

Staff Report

Report To: Community Services Committee
Report From: Adam Parsons, Manager of Parks and Open Space
Meeting Date: November 16, 2022
Report Code: CS-22-146
Subject: Campground Booking Refund Policy Update

Recommendations:

THAT in consideration of Staff Report CS-22-146 respecting the Campground Booking Refund Policy and cashless service delivery at the City's two Municipally operated campgrounds, the Community Services Committee recommends that City Council:

1. Direct staff bring forward a by-law to approve the revised CS086 Campground Booking Refund Policy; and
2. Approve a cashless service delivery at the City's Campgrounds beginning with the 2023 camping season.

Highlights:

- The City Operates 2 Municipal Campgrounds, The Harrison Park Family Campground and the Kelso Beach Campground.
- Online Bookings are available for self-service bookings each season starting the first full week of February.
- There were over 200 refund requests in the 2022 camping season, heavily skewed to customers who booked at more than one campground for the same date and cancelled just before the existing policy triggered cancellation fees.
- There were 6668 days of camping booked in 2022 cumulative of both municipal campgrounds.

Strategic Plan Alignment:

[Strategic Plan](#) Priority: Clear Direction - KR2 - Align total municipal levy to Council's directed threshold each year while maintaining capital increase of 1 per cent annually

Previous Report/Authority:

CS-20-049 Draft Campground Booking Refund Policy (Attachment 2)

[CS086 Campground Booking Refund Policy](#)

Background:

Campground Booking Refund Policy- Current Practice

Camping has been an essential part of Harrison Park since the establishment of the Harrison Park Family Campground in 1921.

Today the campground is a modern 100-site campground with water and hydro services, three comfort stations, and a laundromat. A heritage cabin renovation is underway that will provide a premium experience available for the 2023 camping season.

The Kelso Beach Campground, established to support special events like Summerfolk and the Salmon Spectacular, consists of 65 non-serviced sites. A comfort station with washrooms and showers and a picnic pavilion are also on site.

In 2022, 6668 days of camping were booked between the two campgrounds, generating \$358,800 in revenue as of October 31.

The Campground Booking Refund Policy created in 2020 has served the City well and has provided clarity for visitors and staff.

The City's current [Campground Booking Refund Policy](#) was developed before the availability of self-service online bookings and is structured around 30-day and 15-day windows before any booking:

Current refund timing and schedule:

Timing (Days)	Response
14+ Before Booking Date	100% Refund
7-13 Before Booking Date	100% Credit
6-0 Before Booking	No refund or credit
0-7 Post booking	Request form submitted for adjudication against the policy
8+ Post Booking	Requests are not Considered

Cash Handling – Current Practice

Front line campground customer service staff assist guests, booking support, sundry and firewood sales from Victoria Day weekend to Thanksgiving weekend annually.

Cash sales for bookings, sundries and firewood are increasingly completed via debit and credit purchases in favour of physical cash.

Each team member is issued a cash “float” and is responsible for balancing their cash flat daily and at the end of the season when floats are returned when the campground is closed.

Staff operate out of a small shed at the campground entrance. Although there is a small safe in the campground office, the shed’s security is questionable in a somewhat concealed location after dark.

Analysis:

Campground Booking Refund Policy – Proposed Policy

In 2022, the City opened [self-service](#) for camping customers for the first time. Generally, this program has been well received and delivered the desired outcomes. However, self-service bookings have generated a significantly higher rate of refund requests than previously experienced.

Often, due to competition for campsites provincially, when bookings are made available, campers will book more than one campground on the same date and cancel ‘extra’ bookings just before cancellation policy fees are triggered in 2022, staff processed over 200 refund requests; heavily skewed

to campers who had booked more than one campground and chose to cancel bookings at Owen Sound Municipal Campgrounds ahead of the 14 days before their reservation.

With 14 days’ notice, sites are often left unused and not generating revenue during peak periods. Each refund request requires staff time in Community Services and Corporate Services to issue, and booking fees to the City’s booking software provider are still remitted. As the software fees are transaction based, the City covers the cost of the fees associated with booking and refund processing. A more restrictive refund policy will reduce staff time and administrative costs remitted to the software provider and result in fewer sites sitting idle due to late cancellation.

To discourage campsite “holding” or speculation by campers, reduce staff time and administration costs related to refund requests, and reduce the processing fees to the booking software provider, staff recommend implementing a 15% cancellation processing fee for all campsite bookings. This fee would be applied in addition to the existing structure:

Timing (Days)	Response
14+ Before Booking Date	15% Cancellation Fee; 85% Refund
7-13 Before Booking Date	15% Cancellation Fee 85% Credit
6-0 Before Booking	No refund or credit
0-7 Post booking	15% Cancellation Fee Request form submitted for adjudication against policy for the 85% balance.
8+ Post Booking	Requests are not Considered

Cash Handling -Proposed method

The common and ubiquitous payment tools available in 2022 to avoid cash handling are already used at the Campground.

To provide staff with additional security and improve accountability during the operating season, staff recommend operating the City's municipal campgrounds under a cashless model.

Financial Implications:

The goal of a revised Policy CS086, Campground Booking Refund Policy, is to discourage frivolous bookings for 'holding' sites until a refund trigger date approaches. It is anticipated that a slight increase in revenue will be realized through the retention of 15% of booking fees that are subject to cancellation and fewer cancellations, resulting in a higher occupancy rate at our campgrounds.

Communication Strategy:

This report

[Owen Sound Tourism Website](#)

Alerts will be given to the individual booking a site within the Campground Booking Software before confirming a booking.

Attachments:

Attachment 1 - CS-20-049 Draft Campground Booking Refund Policy

Attachment 2 - Draft Revised Campground Booking Refund Policy

Recommended by:

Adam Parsons, Manager of Parks and Open Space

Pam Coulter, Director of Community Services

Submission approved by:

Tim Simmonds, City Manager

For more information on this report, please contact Adam Parsons, Manager of Parks and Open Space, at aparsons@owensound.ca or 519-376-1440 x1221.