

Background

During the 2017 budget deliberations, means testing and subsidy programs were discussed in the areas of recreation and transit services. At the December 6, 2016, Finance & Administration Committee, Council requested a report on means testing and subsidies for City of Greater Sudbury (City) programs. An overview of current means testing and subsidy programs was requested to be included as part of the report. The report would also provide a framework that could be applied to all programs and services offered by the City.

Current Means Testing and Subsidy Programs in Community Development

The following provides an overview of the use of means testing and subsidy programs currently offered within the Community Development Department:

Children Services

Child Care Subsidy is a program of the City of Greater Sudbury that helps families reduce their child care costs in licensed child care programs and authorized recreation programs. Subsidy is administered by the Children Services Section, and may cover all, or part, of eligible families' child care costs.

The amount of subsidy provided is determined by a provincial income test using the family's net income according to the Canada Revenue Agency. Families are eligible to apply if they require child care to support their employment or education activities, or where the child or parent has an identified need (medical, social or special needs).

Using the provincial income test, the Children Services Section determines a family's eligibility for child care subsidy based on the following:

- Families with an adjusted family annual income up to \$20,000 are eligible for full fee subsidy and there will be no parental contribution required.
- Families with adjusted family income between \$20,000 and \$40,000 the parental contribution required is calculated based on 10% of their adjusted family income over \$20,000.
- Families with adjusted family income annual above \$40,000, parental contribution is calculated at 10% of the amount over \$20,000 up to \$40,000 *plus* 30% of the amount over \$40,000.

The following sample table illustrates the monthly parental contribution at each of the annual family income amounts:

Annual Family Income	Monthly Parental Contribution
\$ 20,000	\$ 0.00
\$ 30,000	\$ 83.33
\$ 40,000	\$ 166.67
\$ 50,000	\$ 416.67
\$ 60,000	\$ 666.67
\$ 70,000	\$ 916.67
\$ 80,000	\$ 1,166.67
\$ 90,000	\$ 1,416.67
\$ 100,000	\$ 1,666.67
\$ 110,000	\$ 1,916.67
\$ 120,000	\$ 2,116.67

There is no cut-off income level for eligibility for subsidy, as long as actual child care costs exceed the monthly parental contribution as determined by the income test. The child care subsidy program pays the child care centre directly for any approved child care costs above the "monthly parental contribution".

For example, a family with three children (6 months, 3 years and 5 years) would have licensed child care costs of approximately \$2,400 per month. If their combined family income was \$100,000, the child care subsidy program would pay \$734 (\$2,400 - \$1,666) of their costs per month.

Applicant (Parent) Reason for Service	
Working Full-time	52%
Working Part-time	14%
Working, Self-employed	1%
Attending School	18%
Referrals (child or family)	8%
Other	6%

Public Libraries

Public Libraries provide universal access to programs and services from 13 locations across the City. Libraries are more than just a place to find books. The following services are available free of charge to all residents:

- Use of computers including internet access.
- Programming and workshops for all ages.
- Borrowing of paper and electronic books, movies, music and other library materials.
- Borrowing of sports and recreational equipment such as snowshoes, fishing rods, tennis and pickleball gear.

Housing Services Division

Housing Services determines eligibility for Rent-Geared-to-Income (RGI) subsidy for individuals who are seeking assistance. An individual would pay 30% of their income towards a rental unit, and Housing Services would subsidize the balance of the market rent.

In many of the social housing projects there is common space available for nonprofit groups, support services, and tenant associations to utilize and offer programming.

The chart below represents the total units (both market and subsidized) available through the City of Greater Sudbury's portfolio:

Project Name	1 Bedroom	2 Bedroom	3 Bedroom +	Total
Non Profits	490	244	91	825
Cooperatives	634	501	326	1461
GSHC	778	338	732	1848
Federal	218	87	88	393
Rent Supplement with Private Landlords	518	59	34	611
Grand Total	2638	1229	1271	5138

Leisure Services Division

The Feel Free to Feel Fit program provides free public swimming once per week at municipal pool locations and offers free return transportation via Greater Sudbury Transit. Since the program's inception in 2009, there have been approximately 10,000 participants taking part annually.

Older Adults (individuals age 65 and over) are offered free public skating. The City also provides discounted access to public swimming, public skating and downhill skiing on Family Day. These rates are captured in the City's Miscellaneous User Fee By-Law. During the 2016-2017 skating season, 158 senior skating season passes were issued.

The City also has a number of facilities and recreation opportunities that are universal and free of charge including access to 55 outdoor rinks, the Ramsey Lake skating path,

Queens Skating Oval, 7 supervised beaches, 10 splash pads, 173 kilometers of non-motorized trails, 8 skate parks and 5 youth drop-in centres.

The Leisure Services Division does not currently conduct means testing for programs and activities.

Residents inquiring about program subsidies are referred to local community agencies including JumpStart, the Sudbury Manitoulin Children's Foundation and the Human League of Sudbury. For 2017, the Sudbury Manitoulin Children's Foundation subsidized 59 day camp registrations.

Social Services Division

Ontario Works is a Provincial social assistance program and is delivered by the City of Greater Sudbury in accordance with the Ontario Works Act. The intent of the Ontario Works program is to help people in temporary financial need find sustainable employment and achieve self-reliance through the provision of effective, integrated employment services and financial assistance.

Financial assistance may include but is not limited to basic needs such as food, shelter, personal needs, other household costs, health related expenses and employment related expenses.

Monthly financial assistance allowance levels are determined by the Ministry of Community and Social Services. When determining eligibility for the Ontario Works program, means testing is completed and specific questions will be asked regarding;

- Family size
- Household and shelter related expenses
- Income/earnings
- Value of assets

For the purpose of social assistance, income includes all payments received by or on behalf of a recipient, spouse, and any dependents in the benefit unit. Unless specifically exempted, income or earnings declared are reviewed when determining eligibility for social assistance. If the client or participants income/earnings are in excess of the maximum monthly amount of financial assistance, the person is not eligible for financial assistance.

Depending on family size in conjunction with accommodation costs, assistance may range as follows:

Family Size	Monthly Assistance Range (\$)
Single	\$337 - \$721
Couple	\$486 - \$1,118
Family of Four	\$486 - \$1,230
Temporary Care Assistance	\$269 – An additional \$220 added for each additional child

All assets are reviewed when determining eligibility for income assistance. The Ontario Works legislation prescribes the maximum asset level for each family size. If the applicant or participants, including members of that benefit unit, have assets that exceed the maximum, the person is not eligible for Ontario Works assistance.

The City offers an Affordable Transit Pass Program, whereby an eligible applicant qualifies for a 31-day ride card at half price. To qualify, the applicant must; be a resident of Greater Sudbury; work full-time, part-time or on a casual basis; be between the ages of 18 and 64 years; and living with a low income (below the LICO threshold) or in receipt of Ontario Works (OW) or Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) benefits. From March 2016 to March 2017, there were 328 transit passes issued to eligible applicants for the Affordable Transit Pass Program.

Transit Division

Under the City's Miscellaneous User Fee By-Law, fare discounts are offered under a number of categories. In 2016 there were approximately 15,000, 31 day discounted passes sold. Older Adults (individuals aged 65 and over), children (between 5 years and up 60" tall) and Disability Pensioners receive an approximate 40% discount on 31-day ride passes.

Overview of Best Practices

Other Municipal Means Testing and Subsidy Programs

Information regarding affordable access was gathered from the following municipalities to determine best practices in these areas:

- City of Barrie
- City of Calgary
- City of Guelph
- City of Halifax
- City of Hamilton
- City of Mississauga
- City of Toronto
- City of Windsor
- Region of Peel
- Town of Banff

Municipalities noted above all use an income-based measure such as Statistics Canada's Low-income Cut-Off (LICO) thresholds or the Low-income Measure (LIM) thresholds as their main criteria to determine eligibility. Additional criteria used include OW and ODSP recipients.

Recreation subsidy programs focus mainly on children, youth and seniors. Most municipalities provide a credit (from \$75 to \$275 annually) to eligible individuals towards registration to recreation programs (with some limitations). Many provide free access to public swimming, fitness centres, drop-in programs and community centres for eligible individuals.

Transit subsidy programs provide reduced rates between 21% and 90% of full transit fee.

Affordable Access to Recreation for Ontarians Policy Framework

Parks and Recreation Ontario has developed a policy framework which sets out a vision, objectives and strategic directions to guide decisions relating to affordable access to recreation.

Objectives of the policy framework include:

- Affordability - A range of affordable recreation programs will be in place in every community across the province. Where user fees exist, fee assistance will be provided for those facing financial barriers.
- Awareness - Low-income Ontarians will be aware of the existence and importance of affordable recreation opportunities.
- Inclusion - Affordable recreation programs will be responsive to Ontario's cultural diversity, gender, and accessible to persons with disabilities.
- Capacity - Municipalities and community providers will have sustainable funding, and the skills and tools they need to provide affordable recreation programs and facilities.
- Collaboration - All stakeholders will work together to develop and implement access policies and to design and maintain affordable programs and spaces, drawing on the strengths of what already exists.
- Accountability - A concerted effort will be made to implement the policy framework, monitor its implementation, and build on successes.

The Affordable Access to Recreation for Ontarians Policy Framework includes two fundamental policy objectives that must be in place in order to overcome barriers faced by low-income individuals:

- Access Policies - Municipal and community delivery organizations must establish Affordable Access Policies to ensure individuals that face income barriers have equitable opportunities to participate.
- Core Set of Free, Universal Programs – Communities must identify a core set of recreation programs that will be universally available to children, youth, individuals and families and offer these programs without a user fee.

Best Practices for Transit Services

The Canadian Urban Transit Association and the Ministry of Transportation Ontario share similar recommendations for best practices which focus generally on convenient, high efficiency fare media (i.e. smart cards) and fare subsidy incentives to increase ridership.

City of Greater Sudbury Summary of Principle Statements for Affordable Access

The City will use the following principles when developing strategies for affordable access to recreation and transit:

- Availability of universal, free programs and services to children, youth, seniors, individuals and families.

- Where program subsidies are implemented, the City will utilize the (LICO/LIM) means testing to determine eligibility.
- Programs will contribute to maximizing use of underutilized facilities, programs and services.
- Subsidy programs will not stigmatize individuals participating.
- The City will develop public promotions to better inform residents regarding universal and program subsidies.
- Services will be responsive to the City's Diversity Policy and the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act.
- The City will engage and collaborate with community partners to develop, enhance and promote policies and affordable programs.
- Programs initiated will be sustainable.
- Affordable programs will be monitored upon implementation for the purposes of reporting and exploring opportunities to build on success, value for money.
- The City will adopt/make use of technology and/or systems that maximize efficiencies, accessibility, and flexibility (for recipients and administrators).
- Performance standards and program review will ensure success.

Next Steps

Using the principle statements above, staff will bring forward separate reports regarding an Affordable Access to Recreation and an Affordable Fare Strategy to the Community Services Committee before the end of the 2nd quarter of 2018.

References

City's Miscellaneous User Fee By-Law

<https://www.greatersudbury.ca/city-hall/by-laws/pdf-documents/user-fee-2017-24/>

Affordable Access to Recreation Presentation to Community Services Committee (August 12, 2013)

<http://agendasonline.greatersudbury.ca/index.cfm?pg=feed&action=file&attachment=10582.pdf>

Parks and Recreation Ontario Affordable Access to Recreation for Ontarians Policy Framework

http://www.prontario.org/index.php/ci_id/3681.htm