Save Our Seine River Environment Inc.

December 5th2017

His Worship Mayor Brian Bowman, Councillors and guests

Re: Request for increase in Executive Director budget allocation for Save Our Seine.

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Save Our Seine and volunteers I thank you for providing me with the opportunity to provide feedback regarding an important item in the City of Winnipeg budget. That being the $30,000.00 grant allocated to SOS for the hiring of an Executive Director. My purpose is to share with you the reasons why we are making an appeal to increase the grant to the Executive Director position of Save Our Seine. Why are we asking for an increase in a time of budget cuts and greater challenges?

The same amount of funding has been granted to us for the past three years and as the position has evolved in scope we now believe that this position deserves an increase.

This grant has permitted the ED to not only increase the profile of the organisation but also to add to the visibility and the value of the Seine River Greenway to the community and to the city of Winnipeg. During the past three years the amount of the grant has remained at $30,000.00.

Rain Garden Project

Two years ago our ED initiated a rain garden project that is still evolving with each growing season. The development of the rain garden in St.Vital has brought together stakeholders, dedicated volunteers and students of the community. It is but one example of the leadership of our ED who has put into practice a collaborative approach involving these groups. Located at the corner of St.Anne's Rd. and Fermor Av. the area has seen the planting of tall grass, native plants, trees and flowers. Over 600 plants in all. Classes of students gather with their teachers to learn about the removal of toxic products from the soil before the water reaches the Seine River, the Red River and eventually Lake Winnipeg. This is a project that could serve as a model for other locations in the city.

A $5,000.00 grant from the province of Manitoba has evolved into a one hundred thousand ($100,000.00) project. Our ED has been instrumental in fostering cooperation with an environmental architecture firm, a grocery store chain, Manitoba Echo-Network, a financial institution, schools and community members.

Green Team

One of the CORE activities of our organisation is the work of our Green Team that keeps the river navigable and free of debris and fallen trees most of the summer. Under the guidance of our ED the quality and quantity of the work of the team has greatly improved. The team members are learning to identify plants and support our effort of invasive plant removal with the assistance of volunteers from the community. These activities are continued on a smaller scale by volunteers after the Green Team schedule comes to a conclusion in mid August. The Green team is well respected and interacts with the community on a daily basis. A good indicator of leadership skills development occurs as regular green team members become team leaders and eventually coordinators of the team the following year.

This occurs because our Executive Director develops effective team building skills amongst team members.

Community Engagement and Advocacy

During the past ten years there has been a significant increase in residential development adjacent to the Seine River in South St.Vital. This has led to a larger number of citizens using nature trails and adjacent green spaces for outdoor activities. An increase in pedestrians and cyclists means more information needs to be shared regarding the conservation of fragile ecosystems, fauna and flora. We thank the city of Winnipeg for the informative, bilingual signage that has been installed in Bois-de-Esprits in South St.Vital and also on the Gabriel Dufault Trail adjacent to John Bruce Park. Please note that during the past few years there has been a significant increase in canoe and kayaking activity on the entire length of the Seine River. More outdoor activity is a positive development in this age of child obesity and increasing health challenges due to lack of physical activity.

Our ED publishes monthly articles in the local Lance aimed at informing the public about proper trail use, respect for pedestrians, conservation issues, the value of wildlife in the forest and safety along the river. Facebook and our web site are also tools for reaching out to the public and informing citizens about current benefits and assets of the Greenway. Please visit us on Facebook.

Our Adopt a River program in the schools helps young citizens understand the value of green spaces, the existing fragile echo-systems and understanding of the value of wildlife. This program provides a link between the parents and the school activities along the Greenway. Our ED provides expertise to schools as her schedule allows it. We would like to do more in this area.

Public engagement reports place a high enough priority on parks, green spaces and waterways to justify an increase of funds allocated to this area. Green spaces and rivers continue to be valued by citizens across the city. That is another reason we advocate for an increase in the amount of ED grant in proportion to the interest shown in the survey.

Conclusion

SOS recognizes the immense challenges facing the city of Winnipeg in its decisions regarding the budget. Unfortunately these challenges have become greater due to funding cuts from the Province of Manitoba. Our answer is more attractive communities, more active and involved citizens. SOS helps provide this with the leadership of our Executive Director. It is with this in mind that we are asking the city to consider an increase of our Executive Director grant from $30,000.00 per year to $35,000.00 per year. In our opinion that this is not a large amount and it would make a significant difference to our organisation.

Thank you for your attention and for the opportunity to speak to this topic.

Denis Gautron (President, Save Our Seine River Environment Inc.)

Vision: A sustainable and protected 26 kilometre Seine River Greenway that provides a healthy habitat for vegetation and wildlife and contributes to the quality of life of all citizens.