



SUBJECT: Civic Recognition program recommendation
TO: Corporate Services, Strategy, Risk & Accountability Cttee.
FROM: Office of the City Clerk

Report Number: CL-21-23

Wards Affected: N/A

Date to Committee: November 1, 2023

Date to Council: November 14, 2023

Recommendation:

Approve the civic recognition program to be implemented starting in 2024 as outlined in Appendix A to office of the city clerk report CL-21-23.

PURPOSE:

Vision to Focus Alignment:

- Building more citizen engagement, community health and culture

Background and Discussion:

Civic recognition awards are honours given to groups or individuals for their outstanding contributions and achievements in service to the community. Since 1965, the civic recognition program at the City of Burlington has evolved to include a range of methods for acknowledging and celebrating community volunteers. In 2012, the program was rebranded from Civic Recognition to Burlington's Best, which continued from 2012 to 2019 when the following staff direction was approved on January 28, 2019, through office of the city clerk report CL-01-19:

Direct the City Clerk to explore partnerships with other recognition programs across the City in order to establish one event program that celebrates the recognition for volunteerism and report back to Council by Q3 of 2019.

Subsequent to this staff direction the following recommendation was approved at the City Council meeting on April 20, 2021, as part of Office of the Mayor report MO-04-20:

Report back on options for resident recognition programs and/or events, and exploring, among other possibilities:

- a) revised/rebranded Burlington's Best/Civic Recognition/Inspire Burlington;
- b) partnership with the Key to the City program; and/or
- c) incorporating recognition into the annual Burlington Day festivities being developed by the mayor's office in partnership with the recreation services department to launch in 2021.

Staff provided an update to Council in April 2022 by way of report CL-22-02 with the following recommendation and staff direction being approved:

Direct the City Clerk to report back in Q3 2022 on potential (draft) criteria, a formal process for nominating community members to be recognized and a plan for a recognition event to take place in 2023; and

Direct the City Clerk to work with the Manager of Engagement and Volunteers to plan and implement an engagement campaign regarding civic recognition in Q2 2022; and

Direct the City Clerk to implement the working group model, as utilized for the council compensation process, in conjunction with other models of citizen engagement by the end of Q3 2022 to ensure robust community input in regard to the important re-establishment of a Burlington civic recognition program for 2023. (SD-11-22)

This report aims to present Council with options for implementing a new civic recognition program, fulfilling this staff direction.

Strategy/process/risk

Since the initial staff direction in 2019, staff have been actively obtaining feedback on the existing civic recognition program, Burlington's Best, and exploring opportunities for program improvements. Valuable input and recommendations have been gathered through Council interviews, the civic recognition working group and an online survey. This feedback has played a crucial role in forming the civic recognition models in this report.

Council Feedback

To fully understand what Council members expect in a civic recognition program moving forward, staff conducted interviews in the summer of 2021 with each member of Council. Some of the comments that the majority of members shared include:

- the gala format was not necessary or expected from award recipients.
- the event should be free to attend for everyone

- awards should not have winners or losers
- a clear set of criteria for someone to receive recognition

A full analysis of questions and feedback from Councillors can be found in office of the city clerk report CL-02-22.

Civic Recognition Working Group

To incorporate community input, a staff direction prompted the creation of a working group comprised of seven members of existing Advisory Committees. The Terms of Reference and membership for the working group was approved by the City Manager as per the Public Appointment Policy and communicated to members of Council through the Council Information Package on June 24, 2022. The working group met several times over the summer of 2022 to discuss different models of civic recognition. Staff provided the group with a scan of civic recognition models used in other municipalities and a summary of Council's feedback for consideration. Three common models of civic recognition were identified and considered by the working group:

Model A – Annual Event

- One event during the year, usually a gala or dinner event
- Many categories with one winner
- Nominations are submitted to a panel and selected during a specified time of year
- Some have rules around how frequently people can win

Examples include Calgary, AB, Pickering, ON, Aurora, ON

Model B – Year-round Recognition

- Recognition throughout the year at Council meetings
- Multiple citizens can be recognized at a Council meeting (not just one)
- One or few categories or focuses and specific criteria
- Nominations submitted to staff for review
- Provisions around how frequently one can be nominated

Examples include Reno, NV, Kenora, ON, Sioux Falls, SD, Riverton, UT

Model C – Year-round recognition and annual event

- Recognition at Council meetings, and a special annual event
- Recognition at Council meetings is for general achievements
- Special annual event to recognize citizens who have exceptional achievements in specific categories

Examples include Leduc, AB, Thunder Bay, ON

The working group discussed topics including what had been done in the past, future options, criteria, nomination process, and provided general feedback and suggestions. There were two overall themes that came out of the working group. The first being that recognition doesn't need to be anything extravagant, the group agreed that people volunteer for the joy of volunteering (giving back to community, being a valued member of society, contributing value to an important cause), and generally are not doing it for the recognition. The second theme being that recognition should be provided in a way that recognizes as many volunteers as possible in a way that does not create a competition. The working group felt it was important to not limit the amount of 'awards' or recognition given out and some thought categories could exclude some activities that would otherwise deserve recognition.

Civic Recognition Survey

In order to gain insights on community preferences for a civic recognition program, staff conducted an online survey on Get Involved Burlington. The civic recognition survey was available from July 16, 2022 to August 15, 2022. The survey was promoted on all city social media outlets (including paid ads), advertised in the Burlington Post, digital information displays in community centres, Get Involved newsletter, and emailed to current advisory committee members. During the duration of the survey there were 157 visits to the Get Involved page, with 73 respondents completing the survey. Survey results can be found attached as Appendix B. In summary, the results show:

- The majority of the respondents were aware that the City has a program to recognize residents contributions to the community.
- When asked how people who contribute to the community should be recognized, the options to have a ceremony at a city event and recognition on city digital media channels tied for the most votes. Coming in a very close second was receiving a certificate at a City Council meeting. These results have influenced the recommendation in the report.
 - There were many additional comments that residents don't volunteer for the recognition, that it's a selfless act to bring joy to others and to better the community. Additional comments also pointed out that the importance in recognizing volunteers is to spread their stories in the hopes to inspire others to get involved in the community. A simple thank you was also mentioned as an option several times in the comments.
- When asked about which criteria should be included when determining which contributions and volunteer work should be recognized the predominant choice was 'overall positive impact on the community'. Tied for second was 'innovation' and 'number of years/time'. This indicates that the respondents consider the difference someone's contributions are making to the community and its

members as the most important. While measuring an individual's contributions can be challenging, it is imperative to consider this criteria when choosing recipients.

- Strong support for an independent committee or panel consisting of staff, Council member(s), residents and businesses (55%) to select the recipients of civic recognition. The second choice was an advisory committee consisting of just residents which received 15%.

The majority of respondents indicated a preference for naming the event "Civic Recognition" and having recognition as one large annual event. The survey offered various options for how recognition is delivered. The following in-person options were the most voted for:

- Civic Recognition recipients will receive a certificate from the Mayor and members of Council at a Council meeting.
- Provide the opportunity (optional as this type of recognition may not be wanted by all) to be recognized on stage during the annual Burlington Canada Day event. The Mayor and members of Council will invite recipients to the stage and provide a brief introduction for each recipient and how their contributions have impacted the community. A small token of appreciation could be presented at this time such as a City of Burlington pin or another souvenir.

The feedback received from Council, the Civic Recognition Working Group and survey share common ideas and themes including establishing a clear set of criteria for eligibility, no competition for recognition, and preference for a smaller, less formal award ceremony that is free to attend and open to all.

Options Considered

Civic Recognition program policy

Based on the aforementioned feedback, staff have developed a policy for a new program, Civic Recognition, attached as Appendix A. The program includes:

- A similar process for nominations in the past where nominators complete an online nomination form during a designated time frame. The call for nominations will be promoted with a communications plan.
- An independent selection committee made up of current advisory committee members and facilitated by a staff liaison will review the nominations and determine the nominees that fit the criteria for recognition. Nominations will remain confidential.
- No categories or limit on how many awards can be given out. If all nominees meet the requirements, they may all receive an award.

- Event will be held at an evening Council meeting twice per year (May and October) where recipients will be announced and presented with a certificate from the City. Light refreshments will be served after the meeting.
- Feature the award recipients and their accomplishments on City social media outlets and website (with consent of the nominee).

Recognition with Categories

Additionally, staff considered including categories for awards to add structure to the civic recognition model and provide a framework for nominations. As an alternative recommendation, direction could be given to staff to report back on potential categories for awards. These categories could be based on one or more of the following:

- City priorities (accessibility, diversity and inclusion, environmental sustainability, active transportation, and creating neighbourhood connections)
- Types of volunteerism performed by community groups (eg. Volunteer Halton members)
- Other volunteer award models

While it is important to acknowledge that although the addition of categories contradicts the feedback that was received, they could be a good option to add a layer of organization and formality to the program. As the proposed policy does not include categories, staff direction would be required to establish them.

Potential School Board Partnerships

Staff have connected with the Halton District School Board and the Halton Catholic District School Board to discuss a potential youth recognition partnership that would have school administrators nominate elementary-aged children whose achievements or volunteerism have made an impact on their school or community. Both school boards have expressed interest in participating.

Staff plan to continue to pursue this partnership for inclusion in the recognition program. This will be done on an informal basis unless direction to staff is provided to formalize the partnership with the school boards.

Key to the City

The Mayor's Key to the City award presentation could be included in the civic recognition program in order to present the Key at the same Council meeting as the civic recognition certificates. Staff do not recommend that the Key to the City initiative be integrated into the civic recognition program but should remain with the Mayor's Office. Feedback from the survey and the working group indicated that the Key to the

City should be reserved for special circumstances such as life-long achievements, exceptional contributions, and achievements above and beyond the average volunteer.

Other considerations

Other options considered but not being recommended include a BBQ event for recipients, a walk or wall of fame, gift cards for recipients, donation to charity of recipient's choice, and doing nothing. There was significant feedback in the survey and from the working group that people do great things in the community out of a genuine desire to make a positive impact rather than seeking recognition. Given that there was significant feedback from the community that the rewards of volunteering are why people do it, the above options were not recommended. We also took into consideration the cost to implementing some of the other options listed above and ruled them out due to complexity and cost.

Staff support that members of Council continue to have, or implement, ward-specific recognition programs for residents in their respective wards. This is a great way to recognize the contributions of those that may not qualify for the civic recognition program.

Financial Matters:

Costs for the recommended civic recognition program would be minimal. The only costs would be for certificates to be produced and refreshments for the event.

Total Financial Impact

Not applicable.

Source of Funding

All expenses from the civic recognition program would be covered from the existing Advisory Committee budget.

Other Resource Impacts

Staff from several departments will be impacted by the delivery of the recommended recognition program including office of the city clerk, recreation, community and culture and corporate communications and engagement.

Climate Implications

Not applicable.

Engagement Matters:

A summary of engagement initiatives is available under the Strategy/process section of the report. Should Council approve the policy, staff will create a comprehensive communication plan to promote the new program.

Conclusion:

Civic recognition is an important program that recognizes exceptional efforts and positive impacts made by recipients who have contributed to the betterment of the community. Based on the results from engaging the community through a survey and working group, staff feel the recommended option for delivering civic recognition is an appropriate and respectful way to recognize the amazing contributions of our residents and promote civic pride and engagement.

Respectfully submitted,

Suzanne Gillies
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Appendices:

- A. Civic Recognition program policy for approval
- B. Get Involved survey results and comments summary

Report Approval:

All reports are reviewed and/or approved by Department Director, the Chief Financial Officer and the Executive Director of Legal Services & Corporation Counsel.