Minutes – Executive Policy Committee – November 13, 2024

Report – Standing Policy Committee on Community Services – November 4, 2024

Item No. 6 Proactive Cleanup of Needle Debris and Weapons in City Parks

EXECUTIVE POLICY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

The Executive Policy Committee concurred in the recommendation of the Standing Policy Committee on Community Services and submitted the following to Council:

1. That this report be received as information.

2. That the Province of Manitoba be requested to put in place a needle exchange program within the City of Winnipeg to encourage a value being placed on used needles.

3. That the Proper Officers of the City be authorized to do all things necessary to fulfill the intent of the foregoing.

Report – Standing Policy Committee on Community Services – November 4, 2024

DECISION MAKING HISTORY:

Moved by Councillor Santos,

That the recommendation of the Standing Policy Committee on Community Services be concurred in and forwarded to Council.

Carried

Councillor Gilroy, Daniel McIntyre Ward, submitted a communication with respect to the matter.

STANDING COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

On November 4, 2024, the Standing Policy Committee on Community Services concurred in the recommendation of the Winnipeg Public Service, with the following amendment:

- Add the following new Recommendations:

  "2. That the Province of Manitoba be requested to put in place a needle exchange program within the City of Winnipeg to encourage a value being placed on used needles.

  3. That the Proper Officers of the City be authorized to do all things necessary to fulfill the intent of the foregoing."

and submitted the matter to the Executive Policy Committee and Council.

David Grant submitted a communication in support of the matter.

On September 10, 2024, the Standing Policy Committee on Community Services concurred in the recommendation and granted an extension of time of up to 60 days for the Winnipeg Public Service to report back on the following:

1. Policy options and associated cost implications to cleanup dangerous debris inside City of Winnipeg parks.

2. That the Proper Officers of the City be authorized to do all things necessary to fulfill the intent of the foregoing.

Report – Standing Policy Committee on Community Services – November 4, 2024

DECISION MAKING HISTORY (continued):

COUNCIL DECISION:

On April 25, 2024, Council concurred in the recommendation of the Standing Policy Committee on Community Services and adopted the following:

1. That the Winnipeg Public Service be directed to report back in 120 days to the Standing Policy Committee on Community Services with policy options and associated cost implications to cleanup dangerous debris inside City of Winnipeg parks.

2. That the Proper Officers of the City be authorized to do all things necessary to fulfill the intent of the foregoing.

On February 22, 2024, Council ruled automatic referral of the following motion to the Standing Policy Committee on Community Services:

Moved by Councillor Gilroy,
Seconded by Councillor Chambers,

WHEREAS within the defined higher needs areas of the City, community members and daycares have been finding weapons (knives, machetes, etc) and discarded needles littered around city parks, playgrounds and tot lots, which is creating an unsafe environment for children;

AND WHEREAS discarded needles are a bio hazard and can cause injury to people who find them;

AND WHEREAS parks, playgrounds and tot lots are valuable community assets and are essential to the health and well-being of all Winnipeggers;

AND WHEREAS the proactive cleanup of any needle debris and weapons in City of Winnipeg parks, playgrounds and tot lots will alleviate the strain on 311 and the concerns around safety from residents and children using the parks;

Report – Standing Policy Committee on Community Services – November 4, 2024

DECISION MAKING HISTORY (continued):

COUNCIL DECISION (continued):

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Public Service be directed to report back to the Standing Policy Committee in 60 days on the following:

1. Creation of a policy for the proactive cleanup of needle debris and weapons, prioritising all parks, playgrounds and tot lots located within a 1km radius of a daycare within the higher needs areas of the City.

2. Potential partnerships with community organizations that may have the infrastructure and capacity to assist.

3. Options for provincial funding to help offset the cleanup costs.

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

Title: Proactive Cleanup of Needle Debris and Weapons in City Parks

Critical Path: Standing Policy Committee on Community Services

AUTHORIZATION

Author	Department Head	CFO	CAO
D. Domke	J. Berezowsky	T. Graham	S. Armbruster, Interim CAO

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Needles and weapons found in parks are an increasing concern for Winnipeggers.

On February 22, 2024, a motion from Council was automatically referred to the Standing Policy Committee of Community Services. The motion was supported by the local Councillor and an ad hoc group of inner-city daycare operators. The Public Service was directed to report back with policy options and associated cost implications to clean up dangerous debris inside City of Winnipeg parks.

The service level for needles, sharps, and weapons has two components: monitoring and response. Monitoring is currently taking place by staff already while providing other services (such as gardening and litter pick-up). The Public Service is also made aware of discarded needles via resident-initiated 311 service requests. Staff immediately remove any needles found during monitoring or via a service request.

This report outlines two options to improve this level of service:

- Hiring and deployment of two crews to monitor park locations from April to October;
- Hiring and deployment of two crews to monitor park locations year-round; two crews from April to October and reducing to one crew from November to March.

The estimated annual cost for the first option is $193,704, while the second option is $262,884. Additional operating budget including Full Time Equivalents (FTEs) would be required for both options to be able to provide this new service level.

The report is presented for information only; further action would require referral to the operational budget process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That this report be received as information.

REASON FOR THE REPORT

On April 25, 2024, Council directed the Winnipeg Public Service to report back in 120 days to the Standing Policy Committee on Community Services with policy options and associated cost implications to cleanup dangerous debris inside City of Winnipeg parks.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS

As this report is received as information, there are no direct financial implications. If either Option 1 or 2 is selected, additional operating funding, including FTEs would be required.

HISTORY/DISCUSSION

On April 25, 2024, Council directed the Winnipeg Public Service to report back to the Standing Policy Committee on Community Services with policy options and associated cost implications to cleanup dangerous debris inside City of Winnipeg parks in 120 days.

The service level for needles, sharps, and weapons has two components: monitoring and response. Monitoring is currently completed passively by Public Works staff while providing other services, such as gardening and litter pick-up. Staff working in the downtown area maintain logs to note the location and number of items found when they encounter applicable hazards during the course of their maintenance activities. Monitoring is also completed by the public and reported as 311 service requests (SRs). Over the past five years, the average number of SRs received per year is 103, with a high of 162 cases in 2019. The current response rate to both passive and reported cases is immediate. When staff find items during their maintenance activities they are removed immediately, and when items are reported through 311, the concern is prioritized and staff are dispatched to remove the items immediately. While the frequency of needle cases is reduced in winter, needles are still found.

The Public Works Department installed nine sharps containers in 2018 at various sites of concern as a pilot project. Presently, these boxes are now monitored and maintained by Public Works and can be found in Central Park, Joseph Royal Park, Mayfair Park East, Gerald Lynch Park, Donald Street Bridge, Maryland St Bridge, Spence Street End, St John’s Park, and Louise Bridge.

Street Connections also works in the community (from a harm reduction perspective) through the operation of a mobile van that provides nursing supports and distributes needles to the public. When doing so, sharps containers are offered which can be used to return needles to their facility or mobile unit. Street Connections also offers needles and containers to over 50 organizations and supports 12 community patrol groups who perform needle collection. They have also installed 12 needle collection boxes for public needle disposal which they locate to areas of concern.

Both the City’s sharp container boxes and Street Connections report their needle collection service is not very effective at collecting used needles.

Daycare facilities near Central Park have reported finding needles within play areas and have begun to establish their own inspection process prior to allowing their children to access the areas.

The concerns reported to the City suggest a gap in the monitoring component of the service. While the response to instances is currently immediate, some cases may be going undetected by the existing passive monitoring completed by staff. To meet that service level, a proactive monitoring program for visiting parks would be required. Given trends in response and feedback from staff, this program could be directed towards locations of high concern where staff would inspect around play spaces, benches, and gardens. Needle collection in active encampments will not be considered by this crew for personal safety reasons.The priority park locations for this program are listed in Appendix 1.

Two options were considered:

Option 1: Seasonal Crews – April to October

Two crews consisting of four staff with two trucks would monitor the park locations listed in Appendix 1. In order to ensure weekend coverage, one crew would work from Sunday to Thursday and one crew would work from Tuesday to Saturday. The goal of the crew would be to address each site daily. The estimated annual cost for this option is $193,704.

Option 2: Year Round Crews

Two crews consisting of four staff with two trucks would monitor the park locations from April to October and reduce to one crew consisting of two staff and one truck to monitor the park locations from November to March. The winter crew would monitor on a reduced cycle due to lower incidences of needles. The estimated annual cost for this option is $262,884.

If either Option is adopted, additional operating funding would be required to offer this service. See Appendix 2 for details of the cost estimates.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Financial Impact Statement Date: August 27, 2024

Project Name:
Proactive Cleanup of Needle Debris and Weapons in City Parks

COMMENTS:

As this report is for information purposes, there are no financial implications.

Implementation of the options as outlined in the report would require an increase to the department's staff complement ranging from 2.33 FTEs to 3.17 FTEs as well as additional operating budget/Mill Rate support of ranging from $193,704 to $262,884 per year. Currently, there is no approved budget and this service level enhancement will not proceed without additional budget.

J. Ruby, 2024-08-28
J. Ruby CPA,CA
Manager of Finance & Administration

CONSULTATION

This Report has been prepared in consultation with: N/A

OURWINNIPEG POLICY ALIGNMENT

Goal: Good Health and Well-Being
4.9 Inclusive Public Places: Provide and promote the amenities, and the design and maintenance standards, necessary to ensure accessible, safe and sanitary conditions in gathering spaces frequented by the public.

WINNIPEG CLIMATE ACTION PLAN ALIGNMENT

Consideration was given as to whether this report connects to the Winnipeg Climate Action Plan (CAP), and it was determined that the CAP is not applicable to this specific report.

WINNIPEG POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY ALIGNMENT

The information and recommendations presented in this report align with and advance the Winnipeg Poverty Reduction Strategy (2021 – 2031) as follows:

Goal #4 - Community Well-Being Supports for those in Greatest Need are Increase.

SUBMITTED BY

Department: Public Works
Division: Parks and Open Space
Prepared by: Karl Thordarson/Dave Domke
Date: August 28, 2024

Attachments:
Appendix 1 Proactive Needle Monitoring Locations

Appendix 2 Estimated Proactive Cleanup Crew Costs