

## **Parks Renaissance Strategy – Progress Report**

<b>Date:</b>	April 20, 2007
<b>To:</b>	Parks and Environment Committee
<b>From:</b>	General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation
<b>Wards:</b>	All
<b>Reference Number:</b>	

### **SUMMARY**

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The Parks Renaissance Strategy (PRS) is being undertaken by the Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division in order to realize the goals set out in Our Common Grounds, the Division's strategic plan for revitalization of its parks, trails, urban forest and recreation facilities. The PRS will be an action-oriented and creative strategy that sets the stage for a multi-year re-investment program in Toronto's parks and trails.

Work to date has focused on background research, an extensive consultation program and the development of a first draft Strategy. A preliminary list of recommended action areas where future investments and activities should be concentrated in order to create a 'Parks Renaissance' has been identified at this time:

1. Improving the Overall Quality of Parks and Trails
2. Natural Areas: Education and Stewardship at the Forefront
3. City-Wide Parks: Management Plans to Maintain a Diversity of Experiences
4. Local Parks: Create Hubs of Neighbourhood Activity
5. Trails: Build a Significant Trail System
6. Engage People: Better Communication and Involvement
7. Financing the Renaissance: Increased Funding and Partnership Opportunities

Next steps in the development of the Parks Renaissance Strategy include delivery of the final draft by the consultant (May 2007), review and consultation with internal stakeholders (Spring 2007), presentation to the public (early Fall 2007) and a report to the Parks and Environment Committee and Council (Fall 2007).

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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**The General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation recommends that:**

1. Council endorse, in principle, the preliminary list of the seven (7) action areas listed below where future investments and activities should be concentrated in order to create a 'Parks Renaissance':
  - (a) Improving the Overall Quality of Parks and Trails;
  - (b) Natural Areas: Education and Stewardship at the Forefront;
  - (c) City-Wide Parks: Management Plans to Maintain a Diversity of Experiences;
  - (d) Local Parks: Create Hubs of Neighbourhood Activity;
  - (e) Trails: Build a Significant Trail System;
  - (f) Engage People: Better Communication and Involvement; and
  - (g) Financing the Renaissance: Increased Funding and Partnership Opportunities; and
2. the General Manager report back on the Parks Renaissance Strategy to the Parks and Environment Committee in the fall, following the public consultation process.

### **Financial Impact**

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

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## DECISION HISTORY

A progress report on the PRS was presented to Economic Development and Parks Committee on May 4, 2006 (copy attached).

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/2006/agendas/committees/edp/edp060504/it001.pdf>

In order to familiarize the new Council with the objectives, progress to date and next steps in the development of the Parks Renaissance Strategy, a further progress report is being presented at this time.

## ISSUE BACKGROUND

The Parks Renaissance Strategy (PRS) is being prepared by a project team that includes Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division staff and a consultant team led by Urban Strategies Inc. This initiative responds directly to a recommendation in Our Common Grounds (the Strategic Plan for Parks, Forestry and Recreation adopted by Council in 2004) for the preparation of a Master Plan to guide the renaissance of parks and trails across the city.

Our Common Grounds clearly articulated how a healthy and well-functioning system of parks, trails, urban forest and recreation facilities is central to the health of the City and how this helps to achieve important City objectives. The Parks Renaissance Strategy will

apply this thinking specifically to parks and trails. The Strategy will make the case for ongoing support and investment in the parks and trails network. It is the bridge between the vision of Our Common Grounds and the realization of this vision through new investment.

## **COMMENTS**

### **Objectives of the Parks Renaissance Strategy**

The Parks Renaissance Strategy is not a physical Master Plan. Rather, it is a mechanism for establishing strategic priorities for the City's network of parks and trails. To do this, the Strategy will:

- build on and implement recommendations of Our Common Grounds;
- confirm community expectations for a beautiful, connected parks and trail system;
- co-ordinate with existing policies, strategic directions and improvement plans to achieve maximum benefit;
- clearly define the character, use, connections and expectations of the network of parks and trails to staff and to the public; and
- implement a strategic process for establishing priorities, allocating funding and undertaking parks and trails improvements.

### **Progress To Date**

To date, the following progress has been made in the development of the Strategy:

- Research: Review of existing City studies, policies, budgets and initiatives, including Our Common Grounds;
- Research: Best Practices from other cities;
- Consultation: Key parks & trails stakeholder groups and ethnic communities, Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff; councillors;
- Preparation of Parts One (Background: Setting the Context) and Two (Vision: Principles and Objectives) of the Parks Renaissance Strategy. A final draft of the entire strategy is anticipated in early May.

### **Identified Action Areas**

The consultant team has identified a preliminary list of seven key action areas where future investments and activities should be concentrated in order to achieve a 'Parks Renaissance'. Specific recommendations and implementation strategies will be developed from these action areas and, after further review by staff, key internal stakeholders and the general public, these will be brought forward for Council endorsement. The key action areas to date are:

1. Improving the Overall Quality of Parks and Trails
  - Public expectation is for a high quality parks and trails system;

- Primary objectives are to ensure all parks, natural areas and trails are clean, beautiful, well-maintained and exhibit a high quality of design;
  - Universal accessibility should be a foundation of parks and trails design to address use by all ages and levels of ability; and
  - The redesign of parks and trails can provide opportunities for tree planting to significantly increase the City's Urban Forest.
2. Natural Areas: Education and Stewardship at the Forefront
    - High public expectation for the preservation, rehabilitation, and stewardship of Toronto's natural areas;
    - Primary objectives for natural areas are to identify, protect, and rehabilitate natural features; promote their significance and provide opportunities for education;
    - Limit active use to less sensitive areas;
    - Create linkages between natural areas to improve continuity and strengthen the natural system; and
    - Increase the planting of native species and enhance tree canopy overall.
  3. City-Wide Parks: Management Plans to Maintain a Diversity of Experiences
    - City-wide parks provide diverse opportunities for active recreation and sports, large gatherings, special experiences and multi-use;
    - Provide for one-of-a-kind park experiences and promote educational opportunities;
    - Develop principles-directed Management Plans to guide improvements and change over time;
    - Secure opportunities for public use in large open spaces that are not managed by Parks, Forestry and Recreation; and
    - The development of one new City-wide park in each of the four districts is part of the overall renaissance.
  4. Local Parks: Create Hubs of Neighbourhood Activity
    - Local parks are open spaces that most people experience on a daily basis and should function as hubs of neighbourhood activity;
    - Primary objective is to serve primary neighbourhood recreation needs;
    - Ensure that local parks are appropriately distributed throughout the City;
    - Configure large neighbourhood parks to function as "neighbourhood commons;"
    - Program small neighbourhood parks and parkettes to complement the larger parks;
    - Promote a high quality of locally-flavoured design;
    - Improve small, underutilized spaces through new plantings, design improvements and maintenance; and
    - Formally allow school grounds to function as part of the local park network.
  5. Trails: Build a Significant Trail System
    - Expanding the trail system to create a connected parks and trails system can be a relatively quick and simple way to begin work towards the Parks Renaissance;

- Purchasing lands and easements for the creation of trails should be a high acquisition priority for the parks system;
  - Create a plan and process for guiding and monitoring ongoing trail development; and
  - Establish a network of “green streets” that provides landscaped linkages to parks and trails along public rights-of-way.
6. Engage People: Better Communication and Involvement
- Communication and citizen engagement are important to the success of the Parks Renaissance;
  - Primary objective is to improve communication with citizens and users through a variety of media;
  - Improve community engagement in the planning, design, operations, and implementation of park projects;
  - Increase outreach to ethnic communities and cultural groups;
  - Promote citizen stewardship of parks and trails; and
  - Provide an increased staff presence in the parks and trails system and more direct contact between parks staff and parks users.
7. Financing the Renaissance: Increased Funding and Partnership Opportunities
- A Parks Renaissance needs a commitment to funding;
  - Primary objective is to commit to increased budgets for parks and trails that reflect appropriate per capita spending targets;
  - Distribute capital investments and programming to reflect the growing population and its distribution;
  - Coordinate with other levels of government, departments, boards, agencies, and institutions to achieve efficiencies and leverage open space investments;
  - Create partnerships with other levels of government and identify specific programs and opportunities for funding; and
  - Outreach to the private sector and encourage funding partnerships.

## **Next Steps**

The consultant team is preparing the final draft of the Parks Renaissance Strategy for delivery in May 2007.

The Parks, Forestry and Recreation project team will review the draft material and present the findings to key internal stakeholders for comments and further input in the spring of 2007. Internal stakeholders to be consulted will include:

- Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff representing all Branches of the Division;
- Staff from other City Divisions (e.g. City Planning, Transportation, Culture, Environment Office);
- Other agencies (e.g. TRCA, Public Health);
- Members of the Parks and Environment Committee; and
- Members of City Council.

The Parks Renaissance Strategy will be presented to the general public in early Fall 2007 and then brought before Council following consultation with the public.

## **CONTACT**

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## **SIGNATURE**

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