

TO: CHAIR AND MEMBERS
FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

DATE: 2019 April 17

FROM: DIRECTOR FINANCE

FILE: 7500-01

SUBJECT: EXPANDING INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES

PURPOSE: To request Council to support changes to the Community Charter to allow for prudent investor rules, thus expanding investment parameters and opportunities.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. **THAT** the Committee recommend Council provide support for changes to the Community Charter to allow for expanded asset class investments under prudent investor rules.
2. **THAT** the Committee recommend Council request support from other municipalities for the requested changes to the Community Charter.
3. **THAT** the Committee recommend Council submit a resolution, as outlined in Section 4.1 of this report, to the Union of British Columbia Municipalities as outlined in this report.

REPORT**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Financial investments form a critical part of the activities of a municipality, providing a source of revenues for capital expenditures and to offset cash flow fluctuations. The allowable investment parameters as laid out in the Community Charter is considered a “prescribed” or a “closed” set of legislated guidelines designed to protect municipalities from taking unnecessary or undue risks. The concept being that the current regulations provide for a list of instruments that can be placed in the portfolio, instruments that are considered the most creditworthy and least risky, such as provincial debt obligations and investments in financial institutions in Canada. What occurs in a market such as Canada, which represents less than 3% of the global economy, is an over concentration of holdings and limited investment diversification due to the regulation limitations.

The parameters set and limitations for investment powers and opportunities has not changed for decades in British Columbia. The purpose of the proposed changes to Section 183 of the Community Charter is to provide municipalities with the ability to obtain improved returns

through asset class diversification, which in return can reduce tax implications and funding costs associated with capital funding; while also reducing investment risks. Analysis and discussion for structured governance will be critical to determine the scope of change and authority granted through legislated changes. However, the purpose of this report is to start the conversation with the Province.

2.0 POLICY SECTION

Goal

- A Connected Community
 - Partnership –
Work collaboratively with businesses, educational institutions, associations, other communities and governments
- A Dynamic Community
 - Economic opportunity –
Foster an environment that attracts new and supports existing jobs, businesses and industries
 - Community development –
Manage change by balancing economic development with environmental protection and maintaining a sense of belonging
- A Thriving Organization
 - Financial viability –
Maintain a financially sustainable City for the provision, renewal and enhancement of City services, facilities and assets

3.0 MUNICIPAL INVESTMENTS

3.1 Investment Funds

Part 6, Division 3, Section 183 of the Community Charter provides investment guidelines to British Columbia municipalities. These legislated guidelines state that municipalities may invest or reinvest money that is not immediately required for expenditures as follows:

183 Money held by a municipality that is not immediately required may only be invested or reinvested in one or more of the following:

- (a) securities of the Municipal Finance Authority;
- (b) pooled investment funds under section 16 of the *Municipal Finance Authority Act*;
- (c) securities of Canada or of a province;

- (d) securities guaranteed for principal and interest by Canada or by a province;
- (e) securities of a municipality, regional district or greater board;
- (f) investments guaranteed by a chartered bank;
- (g) deposits in a savings institution, or non-equity or membership shares of a credit union;
- (h) other investments specifically authorized under this or another Act.

The British Columbia provincial government is responsible for the laws and framework that provide governance across the province. The *Municipal Act* has provided this guidance since the 1880's. In 1991, UBCM proposed the idea for the creation of a Bill of Rights for municipalities for the purpose of providing broader powers and greater freedoms for BC municipalities. The *Local Government Act* was then created and received Parliamentary approval in 1996. Finally, with Royal Assent in August 2001 of the *Community Charter Council Act*, a Community Charter Council was created for the purpose of developing the *Community Charter*.

BC municipalities have managed investment portfolios under these guidelines as a matter of fiduciary responsibility and with due diligence. Internal investment guidelines support each municipality's investment activities within the constraints of the *Community Charter*. While protectionist in nature, the regulations actually place inadvertent restrictions on the ability to generate higher rates of return and increased revenues, as well as limiting asset class diversification which is paramount to financial sustainability and risk diversification. Currently, BC municipalities can invest in two of the four main asset classes - money market (including cash equivalents) and fixed income (bonds). The other two asset classes include equities and real estate (or other tangible assets). This limitation in turn affects the portfolio real rate of return once inflation is considered and it affects annual taxation rates and other capital costs for a municipality.

3.2 Prudent Investor Rules

The prudent investor rule (aka prudent investor standard) requires the investment manager of an organization to conduct investment activities with care, skill and due-diligence for that which a prudent person would do when managing their own investments, such as property, cash or securities. Such a person would therefore deploy investments through a diversification strategy that can potentially reduce risks while enhancing returns.

A prudent investor would therefore have flexibility and seek opportunities based on market and economic cycles, as well as utilize diversification opportunities both in and outside of Canada. For a municipality, benefits from increased returns can reduce taxation requirements and fees. Without a change to provincial legislation, BC municipalities will continue to invest in

prescribed investment products which under varying market conditions, like the historical low interest rates experienced over the last 10 years that has in turn translated into the lowest yields and lower income.

3.3 Prudent Investor Rules – Other Jurisdictions

Various municipalities and pensions maintain prudent investor rules such as the cities of Ottawa, Edmonton, Calgary, Medicine Hat and more recently the City of Toronto. In 2000, the Canada Pension Plan began investing in equities and other investment products (real estate, commodities and futures) with the main goal of seeking higher returns and to stabilize the Canada Pension Plan (CPP) program for future generations. This change meant a more diversified and global deployment of funds for capital appreciation, taking advantage of a much larger global market than just Canadian content.

When the Province of Ontario decided to make changes to the municipal legislation, it was for the purpose of providing municipalities more flexibility. Thus, allowing local governments more freedom to invest available funds in a larger pool of diversified investment products. Providing the added flexibility and freedom could potentially deliver higher returns while lowering or removing systemic risks, reinvestment risks and interest rate risks. The Ontario government put in place specific requirements that a local government must meet to permanently opt into the prudent investor program. The logic was to ensure appropriate governance and structure was in place with separate guidance from an independent board for the expanded portfolio.

The City of Toronto is currently preparing to place their initial investments into equities now that the legislated requirements for prudent standards have been met. The City of Ottawa however has been investing endowment funds of over \$200 million since 2007. Ottawa conducted an RFP and hired two fund managers to manage the investments of the endowment. Applying prudent investment standards to the endowment funds has allowed the City of Ottawa to generate much higher yields over the last decade when compared to the funds invested based on the prescribed legislation. Also, the City of Ottawa is watching Toronto's activities closely and will contemplate the opt-in decision for the remaining portfolio funds as they have first-hand knowledge of the large differential in returns between their funds.

The City of Edmonton began investing in equities in 1995 with the creation of an endowment fund. A May 2014 staff white paper identified that through the use of asset class diversification, the endowment fund has contributed well over \$700 million to the City of Edmonton's operating budget and the fund has grown from \$445 million to \$710 million. Staff reports indicate that the change to investment structure has allowed the city to achieve cost efficiencies and to better align the portfolios with specific risk profile needs and objectivity. This in turn allows for the creation of new asset class investing, such as global infrastructure and emerging market equities, while achieving the goals of increasing overall returns and long term financial sustainability.

Another report highlighted that Edmonton home owners have saved over 7% for the period 2005 – 2014 on property taxes paid. Not only have the funds increased returns resulted in a reduction of the tax burden on citizens, but has and will continue to the support the city's financial position

and sustainability. The investment diversification through prudent investor rules has meant an expanded revenue base for operating and capital budgets.

3.4 Prudent Investor Rules – Capacity and Knowledge

While providing expanded investment options to municipalities through legislation can achieve many benefits, consideration must be made regarding municipal capacity and expertise. Any change in legislation will require municipal input in determining the governance structure that will work best for the province and each municipality. With examples from Ontario and Alberta now in place, this presents a tremendous opportunity to learn from the legislative process and experiences and to understand the need for improvements and the request to change.

Because of the vast range of assignments and work conducted in municipal treasury, the current staff compliments most likely will not have the expertise to branch out into a larger array of investment asset class products. Indeed, smaller municipalities have very few staff that manage varying professional disciplines such as budgets, banking, trades payable, accounting and investments. There are however significant differences amongst the municipalities in the lower mainland and across the province when it comes to portfolio management expertise and knowledge. So governance must consider inclusion for all without creating additional costs and risks.

Such risks can be mitigated through pooling investments or contracts with qualified funds managers through the set-up of simplified but effective reporting standards and clear guidelines. Under prudent investment standards the need for monitoring the decisions made, portfolio performance, policy and governance principles becomes even greater. Setting the criteria by thoughtful consideration will ensure a more comprehensive and general acceptance and adaptation by municipalities. The goal is not to make prudent investing an impossible challenge, but to ensure there is significant and meaningful impact when prudent investment standards are followed.

4.0 REQUIRED CHANGE IN LEGISLATION

The City of Burnaby has maintained a concentrated and focused effort on the investment portfolio for over three decades. This attention has provided for consistently improved yields and income generation. While the City of Burnaby has outperformed market benchmarks and municipal peers, there are still missed opportunities due to investment restrictions based on the current legislation.

While protectionist in nature, a “prescribed” or “closed” set of guidelines can introduce unintended risks by being extremely limited, thus introducing systemic and interest rate risks to a municipal portfolio. This can increase in magnitude for a large portfolio that seeks additional product and yield within the limited reach and size of the Canadian fixed income market. The *Community Charter* provides clarity but does not empower a municipality to obtain greater investment variation and seek to reduce risk further through asset diversification and allocation.

It is therefore proposed that by providing prudent investor standards within the *Community Charter* or other provincial legislation, risk versus reward through asset class diversification can culminate into various funding and cash flow opportunities as returns increase. If the City of Burnaby moved 30% of current holdings to other asset classes for example (Edmonton has 60% of the endowment fund in equities), with only a 2.5% increase in yield on that portion of the portfolio, the annual additional revenue would be \$12.75 million per year.

The evidence is very clear from municipal examples to pension plans and historical analysis that asset mix is a critical determinant of long term investment fund stability, yield and income. Maintaining a set of guidelines that limits municipal investing to a restricted list of products within limited asset classes will result in what is occurring in many municipal portfolios today – yields that range from 1.50% - 3.00% with significantly reduced income. The current standards limit municipal investments to the Canadian market only and to the fixed income asset class which is based on Canadian interest rates only.

The size and utilization of the City's investment reserves, without debt payment obligations other than internally through annual depreciation, means we are well positioned for the longer term investment time horizon that is needed under other asset classes such as equities and real estate. Providing proficient and transparent oversight to the investment portfolio ensures the City of Burnaby is acting in the best interest of citizens. This also means identifying that as investment markets and economies have changed over the years, opportunities have been missed. The best starting point is to begin the conversation about making changes to the current investment legislation in British Columbia.

And while those opposed to change may suggest that introducing the prudent investor rules will bring with it needless risks, one must consider that risk is defined in many ways, including the long term financial sustainability of municipalities and the tax burden placed on residents. Risk diversification also means fund managers and fund management, not just guarantors and asset class diversification. Risk management means a governance structure that takes into consideration the varying investment strategies that can be deployed and empowering municipalities to diversify and grow for future generations of citizens. For these reasons, updating legislation to include prudent investment rules is practical and warranted.

4.1 Resolution: Expanded Asset Class Investments Under Prudent Investor Rules

Given the discussion above, and recognizing that the ability to properly manage and grow assets is an important role of local government, the following resolution has been prepared for the Committee and Council's consideration.

WHEREAS financial investments form a critical part of the activities of a municipality, providing a source of revenues for capital expenditures and to offset cash flow fluctuations;

To: Financial Management Committee
From: Director Finance
Re: Expanding Investment Opportunities
2019 April 24..... Page 7

AND WHEREAS allowable investment parameters as laid out in the *Community Charter* is considered a “prescribed” set of legislated guidelines.

AND WHEREAS the Provinces of Alberta and Ontario have implemented a wider scope for local government investment, which responds to the needs of local governments of all sizes:

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Union of BC Municipalities request the Ministry of Finance to amend the *Community Charter* to provide municipalities with the ability to obtain improved returns through asset class diversification, which in return can reduce tax implications and funding costs associated with capital funding, while also reducing investment risk.

5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Committee recommend Council provide support for changes to the Community Charter to allow for expanded asset class investments under prudent investor rules. It is also recommended that the Committee recommend Council request support from other municipalities for the requested changes to the Community Charter and that a resolution, as outlined in Section 4.1 of this report, be submitted to the Union of British Columbia Municipalities on this matter.



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DIRECTOR FINANCE

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Copied to: City Manager