



CITY OF KINGSTON
**INFORMATION REPORT TO ARTS, RECREATION &
COMMUNITY POLICIES COMMITTEE**

Report No.: ARCP-11-022

TO: Chair and Member of the Arts, Recreation and Community Policies Committee

FROM: Lanie Hurdle, Commissioner, Community Services

RESOURCE STAFF: Cheryl Hitchen, Manager, Social Planning and Policy

DATE OF MEETING: November 9, 2011

SUBJECT: Municipal Fee Assistance Program Update

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the Municipal Fee Assistance Program since its inception in the fall of 2009.

Staff, in collaboration with the Kingston Round Table on Poverty Reduction, developed this program in response to a request by Council to provide a subsidy to low income individuals. The purpose of the program is to assist residents with costs related to monthly transit passes and municipal recreation program fees. The Municipal Fee Assistance Program (MFAP) has a single application process for the three program components: Affordable Transit Pass (ATP), the Subsidy Program for Affordable Recreation in Kingston (SPARK) and the Positive Recreation Opportunities (P.R.O.) for Kids program. This application process is administered by the Community and Family Services Department.

Eligibility for the program is based on residency in the City of Kingston and a household income below the Statistics Canada "Low Income Cut off" (LICO) for that year. Recreation subsidies are available at reduced levels for households with incomes over the LICO.

Over the past two years, approximately 2,400 households have completed the MFAP application process and have been deemed eligible for the program comprising 2,744 adults and 1,450 children. According to the 2006 Census, there were 12,548 people in the City of Kingston living below the LICO. Based on this, approximately one-third of all individuals living under the LICO in the City have applied and been deemed eligible for this program.

The City invests a total of about \$300,000 per year to support low income households to access municipal and community based programs. There is about \$165,000 spent in Transit, \$117,000 spent for SPARK and \$20,000 for PRO Kids.

RECOMMENDATION:

This report is for information only.

AUTHORIZING SIGNATURES:

ORIGINAL SIGNED BY COMMISSIONER <hr/> Lanie Hurdle, Commissioner, Community Services
ORIGINAL SIGNED BY CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER <hr/> Gerard Hunt, Chief Administrative Officer

CONSULTATION WITH THE FOLLOWING COMMISSIONERS:

Cynthia Beach, <i>Sustainability & Growth</i>	N/R
Denis Leger, <i>Transportation, Properties & Emergency Services</i>	
Jim Keech, <i>President and CEO, Utilities Kingston</i>	N/R

(N/R indicates consultation not required)

OPTIONS/DISCUSSION:

Background

The Municipal Fee Assistance Program (MFAP) has been in operation in the City of Kingston for the past two years. It provides a “one window” eligibility approach for recreation subsidies and discounted monthly transit passes for those living in Kingston in a low income household.

In late 2007, Council supported a recommendation from the Mayor’s Task Force on Poverty to make recreation programs more accessible for low income families. The Subsidy Program for Affordable Recreation in Kingston (SPARK) was developed from background research carried out in 2008 and presented in the “Fair Play” report. Simultaneously to this recreation research, the EITP committee passed a resolution in 2008 to find ways to make transit more accessible to low income individuals and families, especially those on social assistance. Kingston Transit staff worked with staff from ODSP, Community and Family Services and representatives from the Poverty Roundtable to develop the Affordable Transit Pass (ATP) program.

While SPARK and ATP were being developed, discussions about the eligibility process led to the suggestion from the Kingston Round Table on Poverty Reduction that the City try to develop a single eligibility process for both programs. The intent was to eliminate the need for those living in low income households to apply multiple times and share their income information with multiple municipal departments. A working group of staff from Kingston Transit, Recreation, ODSP, Community and Family Services and representatives from the Round Table spent the early part of 2009 developing MFAP. Through a single point of access at the Community and Family Services Department, households can verify their eligibility and then be referred to Recreation and/or Kingston Transit to access the three components: ATP, SPARK or PRO Kids.

While other Canadian municipalities have programs providing discounts for transit passes or for recreation programs for low income families, MFAP is unique in the provision of a single eligibility process. There has been much interest expressed from municipalities across the country in the City’s process and MFAP was noted by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities as a best practice in their report “Mending Canada’s frayed social safety net: The role of municipal governments.”

Eligibility Process

Applicants need to complete an application which can be found on the City’s website, in libraries, recreation facilities or City Hall and drop in to Community and Family Services for an eligibility assessment. Applicants need a completed application form, proof of residency in the City of Kingston and one of several acceptable government documents to verify household income.

Once assessed, they are given a “My Kingston” card for every household member that can be used to access the discounted monthly transit pass for the next 12 months. If the household is approved for either of the recreation subsidies, basic household information (no financial information) is sent to Recreation & Leisure so the subsidies can be inputted into the CLASS Registration system for the household members. PRO Kids applicants are contacted by Recreation staff for an interview to explain the program and complete the registration process.

Since the program’s inception in the late fall of 2009, approximately 2,400 households (2,744 adults and 1,450 children) have been deemed eligible for the program by Community and Family Services. According to the 2006 Census, there were 12,548 people in the City of Kingston living below the LICO. Based on this information, approximately one-third of all individuals living under the LICO in the City have been deemed eligible for the program. Eighty percent of households accessing the program are on social assistance while the remaining 20 percent would be classified as “working poor”. It should be noted that not all households who are deemed eligible for a recreation subsidy or a transit discount actually utilize them. A brief description of each component of MFAP is described below with utilization information.

The table below provides a breakdown of participants by age group for both the ATP and SPARK programs in 2011.

User Age Group	SPARK	ATP
Youth (0-17)	362	50
Adults (18-64)	617	579
Seniors (65+)	21	28
Total	1000	657

Transit (ATP)

The ATP program provides a 32% discount off the full price of a monthly transit pass in the categories of adults, youth, and seniors where the household income falls below the LICO. To date, 657 individuals, comprised of 579 adults, 50 youth and 28 seniors, have purchased at least one monthly discounted transit pass. . Whereas the projected amount for the first year (2010) was \$108,000, the experience and uptake actually amounts to approximately \$165,000 which is required from the Transit budget to offset the discounted pass program,. Ridership information shows that the adult ATP riders are averaging about 38 trips per person, per month which is consistent with our regular monthly adult fare passengers. Beginning in 2012, after receiving an initial monthly transit pass and ID at City Hall, monthly pass holders including those receiving a discount will be able to purchase their monthly passes on-line, making the program even more accessible.

SPARK

The SPARK program provides a recreation subsidy credit of up to \$300 per year per household member for use toward any municipal recreation program or service. The subsidy is transferable within a household. The chart below indicates the subsidy levels for various income amounts for the upcoming 2012 year using the current after-tax LICO. As indicated, reduced subsidy levels are available for those households with incomes above the LICO; however, ninety-eight percent of households accessing the program have incomes below the LICO therefore qualifying for the full subsidy amount.

2012 Recreation Subsidy Amount (per person/per calendar year)	\$300	\$225	\$150	\$75
Household Size	Maximum Net Household Income			
	LICO			
1	\$ 15,865	\$19,038	\$22,211	\$25,384
2	\$19,308	\$23,170	\$27,031	\$30,893
3	\$24,043	\$28,852	\$33,660	\$38,469
4	\$29,996	\$35,995	\$41,994	\$47,994
5	\$34,157	\$40,988	\$47,819	\$54,651
6	\$37,881	\$45,457	\$53,033	\$60,610
7+	\$41,604	\$49,924	\$58,246	\$66,566

The 2010 and 2011 operating budgets allocated \$117,000 toward this program each year and an additional one time contribution of \$10,000 was redirected from Community and Family Services in 2011. It is important to note that community interest in this program increased significantly in 2011. In 2010 only about 50% of SPARK funds were used for municipal recreation programs and as of October 4, 2011, almost 90% of the funds have been utilized. As per page 12 of report EITP-09-026, staff had anticipated that the program take up would be much lower in its first year as much of the promotion is traditionally done through word of mouth.

In 2011, individuals receiving SPARK funds used the following services:

1. Artillery Park 68%
2. Outdoor Aquatic Centre 16%
3. INVISTA Centre 11%
4. Fit Pass 5%

These percentages above include membership purchases, program registration (e.g. day camps, swimming, Aquafit) and drop in programs such as swimming, skating or fitness. To date in 2011, SPARK has been used by 21 seniors (65+), 617 adults (19-64) and 362 children/youth (0-18).

P.R.O. Kids

The Positive Recreation Opportunities (P.R.O.) Kids was first implemented in Kingston in 2004. This program is accessible for children and youth only and is funded by the City, local sport and recreation organizations and through community/corporate donations. Subsidies provided through P.R.O. Kids can be used to access community based and operated recreation programs and/or equipment required to participate in the activity. From 2005 through 2009, there were between 500-600 children and youth accessing P.R.O. Kids annually. Since the introduction of SPARK, this number has dropped to 377 in 2010 and 257 in 2011. These two programs complement each other as one is focused on municipal programs and one on community based programs providing families with a broader range of recreational options to meet the family's needs. The annual revenues from PRO Kids vary from year to year depending mainly on community donations and parent contributions. A municipal contribution of \$20,000 is built into the annual budget.

MFAP Changes for 2012

No significant changes are being recommended for the upcoming year. Staff have been working on improving lines of communication, internal processes and data collection and will continue to do so in the next year. Staff have also had some preliminary discussions with the Roundtable on Poverty Reduction about ways the program could be expanded in the future to use the “My Kingston” card to access discounts for other community programs or services beyond transit and recreation.

EXISTING POLICY/BY LAW:

KIN-FSB-001 Municipal Fee Assistance Program Policy

NOTICE PROVISIONS:

Not applicable

ACCESSIBILITY CONSIDERATIONS:

This report is available in alternative formats upon request.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS:

The SPARK program has an annual operating budget of \$117,000 while PRO Kids has a \$20,000 annual municipal contribution. The Affordable Transit Program subsidy of approximately \$165,000 is a cost within the Kingston Transit budget. Costs of administering the eligibility process are absorbed within the Community and Family Services budget. Combined programs provide for about \$300,000 in funding to support individuals with lower income to access municipal and community based programs.

CONTACTS:

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OTHER CITY OF KINGSTON STAFF CONSULTED:

Sheila Kidd, Director, Transportation Services
Jeremy DaCosta, Manager, Transit
Lynda Breen, Supervisor, Recreation Programs
Laura Austin, Supervisor, Children’s Services
Bryna Everson, Finance Clerk, Recreation and Leisure

EXHIBITS ATTACHED:

N/A