

The
Lance

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The Lance welcomes letters to the editor by email or regular post. All letters must include a name, address and phone number for verification of authorship.

SOS grant at risk in 2020 City budget



Michele Kading
COMMUNITY
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ST. VITAL

Life is full of surprises — and decisions.

Two weeks ago, Save Our Seine volunteers were busily making plans to celebrate our 30th anniversary in 2020. We were working to raise money for an accessible dock at John Bruce Park, river cleanups, and a future project to improve habitat for pollinators. Committees were working on various projects including a Greenspaces Enhancement Project funded by the Conservation Trust and The Winnipeg Foundation.

Then we learned that the city administration has recommended that the \$30,000 grant to SOS be discontinued in 2020.

Surprise!

We had to prove how valuable SOS is to the city and mobilize supporters to speak at a public budget hearing. The standing committee would make its decision in just 10 days.

To understand why this grant to SOS is so important, some background is needed. Historically, the City's limited budget

never included keeping the Seine River clean and navigable. In 1990, local residents stepped up to fill this gap. They cleaned the neglected river and SOS was born. By the mid-1990s, SOS realized that it would take more than community volunteers to clean 26 kilometres of river, banks, trails, and parks. Each year, volunteers applied for government grants to hire a team of River Keepers. They needed another grant to hire a co-ordinator to supervise the team. Although Casera Credit Union came through with a multi-year grant, volunteers were burning out.

A year-round paid position was needed to support the volunteers and further SOS goals. In 2013, Coun. Brian Mayes (St. Vital) fulfilled an election promise to support SOS with a grant from his ward budget. He successfully made the case to include a grant to SOS in the city's annual budget. This was a godsend.

Financial continuity since 2013 has given SOS enough stability to retain an executive director and initiate new projects. SOS worked with the city and other partners on projects to protect habitat, clean the river, enhance trails, build a rain garden, plant trees, educate the public, and improve parks. During this time, SOS received \$208,000 from the City and raised almost \$500,000 from other sources for projects to enhance the Greenway.



Photo by Roger Froebe

Save Our Seine works with the city and local land care volunteers to plant trees, shrubs, and wildflowers.

This is a 2.4 to 1 return on investment — without factoring in the value of volunteer time.

To quote one supporter: "Discontinuing the grant to SOS seems penny wise and pound foolish."

By the time you read this article, we will know if the standing committee agrees.

Michele Kading is a community correspondent for St. Vital and the executive director of Save Our Seine.