

REPORT TO COUNTY COUNCIL

Grants Program Policy

To: Warden and Members of County Council

From: Director of Corporate Services

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Grants Program Policy 6.26, as attached to Report CS 2024-31, be approved and included in the General Policy Manual, effective September 11, 2024;
2. And further, that County Council give notice to Community Futures Oxford that the Future Oxford Legacy Fund be wound down, and the principal funds be repatriated to the County as collected and contributed to the General Reserve to support future years' tax stabilization as determined by Council.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- The Grants Program Policy establishes a governance framework for the annual disbursement of grant funds to local non-profit organizations and economic development offices.
- This Policy is proposed in response to Council direction arising from the 2024 business plan and budget process for staff to prepare a grants policy to replace the existing grants program and initiate service agreements between the County and Oxford Connection; and the County and The Small Business Centre.

IMPLEMENTATION POINTS

Subject to Council's approval of the Grant Program Policy, staff will implement the Program pursuant to the Policy and supplementary procedures, including reporting to Council through the annual business plan and budget process; and upon completion of final reporting submissions received in the following year from the local agencies who were grant recipients.

Further, staff will work collaboratively with the Oxford Small Business Centre to repatriate repaid loan funds upon regular quarterly reviews starting immediately.

Financial Impact

The recommendations in this report do not impact the current year's approved budget.

Future grant allocations will be subject to County Council approval through the annual business plan and budget process.

The recommendations in this report include transfer of repaid Future Oxford Legacy Funds retired from loans invested in medium and small business to support capital needs that meet the goals and objectives of the Future Oxford Community Sustainability Plan. As those funds are received they will be contributed to the General Reserve to be used for future tax stabilization, including significant assessment appeals and year end deficits, in accordance with Reserve Policy 6.20. The General Reserve had a 2024 projected year end balance of \$4.3 million, and a target balance of \$12.4 million, being 15% of the current year's tax levy.

Communications

Upon Council's approval of the Grant Program Policy, the policy and applications will be posted on the County's website.

The application process and procedures will be shared with Safe and Well Oxford in seeking grant funding for participating community agencies involved in implementing the Safe and Well Oxford Plan as endorsed by County Council. Similarly, the Policy process and procedures will be shared with the local Economic Development Offices for submissions that align with the County's Strategic Plan.




County Council will be informed of staff's recommendations for annual grant allocations through the business plan and budget process and report on the final outcomes of each grant allocation in the subsequent year to demonstrate how the invested funds have advanced the relevant Strategic Plan directives.

2023-2026 STRATEGIC PLAN

Oxford County Council approved the [2023-2026 Strategic Plan](#) on September 13, 2023. The Plan outlines 39 goals across three strategic pillars that advance Council's vision of "Working together for a healthy, vibrant, and sustainable future." These pillars are: (1) *Promoting community vitality*, (2) *Enhancing environmental sustainability*, and (3) *Fostering progressive government*.

The recommendations in this report supports the following strategic goal.

Strategic Plan Pillars and Goals

PILLAR 1	PILLAR 2	PILLAR 3
		
Promoting community vitality	Enhancing environmental sustainability	Fostering progressive government
<p>Goal 1.1 – 100% Housed</p> <p>Goal 1.2 – Sustainable infrastructure and development</p> <p>Goal 1.3 – Community health, safety and well-being</p> <p>Goal 1.4 – Connected people and places</p>	<p>Goal 2.1 – Climate change mitigation and adaptation</p> <p>Goal 2.2 – Preserve and enhance our natural environment</p>	<p>Goal 3.1 – Continuous improvement and results-driven solutions</p> <p>Goal 3.2 – Collaborate with our partners and communities</p> <p>Goal 3.3 – Attract, retain and engage staff</p> <p>Goal 3.4 – Financial sustainability</p> <p>Goal 3.5 – Advocate for Oxford County</p>

See: [Oxford County 2023-2026 Strategic Plan](#)

DISCUSSION

Background

The County has historically provided grant funding to various local non-profit organizations that deliver services and programs beneficial to the community. However, the absence of a formal governance framework has led to challenges in ensuring that these funds are distributed in a manner consistent with the County’s strategic priorities.

During the final deliberations and approval of the 2024 Business Plan and Budget, at their December 13, 2023 meeting, County Council passed 20 resolutions in consideration of grant requests received for 2024, followed by:

Resolution No. 41 “Resolved that Staff bring forward a policy for Council’s consideration, prior to 2025 budget deliberations for considering grant requests to the County.”

Further dialogue ensued suggesting grants be allocated based on staff direction governed by policy containing specified criteria, and funding limits to set expectations and greater scrutiny.

Prior to the previously cited resolution, of the 20 prior grant related resolutions, the following were included:

Resolution No. 36 “Resolved that the grant request from Economic Development (Oxford Connection) (\$50,000) be funded as was agreed to by Resolution 12 from the September 13, 2023 Council meeting through a service agreement between the County and Oxford Connection, rather than the grants program.”

Resolution No. 39 “Resolved that the grant request from The Small Business Centre (\$50,000) be funded as was agreed to by Resolution 12 from the September 13, 2023 Council meeting through a service agreement between the County and The Small Business Centre, rather than the grants program.”

Also considered during the 2024 Business Plan and Budget Deliberations was the annual \$100,000 contribution to grants and reciprocal loans under the guise of “Future Oxford Legacy Fund”, delivered by Community Futures Oxford. This funding program was established in September 2015 when Council adopted the Future Oxford Community Sustainability Plan and soon thereafter adopted a funding strategy to support delivery of the Community Sustainability Plan. A key component of the funding strategy was the development of a Future Oxford investment fund. The intent of a Future Oxford investment fund was to create a streamlined, locally managed, loan and/or grant allocation model that would allow the Future Oxford Partnership resources necessary to implement the plan, while maintaining transparent and accountable use of available funds.

An agreement was executed with Community Futures Oxford in October 2016 and renewed in 2022 for another five years, 2026 being the final year of the current agreement. The grant in the first year was \$340,000 - \$300,000 for the loan and grants program and \$40,000 to support related administrative costs. The following years of the Agreement, County Council approved grants in the amount of \$100,000 for the loan and grants program (except in 2024) and increased the administration grant in each year by \$1,000 to reflect cost of living increases. To date, Council has contributed \$1.0 million to the loan and grants program and \$388,000 for administration of the Future Oxford Legacy Fund. The agreement commits to the annual administration fee, however the annual contribution to the Fund is discretionary and based on annual budget approvals.

Subsequent to Council approving the renewed agreement in 2022, Council adopted a updated Strategic Plan that reinforces Council’s commitment to a more sustainable future, with emphasis on adapting to climate change impacts and continuing Oxford’s role as a leader in sustainability, which prompted Council’s pause to question if the Future Oxford Legacy Fund continued to be an effective investment resulting in a notice of motion that omitted the annual \$100,000 contribution to the Fund. The County will continue to honour the commitment to support administration costs related to retiring the loan program at least for 2024 to 2026 in accordance with the agreement. In the meantime, staff are seeking Council direction and clarity for Community Futures Oxford at this time of their intent to wind down the Future Oxford Legacy Fund and have repaid principal contributions repatriated to the County, so Community Futures Oxford can plan accordingly.

Comments

In response to the foregoing, this report proposes a structured governance policy framework designed to enhance transparency, accountability, and alignment with the County’s strategic goals.

Strategic Alignment

The proposed governance framework directly supports the municipality's strategic plan by funding programs that are:

- Promoting community vitality
 - 100% Housed
 - Sustainable infrastructure and development
 - Community health, safety and well-being
 - Connected people and places
- Enhancing environmental sustainability
 - Climate change mitigation and adaptation
 - Preserve and enhance our natural environment
- Fostering progressive government
 - Continuous improvement and results-driven solutions
 - Collaborate with our partners and communities
 - Attract, retain and engage staff
 - Financial sustainability
 - Advocate for Oxford County

Proposed Governance Framework

The proposed framework includes the following key elements:

Eligibility Criteria

To ensure alignment with the strategic plan, non-profit organizations must meet the following criteria to be eligible for grant funding:

- Must be a registered non-profit organization or a local economic development related government agency with a clear mission that aligns with the County's strategic priorities.
- Must demonstrate a track record of delivering community services or programs that benefit the residents.
- Must have a governance structure that ensures accountability and transparency.

Application Process

A supplementary procedure document sets out facilitation, requirements and responsibilities of the process:

- Application submission: Organizations will be required to submit a comprehensive application outlining their project proposal, intended outcomes, and alignment with the County's strategic goals.
- Evaluation Committee: An evaluation committee comprising municipal staff will review applications based on predefined criteria, including strategic alignment, financial viability, and community impact.
- Scoring System: Applications will be scored based on their alignment with strategic priorities, expected outcomes, and organizational capacity using a comprehensive decision making criteria tool.
- Responsibilities
 - Corporate Services
 - Facilitate the process
 - Review applications for completeness and eligibility

- Prepare and facilitate execution of funding agreements
- Ensure terms and conditions of the agreements are met
- Approval Committee
 - Evaluate application forms and recommend grant funding for approval in accordance with the procedures document
- Safe and Well Oxford Steering Committee
 - To invite proposals from local non-profit agencies that demonstrate advancing goals and objectives as set out in the Safe and Well Oxford Plan and present a consolidated proposal to the County for consideration

Funding Allocation

Funding allocations will be based on:

- Level of funding availability will be based on the prior year's grant budget to set reasonable expectations.
- Funding level for recipients will be commensurate with impact and strategic priority alignment.
- Performance based – contingent on achievement of agreed-upon milestones and outcomes.

Monitoring and Reporting

Funded organizations will be required to submit reports detailing progress, supporting financial documentation, and outcomes achieved. The Policy will be reviewed regularly to ensure alignment with the County's Strategic Plan is maintained.

Further details regarding the Policy framework are found in the attached draft policy and procedures documents attached to this report. This Policy also serves to address Council's direction for staff to develop a service agreement with Oxford Connection and The Small Business Centre, rather than the existing grants program, as all grant recipients under the proposed Policy would enter into an agreement with the County, customized to address funding goals, objectives, deliverables, outcomes and alignment with the County's Strategic Plan.

CONCLUSIONS

The establishment of a governance framework for the disbursement of grant funding to local non-profit organizations and local economic development offices is essential to ensuring that municipal funds are allocated transparently, equitably, and in alignment with the County's strategic plan. The proposed framework provides a structured approach that will enhance accountability, foster stronger community partnerships, and deliver tangible benefits to residents.

SIGNATURES

Departmental approval:

Original signed by

Lynn S. Buchner, CPA, CGA
Director of Corporate Services

Approved for submission:

Original signed by

Benjamin R. Addley
Chief Administrative Officer

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – Grants Program Policy
Attachment 2 – Grants Program Procedure