

COUNCIL REPORT

To: Mayor and Council

From: Administration

Date: August 5, 2025

Subject: Support for Non-Profits – Policies Review

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT Council approves the proposed financial aid policies review and associated public engagement plan as outlined in this report;

AND THAT Council approves the 2026 budget and community grants program recommendations.

BACKGROUND:

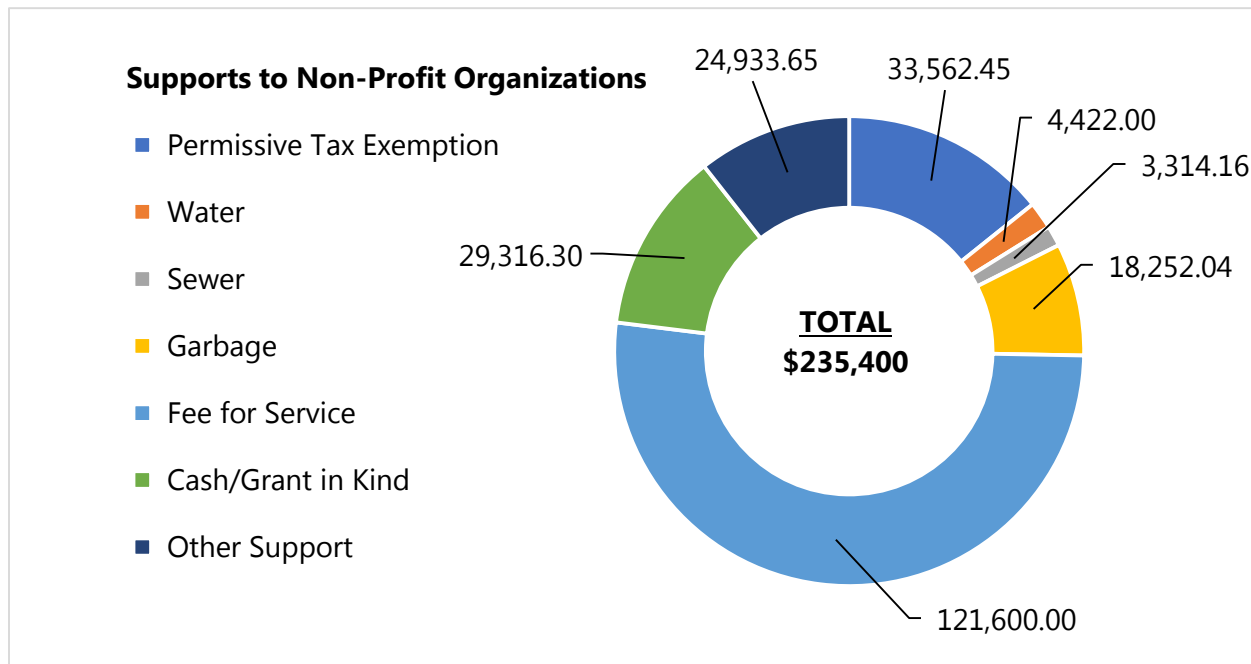
Following the 2025 Budget discussions and due to the reduction in tax revenue for the District, a review of all service areas and policies is being conducted to find practical budget cuts to ensure the District can provide the levels of service that residents value most without significant taxation increases. Council has asked staff to engage the non-profit community in a discussion about potential reductions in financial aid for their operations through cash grants, in-kind services, tax exemptions, and subsidized District services.

Current State of Affairs

In 2025, the District approved and will provide approximately \$235,000 in cash and in-kind support to local non-profit organizations and faith-based organizations through various granting and support policies. The main categories of support the District provides include:

- 1) Permissive Tax Exemptions (free municipal property tax)
- 2) Free Utility Fees (water, sewer, garbage pick-up)
- 3) Fee-for-Service Funding Agreements (multi-year funding typically for operations)
- 4) Grants (in-kind and cash)
- 5) Other – (ie. bursaries, storage, donations to fundraiser, rent support etc.)

The diagram provided shows the breakdown of the District's investment in each category. The full listing of 2025 grants, exemptions, and in-kind support provided by the District has been provided in Appendix A for further information.



Other Support - Storage

The rates listed in Appendix A for storage at the Recreation Centre were estimated based on a commercial lease rate per square foot. To be transparent, it does not cost the District to have those spaces in use, nor do we lose potential revenue as we would typically be using the space ourselves. However, the value is included to reflect that there is limited space in the facility for user group storage and not every organization has access to those spaces. Recreation Services has tried to accommodate user groups the best they can as these groups do provide important recreation programming for residents of the community.

Proposed Policy Review

Staff are recommending a review of the District's financial aid policies with the goal of assessing the potential to reduce this budget without diminishing the value of the non-profit community in assisting the municipality in providing a strong community focus for residents. The following are the main policies and bylaws that encompass the District's financial aid for non-profit organizations in the community:

- Community Grants Policy 3.16
- Permissive Tax Exemption Policy 3.17
- Water, Sewer, Garbage Bylaws

The proposed phasing and timeline for this review are outlined in the table below:

	Timeline	Activities
Phase 1 – Plan	August 2025	Project kick-off and planning
Phase 2 – Engage	Sept. 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Host a Booth at the Recreation Fair - Public and Grant Recipient Survey - Interviews with Fee-for-Service Agreement Holders and those receiving Permissive Tax Exemptions. - A “What We Heard Report” will be shared with Council following the engagement period.
Phase 3 – Create	October 2025	Staff will draft new policy and explore budget options.
Phase 4 – Review	Oct./Nov. 2025	Second round of public engagement asking for feedback on the proposed policy and budget. A What We Heard Report would be presented to Council at a Regular Council Meeting following engagement.
Phase 5 – Adopt	Nov./Dec. 2025	Council considers the final draft policy for adoption based on feedback received during engagement.

Open House / Town Hall

Initially there was discussion about having an open house or town hall style meeting as part of this engagement process. The primary motivator to not host one is that September is turning into an already busy month for events and public engagement with the Rec. Fair, Agricultural Symposium, Seniors Week, and some OCP/Housing Needs Report engagement. We felt it may be better to go to where the community already is (ie. have a booth at events), rather than ask them to attend another event. Secondly, with Town Halls in particular, it can make it difficult to ensure everyone can attend and/or give an opportunity to speak at those events equitably.

2026 Budget Recommendations:

As the policy review is occurring during the budget preparation period for 2026, the following recommendations are proposed for each policy and associated budget:

Policy	Recommendation for 2026 Budget
Community Grants Policy 3.16	Offer 1 st intake for 2026 only, at a reduced budget based on 2025 awards. Any policy changes would be recommended to come into effect for the 2027 Budget, to allow 1-year notice to any current or new funding applicant or agreement holder. Recommendations for 2027 would come as part of the policy review.
Permissive Tax Exemption Policy 3.17	Maintain current permissive tax exemptions that expire in 2026, but do not accept further applications. Recommendations for 2027 would come as part of the policy review process. This would provide at minimum 1-year notice of any changes to the exemptions these organizations have been receiving.

Water, Sewer, Garbage Bylaws	Recommendations for 2026 and 2027 Budget will come as part of this policy review process.
------------------------------	---

If Council approves these recommendations, it would be communicated publicly and directly to all current support/grant holders.

Items Not Included in this Policy Review

Recreation Centre Fees and Charges and Portable Spirit Stage Use Policies

Although non-profit youth sport organizations do receive a lower rate for arena ice and floor use and the Spirit Stage, a review of the Recreation Centre Fees and Charges are not included as part of this policy review process. The Recreation Centre budget is ~90% funded through taxation. Most, if not all, user fees are subsidized to some degree. As a result, the discussion around the Recreation Centre budget and goals for cost-recovery are recommended to take place separately from the other financial aid policies that are focused on the disbursement of cash, exemptions, or in-kind services directly to the non-profit community.

Land Donations

Land donations are not listed in Appendix A for 2025, but should still be noted for the policy review process. In 2022, the District donated one industrial site property, Lot 10, to the Omenica Growers Society to support a greenhouse and local food security project, as well as has in principle donated the Ernie Bodine Community Centre (EBCC) property to the Williston Lake Elders Society to support a seniors housing development. Council has used their authority under the *Community Charter* to pursue these strategic land donations. If Council wished, we could include these types of requests as part of the policy, or continue to treat them individually as unique one-off requests.

EBCC Transition Rent Support

Lastly, the District is providing rent assistance to some EBCC tenants moving out of the facility (Mackenzie & District Museum, Mackenzie & Area Radio Society, and the Hospital Auxiliary Thrift Store). These are not included in Appendix A, but should still be noted for the policy review process. These were one-off supports specific to the District's decision to close the Ernie Bodin Community Centre. This was funded through the EBCC operating budget and not the Community Grants budget. If Council wished, we could include these types of requests as part of the policy, or continue to treat them individually as unique one-off requests.

BUDGETARY IMPACT:

There is no budgetary impact for this recommendation.

COUNCIL PRIORITIES:

Strong Governance and Finances

- As the municipality's elected governing body, we serve all residents and businesses in the community. We engage residents and stakeholders on important issues and make our decisions through open and transparent processes. We are careful in our use of resources, mindful of the need to maintain programs and services, while also meeting the community's infrastructure needs.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED:

Emily Kaehn, Director of Corporate Services (Acting CAO)

Reviewed By: Financial Services