

Grand River Conservation Authority

Report number: GM-10-24-94

Date: October 25, 2024

To: Members of the Grand River Conservation Authority

Subject: Fee Policy, Fee Schedules, and Proposed 2025 Fee Increases

Recommendation:

THAT amendments to the Grand River Conservation Authority Fee Policy as outlined in this report be approved and implemented effective January 1, 2025;

AND THAT Fee Schedule 1 – Outdoor Environmental Education Fees be approved and implemented effective January 1, 2025;

AND THAT Fee Schedule 2 – Conservation Areas Fees be approved and implemented effective January 1, 2025;

AND THAT Fee Schedule 4 – Tree Nursery Fees be approved and implemented effective January 1, 2025.

Summary:

Conservation Authorities are required to have a written fee policy, as per the [Conservation Authorities Act \(s.21.2\)](#). The current fee policy for the Grand River Conservation Authority (GRCA) was approved on April 26, 2024. The attached Fee Policy has been updated to reflect minor changes due to legislative and cost allocation changes.

The Fee Schedules list 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 2025, 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 by varying amounts, depending on the specific program or service.
- Fee Schedule 3 – Planning and Regulations
 - Varying increases are proposed for permits and inquiries as well as plan review based on the direction provided by the General Membership through GM Report 10-24-93
- Fee Schedule 4 – Tree Nursery
 - Fees include a general three percent increase.

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

Report:

Fee Policy

Conservation Authorities were 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) was approved at the General Membership Meeting on December 16, 2022 with amendments approved in December 2023 and most recently on April 26, 2024. The attached Fee Policy (Appendix B) has been updated to reflect minor changes.

Fee Schedules and Proposed 2024 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-E. 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 funded by various sources including agreements with school boards, fees charged directly to school classes or other groups participating, and donations from the GRCF. This revenue has been augmented by the GRCA Transition Reserve to cover costs for 2025. 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. No fee increases are proposed at this time.

Schedule 2 – Conservation Areas

Conservation Areas provide various active recreational programs and services that are offered to the public at 11 Conservation Areas. In 2025, Conservation Areas continue to experience high demand for the programs and services within each park. 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 2025. Staff focused on keeping proposed 2025 fee increases within a typical average range from 3% to 5%, however, in some cases proposed fee increases are higher than this average.

As mentioned in the 2024 annual fee report, the Watson User Fee study included an analysis of fees and the anticipated cost recovery of the various programs and services for Conservation Areas. The recommendations included an increase to both day-use fees and seasonal camping fees to operate on a break-even basis, which amounted to 15%, in addition to the annual increase to the cost of operations of 3%. Staff have proposed implementing incremental increases to both day-use and seasonal camping fees over 5 years. 2025 is the second year of this phased increase and staff are proposing a larger than 3% increase in seasonal camping and day-use fees.

With respect to membership fees, the GRCA is in the process of procuring a new vendor to manage the membership program as well as online ticketing. As a result of that process, there may be a need to adjust the membership fees. Should that be the case, an updated membership/fee report will be provided to the board for consideration.

Similarly, the firewood vendor contract will be updated for 2025. A modest increase was included in the 2025 proposed fees, however, if the contract is significantly different than anticipated, the firewood fee might require re-evaluation before the May 1st campground opening.

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

- Overnight camping fees: with the realignment of the seasonal camping program a new category of overnight site has been created at Byng Island CA. Premium waterfront (water-only service) has been added to the overnight camping options with a nightly rental fee of \$58.50 (2025 proposed fee)

- Seasonal camping: To help ensure alignment of all seasonal camping sites, Brant Conservation Area has updated the Premium Waterfront site to reflect that they also provide water service to those sites. The 9 % increase reflects the alignment with similar sites offered at Byng Island CA.
- Lifejackets are free for use in the Conservation Areas. To help deter theft of lifejackets, users are required to provide contact information and/or a deposit (pools excepted)
- Guelph Lake CA has added two pavilions back into the rental program. Sunrise Pavilion and the Sandy Bay Pavilion will be available for rent in 2025
- Rockwood CA will no longer be offering access to the sanitation dumping station. The entrance at Rockwood is narrow and most often users are trying to come into dump their trailer black water and grey water tanks when the conservation area has reached capacity, making accommodation for this service challenging, especially with navigating the narrow entry. Guelph Lake CA has larger roadways, a larger trailer dumping station and is only 15 minutes from Rockwood CA. Guelph Lake CA will continue to offer this service to those who require it. Trailer dumping is included in the camping fee, this service is made available for people who are not camping at GRCA properties.
- 6-month trailer storage is proposed to be increased by 13%. This fee was below market value in comparison to other storage sites. Guelph Lake CA and Laurel Creek CA offer this to the public and seasonal campers. Elora Gorge CA offers storage to only those in the seasonal program at Elora Gorge CA. Byng Island CA also offers storage to only those in their seasonal camping program and most trailers remain on a specific site year-round.
- Hunting fees: The opening day of the waterfowl hunt at Luther Marsh is proposed to increase 10% as the fee has remained the same for over a decade. The Miscellaneous Property Hunting permit is proposed to increase 13% bringing that fee closer to Conestogo and Belwood hunting fees.

A chart showing the proposed Conservation Area fees for 2025, with 2024 fees for comparison and corresponding percentages is attached as Appendix A.

Schedule 3 – Planning and Regulations Services

The Planning and Regulations program is a mandatory service that provides a watershed benefit by regulating development and undertaking review of applications/proposals in and near natural hazards to reduce the risk of loss of life and minimize property damage. The Planning and Regulations budget includes all elements of planning, including the permit process. This includes proactive planning (ie. plan input and policy advice), review of planning and other applications, as well as the GRCA permit process, public inquiries, title clearances, compliance and enforcement. The budget is funded through a combination of self-generated revenue through user fees, and municipal apportionment.

Currently, as per a Minister's Direction, planning and permitting fees are frozen until December 31, 2024. At this time, it is unknown if this direction will be extended. In the event fees can be increased in 2025, two reports (GM-09-24-81 and GM-10-24-93) have been prepared to determine user fee cost recovery targets and outline potential new fee categories to inform the development of final proposed fee schedules.

Based on direction received on Report GM-10-24-93, staff will finalize draft Planning and Regulations Fee Schedules, consult with the GRCA-Home Builders Liaison Committee and present the revised Fee Schedules at the next General Membership meeting.

Schedule 4 – Tree Nursery

The GRCA's nursery and tree planting programs seek to operate on a cost-recovery basis. It is proposed that surplus funds from other Category 3 programs and services will be used to address any deficit in the operating budget for this program.

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 to be prepared for the planting season in the following year. Tree Nursery fees for 2025 include a general 3% inflation increase.

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.

Financial Implications:

The fees outlined in the schedules are proposed to be implemented on January 1, 2025. The budget for 2025 will incorporate these fees as applicable. If any fee adjustments arise during 2025, 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:

Karen Armstrong
Deputy CAO, Secretary-Treasurer

Approved by:

Samantha Lawson
Chief Administrative Officer