



Legislation Text

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Utility Relief Grant

Presented by: Terra Shmyr, Financial Operations Controller - Revenue Services & Utilities, Financial Services and Information Technology

RECOMMENDED MOTION(S)

That the following postponed motion be approved:

(PM-22-003)

1. That the Utility Relief Grant program become a permanent service level effective January 1, 2022 with a base budget to be set at \$24,000 and to be funded through utility rates.
2. That any unused funds from the initial \$200,000 approved by Council be uncommitted within the Stabilization fund at the end of 2021.

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To provide Council with a recommendation to include the Utility Relief Grant as a permanent program.

ALIGNMENT TO PRIORITIES IN COUNCIL'S STRATEGIC PLAN

Strategic Priority #7: Community Recovery - Post COVID-19

The program provides financial support for qualifying residents, and there may be an increased demand during COVID-19.

ALIGNMENT TO LEVELS OF SERVICE DELIVERY

N/A

ALIGNMENT TO COUNCIL DIRECTION OR MANDATORY STATUTORY PROVISION

On December 1, 2014 Council passed the following motions:

(C547-2014)

That a one-time withdrawal of \$200,000 be made available in 2015 from the Stabilization Reserve to support the creation of a Utility Relief Grant aimed at providing financial support to individuals with fixed or low-incomes in paying their City of St. Albert Utility Bills; and that Administration bring forward to Council recommendations on options for the administration and eligibility criteria for the Utility Grant by Q1 2015.

On March 16, 2015, the following motion was moved and subsequently postponed by Motion C141-2015:

(C140-2015)

That the City of St. Albert implement a Utility Relief Grant program, on a one year trial basis, effective October 2015, with a capped allocation from the Stabilization Reserve of \$200,000;

That the City Manager be authorized to enter into a one year agreement with the Community Village for the purposes of administration of the program; and

That Administration report to Council on the outcome and analytics of the Utility Relief Grant within 3 months of the completion of the one year trial program.

On March 16, 2015 Council passed the following resolution:

(C141-2015)

That Motion C140-2015 be postponed and come back prior to April 30, 2015

On April 27, 2015 Council passed the following resolution:

(C219-2015)

That the City of St. Albert implement a Utility Relief Grant program, on a one year trial basis, effective October 2015, with a capped allocation from the Stabilization Reserve of \$200,000.

That the City Manager be authorized to enter into a one year agreement with the Community Village for the purposes of administration of the program.

That Administration report to Council on the outcome and analytics of the Utility Relief Grant within 3 months of the completion of the one year trial program.

On October 3, 2016 Council passed the following motions:

(AR-16-130)

1. That the City of St. Albert extend the Utility Relief Grant pilot program to August 31, 2017 and the remaining funding of approximately \$166,000 originally approved by resolution C140-2015 be used to financially support this extension.

2. That the Utility Relief Grant amount be increased to \$200 (from \$150) for single family residential and to \$75 (from \$50) for multi-unit residential.
3. That the City Manager be authorized to extend the agreement with Community Village to August 31, 2017 for the purposes of administering the program.
4. That Administration report back to Council in Q4 2017 with outcome and analytic data related to the Utility Relief Grant.

On November 20, 2017 Council passed the following motions:

(AR-17-422)

That the utility grant relief program outcome decision recommendations 1,2 and 4 are postponed until the current approved funding is exhausted.

That the City Manager be authorized to enter into a service agreement with St. Albert Community Village for purposes of administering applications for the Utility Relief Grant.

BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION

In 2015 Council established a pilot program to offer a utility relief grant to low income households in St. Albert. An initial investment of \$200,000 was approved from the Stabilization Fund. At the direction of Council in November 2017, the program was approved to continue as a pilot until such time as the \$200,000 program budget was fully expended. Upon full expenditure of the budget, Council would decide whether or not to continue the program on a permanent basis.

The Utility Relief Grant is offered as a single payment grant, once per calendar year. The amount of the grant is \$200 for single family/duplex type properties and \$75 for multi-family properties. In order to qualify for the grant the following eligibility criteria must be met:

1. Total annual household income must be at or below the current CNIT (Core Needs Income Threshold).

FAMILY STATUS

CNIT THRESHOLD-2021

Individual with no dependants	36,500
Couple with no dependants	42,000
Couple/Individual with 1 dependant	52,500
Couple/Individual with 2 dependants	62,500
Couple/Individual with 3+ dependants	65,500

2. Over 18 years of age
3. Lived in St. Albert a minimum of 6 months with a fixed address and must be the homeowner or lease holder

4. Must be a Canadian Citizen, Permanent Resident or Landed Immigrant

The program has not been utilized by households as much as anticipated; therefore, there is approximately \$56,000 remaining of the initial investment. Complete program statistics are attached to this agenda report.

The recommended budget will support approximately 100 households per year as well as cover the contracted administration costs. The intent would be to develop a regularly scheduled communication strategy to ensure awareness of the grant remains high.

STAKEHOLDER COMMUNICATIONS OR ENGAGEMENT

Community Village is supportive of the continuation of this program and has agreed to continue its administration.

IMPLICATIONS OF RECOMMENDATION(S)

Financial:

If approved, \$24,000 will be added to the utilities operating budget starting in 2022 to support this program on an annual basis and will be amended annually to reflect demand. Any funding remaining from the originally approved \$200,000 at the end of 2021 will be uncommitted within the stabilization reserve.

Legal / Risk:

A contract with Community Village for ongoing administration of the program will be required if approved by Council.

Program or Service:

Utility Relief Grant service will be a permanent program.

Organizational:

None at this time.

ALTERNATIVES AND IMPLICATIONS CONSIDERED

1. Discontinue the program at the end of 2021 and return unallocated funds to the Stabilization Reserve.
2. Continue running as a temporarily funded (pilot) program until the remaining funding is exhausted and bring back to Council for further decision.

Report Date: June 8, 2021

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