
Subject: 2021 Capital Budget - Court Scheduling Tool Modernization Project
To: Joint Board of Management, Niagara Region Courts
Date: August 13, 2020

Recommendations

That the Court Scheduling Tool Modernization Project **BE REFERRED** for consideration by the Joint Board of Management as part of the 2021 Capital Budget for Court Services with recommended funding from the 2021 Court Services Operating Budget.

Key Facts

- The purpose of this report is to provide an outline of the Court Scheduling Tool Modernization Project business case, which is proposed to be submitted for consideration through the 2021 Capital Budget process for JBM.
- The 2021 capital budget request of \$150,000 will be submitted in conjunction with IT Services' capital budget requests in line with Niagara Region best practice for Information Technology projects.
- The Welland Provincial Offences Court location serves the entire Niagara Region. The current scheduling tool application does not adequately meet Court Services operational needs and fails to meet current programming standards to be effectively supported by IT Services.
- The current application requires additional time and resources from IT Services to maintain and is an inefficient tool overall. An upgrade of the existing application provides opportunities for significant efficiencies in staff time for more value-add tasks.
- The proposed 2021 capital budget request of \$150,000 will provide the funding to replace the current scheduling tool with an upgraded application.

Financial Considerations

A budget of \$150,000 has been proposed for this capital project based on an estimate of the hours and related costs required for a vendor to develop a new scheduling application, with the internal supports to manage the project.

Staff are recommending that the proposed capital project be funded through Court Services' 2021 operating budget via a transfer to the general capital levy to then be utilized for the project.

Staff are in the process of drafting the 2021 operating budget and don't yet have full line of sight to all the impacts. Staff continue to closely monitor trends in revenue as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and will continue to do so leading into September 2020, when in-person court operations are anticipated to resume. Should the 2021 revenue budget be reduced it will become very challenging to achieve a 1% operating budget increase as outlined in Regional Council's 2021 budget strategy. For context the 2020 budget net revenue shared between the Region and the local area municipalities is \$1.5 million, therefore this project would represent approximately a 10% reduction in net revenue.

Given the potential operating pressure, including this project in the budget may require the JBM to consider one of the following approaches, in order of staff preference, when reviewing its consolidated operating budget.

1. Reduce costs in the operating budget to create enough savings to fund this project. Would be considered in conjunction with any revenue assumptions that may increase/decrease in 2021.
2. Reduce the distribution of net revenues to the local area municipalities for 2021 in order to fund the project.
3. One-time reduction in the \$200,000 annual transfer to the Court Services reserve fund established to help ensure funding would be available in the future when significant capital facility requirements occur. Reducing this contribution will impact the long-term asset management plan as outlined in CSD 77-2020.
4. Recommend an operating budget that exceeds Council's 1% operating strategy.

Analysis

Risks of not proceeding with the project are as follows:

- Increased time and resources from IT Services will be required to maintain the existing application. As the application becomes increasingly outdated, it limits the ability to update the software effectively based on legislated requirements.
- Sudden loss of application functionality could create logistical scheduling issues, including a negative customer service impact, impact to Niagara Region's

reputation, as well as an impediment to meeting legislated timelines for court matters.

Alternatives Reviewed

Another alternative option considered was deferring the replacement of the scheduling application to a future year. However, the increased amount of staff time dedicated to maintain the existing application would be utilized more effectively in preparing the new application. In addition, the risk of sudden loss of functionality could pose significant issues and risks related to service delivery of the Provincial Offences program.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

The Court Scheduling Tool Modernization project links to the Healthy and Vibrant Community priority, as it pertains to the administration of the Provincial Offences Court program and the overall goals of community safety across Niagara.

Other Pertinent Reports

CSD 77-2020 2020 Court Services Budget

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