

REQUEST FOR DECISION 016-2017

Title: Wolfville School Playground

Date: 2017-03-07

Department: Community Development



SUMMARY

Wolfville School Playground One Time Capital Request

The Wolfville School Playground Improvement Committee is seeking a \$100,000 contribution for capital improvement to the Wolfville School playground. Council received a presentation from the Committee which submitted the application, received an information report from staff evaluating the proposal on February 7th, 2017 and are now receiving supplemental information to assist in its decision making.

As per the Grants to Organization Policy, 710-003, staff is not making a recommendation regarding the grant request.

Staff is providing two motions for Council's consideration.

DRAFT MOTION:

Potential Motion #1

That Committee of the Whole forward the grant for the Wolfville Playground in the amount of \$_____ to the 2017/18 Operating Budget process.

Potential Motion # 2

That Council denies the request for a One-Time Capital Grant from the Wolfville School Playground Improvement Committee for funding in the fiscal year 2017-18.

REQUEST FOR DECISION 016-2017

Title: Wolfville School Playground

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1) CAO COMMENTS

Staff has provided information to assist Council with this decision. As per policy, there is no recommendation coming from staff. It is important that Council consider not only the criteria scoring of this application, but also the current financial situation of the Town and our ability to provide the grant.

2) LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

See attached Request for Direction.

3) STAFF RECOMMENDATION

No recommendation

4) REFERENCES AND ATTACHMENTS

- Request for Direction dated February 7th, 2017
- Application Package

5) PURPOSE OF REPORT

To seek a decision from Council regarding funding for the Wolfville School Playground under the Grants To Organizations policy 710-003

6) DISCUSSION

Council received an information report and staff presentation on February 7th, 2017 regarding this request along with a presentation from the applicants in January. This RFD is largely based on the February 7th report and also provides supplemental information for Council's consideration.

Scan of other Municipalities

Staff sought feedback from other municipal units to see if others had provided funding to school playgrounds.

- Cumberland County established a fund to provide funding to schools within its region. Grants ranged from 30-50K. It also established a [community park funding program](#) to support park development by non-profits and community organizations. The municipality contributes up to 50% of the total capital cost of the project, up to a maximum of \$40,000. Any request exceeding \$40,000 will be reviewed and decision made by Council on a case to case basis.
- Bridgewater Town Council was approached in January 2017 to support playground improvements at Bridgewater Elementary School ([see news article](#)).
- HRM considers school playgrounds part of its Open Space network¹ and designs, tenders and constructs school playgrounds in exchange for school playgrounds being open to the public.

¹ Section 202.7(g) of the [HRM Regional Plan](#)

REQUEST FOR DECISION 016-2017

Title: Wolfville School Playground

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- West Hants provided grants between \$1500-\$5000 from its Open Space Reserve Fund to school playgrounds.
- CBRM did fund a school playground a year and a half ago. It was a project in excess of \$176,000 which was cost shared and its contribution was \$20,000 with following conditions
 - The playground was unique to the community – it was a “Natural” playground unlike any other in our municipality
 - It has the support of other funding partners including ACOA
 - It was a playground that was accessible to the entire community and not just the school children.

Supplemental Information from the Playground Committee

Staff reached out to the Wolfville Playground Committee and the following information was provided

- The Committee will seek funding from the Municipality of the County of Kings.

Staff asked, “what is the most important element of the proposed playground?” This is the response:

By far the most useful element is the soccer court as it solves a longstanding problem with the playground and has wider community appeal. Second would be the rope climber as it adds capacity and broadens the age range of play equipment from Primary - Grade 3 to Primary - Grade 8. You should know that our preferred rope climber has changed from the product shown in the project overview I sent you. We are now looking at a structure that has a core component with extra components that can be added later if sufficient funds are not immediately.

Staff sought clarification on the expected local funding target. This is the response:

My expectation is that local fundraising will be in the \$100 - 150k range. The total includes some significant contributions that we have already received from private donors (anonymous but believed to be parents at the school). We are holding off on a small scale fundraising campaign until we have completed major grant applications and approached local and regional businesses. This is purely a time management issue and recognition that the project is large and will sink or swim on based on what we receive from larger donors.

Staff sought input on the idea of the Town contributing and requiring matching funds. The response is below:

Our preference would be for a straightforward grant but if matching funds is the only way to achieve Town participation then yes we would be interested. Given that we are focusing on big first, smaller second I do not know if community (and Town matched) contributions would play a significant role in any work that is undertaken in 2017. That's excluding the community contributions we have received so far of course.

Staff sought information on other potential funders.

The Committee has made applications to Mud Creek Rotary and the Province and will approach smaller funders (EKM etc.) and national/regional corporates)

REQUEST FOR DECISION 016-2017

Title: Wolfville School Playground

Date: 2017-03-07

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Other references

Staff conducted a brief review to assess if other municipal units are being approached to fund school playgrounds. It is clear from the review that Municipalities across Canada are dealing with requests to support school playgrounds. Council may be interested in the following links to newspaper articles:

<http://www.saultstar.com/2011/01/04/no-monkeying-around-with-playground-funding-request>

<http://www.insideottawavalley.com/news-story/3944413-town-to-partner-with-school-to-develop-playground-area/>

<http://www.yorkregion.com/news-story/4800891-georgina-considers-partial-funding-for-school-playground/>

<http://thestarphoenix.com/news/local-news/playground-money-from-city-for-new-schools-would-address-a-unique-situation-city>

https://lighthousenow.ca/article.php?title=Committee_wants_to_transform_Bridgewater_Elementar

Contents of a Potential Memorandum of Understanding

If Council decides to fund the playground, the contents of the MOU should include at minimum the following:

- That the playground is for public access when the school is not in session.
- Ensure that the town's liability is waived and all insurance issues are dealt with
- The time frame for installation of the funded elements of the playground
- What will happen to the funds if the playground is not built?
- Clarify who is responsible for the maintenance of the structure?
- Clarify who is receiving the money and the reporting on expenditures?

At this point, it is unclear if the Playground Committee is a legal entity capable of entering into an MOU or if the AVRSB would need to be a party to the agreement. If Council decides to fund the project, then staff would ensure that the agreement appropriately executed.

7) FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Request for Direction provided information on the financial implications. As mentioned in the previous staff presentation, this \$100K request would equate to approximately a 2.5 cent increase in the tax rate if funded from this year's tax rate. As this is not seen as acceptable, the funding could be taken from operational reserves so as not to impact the tax rate in 2017-18.

The option of reserve funding is constrained by the long term financial planning already developed for both the Town's 10 Year CIP and 4 Year Operating Budget Projections. As discussed during the budget process the last few years, there remains a shortfall in the 10 Year CIP funding, and this is now further impacted by anticipated use of operating reserves for Town initiatives over the next four years within the operating budget.

REQUEST FOR DECISION 016-2017

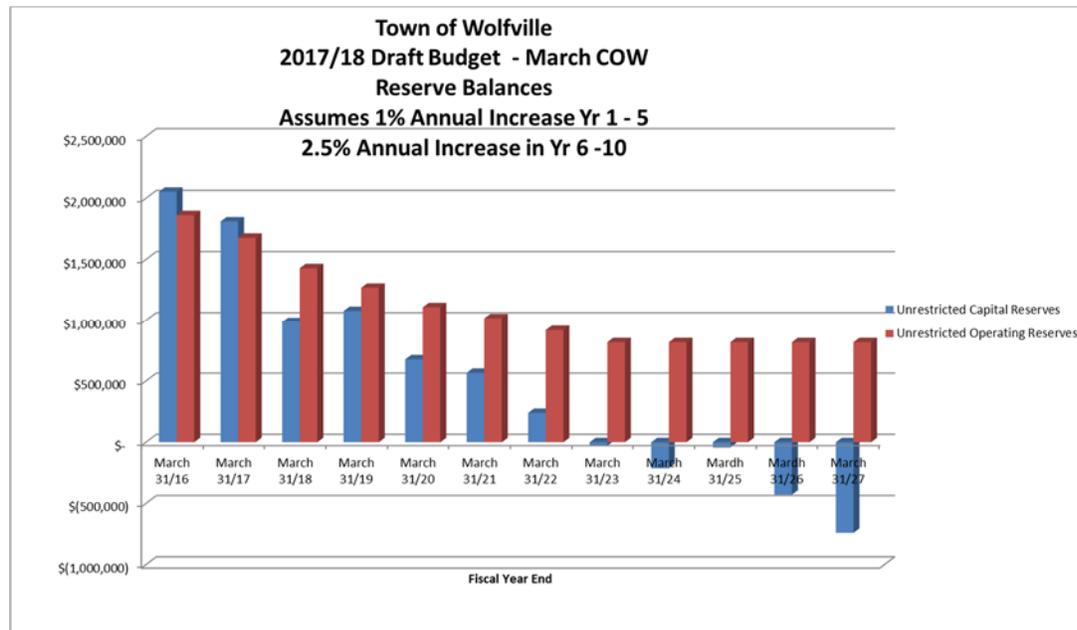
Title: Wolfville School Playground

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The following is an updated graphical depiction of the planned use of Town reserves:



Key changes to the graph since it was last reviewed with COW include

- \$385,500 use of reserves for the operating budget projections over the next four years
- Correction in debt repayment projections over the next 10 years. The data for the 2013 debenture issue had been missed in the original analysis.

Further information is included in the budget RFD, but in summary any significant use of Operating Reserve balance for grants will create financial constraints by Year 3 as the Town will have dropped to the minimum required reserve balance according to provincial benchmark.

8) REFERENCES TO COUNCIL STRATEGIC PLAN AND TOWN REPORTS

See information report

9) COMMUNICATION REQUIREMENTS

The applicant will be notified of Council's decision.

10) ALTERNATIVES

To assist Council in its decision making, it may be useful to consider the following questions:

1. Does Council wish to provide funding?

REQUEST FOR DECISION 016-2017

Title: Wolfville School Playground

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2. If yes, does Council wish to provide matching funding, meaning that a set amount will be contributed if other matching funding is also secured?
3. If yes to question 1, what level of funding do you wish to provide?
 - a. 25K
 - b. 50K
 - c. 75K
 - d. 100K
 - e. Some other amount?
4. Does Council wish to fund a particular element of the playground? Options include:
 - a. Mini soccer pitch – 115K
 - b. Rope climbing structure- 93K
 - c. Fitness equipment -20K
 - d. Landscaping -50K
 - e. Play structure – 169K