

NO: **F005**

COUNCIL DATE: **FEBRUARY 2, 2015**

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## FINANCE COMMITTEE

TO: **Mayor & Council**

DATE: **January 23, 2015**

FROM: **Chief Librarian &  
General Manager, Finance & Technology**

FILE: **1850-20**

SUBJECT: **City of Surrey – Poet Laureate**

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## RECOMMENDATION

The Chief Librarian and the Finance & Technology Department recommend that Council approve a 3 year sponsorship contribution from the Council Initiatives Fund for a Surrey Poet Laureate Program at \$10,000 per year for a total of \$30,000, as outlined in this report

## INTENT

To create a Poet Laureate for the City of Surrey to champion the literary arts and to raise the profile and image of Surrey as a creative, cultural centre that values literacy.

## BACKGROUND

In March 2012, the City of Surrey proclaimed March 21<sup>st</sup> as World Poetry Day and April as National Poetry Month. Following this proclamation, the Cultural Development Advisory Committee (CDAC) asked Surrey Libraries to investigate the concept of hosting a Poet Laureate Program in Surrey. In order to test local interest in the idea, the Library ran a poetry contest in honour of the opening of the New City Hall (NCH). The contest was run in April 2013 with over 30 entries received from across Surrey. The winning entry by Irene Plett was read at City Centre Library as part of the NCH Grand Opening in April 2014.

CDAC also asked Surrey Libraries to follow up by developing a Poet Laureate Program for Surrey. Many Canadian cities have a Poet Laureate, including Vancouver, New Westminster, Victoria, Toronto and Edmonton. Their main role is to serve as an ambassador for the City; advocating literacy and the literary arts and to raise the status of poetry, language & the arts in the City. Surrey Libraries reached out to the community and formed a planning committee comprised of members from:

- City of Surrey Cultural Development Advisory Committee
- Surrey Arts Centre
- Surrey International Writers Conference
- Arts Council of Surrey
- Simon Fraser University
- Surrey Muse
- Semiahmoo Arts

The planning committee will work closely with the Library to develop the nomination, selection and award process for the proposed Poet Laureate Program.

## DISCUSSION

The Poet Laureate would create a unique artistic legacy. It is vital that the Poet engages with the people of Surrey. Duties range from city to city and will be determined by the planning committee. Duties can include, writing a poem for at least one formal civic occasion each year; attending civic functions such as Council inaugurations or grand openings; organizing public poetry events; working with at-risk youth; or developing city-wide outreach projects such as contests, readings and poetry clubs.

It is important that the selected Poet be affiliated with Surrey in some way, preferably through residence, but potentially through workplace or projects. Priority will be given to applicants who reside in Surrey but applicants who live elsewhere in the Lower Mainland are welcome to apply (taking into consideration applicants who may have grown up in, lived in, or worked in Surrey for a long period of time).

Ideally the Poet would have a working space, as this is a crucial component for enabling the Poet Laureate to write and to connect with Surrey community members in person. Possibilities include the City Centre Library or space provided by the Arts Council of Surrey at the Newton Cultural Centre.

Most cities offer a stipend of \$5000 per year (for a typical term of 3-4 years). The planning committee is recommending a 3-year term with a \$5,000 honorarium for the poet and \$5,000 for program expenditures, for a total of \$10,000 per year as shown below.

### Proposed Budget:

Honorarium - \$5,000

Programming / outreach - \$3,000

Travel / administration fees - \$2,000

**Total: \$10,000 / year**

With regards to terms of Poet Laureates across Canada, there is a range of 2 – 5 years. The Planning Committee recommends that the successful candidate will have a better opportunity to create a legacy and to integrate sustainable programs during a 3-year term. Three years would also enable the organizing committee ample time to coordinate the subsequent term and plan for a successor. The successful candidate would be required to provide a final report to allow proper evaluation of the program.

## SUSTAINABILITY CONSIDERATIONS

The implementation of the recommendations of this report will assist in achieving the objectives of the City's Sustainability Charter; more particularly the following action items:

- SC5: *Plan for the Social Well Being of Surrey Residents;*
- SC15: *Promote Literacy, Education and Training;*

## CONCLUSION

Pending funding approval, the planning committee anticipates sending a call-out for applications in early March 2015 with a deadline of early April. The committee would evaluate the applications in April and announce the Poet Laureate during Poetry Month by the end of April.

Having a Poet Laureate would contribute to Surrey's image as a culturally diverse, growing city that values literacy and the literary arts. This invaluable program offers the opportunity to connect Surrey residents with poetry, language, and the arts in their daily lives.



Melanie Houlden  
Chief Librarian  
Surrey Libraries



Vivienne Wilke, CGA  
General Manager  
Finance and Technology

Attachment:  
Appendix I: Status of the Council Initiatives Fund



## 2015 FINANCIAL PLAN COUNCIL INITIATIVES

Description	Amount	Allocation to date
Carried Forward from Prior Year	0	
<b>2015 Approved Budget</b>	<u>250,000</u>	
My Neighbourhood, My futures Initiative (year 3 of 5)		40,000
2015 Façade Enhancement Program (Proposed)		25,000
Surrey Poet Laureate (Year 1 of 3) (Proposed)		10,000
<b>Allocations for 2015</b>		<u>\$ 75,000</u>