

February 11, 2008

Adjustments to recreation user and permit fees

Last week, Budget Committee directed City staff to consider lower recreation user fee and permit fee increases for Parks and Recreation programs and services. The original 2008 recommended Parks, Forestry and Recreation budget included an average 21% increase to fees (over the 3% cost of living adjustment).

The option presented to Budget Committee today includes an across-the-board increase of 5% over the 3% COLA adjusted 2008 rates for all recreation user fees and permit fees (with all free permit policies and discount rate structure remaining in effect). The proposed fee changes result in reduced revenue of \$4.164 million.

In order to balance the 2008 Operating Budget, the reduction in revenues must be offset by making a budget adjustment elsewhere. City staff have recommended the reduction of Social Services budgeted caseload by 2,000 cases (to 77,000 cases). As in previous years, the General Manager of Social Services is requested to report to Budget Committee on the year-end Ontario Works monthly caseload. The recommended budget has been adjusted to better reflect the actual caseload experience for the previous year, resulting in reduced net expenditures of \$4.2 million.

The Council-approved permit policy for recreation places a higher priority on children and youth. The vast majority (94%) of permits issued for sports fields and room rentals for children and youth are free – and will continue to be free. Increases will largely impact adults and advanced level competitive sports. For example, one hour of ice time typically used for house league hockey will increase \$5.46 per hour, or approximately 36 cents per player (15-member team).

Average increases to recreation programs will be 36 cents per class or \$3.24 per 9-week session. The budget adjustment also protects free recreation programs offered across the City such as leisure skating and swimming, drop-in programs, seniors' activities, playground programs, wading pools and splash pads. These free programs comprise 27.1% of all recreation program hours offered by the City and result in attendance of over 2.2 million annually. Seniors will continue to receive a discount of 50% off regular adult rates for programming. Programs in the City's 21 Priority Centres will continue to be offered free of charge.

Permit fees remain substantially lower in City of Toronto facilities, compared to surrounding municipalities and other service providers. The City's cost recovery rate of 30% increasing to 31.5% in 2008 also remains well below that of other municipalities.

Toronto is Canada's largest city and sixth largest government, and home to a diverse population of about 2.6 million people. It is the economic engine of Canada and one of the greenest and most creative cities in North America. In the past three years, Toronto has won more than 70 awards for quality, innovation and efficiency in delivering public services. Toronto's government is dedicated to prosperity, opportunity and liveability for all its residents.