

Grand River Conservation Authority

Report number: GM-12-22-98

Date: December 16, 2022

To: Members of the Grand River Conservation Authority

Subject: Fee Policy, Fee Schedules, and Proposed 2023 Fee Increases

Recommendation:

THAT the Grand River Conservation Authority Fee Policy be approved and implemented effective January 1, 2023;

AND THAT Fee Schedule 1 – Outdoor Environmental Education Fees be approved and implemented effective January 1, 2023;

AND THAT Fee Schedule 2 – Conservation Areas Fees be approved and implemented effective January 1, 2023;

AND THAT Fee Schedule 3 – Planning and Regulations Fees be approved and implemented effective January 1, 2023;

AND THAT Fee Schedule 4 – Tree Nursery Fees be approved and implemented effective January 1, 2023

Summary:

Conservation Authorities are required to adopt a written fee policy by January 1, 2023, as per the [Conservation Authorities Act \(s.21.2\)](#). A comprehensive fee policy for the Grand River Conservation Authority (GRCA) is not currently in place. In previous years, proposed fee increases for Conservation Areas, Nature Centres, and Resource Planning have been reviewed and approved by the Board. The GRCA's proposed Fee Policy reflects the requirements identified in legislation and other specified requirements, and is attached as Appendix B.

Fee Schedules have also been developed that include a listing of the programs and services for which the GRCA charges fees, and the corresponding fee amount for each program and service. A summary of the various Fee Schedules and the proposed increases for 2023, as applicable, is as follows:

- Fee Schedule 1 - Outdoor Environmental Education
 - No fee increases are proposed at this time
- Fee Schedule 2 – Conservation Areas
 - Fees throughout Conservation Areas are proposed to increase varying amounts, depending on the specific program or service.
- Fee Schedule 3 – Planning and Regulations
 - A 4% increase (rounded to the nearest \$5.00) is proposed for permits, plan review applications, and inquiries
- Fee Schedule 4 – Tree Nursery
 - No fee increases are proposed at this time

As per [O.Reg.400/22 Information Requirements](#), once approved, the Fee Policy will be posted on the GRCA's website on the [Governance page](#).

Report:

Fee Policy

Conservation Authorities are required to adopt a written fee policy by January 1, 2023, as per the *Conservation Authorities Act* (s.21.2). A comprehensive fee policy for the Grand River Conservation Authority (GRCA) is not currently in place. In previous years, proposed fee increases for Conservation Areas, Nature Centres, and Planning and Regulations have been reviewed and approved by the Board.

The GRCA's proposed Fee Policy, attached as Appendix B, reflects the requirements identified in the *Conservation Authorities Act* (CA Act). Further to the requirements in the CA Act, a Policy has been developed, called the [Policy: Minister's list of classes of programs and services in respect of which conservation authorities may charge a fee](#), outlining the list of classes of programs and services for which CAs can charge fees. Conservation Ontario also published a guidance document for CAs to use as a reference when developing this policy. Both of these documents guided the GRCA's proposed fee policy.

Fee Schedules and Proposed 2023 Fee Increases

As required by the CA Act, Fee Schedules have also been developed that include a listing of the programs and services for which the GRCA charges fees, and the corresponding fee amount for each program and service. These are attached as Appendices C-F. Additional information on each program and/or service, and the proposed fee increases, as applicable, is included below.

- **Schedule 1 – Outdoor Environmental Education**

GRCA outdoor education programs are currently funded through a number of avenues including agreements with school boards, fees charged directly to school classes or other groups participating, and donations made to the GRCF. This revenue is augmented by GRCA levy funds to cover costs. The program includes fees for both school and non-school programs. Fees have been determined based on the cost to deliver the program, the demand for the program, and the user's ability to pay. Due to changes to the Conservation Authorities Act, the outdoor environmental education program will no longer be eligible for municipal levy funding as of January 1, 2024. As a result, the program is currently under review with a goal of long-term financial sustainability. No fee increases are proposed at this time, but are being evaluated as part of the overall program review.

- **Schedule 2 – Conservation Areas**

Conservation Areas provide various active recreational programs and services that are offered to the public at 10 Conservation Areas. In 2022, Conservation Areas experienced growth in the demand for use of programs and services within each park, with a year-over-year revenue increase of roughly 15%. With increased demand comes increased operating and maintenance costs, as well as increased wear and tear that impacts the long-term useful life of the assets in each Conservation Area. These factors, combined with the overall economic impact of increased inflation and staying current with market trends, have been factored into the proposed user fees for 2023. Staff focused on keeping proposed 2023 fees within a typical average range from 3% to 5%, however, in some cases proposed fee increases are higher than this average. A chart showing the full listing of proposed Conservation Area fees for 2023, 2022 fees for comparison, and the corresponding percentage increase is attached as Appendix A.

The information below highlights some example programs and services where a higher-than-average fee increase has been proposed:

- Increase of 10% for day-use membership cards (after-tax cost increase from \$145 in 2022 to \$160 in 2023) to reflect the average cost for two adults day-use admissions for 10 visits over the course of a given year.
- Increases of 12% for nightly unserviced campsites (after-tax cost increase from \$43 in 2022 to \$48 in 2023) due to demand for site-use and associated maintenance operating expenses.
- Increases of 12% for nightly serviced campsites (after-tax cost increase from \$51 in 2022 to \$57 in 2023) due to demand for site use and associated maintenance operating expenses.
- Varied increases to facility rentals fees were applied across Conservation Areas. Increases reflect demand for facility use and associated maintenance operating expenses.
- There is a change in process for group campsite bookings that could have the potential to increase fees from 2022. This process reflects an existing process used for Youth Group bookings where group site requests will receive a set-fee based on the number of participants and vehicles that will be registered for the site. Previously, group campsites were charged a set fee, regardless of the number of individuals registered to use the site.

- **Schedule 3 – Planning and Regulations**

The GRCA planning and regulations budget includes all elements of planning, including the permit process. This includes: proactive planning (plan input and policy advice, environmental assessments, public inquiries etc.), compliance, review of planning files, as well as the GRCA permit process. Municipal levy supports proactive planning initiatives and the watershed interests in regulations and compliance activities.

Permit Fees

The fee structure is graduated, with minor applications that require less technical review having a lower fee and more complex applications that require technical plans and reports assigned a higher fee. Permit processing and compliance related to the GRCA regulation requires a large amount of time by the planning and regulations staff. A 4% increase (rounded to the nearest \$5.00) in the permit fees is proposed, with the exception of the \$90 processing fee for Rural Water Quality Programs, expired permits and plans to amend an existing permit.

Title Clearance and Inquiry Fee

A 4% increase (rounded to the nearest \$5.00) is proposed in the fee for written responses to legal and general inquiries.

Plan Review

A 4% increase (rounded to the nearest \$5.00) in the Plan Review fees is proposed, with the exception of subdivision/condominium fee cap which is recommended to remain at \$30,000.

- **Schedule 4 – Tree Nursery**

The GRCA's nursery and tree planting programs seek to operate on a cost-recovery basis, but at present, the program is augmented by GRCA levy funds to cover costs. Fees are charged for plant material and planting services and are determined through analysis of operating costs, market comparators, and inflation. Fees are analyzed and established in the late summer or early fall of any given year in order to be prepared for the planting season. Tree Nursery fees for 2023 have already been established and communicated, so there are no proposed increases at this time. Due to changes to the Conservation Authorities Act, the tree planting program will no longer be eligible for municipal levy funding

as of January 1, 2024. As a result, the program will seek to achieve long-term financial sustainability either through full cost recovery and/or other funding sources.

As per [O.Reg.400/22 Information Requirements](#), once approved, the Fee Policy will be posted on the GRCA's website on the [Governance page](#). Fees will be updated on other webpages as applicable to each program and service, and in other printed materials, as applicable.

Fee Study

Staff are currently working with the consulting firm Watson and Associates to analyze and evaluate user fees within the Resource Planning and Conservation Areas departments. This includes identifying internal factors that have an impact on user fees and comparing fees at other Conservation Authorities and other similar comparators. These findings will be presented to the General Membership in early 2023 with recommendations.

Financial Implications:

The fees outlined in the schedules are fees that are considered to be effective January 1, 2023. The budget for 2023 will incorporate these fees as applicable. If any fee adjustments arise during 2023, they would be brought to the General Membership for approval and their impact would be reflected in monthly forecast adjustments that are reported to the General Membership.

Other Department Considerations:

Various departments participated in the preparation of the policy and the proposed fee increases.

Prepared by:

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