grants Program: Environment & Climate Change Category – Strengthen Funding Priorities – Effective 2025/26**

*Energy Efficiency:* In recent years there has been a noticeable increase in funding requests towards the purchase and installation of heat pumps. Factors believed to contribute to this trend include the availability

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<sup>4</sup> Likewise, requests for registered heritage property restoration received under HRM's Community Museums Grants Program would be directed to the Heritage Incentives Grant Program. If approved, this change is expected to reduce demand for heritage property Capital Grants in both the Community Grants Program and the Grants to Community Museums Program<sup>4</sup>. For clarification, the Community Museums Grants Program would continue to be administered independent of the Heritage Incentives Program, only capital funding requests related to conservation of registered heritage property would be referred to the Heritage Incentives Program.

of government financial incentives (rebates, financing, grants), private sector marketing, and the rising cost of utilities. As proposed, grants for energy efficiency would prioritize those organizations whose programs and services are eligible for consideration under one of the Community Grants Program's other funding categories listed in Schedule 1. This is not an amendment to policy; funding priorities are published in an annual guidebook in accordance with Sections 9 through 13 of policy. Preference *may* also be given to applicants who have completed and submitted an energy audit by a qualified service provider. Professional fees for an energy audit can be funded under a Project Grant and are often a requirement for a government rebate.

*Community Gardens:* With adoption of a Food Security Strategy and the pending launch of a grants program for community gardens administered by Community Safety this element will be removed from the 2025 Community Grants Program. Within this context "community garden" refers to small-scale food production serving individuals, families, groups, or institutions.

The Community Grants Program will continue to support "food security" for homeless persons and low-income households under the Emergency Assistance & Public Safety category. Notably, food banks, a mobile food bank/food delivery or a food distribution system (for example, Knox United Church Youth Food Truck Project, Feed Nova Scotia, Sackville-Bedford Meals-on-Wheels Society), designated community feeding programs (for example, Feeding Others of Dartmouth, Hope Cottage), and gardens affiliated with a shelter for the homeless (for example, the Salvation Army's "Hope Garden" project). Other types of gardens may also be considered on a case-by-case basis under other funding categories. For example: a heritage garden, art garden, garden accessibility features for persons with a disability, or site naturalization projects.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no financial implications associated with the recommendations presented in this report.

### **RISK CONSIDERATION**

Low: Amendments to Administrative Order 2022-005-ADM are meant to enhance access to opportunity for those volunteer and community-based organizations not in receipt of government funding, realize administrative efficiencies, and improve customer service to the local nonprofit sector.

### **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

The Grants Committee is comprised of six (6) citizen members and four (4) members of Regional Council. Meetings are live webcast and agenda, reports, video, and minutes are posted on halifax.ca. The Committee's role includes oversight and recommendations to Regional Council regarding the development and implementation of eligibility criteria, priorities, policy and procedures for assistance, including grant programs.

HRM staff who administer or manage a grant program have been advised of the proposed changes for feedback and meetings convened as applicable.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

No environmental implications were identified.

## ALTERNATIVES

The Grants Committee could recommend that Halifax Regional Council:

1. Refuse to adopt the amendments to Administrative Order 2022-005-ADM; or
2. Adopt the amendments to Administrative Order 2022-005-ADM subject to modifications. This may require a supplementary staff report.

## LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

- *HRM Charter, S.N.S 2008, c.39*

**Section 7A** The purposes of the Municipality are to (a) provide good government; (b) provide services, facilities and other things that, in the opinion of the Council, are necessary or desirable for all or part of the Municipality; and (c) develop and maintain safe and viable communities.

**Section 79A (1)** Subject to subsections (2) to (4), the Municipality may only spend money for municipal purposes if

- (a) The expenditure is included in the Municipality's operating budget or capital budget or is otherwise authorized by the Municipality.

- *Administrative Order 2022-005-ADM Respecting the Community Grants Program*

**Section 13.** The funding categories listed in Schedule 1 of the Administrative Order shall be reviewed regularly in relation to the Municipality's 5-Year Strategic Priorities Plan and other municipal assistance programs and practices. Upon review, the Council may amend Schedule 1 to continue, amend, or discontinue funding categories.

- *Administrative Order 54 Respecting the Procedures for Developing Administration Orders.*
- *Administrative Order 2014-002-ADM Respecting the Heritage Incentives Program.*
- *Administrative Order 2014-012-ADM Respecting Grants for Rural Transit.*
- *Administrative Order 2018-010-ADM Respecting Grants to Community Museums.*
- *Administrative Order 2019-007-ADM Respecting Public Disclosure of Municipal Grants.*
- *Administrative Order 2020-008-ADM Respecting Grants for Affordable Housing.*
- *Administrative Order 2024-001-ADM Respecting Tax Relief for Non-Profit and Registered Canadian Charitable Organizations.*

## ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 - Showing Proposed Changes to Administrative Order 2022-005-ADM

Attachment 2 - Amendments to Administrative Order 2022-005-ADM

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**Schedule I**

1. The funding categories for the Community Grants Program are as follows:

(a) ~~Affordable Housing: enhances housing safety, availability, suitability, and affordability~~ Repealed.

(b) Community Arts: encourages residents' engagement in the arts as a learning or leisure activity

(c) Community Histories: protects, interprets, and presents the region's culturally diverse histories

(d) Diversity & ~~Inclusion~~ Accessibility: addresses barriers to participation for under-represented, economically-disadvantaged, equity-seeking, ~~or~~ interest-based communities, or persons with a disability

(e) Emergency Assistance & Public Safety: community-based supports for individuals and families unable to meet their basic needs for daily living and projects that enhance public safety

(f) Environment & Climate Change: prevents or remedies harm to the natural environment

(g) Leisure: strengthens social connection through community-based organizations, self-directed group activities, and community-owned venues

(h) Recreation: encourages physical fitness through non-elite and inclusive sport and recreational activity



**Attachment 2**  
**(Amendments to Administrative Order)**

**ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER NUMBER 2022-005-ADM**  
**Respecting the Community Grants Program**

**BE IT RESOLVED** by the Council of the Halifax Regional Municipality that Schedule 1 of Administrative Order 2022-005-ADM, the *Community Grants Program Administrative Order*, is amended as follows:

1. Repealing clause 1(a);
2. Striking out the word “Inclusion” after the symbol “&” and before the colon and replacing it with the word “Accessibility” in clause 1(d);
3. Striking out the word “or” after the comma and before the word “interest-based” in clause 1(d); and
4. Adding the comma and words “, or persons with a disability” after the word “communities” in clause 1(d).

Done and passed this                      day of                      , 202 .

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Mayor

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Municipal Clerk