



**CITY OF VANCOUVER**

**ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT**

Report Date: November 22, 2005  
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Meeting Date: December 15, 2005

TO: Standing Committee on City Services and Budgets  
FROM: General Manager of Engineering Services  
SUBJECT: Grant to 'Save Our Living Environment'

**RECOMMENDATION**

THAT Council approve a grant of \$75,000 to Save Our Living Environment (SOLE) for supplementary cleaning of sidewalks, lanes and public spaces in the Downtown Eastside in 2006, as outlined in this report, with funding provided from the Solid Waste Capital Reserve.

**GENERAL MANAGER'S COMMENTS**

The General Manager of Engineering Services recommends approval.

**COUNCIL POLICY**

In each of the past seven years, City Council has approved grants to SOLE for micro street and lane cleaning in the Downtown Eastside. The source of funds was the Solid Waste Capital Reserve.

Approval of grants requires eight affirmative votes.

## PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to seek Council's approval for a grant to SOLE of \$75,000, so that it can continue for twelve months its very successful program of supplementary cleaning of public spaces in the Downtown Eastside (DTES).

## BACKGROUND

Save Our Living Environment (SOLE) is a non-profit urban environmental group active in downtown Vancouver. The Society sponsors several projects at 39 East Hastings Street, including the United We Can Bottle Depot and Crossroads and Lanes. A primary objective of the Society is to create self-sustaining enterprises that focus on caring for the urban environment, while also creating income and job training opportunities for people of the inner city. The program employs residents from the DTES with barriers to traditional employment, giving them valuable job-training and enhanced self-esteem.

SOLE now employs between 25 and 35 people (depending on the season) who no longer require income assistance. Six full-time employees work primarily in the lane and sidewalk cleaning project funded by the City's grant. SOLE's pool of active work participants is sustained at 150 people, many of whom have participated in the cleaning program.

SOLE continues to contract with the provincial Ministry of Human Resources to operate a community assistance project (CAP) which has allowed the society to offer support to more than 350 people in the inner city, who are seeking opportunities to make a positive contribution to their community by engaging in this work and in the other projects operated by SOLE. Ministry regulations and CAP program guidelines have allowed people with disabilities who receive income assistance to earn up to \$400 per month without deductions, people with persistent multiple barriers to earn up to \$300, and people who are considered employable according to Ministry employability screening to receive up to \$100 as a training allowance while participating in the project. The CAP Program will end in March 2006.

In 2005, SOLE's lane cleaning crews continued to participate in the needle collection program and attended some meetings of the Needle Sweeps Committee coordinated through Vancouver Coastal Health.

Other ventures that SOLE continued to develop in 2005 included:

- A commercial beverage container collection service, which now serves 147 customers in Vancouver.
- A bicycle repair shop, Bikeworks, which continues to grow towards self-sufficiency.
- A Bidders' Association. SOLE is working with a designer to support the development and fabrication of a new binning cart as part of a strategy to provide customer service training and encourage an improved image, which will help integrate its workers and services into a model that can reflect the City's vision for the "Inclusive 2010 Winter Olympic Games".

- SOLE has worked with City staff in the Housing Centre to support the development of a new social housing project at 55 East Hastings Street. This project was identified as a priority by the Mayor's Task Force on Homelessness, commissioned by the Premier. Construction is to begin in the spring of 2006. The project is designed to house United We Can bottle on the ground floor.
- SOLE and United We can continue to plan for a community recovery residence as part of a vision for a more holistic approach to revitalization in the Downtown Eastside. Funding support for this project has been extended by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation and the Real Estate Foundation of British Columbia.
- SOLE/United We Can recently completed a comprehensive 5 year plan for enterprise expansion, management, capacity building and succession.

### Street and Lane Clean-Up

The amount of garbage and litter that is deposited on streets and lanes in the DTES is far greater than elsewhere in the city. There are many reasons for this, including:

- a large number of premises have no formal garbage disposal arrangements
- the drug and sex trades create litter from discarded drug paraphernalia, etc.
- street people pull garbage from dumpsters and litter containers, while searching for food and commodities to sell
- dumpsters are left unlocked and become overfilled, which results in spillage when the dumpsters are emptied
- there is, generally, a lack of stewardship of the public spaces by adjacent property owners and the community.

While there are some businesses in the DTES who are very conscientious about keeping the public areas around their premises clean, the Engineering Department's Sanitation Branch and the Park Board provide a much higher frequency of cleaning services on DTES streets, lanes and parks than elsewhere in the city. In addition, the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority also pays a number of agencies to perform needle-sweeps in the DTES.

However, these cleaning activities are still insufficient to keep the DTES streetscape acceptably tidy on a consistent basis. The grant which the City has given to SOLE in the past six years has been used to supplement these cleaning activities in the public realm. SOLE's program has been very effective in cleaning up the smaller or more frequent items of litter, such as cigarette butts, bottle caps, drug paraphernalia and condoms, as well as litter which accumulates in abandoned entranceways and private alcoves.

Furthermore, the Gastown, Chinatown and Strathcona BIA's hire SOLE to do regular cleanups of public property in their areas. Movie Production companies also contract SOLE's cleaning services. It is hoped that the higher level of street and lane cleanliness that results from these activities helps encourage merchants and property owners to pitch in and help keep the public spaces around their premises tidier.

## DISCUSSION

### Proposed Grant for 2006

In each of the past seven years, Council has approved grants to SOLE (\$50,000 per year 1999-2002, \$60,000 per year 2003-2004, and \$75,000 for 2005) for micro-cleaning sidewalks and lanes in the Downtown Eastside (DTES). The 2005 grant included \$15,000 for garbage container service, on the understanding that any unused portion of the \$15,000 could be spent on SOLE's lane and sidewalk cleaning program. In the past six years, SOLE has been able to raise matching funds to double the amount of the City's grant and in some years has even been able to exceed this level. The program now covers approximately 65 blocks and several parks. The work is regularly monitored by City staff, and is very effective in supplementing the Sanitation Department's daily street cleaning in the challenging DTES area.

For 2006, SOLE is requesting \$75,000, of which a portion may be used to pay for garbage container service for disposing of the litter and garbage which their clean-up crews collect (on the same basis as last year). The grant will fund:

- micro cleaning of DTES sidewalks
- supplementary DTES lane clean-ups
- litter pick-up on public spaces on private property adjacent to lanes and sidewalks (building setbacks, entranceways, alcoves, loading bays, vacant lots, etc.)
- collection and separation of discarded needles as part of a monitored needle collection system coordinated by the City and Coastal Health Authority.

In 2006, SOLE will again solicit matching funds to support this work. During the ten years that SOLE has been engaged in sidewalk and lane cleaning in the inner city, it has been able to raise approximately \$500,000 from sources other than the City of Vancouver to assist with the cost of doing this work. 92% of the dollars spent on the project go directly to pay the workers who do the actual cleaning work. 8% of the funding is used to cover administration, overhead and supplies. (However, a portion of the \$75,000 grant requested for 2006 may be used for commercial garbage container service.)

SOLE's cleanup program provides a very effective contribution to the cleanliness of the Downtown Eastside. It complements the City Sanitation Branch's street cleaning program by providing a level of 'micro-cleaning' under and around parked vehicles, garbage containers, in alcoves, etc. which the City's mechanized equipment cannot do as efficiently. There is no question that without SOLE's efforts, the Downtown Eastside would be far messier and less attractive.

## FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

As in previous years, funding is available for this grant in the Solid Waste Capital Reserve.

## CONCLUSION

Recognizing the considerable benefits of this public spaces cleanup program to the City and to the DTES, in terms of cleanliness and employment training and opportunities for inner city residents, it is recommended that a grant of \$75,000 be given to SOLE for 2006. The DTES Policy and Core Staff Committees, as well as the City Manager, support this recommendation.

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