

Report

City of Merritt
REGULAR Council Meeting
September 15, 2020

File Number: 1854.40

To: Sean Smith, Chief Administrative Officer
From: Will George, Economic Development & Tourism Manager
Date: August 27, 2020
Subject: 2019 Rural Dividend Fund Grant Project Change

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT Council adopts the staff recommended changes to the RDF grant application projects,

And

THAT Council directs staff to apply for the staff recommended changes with the Province of BC.

Background:

On August 13th, 2019, Council provided a resolution of support to apply for \$100,000 for the 6th intake of the BC Rural Dividend Fund Grant Program (RDF). On March 31, 2020, the City of Merritt received funding approval for a successful grant application. The RDF was approved for the City of Merritt for \$100,000 to complete the below projects.

- \$20,000 Community Grant Writer
 - A community grant writer had been previously hired for a 1-year pilot program starting June 2019 to assist the City of Merritt and Nicola Valley non-profits. This funding would continue the program into 2021.
- \$10,000 Merritt Youth Entrepreneurship Program
 - The Merritt Youth Entrepreneurship Program operated in both 2018 and 2019 from Rural Dividend grant funding. The City of Merritt, Community Futures Nicola Valley and other community partners have worked together

to introduce youth in the Nicola Valley to new business start-up ideas. This funding was allocated to continue the program for 2020- 2021.

- \$20,000 Tourism Co-Ordinator Position
 - The City of Merritt currently has a tourism social media coordinator on contract to assist with implementing the Tourism Strategic Business Plan. This funding was to continue the contract position.
- \$10,000 Tourism Attraction Video
 - The City of Merritt had scheduled to hire a video production company to complete 6 tourism attraction promotional videos for the community. These videos would be showcased on a variety of platforms targeting new guests to the Nicola Valley.
- \$20,000 Information Signage
 - These funds were scheduled to be used to create and implement additional directional signage in Merritt to assist with the City of Merritt Signage Strategic Plan.
 - During the 2015- 2018 Merritt Business Walks, business owners identified additional signage in the community as one of the top three areas to improve on. This feedback along with strategic plans in place for increased signage helps guide this project forward.
- \$20,000 Merritt and Nicola Valley Trail Co-Ordinator Position
 - With a mandate for “Enhancing, expanding, promoting trails in Merritt and the Nicola Valley”. This funding was scheduled to create a new position fully funded by the grant for a 1-year pilot.

Due to COVID-19 and new priority projects, City staff have discussed requesting to change the grant projects to the below.

- \$40,000 Community Grant Writer
 - This program would continue from 2019 but increase the hours for the Grant Writer position. City of Merritt staff and local non-profits have expressed an interest to continue this program for the term of 2020 - 2021.
- \$0 Merritt Youth Entrepreneurship Program
 - This program could be potentially funded through community business support. The program is currently operated by Community Futures Nicola Valley.
- \$20,000 Tourism Co-Ordinator Position
 - There are many projects in the City of Merritt's Economic Development Action Plan, Nicola Valley Tourism Plan and other related plans which have tourism initiatives identified to be completed.
- \$0 Tourism Attraction Video

- In 2020 the City of Merritt via the Tourism Merritt channels would utilize previous videos. New tourism attraction videos would continue in 2021.
- \$10,000 Information Signage
 - To complete the information signage in downtown Merritt, trailhead markers and directional signage. With the reduction of funding, City signage would be prioritized in a phased approach.
- \$30,000 Business Improvement Association (BIA)
 - Hiring a consultant to work with the City of Merritt and local businesses to explore options of a Merritt BIA. There are currently over fifty-eight BIAs operating in BC representing 60,000+ businesses.
 - BIA legislation provides a special charge to be levied on each property within the designated area. This can either be through the Assessment (mil rate percentage) or Frontage (fixed sum per linear front footage).
 - If a BIA was established, the City of Merritt would collect the levy on all commercial properties within the proposed boundary and provide the funds to the BIA to operate and complete City-approved projects.
 - There has been an interest from Council, staff and local businesses to establish a BIA in Merritt for numerous years. This opportunity could be explored with additional capacity focused on the needs of the business community and providing education to community members on the differences between BIA and other business support structures.
 - Council could also directly contribute funds to support BIA initiatives, in addition to collecting the special levy.

City staff are seeking Council direction on the RDF Project changes.

Options / discussion

1. THAT Council adopts the staff recommended changes to the RDF grant application projects, and

THAT Council directs staff to apply for the staff recommended changes with the Province of BC.

2. THAT Council adopts alternative RDF project changes for a total of \$100,000.
3. THAT Council receives this report for information.

Financial / Risk Implications:

Additional staff time would be required to change the Rural Dividend Grant projects and implement the recommended action items.

Others Consulted:

- Manuel Olguin, Community Futures Nicola Valley, Business Development Officer

Attachments:

- 2019 Completed Rural Dividend Grant Application

Respectfully submitted,

Will George
Economic Development, Communications and Tourism Manager