

Subject: Conservation Authorities 2024 Levies

File Number: ACS2024-FCS-FSP-0006

Report to Finance and Corporate Services Committee on 7 May 2024

and Council 15 May 2024

Submitted on April 26, 2024 by Cyril Rogers, Interim General Manager and Chief Financial Officer, Finance and Corporate Services Department

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Ward: Citywide

Objet : Prélèvements de 2024 des Offices de Protection de la Nature

Numéro de dossier : ACS2024-FCS-FSP-0006

Rapport au Comité des finances et des services organisationnels

le 7 mai 2024

et au Conseil le 15 mai 2024

Soumis le 26 avril 2024 par Cyril Rogers, Directeur général par intérim et chef des finances, Direction générale des finances et des services organisationnels

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REPORT RECOMMENDATION

That the Finance and Corporate Services Committee recommend that Council approve the 2024 levies for the Rideau Valley, South Nation and Mississippi Valley Conservation Authorities as presented in Document 1, and as outlined in this report.

RECOMMANDATION DU RAPPORT

Que le Comité des finances et des services organisationnels recommande au Conseil municipal d'approuver les prélèvements de 2024 pour l'Office de protection de la nature de la vallée Rideau, la Conservation de la Nation-Sud et l'Office de protection de la nature de la vallée de la rivière Mississippi, tels qu'ils sont présentés dans le document 1, et exposés dans le présent rapport.

BACKGROUND

The City of Ottawa is located in the watersheds of three rivers, all of which have an established Conservation Authority: the Rideau Valley Conservation Authority (RVCA), Mississippi Valley Conservation Authority (MVCA), and South Nation Conservation Authority (SNCA). The taxation requirement by the Conservation Authorities has been excluded in the City's budget as they have a separate levy on the tax bill.

The *Conservation Authorities Act* states that Conservation Authorities shall apportion administrative or maintenance costs amongst participating municipalities in accordance with the benefits derived. The City primarily acts as the tax collector on behalf of the Conservation Authorities and collects the amount in the same manner as municipal taxes for general purposes. Consequently, Council has no discretion over the amounts listed under the general levy. However, Council does have discretion over the special and capital projects portion of their levy.

In accordance with Section 312 of the *Municipal Act*, the municipality shall, each year, pass a by-law levying the separate tax rates for this purpose. Approval of this report will establish the levy requirements.

DISCUSSION

The levy rates for the Conservation Authorities are calculated based on the budgets submitted by each Conservation Authority (attached in Document 1).

The City of Ottawa's share of the general levy is apportioned on the basis of the assessment for the City of Ottawa relative to the total assessment within the watershed. The relative amount can change from year to year depending on the growth in Ottawa as compared to the other contributing municipalities.

There is some discretion on amounts identified as special and capital levies. In the past, funding requests for certain projects that specifically benefitted the City were identified as special levies, these programs are generally supported by staff through Council

approvals as they complement City initiatives resulting in staff partnering with the Conservation Authorities to deliver these programs. In some instances, the Conservation Authorities are able to leverage provincial funding for some of the projects such as the Ice Management Program. In 2023, as per the Conservation Authority Programs and Services Agreements report ([ACS2023-PRE-EDP-0045](#)), Council approved entering into written agreements as required by provincial legislation to deliver these Category 2 and Category 3 programs and services.

The Capital Levy funds offset capital costs related to the design and renovation of new offices for two of the conservation authorities, which do not fall within the definition of an administration or maintenance cost for inclusion in the general levy. Under the *Conservation Authorities Act*, they are classed as general benefitting and allocated to all member municipalities. Details on the special and capital levies are provided below.

Details of Special Levies

LEVY COMMON TO ALL CONSERVATION AUTHORITIES

Aquatic Monitoring – A special levy was created in 2019 by the MVCA, the RVCA and the SNCA at the request of the City of Ottawa to provide funding to conservation authorities to undertake water quality monitoring and fish and benthic invertebrate sampling at sites within the City of Ottawa, previously undertaken by City staff. City staff have refocused their monitoring efforts towards municipal infrastructure and have delegated aquatic environmental monitoring to the conservation authorities who presently conduct monitoring and reporting throughout their watersheds and are all well positioned to conduct this work. The cost of aquatic monitoring varies depending on the number of monitoring sites within each watershed. The total of these special levies allocated to the conservation authorities is \$277,457.

RIDEAU VALLEY CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

Rideau River Ice Management – There is a longstanding arrangement between the RVCA and the City concerning Rideau River Ice Management. By Council approval, on June 8, 2005 ([ACS2005-PWS-SOP-0003](#)) the RVCA is to fund the full cost of Rideau River Flood Control through their special levy, beginning in 2006. In conformity with this direction, the RVCA is requesting \$795,717 in special levies for the 2024 program.

Requests are usually based on the previous year's actual cost and factors in any resulting adjustment that may be required for that year. The 2023 total costs amounted to \$987,648. The 2024 levy request is \$191,931 less than the 2023 levy.

As this is a preventive flood control measure, the RVCA is able to access provincial funding for this program.

Ottawa Infrastructure Reserve – In 2010, when the Conservation Authorities' budgets were approved, Council also established the Water Control Capital Asset Reserve proposed by the RVCA. This reserve is to be funded annually through a \$10,000 special levy contribution by the City of Ottawa. It is intended to cover the City's share of unexpected operating and maintenance costs, preventive maintenance and emergency repairs that exceed annual allowances for routine operation and maintenance of aging RVCA-owned flood and erosion control infrastructure in the City of Ottawa. If this year's request is approved, the City's contributions since 2010 will total \$150,000.

Flood and Erosion Control – The request of \$40,000 is for routine operation and maintenance of flood and erosion control structures at Graham Creek, Borden Farm, Sawmill Creek, and Stillwater Creek.

Brewer and Windsor Park Flood Control Structures – A new special levy has been created in accordance with an amending agreement dated January 1, 2024 for the operation and maintenance of the Brewer and Windsor Park flood control structures. The 2024 request is \$65,000.

Britannia Village Flood Control Project – A new special levy has been created in accordance with the memorandum of understanding (MOU) that was signed between the City of Ottawa and the RVCA in 2014, prior to the Britannia Village Flood Control Project being undertaken. The MOU stipulates that a "major maintenance and replacement" fund be established once the project is complete, and that the annual contribution to the fund be such that, over an assumed 25 year service life, 50 per cent of the replacement value will be accumulated. This annual contribution works out to \$21,500 each year and is to be collected from the City of Ottawa by the RVCA through a special levy.

SOUTH NATION CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

Ottawa Rural Clean Water Program - The Rural Clean Water Program provides grants to rural residents to undertake projects that improve water quality. Since the program's inception in 2000, nearly 1,500 projects have been supported with more than \$3 million in grants. Landowners have invested an additional \$10.8 million in these environmental stewardship projects.

Council approved the 2016-2020 Review and Renewal report on May 12, 2021

([ACS2021-PIE-EDP-0013](#)) which confirmed that the City would continue to fund the program through an annual levy of \$200,000 for 2021-2025. The 2024 request of \$200,000 is in accordance with this approved program.

Eastern Ontario Water Resources Program - The Eastern Ontario Water Resources Program works cooperatively to implement the recommendations of the Eastern Ontario Water Resources Management Study, which includes the City of Ottawa within the SNCA's jurisdiction. The membership includes municipalities, conservation authorities, provincial ministries, and farming groups. As of 2015, the former Eastern Ontario Water Resources Committee now operates as a Program under South Nation's Clean Water Committee. The 2024 funding will be allocated as grants to not-for-profit organizations undertaking projects that protect regional surface and groundwater resources. The funding is allocated through the SNCA Clean Water Program as per the established Eastern Ontario Water Resource Program guidelines.

Forested Land Purchase – The SNCA included this initiative in its general levy request starting in 2024 to address the issue of increasing forest depletion within the South Nation River watershed. It was previously included in the special levy request.

Ash Tree Replacement Program (formerly Emerald Ash Borer Program) – Launched in 2018, the Ottawa Ash Tree Replacement Program offers cost-share grants to residents removing ash trees infected with the Emerald Ash Borer and replacing them with a native tree. The SNCA delivers the program on behalf of the Conservation partners (Mississippi Valley, Rideau Valley, and South Nation Conservation Authorities). Cost-share grant is up to \$500 per tree, to a maximum of \$5,000 per applicant. The 2024 request is for \$200,000.

Details of Capital Levies

MISSISSIPPI VALLEY CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

Mississippi Valley New Office Capital Costs – A new office space requirement was identified several years ago and since 2009, the City has contributed an average of \$262,547 per year towards the design and construction of the new administrative office. The City of Ottawa's 2024 assessed share is \$249,590.

SOUTH NATION CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

Finch Building Capital Cost Repayment – The South Nation Conservation Authority moved into their new headquarters in October 2008. Total cost of the renovations was \$1,246,752 of which \$1,012,051 was the assessed portion that was to be recovered

from the City. That year, South Nation gave its member municipalities the option of paying it off in full or amortizing it over twenty years.

The City opted for the twenty-year amortization period and, based on an interest rate of 3.36 per cent, the City's 2008 amortized share was calculated at \$65,752. SNCA reviews the interest rate each year and adjusts the annual amortization amount. For 2024, the capital repayment cost is \$60,171 including principal and interest (1.75 per cent).

Capital Levy – The SNCA has introduced a capital levy of \$38,311 to support future capital projects that will be identified in the asset management plan.

Long Term Debt Issued

MISSISSIPPI VALLEY CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

The Shabomeka Lake Dam lies in the upper watershed of the Mississippi River, which discharges to the Ottawa River in the City of Ottawa upstream of Fitzroy Harbour. The dam is one of several water controls structures that mitigate downstream flooding and help to maintain base flows for habitat protection, recreational purposes, and municipal drinking water and sewage treatment systems. The dam is at the end of its useful life and requires reconstruction. An environmental assessment was completed in 2020 and the detailed design is nearing completion. The dam is scheduled to be reconstructed this fall at an estimated cost of \$1.52 million, of which approximately 50 per cent is to be funded by the Province. The MVCA board has approved debt financing of the balance. By Council approval, on May 12, 2021 ([ACS2021-FSD-FIN-0007](#)) MVCA and the City entered into a loan agreement in February 2022. The loan will be amortized over 30 years and bears an effective annual interest rate of three per cent. The principal amount of \$700,000 was issued to MVCA on April 1, 2022. The loan is repayable in blended monthly instalments of principal and interest, starting May 1, 2022, and will be deducted from the monthly payments of the annual levies.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Per Council direction, the City's share of the funding requirements for the Conservation Authorities is raised through the establishment of separate tax rates applied to the various property classes within the City of Ottawa. Based on the requirements submitted in this report, the Conservation Authorities are requesting a total of \$14,983,705, which represents an increase of \$503,993 or 3.48 per cent compared to 2023.

Based on the staff recommendations contained in the 2024 Policy and Other Revenue Matters report, ([ACS2024-FCS-REV-0001](#)) it is estimated that the tax rates for Conservation Authority purposes will result in an increase of \$0.49 on the property tax bill for an average residential homeowner.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal impediments to approving the recommendations this report.

CONSULTATION

Budgets for Conservation Authorities are coordinated with the Water Services Branch of the Infrastructure and Water Services department based on documentation supplied by the Conservation Authorities.

ACCESSIBILITY IMPACTS

Finance and Corporate Services adheres to the requirements of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, (2005)* in its operations, programs and initiatives. This report is administrative in nature and has no associated accessibility impacts.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

The Conservation Authorities are key conservation partners with the City.

Their programs assist in watershed planning and management and protecting the health of the watersheds. Programs funded through the general and special levy of the Authorities result in direct efforts to protect, monitor, report on watercourse conditions, and improve water quality. The authorities provide advice on land use planning, provide stewardship programs, and undertake efforts to restore fish and wildlife habitat, restore shorelines and reduce water pollution.

RURAL IMPLICATIONS

Many of the Conservation Authority Programs such as the Rural Clean Water Program directly benefit the rural residents and agricultural operations of the City.

The Authorities also support environmental objectives, stewardship, and education in the rural area through ownership and management of conservation lands, operation of the landowner resource centre, and other initiatives with direct benefits to the rural area.

TERM OF COUNCIL PRIORITIES

The work of the Conservation Authorities is critical in achieving the Term of Council Strategic Priority - Environmental Stewardship, and especially several of the objectives including sub watershed planning; enhancing and protecting the natural environment – its biodiversity and ecosystems; and source water protection to maintain and ensure a supply of safe drinking water.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Document 1 – General, Special and Capital Levies for Conservation Authorities City of Ottawa 2024 Share.

DISPOSITION

The Finance and Corporate Services Department will calculate the property tax rates to generate the levies required, collect the funds, and forward it to the Conservation Authorities. The Finance and Corporate Services Department and Legal Services will work together to prepare and place the Conservation Authority By-laws on the Agenda of Council for enactment once the tax ratios are established.