

## **COUNCIL REPORT**

**To:** Mayor and Council

**From:** Administration

**Date:** June 20, 2023

**Subject:** Taxi Saver Program Policy 1.26 - Update

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### **RECOMMENDATION:**

THAT Council amend Taxi Saver Program Policy 1.26 as outlined in this report.

### **BACKGROUND:**

The Taxi Saver program started in 2010 to allow seniors and people with disabilities greater convenience for spontaneous travel throughout Mackenzie. The Taxi Saver program provides a 50% subsidy towards the cost of taxi rides, for example, eligible individuals would purchase \$60 worth of Taxi Saver coupons for \$30. The purchaser then uses the coupons to pay the dollar meter rate of the taxi fare. The taxi company collects the coupons and then invoices the District for the total value of coupons received.

To purchase taxi saver coupons, individuals must be over the age of 65 or have a physical or mental disability and must provide proof to obtain a Handy Pass. Once they have a Handy Pass, they can purchase taxi saver coupons at any time. Taxi Saver coupons can only be used by Handy Pass holders. A new Taxi Saver Program Policy 1.26 was adopted on January 23, 2022.

### **PROGRAM UPDATE:**

The program was not utilized for a good portion of 2022 due to Mackenzie Taxi closing their business on January 15, 2022 leaving the residents without taxi service until Evergreen Taxi Ltd. opened on December 2, 2022. Since the opening of the new taxi service, we have increased pass holder membership by 14, bringing us to a program total of 76 Handy Pass holders.

### **Passholder Information**

Of the 76, 64% of pass holders are the age of 65 or older with the remaining 36% having joined the program due to a having a physical or mental disability.

Of the 76 pass holders, only 18 pass holders have purchased booklets since December 2022.

### **Program Budget**

The District budgeted \$2,000 towards the 2023 program. This was based on historical budgets over the last 10 years. There were few years since inception that the budget was exceeded.

Since December 2, 2022, 101 coupon books have been sold to 18 pass holders. If all coupons currently purchased are used this year, the District will see an expense of \$3,030. As a result, within the first half of the year, we have already exceeded the \$2,000 budget set aside for the program.

The program was put on hold in June 2023 to reduce further budget overages and to finalize the following proposal for a Taxi Saver Program refresh. Staff are recommending changes to the program to better serve the needs of residents, provide equitable access to the service, and to ensure the service is appropriately funded.

### **PROPOSAL**

#### **Better at Home Program Partnership**

This spring, the Better at Home Program, offered by Mackenzie Community Services, was launched. This program is funded through the United Way and provides a number of services to residents over the age of 55, including a similar taxi saver or transportation subsidy program. It is based on an income threshold, but some members of the community could receive a 100% subsidy on transportation fares and other services in the community. A copy of their brochure has been attached in Appendix A.

Staff approached the Better at Home program to discuss possibly altering the District's program to complement theirs rather than having two competing transportation programs in the community. In addition, the Better at Home program offers a wide variety of services to those 55 years or older, thus connecting the District's current clients with their services would help extend the reach of their program and help more community members.

Based on the conversation, it is being proposed that the Better at Home Program would accept clients over the age of 55 to access a transportation subsidy and the District would continue providing assistance to those under the age of 55 with a disability.

It should be noted that not all of our current clients are necessarily going to be eligible for the Better at Home transportation subsidy as it is based on financial need.

Due to the limited budget, it is being proposed that the District have a similar income threshold as well as put limits on the number of taxi saver booklets sold to each permit holder to work towards more equitable access to the program among all permit holders. This would mean that not all current clients would be eligible for the program going forward.

## Proposed Taxi Saver Policy 1.26 Updates

### New Eligibility Criteria

The following new eligibility criteria is being suggested for the Taxi Saver Program:

- Mackenzie residents under the age of 55 with a mental or physical disability; and
- Meet the qualifying income levels as outlined below, based on the Federal Government's most recent Low Income Cut-Offs data for communities with a population under 30,000:

<b>Qualifying Income Levels</b>	
<b># in family</b>	<b>Level of household income yearly</b>
1	\$21,548
2	\$26,825
3	\$32,978
4	\$40,041
5	\$45,413
6	\$51,219
7	\$57,024

### Maximum Booklet Purchases

Due to the limited budget, staff are suggesting capping the number of books available each year. This would ensure that there would be no budget overruns.

Additionally, it would be recommended to also have a cap on the number of booklets sold to each pass holder. This would ensure that every pass holder would have access to the booklets, and not just one or two pass holders using all of the passes available for the year.

### Increase in Budget

An analysis of the program costs based on the number of pass holders and the number of books sold to each passholder was completed. A copy of this analysis including several proposed subsidy models, based on current taxi fares, has been included in Appendix B.

At this time, staff are recommending a minimal increase in budget from \$2,000 to \$4,500/year for 2024. This would increase the number of coupon books available from 66 to 150.

With the new proposed income threshold, not all of our remaining 25 pass holders may be eligible to continue participating in the program. As a result staff are suggesting the subsidy model be planned for a moderate increase in participants to 30 pass holders in the program.



If there are 30 pass holders in the program per year, to provide equitable access to each pass holder, they would be allocated 5 coupon books per year (150 divided by 30 = 5).

Based on the average taxi fare in Mackenzie (\$15.00), five (5) booklets would be equivalent to 20 trips per year or 1.67 trips per month per pass holder.

Based on the financial analysis in Appendix B, Council may choose an alternative subsidy model.

#### Add an Expiry Date

Lastly, it is staff's recommendation that taxi saver coupons expire at the end of each year to reduce the carryover liability into subsequent budget years.

#### **NEXT STEPS:**

A copy of the proposed Taxi Saver Program Policy 1.26 updates has been attached for Council's consideration.

If Council approves the changes, the District propose to start the new program criteria as of August 1, 2023. The program would remain on hold until that time. This will provide adequate time to advertise the changes, discuss the changes with current policy holders and transition them to the new program or Better at Home, as well as prepare new procedures and processes for program administration.

The District intends to honour taxi vouchers sold to date, however all taxi vouchers purchased before and after August 1, 2023 would still expire on December 31, 2023.

Staff recommend capping the 2023 program budget at \$5,000 - \$3,030 would be set aside for the current liability, and \$1,070 set aside for new program participants for the remainder of the year after August 1, 2023.

An increase in budget from \$2,000 to \$4,500 would be proposed for the 2024 operating budget to support the proposed subsidy model going forward.

#### **BUDGETARY IMPACT:**

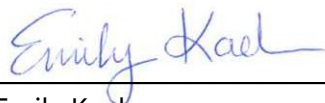
The additional \$3,030 would be allocated from the General Government Operating Budget.

**COUNCIL PRIORITIES:**

**Community and Social Development**

- Our investment in the municipality's services and infrastructure, our commitment to principles of social equity and well-being, and our belief in the value of resident engagement, creates a healthy community in which everyone feels valued and enjoys a high quality of life.

Respectfully Submitted,



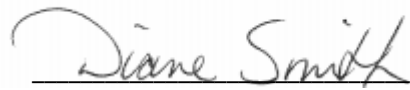
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Emily Kaehn  
Director of Corporate Services



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Kerri Borne  
Chief Financial Officer



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Approved for Submission to Council