

DATE: April 9, 2024

TO: MAYOR AND COUNCIL

NAME AND TITLE: Blake McIntosh, Director of Civic Operations

SUBJECT: City of Prince George Fruit Tree Removal Incentive Program

ATTACHMENT(S): None

RECOMMENDATION(S):

THAT Council RECEIVES FOR INFORMATION the report dated April 9, 2024 from the Director of Civic Operations, titled “City of Prince George Fruit Tree Removal Incentive Program”.

PURPOSE:

As directed by Council, to provide information on a potential new program that may assist in reducing bear attractants provided by residential fruit bearing trees. Removal of fruit trees on private property would support reducing bear interactions within the City. Council may also consider removing City owned and maintained fruit trees within select municipal boulevards.

BACKGROUND:

Dryer than normal seasonal conditions and earlier transitions from winter to spring have impacted local natural food sources for bears in recent years. In the search for food and easy calories, urban residential fruit trees have become an easy source of food in the summer. As a result of significant bear interactions in 2023, Council directed administration to investigate what other municipalities may do to incentivize fruit tree removal on private property. The City also has a number of fruit bearing trees located throughout select City boulevards that could be removed as part of this initiative using standard operational funding.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:

The research and incentive program support the environmental leadership and climate action sustainability pillar and commitment to reducing human-wildlife conflicts. A fruit tree removal program supports the work of the city to reduce conflict between bears and people in our municipal boundaries. This program provides an opportunity to enhance quality of life, foster community pride, safety and be responsive to community needs.

DISCUSSION

When bears become habituated to a specific food source, they’re more likely to return to the area to access the much-needed calories. Fruit trees are often one of the sources of urban bear attraction. Relocation is often unsuccessful, and hibernation can also be delayed if food sources are available.

A fruit tree removal incentive program could be available for individuals who own a home or property located within the City of Prince George. Research on other municipal programs, like the Town of Canmore, involves funding that is 100% of the pretax cost of removal of the fruit tree(s) by an arborist or tree removal service up to \$500/property. Programs are first come first served while funds are available.

Eligible residents would apply through an online form to indicate interest in the program. The approval process would include confirmation by City staff that the tree is on private property and is of a species that is considered bear attractant. Upon receiving approval, the resident would contact a licensed arborist or tree removal service to safely remove the fruit tree from the property. Once the fruit tree has been removed, applicants would contact the City to inform of the work being completed. City staff would then follow up with an onsite inspection to ensure the tree was removed properly and make arrangements to receive a copy of the invoice for reimbursement. The program would limit residents to one tree per year per property up to \$500. The program would not cover a replacement tree or subsequent landscaping.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS:

Should Council wish to proceed with this initiative, Administration recommends a budget of \$10,000 in 2024 and an annual \$10,000 added to the parks operating budget to fund a fruit tree removal program within City of Prince George municipal boundaries on private land.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION:

Prince George and the surrounding area is a natural habitat for bears given the city is situated along two major rivers and surrounded by forests. Bears spend much of their time searching for food, especially in the spring - when they emerge from hibernation - and in the fall when they can consume up to 25,000 calories a day. Unfortunately, bear interactions in Prince George are becoming more common due to a recent reduction in natural forage. To assist alleviating urban bear interactions, the voluntary removal of fruit trees on private property through a municipal incentivized tree removal program could reduce safety concerns and euthanasia of habituated bears. The removal of City boulevard fruit trees in select locations would also support the reduction of urban bear interactions and habituation.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED:

Blake McIntosh, Director of Civic Operations

PREPARED BY: R. McConkey & B. McIntosh

APPROVED:

Walter Babicz, City Manager

Meeting Date: 2024/05/06