

TORONTO STAFF REPORT

June 21, 2006

To: Economic Development and Parks Committee

From: Brenda Librecz, General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation

Subject: Update on the Re-establishment of Exchange of Services Agreements with the Toronto District School Board and the Toronto Catholic District School Board
All Wards

Purpose:

Update the Committee on actions being taken to re-establish exchange of service agreements and joint planning between the City and the Toronto District School Board and the Toronto Catholic District School Board.

Financial Implications and Impact Statement:

There are no financial implications resulting from the adoption of this report.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that:

- (1) Parks, Forestry and Recreation continue to work with the Toronto District School Board and the Toronto Catholic District School Board with a view of exchanging services and entering into joint planning efforts to the benefit of all; and
- (2) the appropriate City Officials be authorized and directed to take the necessary action to give effect thereto.

Background:

At its meeting of March 29 and 30, 2006 City Council adopted the following:

“...that the General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation be requested to report to the Economic Development and Parks Committee on re-establishing with the Toronto District School Board an exchange of service agreement that will result in returning schools as

community assets that allow recreation programs for children and youth to be expanded in their communities, and reduces costs to provide these programs.”

Several years ago, the Provincial Government amended the ways schools were financed. Funds were no longer raised from local tax payers and all school funding was to come from the Province who put some special allocation formulas in place. Those formulas focused on funding for classroom activity and did not actively support community use of school facilities for sport and leisure activities. In order for the School Boards to open facilities and cover operating costs, they were forced to impose user fees. Without independence to raise funds by way of local taxation, there was no recourse other than to impose the fees if the schools were to be used for non-academic pursuits. The result was that sports and leisure supplying organizations were forced out of local schools, the traditional supplier of activity space, and either had to relocate or reduce/eliminate a portion or all of their activities in some cases. This increased demand on City facilities and it was not possible to accommodate the requests.

Although not sufficient to return the access to what it was before, the current Provincial Government recently recognized the need for community access and has provided additional funding to School Boards to assist in that regard.

Comments:

At its meeting of October 26, 27, 28 and 31, 2005, City Council approved Economic Development and Parks Committee Report 9, Clause 8(c), titled “Exchange of Services Agreement between the City of Toronto and Toronto Catholic District School Board,” authorizing the General Manager, Parks Forestry and Recreation negotiate and execute a financially neutral exchange of services agreement for a further three years. The pilot one-year agreement reached exchanged daytime ice in City-operated ice rinks for school space for Parks, Forestry and Recreation programs and camps.

The City and the two School Boards have a long history of cooperation wherein school facilities and fields were opened for the community to use at little to no cost. In return, the City provided landscape maintenance services for sports fields and in some cases paid, for use of school pools. Local tax payers paid taxes to both city and school and benefited from improved access to all the local facilities.

Staff of Parks, Forestry and Recreation, the Toronto District School Board and the Toronto Catholic District School Board have been working together to try to address joint planning and facility development and provision issues. There are a number of initiatives that are underway, including:

- (a) a Joint City – School Board senior management team who are looking at planning, programming, and governance issues;
- (b) meetings between Parks, Forestry and Recreation and both school boards to compare capital programs in an effort to find opportunities for joint planning and development;

- (c) the participation of the School Boards on teams within the Priority Areas identified for special consideration, along with Community Recreation staff; and
- (d) regular contact of field staff with their counterparts at local schools.

This is a good beginning to re-establishing links and co-operative approaches. As part of these renewed consultations, discussions are on-going relative to exchange of services agreements.

The initiatives that are underway are not restricted to liaison between Parks, Forestry and Recreation and the two School Boards. Other City Divisions including City Planning, Toronto Public Library, Children's Services, Public Health and Social Development are also involved in on-going roles through participation in committees and via direct contact with School Boards. The result of this contact is an opening up of lines of communication which will directly lead to consideration of not only service exchanges but long-term planning and development activities in a wide range of areas.

Conclusions:

Initiatives are under way in a variety of capacities to more actively engage the City and the two School Boards in coming together to plan, organize and deliver programs and facilities to help return local schools as "community assets" for use for both educational and sport/leisure pursuits.

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