

Green Infrastructure Strategy Implementation Plan, Near Term Actions and Financing

ISSUE

The Green Infrastructure Strategy (the Strategy) was received by City Council in February 2020. It identifies 15 actions to reach Saskatoon's vision for an interconnected Green Network, each with associated initiatives. An Implementation Plan to form projects and programs as well as define funding requirements is now the next step.

This report provides an update on the Implementation Plan, with a focus on the near-term actions and funding requirements for the 2022-2023 multi-year budget. It also describes opportunities to work with community partners such as Meewasin on implementation. Additional reporting on the full Implementation Plan is planned for Q3-4 2021.

BACKGROUND

At its meeting on February 24, 2020, City Council received the *Green Infrastructure Strategy: Towards an Interconnected Green Network* report as information. The Strategy outlines 15 actions that the City and community can take to reach an interconnected Green Network that provides sustainable habitat for people and nature. The list of actions and initiatives is provided in Appendix 1 – Green Infrastructure Strategy Actions and Initiatives.

The 2020 report identifies development of an actionable Implementation Plan as a next step, as well as five short-term initiatives that would guide early implementation in 2020 and 2021. These are:

- Developing education materials about the green network, including promotion of biodiversity and urban agriculture.
- Collaborating with Meewasin's educational and public outreach programming to increase conservation, ecology, and natural and cultural resource awareness.
- Developing a program to support green infrastructure projects through community and commercial grants or incentives.
- Collaborating with the University of Saskatchewan, the school divisions and other stakeholders around green space management.

Prioritizing sites, assessing risk, and developing management plans or restoration work for natural areas.

CURRENT STATUS

In 2020-2021, the Green Infrastructure Strategy is advancing in two ways:

- Preparing an Implementation Plan to define specific programs and resourcing requirements that advance the Strategy and align with multi-year budgeting.

- Progressing short-term initiatives identified in the Strategy, with a focus on the five items identified for the Sustainability Department's 2020-2021 workplan in the February 2020 information report.

COVID-19 related delays in hiring meant that preparation of the Implementation Plan and progress towards short-term initiatives did not start until October 2020.

Work now is underway on both the Implementation Plan for the Strategy's programs, and the short-term initiatives. More details are available in Appendix 2 – Green Infrastructure Strategy 2020-2021. Regular reporting on Green Infrastructure Strategy implementation progress is planned to begin in 2022.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

Preliminary business cases have been prepared for 2022-2023 in advance of the upcoming budget deliberations. These have been prepared in conjunction with the Implementation Plan to identify the scope of work and resources required to advance the Green Infrastructure Strategy in 2022 and 2023. The Implementation Plan, which will be completed in Q3-4 2021, will provide additional detail on the specific activities in each business case. An overview of preliminary business cases has been provided in Appendix 3 – 2022-2023 Preliminary Business Cases and Resourcing Needs, including background, scope, budget, benefits, and risks.

Operating Program Considerations

2020-2021 green infrastructure implementation has progressed through capital funding, which will be fully spent by mid-2022. To consider it an ongoing civic program, sustainment of green infrastructure work has been presented as a growth item in the operating budget for 2022-2023.

This dedicated staff resource is proposed to develop, sustain, and operate the Green Infrastructure Program. They will complete some project management for capital projects in the plan; develop partnerships with the community, research institutions, City departments, and other levels of government; oversee communications to increase awareness of green infrastructure; provide subject matter expertise for other departments; coordinate external funding opportunities for capital projects; coordinate and complete annual monitoring and reporting; oversee data and studies; and refine the 10-year work portfolio including business cases for multi-year budget submissions. The continuation of a dedicated \$10,000 for green infrastructure in the Environmental Cash Grant is also included in this scope.

Proposed Capital Initiatives

For the purposes of near-term implementation and budget planning, 2022-2023 Green Infrastructure actions have been grouped into business case initiatives as follows:

- *Natural Areas Management*: a program to protect, manage, and restore natural assets and ecosystems in the Green Network.
- *Grey to Green*: a program to increase the adoption of green infrastructure in urban areas, integrated and alongside traditional infrastructure assets.

- *Growing Community*: a program to encourage and support community engagement and stewardship of the Green Network.
- *Sustainable Food*: a program to lead to a sustainable and just local food system through increased urban agriculture opportunities in the Green Network, demonstration projects and policy.

More details are available in Appendix 2.

Meewasin Opportunities

Coordination with Meewasin on upcoming projects is underway. This includes exploring collaboration opportunities in preliminary business cases such as Natural Areas Management and Growing Community; and coordinating on upcoming external funding opportunities. Details are described in Appendix 4 – Opportunities to Collaborate with Meewasin in Green Infrastructure Implementation.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct financial implications by receiving this information report. All operating and capital requests related to this report will be subject to the 2022-2023 business planning and budget process.

Operating Cost Summary and Funding

This report outlines the Green Infrastructure Strategy programs that would require resources to progress operating programs or capital initiatives. Further detail is included in Appendix 3.

The 2022-2023 operating costs outlined in this report are:

Green Infrastructure Strategy Short-Term Actions (2021-2023) - Operating	2022 Funding (\$)	2023 Funding (\$)
Dedicated staff resource to oversee Green Infrastructure Strategy Operations*.	\$135,000	\$135,000
Marketing and Communications	\$20,000	\$20,000
Environmental Cash Grant	\$10,000	\$10,000
TOTAL	\$165,000	\$165,000

* Includes salary, overhead, and burden for management and department administration.

Operating funding for program sustainment would need to be sourced from the millrate as a “growth” position as there currently are no income generating opportunities in the Green Infrastructure program. Should this operating item not be approved, a capital request would be included in the Growing Community initiative to sustain the program for 2022-2023.

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Project Capital Cost Summary

The scope outlined in the business cases for the capital projects is used to define the capital costs for their implementation (Appendix 3). A summary of the 2022-2023 capital projects are as follows:

Table 1: Green infrastructure projects and funding

Business Case	Anticipated Deliverables	2021 Funding (\$)	2022 Funding (\$)	2023 Funding (\$)	Source
Growing Community	Education programming about the Green Network				Unfunded
	Natural area education program			\$250,000	
	School education program				
	Street Garden Program expansion	\$51,500			Sustainability Reserve Recommendation
	If Operating is not approved – base program operations		\$165,000	\$165,000	Unfunded
Sustainable Food	Food Pilots #1		\$25,000	\$175,000	Sustainability Reserve Recommendation
	Food Pilots #2		\$55,000	\$145,000	Waste Minimization Reserve Recommendation
Natural Areas Management	Natural Areas Management Plan template and pilots		\$595,000	\$405,000	Unfunded
	Natural Areas Management Plan template and pilots	\$240,000			P2263
	Program development				
	Contract work with the Municipal Natural Assets Initiative	\$2,500			P2263
	Blairmore NAS Field Study	\$30,000			P2263
	Traditional Knowledge Assessment	\$75,000	\$150,000		Sustainability Reserve Recommendation

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Grey to Green	Feasibility study of green infrastructure financing				
	Implementation of early priorities and pilots		\$175,000	\$175,000	Unfunded
	Asset Management coordination				
TOTAL		\$400,000	\$1,165,000	\$1,315,000	\$2,890,000

Coordination between City departments has been ongoing over the course of 2020-2021. Opportunities have been identified for some shared responsibilities for Natural Areas between Planning and Development and Sustainability which is reflected in the 2022 and 2023 capital cost.

Capital Funding Summary

While there are numerous unfunded implementation projects for the Green Infrastructure Strategy for the 2022-2023 budget cycle, some may be eligible for Reserve for Capital Expenditures, Gas Tax Reallocation, Waste Minimization Reserve, MMSW, or external funding. An approval report is being prepared for EU&CS in August, which will recommend use of the Sustainability Reserve funding for 2021 and define projects for consideration at the 2022-2023 business plan and budget meeting. Tables 1 and 2 provide further details on Strategy projects and funding.

Table 2: Green infrastructure funding summary

Funding Source	2021	2022	2023	Total
Unfunded	0	\$935,000	\$995,000	\$1,930,000
Waste Minimization Reserve Recommendation		\$55,000	\$145,000	\$200,000
Sustainability Reserve Recommendation	\$126,500	\$175,000	\$175,000	\$476,500
Scope into P2263	\$272,500	0	0	\$272,500
Total	\$400,000	\$1,165,000	\$ 1,315,000	\$2,890,000

Table 2 does not include the funding detailed in November 2019 through the 2021-2022 Business Plan and budget deliberations specified for the Green Infrastructure Strategy (P2390)

Federal Funding Opportunities

In the 2021 Federal Budget, a Natural Infrastructure Fund is proposed:

“Budget 2021 proposes to provide \$200 million over three years, starting in 2021-22, to Infrastructure Canada to establish a Natural Infrastructure Fund to support natural and hybrid infrastructure projects. This would help to improve well-being, mitigate the impacts of climate change, and prevent costly natural events.

Budget 2021 proposes to provide \$2.3 billion over five years, starting in 2021-22, with \$100.5 million in remaining amortization, to Environment and Climate Change Canada, Parks Canada, and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans to:

- *Conserve up to 1 million square kilometers more land and inland waters to achieve Canada's 25 per cent protected area by 2025 target, including through national wildlife areas, and Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas.*
- *Create thousands of jobs in nature conservation and management.*
- *Accelerate new provincial and territorial protected areas. Support Indigenous Guardians.*
- *Take action to prevent priority species at imminent risk of disappearing, including through partnerships with Indigenous peoples."*

Depending on external funding availability, including the above federal funds, certain deliverables within the business cases could proceed earlier. Go early projects could be considered ahead of the timelines stated in the appendices. Seed funding or matching funding is frequently a requirement for external funding opportunities.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Natural Areas

At its meeting on March 22, 2021, City Council received the Inquiry on Swale Education, Communications and Partnerships report as information and resolved in part that:

"The reporting on implementation plan for the Green Infrastructure Strategy include specific consideration of the collaborative work of administrative departments to protect the Swale and Small Swale as important and valued natural assets in our city."

While this near-term implementation plan identifies work and preliminary funding needs for natural areas management, further analysis is required to determine the most appropriate processes and assess the feasibility, risks, and benefits of applying specific new natural area protection mechanisms in the Saskatoon context; determine any impacts on City operations, external partners such as Meewasin, landowners, and other stakeholders; prioritize sites for protection; and engage with the public, landowners, and other stakeholders.

A complete response to the above motion is planned for future Strategy reporting. This will include specific recommendations for protecting natural areas and the collaborative efforts of administrative departments and stakeholders.

COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES

Communications will be planned and implemented for both the Implementation Plan Engagement as well as for the programs and projects that will come from the Implementation Plan. Communication and marketing activities will be used to increase awareness, gain participation, and change behaviours.

NEXT STEPS

Engagement is underway on the full Implementation Plan, which is anticipated to be completed and presented to City Council in 2021 Q3. Regular reporting on Green Infrastructure Strategy implementation progress is planned to begin in 2022.

Development, coordination and input of operational and capital planning will continue for deliberation in the 2022-2023 multi-year budget.

APPENDICES

1. Green Infrastructure Strategy Actions and Initiatives
2. Green Infrastructure Strategy 2020-2021
3. 2022-2023 Preliminary Business Cases and Resourcing Needs
4. Opportunities to Collaborate with Meewasin in Green Infrastructure Strategy Implementation

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