

TO:	CHAIR AND MEMBERS COMMUNITY and PROTECTIVE SERVICES COMMITTEE MEETING ON NOVEMBER 13, 2018
FROM:	LYNNE LIVINGSTONE MANAGING DIRECTOR NEIGHBOURHOOD, CHILDREN AND FIRE SERVICES
SUBJECT:	LONDON STRENGTHENING NEIGHBOURHOOD STRATEGY 2017-2020: NEIGHBOURHOOD EVENT EQUIPMENT LENDING PROGRAM

RECOMMENDATION

That, on the recommendation of the Managing Director of Neighbourhood, Children and Fire Services, the following **ACTION BE TAKEN** with respect to the Neighbourhood Event Equipment Lending Program: that Civic Administration maintain the current model for the Neighbourhood Event Equipment Lending Program.

PREVIOUS REPORTS PERTINENT TO THIS MATTER

- London Strengthening Neighbourhoods Strategy 2017-2020 (May 24, 2017)
- London Strengthening Neighbourhoods Strategy 2017-2020 Implementation of New Initiatives (June 20, 2017)

BACKGROUND

At its meeting held on July 24, 2018, Municipal Council REQUESTED that Civic Administration review the Neighbourhood Event Equipment Lending Program and report back to the Community and Protective Services Committee with respect to adding church groups to the list of organizations available to request use of City of London equipment to host community events and implementing a prioritization system for applicants.

The purpose of this report is to inform Council of the current process for lending neighbourhood event equipment to residents and to provide options and implications for increasing access to the program.

London Strengthening Neighbourhoods Strategy (LSNS) 2017-2020

London Strengthening Neighbourhood Strategy is a resident driven strategy that invites and encourages resident participation and engagement to help make all of London’s neighbourhoods stronger.

LSNS significantly contributes to the “Strengthening Our Community” Area of Focus in the City’s Strategic Plan. The Strategy recognizes that neighbourhoods are about both **people** and **places**, and how they work together to make great places to live, work, and play. Strong neighbourhoods are *vibrant, connected, and engaged* – they form the backbone of our *diverse, inclusive, and welcoming community*. LSNS empowers residents to work with the City to create *healthy, safe, and accessible* places.

The strategies and action steps outlined in LSNS 2017 – 2020 align with the Strategic Plan’s strategy to *support neighbourhood driven activities and decision making* to strengthen all of London’s neighbourhoods. The strategies are grouped into four themes:

1. Engagement in Neighbourhoods
2. Communication
3. Tools and Resources to Support Neighbourhoods
4. Overarching Strategies.

One of the strategies identified by residents, under the theme of “*Tools and Resources to Support Neighbourhoods*” is to support residents to build capacity through a variety of tools and resources to improve neighbourhoods through neighbourhood driven activities and decision making. One of the specific action steps to implement this strategy identifies that the **City of London continue to share physical assets such as tents, movie kits, chairs, tables, etc., to support neighbourhood events and activities.**

Neighbourhood Event Equipment Lending Program

The Neighbourhood Event Equipment Lending (NEEL) Program originated with the first LSNS (2009-2015) and has supported residents and neighbourhood groups to hold small events, festivals and

gatherings in their local neighbourhood. Over the past eight years, Civic Administration has purchased items such as tents, chairs, tables, and games to slowly increase the number of physical assets available for residents to borrow in order to hold their events. Funds to support these one-time purchases were identified through small year-end surpluses in NCFS if and when available.

Through this program, Civic Administration has supported residents with tools and resources to grow the number of grassroots neighbourhood driven activities. This in turn has increased the demand on the NEEL Program. With this increase in demand, guidelines were set up for the Program in order to be able to deliver the Program within current available resources. See [Appendix A](#) for further details about the current Program.

Current Guidelines of the NEEL Program

This Program is available for resident groups, which are defined as groups of neighbours working to build community in their neighbourhood. This could be a neighbourhood association or an informal group of neighbours. This does not include faith based organizations, not-for-profit organizations, or other groups affiliated with formal institutions such as schools.

A neighbourhood event is defined as one being held in a public space utilizing volunteers, has a low budget, has low cost/no cost activities, is labelled grassroots (led by local leaders and volunteers), has attendance up to 300 people, and is a non-profit and non-fundraising event. Event examples include street parties, community BBQs, movie nights, plant swaps, and small neighbourhood festivals. Events this program **does not** support include private functions (birthday parties), school-based events, yard sales, events organized by places of worship, business related events, and events that charge an entry fee.

The original decision to focus the Neighbourhood Event Equipment Lending Program on resident groups was based on the following factors:

- resident groups are unable to access most funding opportunities due to their informal nature;
- resident groups do not own buildings so storing equipment can be difficult;
- the number of resident groups is relatively small so the program is manageable;
- the program operates on a first-come first-serve basis, so organizations with paid staff would have an advantage over resident groups; and,
- places of worship, schools, and not-for profit organizations have an ability to raise funds or access other resources to rent or buy equipment.

Highlights of the 2018 NEEL Program

From May 1 to September 30, 2018, Civic Administration supported a total of 72 local neighbourhood events with equipment including chairs, tables, tents, and large outdoor games. Just under 41% were informal resident groups and 59% were local neighbourhood associations. Over this same period, Civic Administration declined 23 requests that did not meet qualifications and the main reasons were the requests were for private functions or the requests were made by schools and faith based organizations.

Based on Council's request to explore options to increase access to the Neighbourhood Event Equipment Lending Program beyond resident groups, Civic Administration has developed four possible options.

Options for Consideration

In London, there are approximately 137 places of worship, 172 schools (including private institutions), and over 400 not-for-profit organizations. Civic Administration recognizes the great community building work of schools, places of worship, and not-for-profits in London neighbourhoods. These groups play a vital role in the community and in building vibrant, connected and engaged neighbourhoods.

It is important to note that there is no dedicated budget or staff resources for this Program. Summer casual staff who are hired to support summer programs such as the outdoor movie nights, support resident groups by overseeing the pick-up and return of equipment at the City of London storage facility. Summer staff are also involved in completing an inventory, cleaning and maintenance of the equipment at summer's end. Full time City staff in NCFS manage the requests for equipment, oversee the scheduling and approval process, and manage pick-up and drop off outside of the summer months.

Based on the above information, Civic Administration considered four options:

1. Maintain the Current Model – equipment is lent to resident groups only
2. Open the Program to resident groups and faith-based organizations that support neighbourhood driven activities on a first come, first served basis.
3. Open the Program to all groups that support neighbourhood driven activities including resident groups, faith-based organizations, schools, and not-for-profit organizations.
4. Prioritization Model - prioritize resident groups to access equipment first and then 2 weeks prior to the date of the rental, the application process opens to faith based groups, schools, and not-for-profits who support neighbourhood driven activities

Civic Administration conducted a high-level analysis to better understand the opportunities and challenges associated with each option and highlighted below are some key factors to consider:

OPTION 1: Maintain the Current Model: Resident groups with a focus on building community in their neighbourhood can access equipment based on availability for no cost on a first come first served basis.	
Opportunities	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aligns with LSNS focus on supporting grassroots resident-led groups. Current equipment inventory and staff levels are able to satisfy demand for residents. The process to approve requests is simple, and streamlined. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is limited equipment and resources therefore some groups (faith based organizations and not-for-profit organizations) are not able to participate. Groups who make last minute requests are not always able to get all the equipment they requested due to limited availability.
<p>Potential Financial Implications: This option is supported within the current base budget and requires no additional resources as the level of service does not change.</p>	

OPTION 2: Program would be open to resident groups and faith-based organizations that support neighbourhood driven activities.	
Opportunities	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Program would support a broader range of groups and events. Simple process for approval of requests: first come, first served. All groups would have to demonstrate that they are working to build community in their neighbourhood. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organizations with staff will have a significant advantage over volunteer resident groups. Increasing the inventory of equipment, staff time, and storage capacity to satisfy demand would be required. There are private companies that rent equipment to organizations, businesses, etc at a cost. This may impact their bottom line if the City provides equipment for free or at a nominal cost. Schools and not-for profit organizations have also asked to access equipment, therefore only supporting faith-based organizations may create inequity.
<p>Potential Financial Implications: Funding to support a dedicated budget for the expanded Program would need to be found in order to increase the level of service. This includes additional resources to support replacing worn equipment on a regular basis, increasing inventory of physical assets, increased staff resources for the program, and increased storage space requirements for physical assets. The estimate cost for this option is \$32,000 as identified in <u>Appendix B</u>.</p>	

OPTION 3: Program would be open to all groups that support neighbourhood driven activities including resident groups, faith-based organizations, schools, and not-for-profit organizations.	
Opportunities	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Program would support a broader range of groups and events. Simple process for approval of requests – first come, first served. By opening the program to any group working to build community in their neighbourhood, supports a more equitable approach. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organizations with staff will have a significant advantage over volunteer resident groups. Increasing the inventory of equipment, staff time, and storage capacity to satisfy demand would be required. There are private companies that rent equipment to organizations, businesses, etc at a cost. This may impact their bottom line if the City provides equipment for free or at a nominal cost.
<p>Potential Financial Implications: Funding to support a dedicated budget for the expanded Program would need to be found in order to increase the level of service. This includes additional resources to support replacing worn equipment on a regular basis, increasing inventory of physical assets, increased staff resources for the program and customer service, and increased storage space requirements for physical assets. The estimate cost for this option is \$85,000 as identified in <u>Appendix B</u>.</p>	

OPTION 4: Prioritization Model: Prioritize resident groups to access equipment first and then two weeks prior to the date of the rental, application process opens to faith based groups, schools, and not-for-profits who support neighbourhood driven activities¹.

Opportunities	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Residents still have priority but open to other groups as well. Potential for broader range of events and groups getting support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Added complication to the booking process. Many resident groups request equipment within 2 weeks of their event. Will result in fewer resident groups getting access to program.
<p>Potential Financial Implications: Funding to support a dedicated budget for the expanded Program would need to be found in order to support replacing worn equipment on a regular basis, increasing inventory of physical assets, increased staff resources for the program, and increased storage space requirements for physical assets. The estimate cost for this option is \$32,000 as identified in Appendix B.</p>	

Recommendation: Option One: Maintain the Current Model

Based on the input and feedback from residents through the development of LSNS, the above analysis of each option, and the current available NCFS resources for the NEEL program, Civic Administration recommend using Option One: Maintain the current model for the Neighbourhood Event Equipment Lending Program. This means that resident groups *only*, with a focus on building community in their neighbourhood, can access equipment based on availability, for no cost, and on a first come first served basis.

If Council wishes to proceed with an alternate option, Civic Administration recommends that the alternate model of service be considered, alongside other priorities, through the 2019-2023 Strategic Plan and the 2020 – 2023 Multi-Year Budget process.

NEXT STEPS

Should Council decide to move away from the current model of the NEEL Program (Option One) and identify an alternate model of service, alongside other priorities through the 2019-2023 Strategic Plan, Civic Administration would undertake the following actions:

- Develop a business case for the 2020 – 2023 Multi-Year Budget detailing the cost of the revised NEEL Program based on the option chosen by Council. As part of the business case, Civic Administration would explore such ideas as requiring a deposit for the equipment in an effort to recoup costs for damaged equipment and a late fee for returning equipment.
- Determine a start date for the revised Program based on the funding made available through the 2020 – 2023 Multi-Year Budget.
- Update the Program’s criteria based on the option chosen on the City’s website and the Program’s application form.
- Develop a communication plan to share the revised NEEL Program with the community.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Funding currently exists in the approved operating budget to meet the current needs of the Neighbourhood Event Equipment London Program, subject to annual confirmation through the annual budget update process.

Should Council decide to move away from the current model of the NEEL Program (Option One), Civic Administration recommends that the alternate model of service be considered, alongside other priorities, through the 2019-2023 Strategic Plan and the 2020 – 2023 Multi-Year Budget process.

CONCLUSION

The heart and essence of every city are its neighbourhoods². London Strengthening Neighbourhoods Strategy is fundamentally a resident driven strategy that encourages resident participation and engagement to help make all of London’s neighbourhoods stronger.

¹ Groups that can borrow equipment must be supporting a neighbourhood. Equipment is not available for events in geography larger than a neighbourhood.

² London Strengthening Neighbourhoods Strategy (2010-2015) Resident Task Force

London Strengthening Neighbourhoods Strategy and its related strategies and actions such as The Neighbourhood Event Equipment Lending Program, builds on Council’s commitment to “*Strengthening Our Community; by building vibrant, connected and engaged neighbourhoods*” through supporting neighbourhood driven activities and decision making.

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RECOMMENDED BY:	
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Information About The City of London's Neighbourhood Event Equipment Lending Program

Purpose

The City of London supports Neighbourhood Events that serve to build community and promote health and wellbeing in a variety of ways. We do this because we value and appreciate the efforts that neighbourhood volunteers devote to organizing events and strive to reduce the barriers while making sure safety and security measures are effectively practiced.

We know that buying, borrowing or renting event equipment can be difficult for new or smaller resident groups. Therefore we offer neighbourhood groups some of the equipment needed in organizing events free of charge.

Please Note: this program is only for resident groups, which are defined as groups of neighbours working to build community in their neighbourhood. This could be a neighbourhood association or an informal group of neighbours who organize one event a year. This does not include churches, schools, or other groups affiliated with formal institutions.

Neighbourhood Event Definition

The type of event is held in a public space utilizing volunteers, has a low budget, has low cost/no cost activities, is labelled grassroots (led by local leaders and volunteers), and has attendance up to 300 people. This event is a non-profit and non-fundraising event.

Promotion

The Neighbourhood Event Equipment Lending Program is regularly promoted through the City's social media accounts, the NeighbourGood monthly email newsletter, community events, and workshops.

Booking

Residents request equipment through an online form accessible on the City's website. After reviewing the details of the request, staff reach out to the resident to confirm details for the booking. Parks and Recreation Customer Service staff book the equipment and generate a contract using the CLASS system. The resident signs and returns the contract to confirm the booking.

Pick-up & Drop-off

Residents are told when and where they can pick up the equipment for their event. The equipment is kept at a storage facility at the Carling Heights Optimist Community Centre. A Neighbourhood Children & Fire Services staff arranges to meet the resident for pick-up and drop-off.

Current Inventory (total of 133 pieces of equipment)

The available equipment includes:

- Pop-up tents (8x8 and 10x10) (5 maximum)
- Folding Tables (5 maximum)
- Folding Chairs (10 maximum)
- Base Kits (10 picnic tables, 5 recycle bins and 5 garbage cans)
- Sandwich Sign (2 maximum)
- Giant Outdoor Games (5 maximum)

In special circumstances where residents are not able to transport items, Parks Operation Staff/Civic Admin will deliver equipment to a residents event location to allow full access by all residents. Equipment is regularly inspected and cleaned by staff to ensure everything is in good working condition. Repairs and replacements take place as required throughout the year.

APPENDIX B

Potential Additional Cost Implications for Expanding the Neighbourhood Event Equipment Lending Program

Additional Costs	Option One	Option Two	Option Three	Option Four
Replacement of equipment due to wear and tear	N/A	\$3,000	\$3,000	\$3,000
Increase inventory of equipment	N/A	\$2,000	\$5,000	\$2,000
Additional storage space	N/A	\$5,000	\$5,000	\$5,000
Increased staff resources	N/A	\$20,000	\$70,000	\$20,000
Technology support to develop a web-based lending and tracking program	N/A	\$2,000	\$2,000	\$2,000
TOTAL COST	N/A	\$32,000	\$85,000	\$32,000