
REPORT TITLE: Building Safer Communities Fund

FROM: Nancy Polsinelli, Commissioner of Health Services

RECOMMENDATION

- 1. That the Regional Chair, on behalf of Regional Council, write to the federal Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness requesting:**
 - a) a contribution agreement to March 31, 2026 that includes the full funding amount originally allocated to Peel Region from the federal Building Safer Communities Fund program; and**
 - b) flexibility to carry over unspent funds or move funds between fiscal periods; and**
 - c) that a copy of the letter to Public Safety Canada be sent to Peel-area Members of Parliament; and**

- 2. That in absence of an agreement with Public Safety Canada beyond September 30, 2024, that Peel Region provide gap funding to the end of December 31, 2024, estimated at \$0.7 million to \$0.9 million funded from the Tax Rate Stabilization Reserve, to enable community agencies to plan programming that can continue uninterrupted until a new accountable entity (or entities) assumes accountability for the program beginning January 1, 2025.**

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- The Building Safer Communities Fund (BSCF) provides time-limited funding to municipalities across Canada to address the conditions that contribute to a young person falling into gun and gang violence.
- BSCF is an important opportunity to invest in intervention and prevention programs in the Peel community, while building a youth gun and gang strategy for Peel.
- Following a lengthy application and review process, Peel Region negotiated and signed a 3-year, \$7.3 million agreement provided by Public Safety Canada (PSC) for the BSCF program. PSC is now unwilling to sign back the agreement due to uncertainty about transition of the program following the dissolution of Peel.
- PSC is offering a new agreement with a shortened timeframe which puts the BSCF program at risk. This will result in challenges for community agencies to implement programs and to hire staff to support BSCF programming.
- Community agencies continue to await funding that was announced and new initiatives to support youth gun and gang activity in Peel are on hold.
- Given the risks and impacts, it is of utmost importance that the Peel community see the full benefit of the BSCF program and are not negatively impacted by the dissolution of Peel.

- While advocacy and negotiation for full funding term continues, authorizing immediate program implementation pending a signed agreement will allow for investments to flow to the community without further delay.
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DISCUSSION

1. Background

In March 2022, Public Safety Canada announced their commitment to support selected municipalities and Indigenous governments with crime prevention and safety through the BSCF program, a targeted, time-limited contribution program that will provide \$250 million from 2022/23 to 2025/26 to develop community-based youth prevention and intervention strategies to tackle gun and gang activities. Gun and gang violence continues to be an issue in the Peel Region and the BSCF is an opportunity to invest in the community, build relationships and partnerships with current youth-serving providers, and embed their ideas and experiences into the development of a comprehensive plan to address the root causes of youth gun and gang violence in Peel. The BSCF program is an opportunity to invest in upstream interventions that complement existing policing strategies by funding eligible organizations, including community-based non-profits.

PSC elected to fund upper-tier municipalities where applicable and police services are ineligible to receive funding.

On April 29, 2022, Peel Region was invited by PSC to apply for up to \$8.1M in funding from April 2022 to March 2026.

2. Peel's Building Safer Communities Fund Program

As the Region does not have a youth gun and gang intervention and prevention strategy, research, planning and community engagement were required to develop an equitable and comprehensive submission on behalf of the Region. With input from community and guided by a Steering Committee, staff submitted an application to PSC for funding in February 2023, proposing the following approach and investments:

- Increase the resources and capacity of community agencies leading peer mentoring, youth justice integration, diversion, entrepreneurship, and other programs offered by youth-serving providers in Peel, including those offered at youth hubs; and
- Develop and implement a co-designed, comprehensive Youth Gun and Gang Prevention and Intervention Strategy for Peel.

3. Negotiations with Public Safety Canada

After significant delays, a 3-year, \$7.3M Contribution Agreement (the "Agreement") was received from PSC for signature on June 20, 2023. Staff identified 2 clauses that posed some risks related to dissolution of Peel Region and requested edits to mitigate those risks and facilitate assignment of the Agreement upon dissolution.

PSC insisted the Region sign the Agreement as-is, indicating that it would take significant time to amend the Agreement given the different levels of required approval within the federal government, thus pushing funding back even further. The Region, taking on associated risks, signed and submitted the Agreement on August 8, 2023.

On August 10, 2023, PSC informed the Region that they were no longer willing to sign back the Agreement citing concerns regarding the future dissolution of Peel and uncertainty regarding the transition of the program to another entity following recommendations from the Transition Board. PSC has proposed providing an updated agreement with a funding end-date of September 30, 2024, as opposed to the original end-date of March 31, 2026. To continue the BSCF program, PSC intends to negotiate a new agreement with a new entity upon dissolution with a contract start-date of January 1, 2025, or earlier if possible, leaving an expected gap in funding and disruption in community investments.

In anticipation of funding, Peel Region staff have been engaging with the community and have a process in place to identify how funding can be equitably allocated to appropriate and interested community providers/groups, as well as a plan to hire Peel Region staff to manage the program. The process is on hold in the absence of a signed agreement from PSC, which has halted any opportunity to transfer funds to community agencies and hire staff to move this important initiative forward.

RISK CONSIDERATIONS

Incidences of gun violence continue to impact the community and these investments are an important opportunity for action. Moving forward with a shortened agreement as proposed by PSC limits the Region's ability to fund programs beyond September 30, 2024, and causes uncertainty regarding the transition period (September 2024 to January 2025). This will result in challenges for community agencies to implement programming and to hire staff to support BSCF programming. The transition period will also impact the Region's ability to hire staff to support the BSCF program, which is already a challenge in the current environment. Further, there is a high likelihood that more funds will be left unspent given PSC's restriction on carrying forward to future years or moving between fiscal periods.

While the Region may be assuming funding and accountability risks for the October 1, 2024 to December 31, 2024 time period if an appropriate agreement is not reached with PSC, staff are optimistic that the recommended advocacy will be effective in finalizing an Agreement that is acceptable to both Peel Region and PSC. Community partners have been anticipating this investment for some time, as news of the BSCF program was shared publicly on February 10, 2023, when the Region hosted the Office of the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness to make the funding announcement for the Peel Region.

BILL 112 RISKS AND IMPLICATIONS

On June 8, 2023, the Province passed Bill 112, *Hazel McCallion Act (Peel Dissolution) 2023* that will dissolve the Regional Municipality of Peel and make the cities of Brampton and Mississauga and the Town of Caledon single-tier municipalities, effective January 1, 2025. A Transition Board has been established to make recommendations on implementing the restructuring.

The Act has put the funding and, ultimately, the success of the program at risk. It is important that our community partners are not disadvantaged by the dissolution of Peel and that the funding flows as originally proposed by PSC, in keeping with Regional Council's commitment to continuity of services and investments in public safety and wellbeing.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

If Public Safety Canada does not provide funding during this time period, staff are seeking approval to fund the Building Safer Communities Fund program during the October 1, 2024 to December 31, 2024 time period to enable community agencies to plan programming that can continue uninterrupted until a new entity (or entities) assumes accountability for the program beginning January 1, 2025. While the total potential cost cannot be specified in advance and is dependent of the final agreement with PSC and the planned expenditures of involved community agencies, the gap funding required is estimated to be between \$0.7 million and \$0.9 million based on the annual funding amount identified for 2024 of \$2,848,061. Funding for the gap will be provided through the Tax Rate Stabilization Reserve.

CONCLUSION

Given the risks and impacts of gun and gang violence, it is of utmost importance that Peel receive uninterrupted funding for the duration of the program without further delay so the community can see the full benefit of the BSCF program, as are other communities across Canada, and are not negatively impacted by concerns over the dissolution of Peel.



Nancy Polsinelli, Commissioner of Health Services

Authored By: Mary Boushel, Manager Strategic Initiatives, Strategic Policy and Performance Division, Health Services