

# **TORONTO** STAFF REPORT

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April 18, 2006

To: Economic Development and Parks Committee

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

Subject: Parks Renaissance Strategy: Information Update  
All Wards

Purpose:

To provide an update on the project goals, progress to-date and next steps in the development of the Parks Renaissance Strategy.

Financial Implications and Impact Statement:

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

Recommendations:

It is recommended that this report be received for information.

Background:

The Parks Renaissance Strategy (PRS) is being prepared for the Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division by a consultant team led by Urban Strategies Inc. This initiative acts on Recommendation 14 contained in Our Common Grounds, the Toronto Parks, Forestry and Recreation Strategic Plan adopted by City Council in 2004, requiring the preparation of a Parks Master Plan to guide the renaissance of our parks and trails across the City.

Comments:

Our Common Grounds clearly articulated how a healthy and well-functioning system of parks, trails, urban forest and recreation facilities is critical to the health of the City and helps to achieve overall City objectives. The Parks Renaissance Strategy will be the bridge between the vision of Our Common Grounds and the realization of this vision through ongoing support and investment in the parks and trails network.

The PRS will be an action-oriented and creative strategy that sets the stage for a 10-year re-investment program in Toronto's parks and trails. The PRS 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 the recommendations outlined in Our Common Grounds and effectively:

- identify and summarize the existing character of the City's parks and trails network (e.g., types, numbers, roles, users, themes, facilities, locations, connections, missing links, etc.);
- articulate the most pressing issues facing the parks and trails system;
- establish a set of guiding principles for improving the system of parks and trails to meet targets and goals and respond to diverse and changing populations in the City;
- develop a series of strategic priorities to inform future decision-making;
- outline improvement opportunities based on the issues, priorities and principles;
- identify specific capital projects and operating programs to be carried out in the next 10 years and illustrate a short-list of demonstration projects to be undertaken as a quick-start to the Strategy;
- identify opportunities for new funding models, management tools, and community involvement; and
- provide a mechanism for incorporating priorities into the annual budget-setting process.

Ultimately, the target audience for the Parks Renaissance Strategy is the general public. However, to be successful, the Strategy must begin by building support internally within the City and externally with various groups. Specifically, the PRS will focus on building support:

- within all branches of the Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division;
- within other City Divisions;
- with related public agencies (e.g., Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, School Boards, Toronto Waterfront Revitalization Corporation);
- with relevant organizations (e.g., Evergreen, sports groups, heritage groups, Youth Cabinet, etc.);
- with targeted community groups and leaders;
- with elected politicians; and
- with residents.

## Overview of Project Timing and Work Program

The project is to be completed in 2006 and is to proceed in four phases that build momentum from initial research stages to consultation with the broader community. Phasing, including timing and required outcomes are summarized below.

### Phase 1: January-May 2006

#### Information Gathering, Data Compilation and Mapping

Physical data on the parks and trails system will be gathered and appropriate maps will be developed to support and explain the project. Existing studies, policies and strategies will be reviewed.

#### Steering Committee Sessions

A series of topical workshops with the Steering Committee (made up of Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff from all branches), will lead to a Draft Framework for a Strategy, which will be used for a focused program of consultation later in the project. The Steering Committee workshops will be an important opportunity to learn about issues and concerns from the perspective of representatives of each Parks, Forestry and Recreation Branch. In parallel to these workshops, the General Manager and each of the Directors will be interviewed individually to understand the key issues and opportunities from their perspectives.

#### Compilation of Stakeholder Lists and Consultation Logistics

Appropriate representatives from outside the Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division will be identified and a comprehensive list of stakeholders to be consulted in the next phase will be developed. The consultant team (Urban Strategies and the Maytree Foundation) and appropriate staff in Parks, Forestry and Recreation will refine this list and make contact with relevant individuals and groups.

### Phase 2: May-June 2006

#### Development of Draft Parks Renaissance Strategy Framework

Based on the Steering Committee and Directors' sessions, the consultant team will develop a

Draft Framework of the Strategy, including a set of guiding principles and priorities for the parks and trails system, which will be the basis of discussion with the stakeholder groups.

### Stakeholder Consultation Sessions

The consultation sessions will be broken into three categories:

1. City staff and relevant organizations,
2. neighbourhood-focused sessions using the City's main geographic divisions of North, South, East and West; and,
3. community-focused sessions, coordinated by the Maytree Foundation, meant to capture the City's cultural and ethnic diversity.

In these sessions, stakeholders will be provided with a summary of the goals and recommendations of Our Common Grounds and an explanation of the purpose of the Parks Renaissance Strategy. They would then be asked for their input into a set of guiding principles and priorities for parks and trails improvements. The consultations will occur in late May and early June.

### Phase 3: July-August 2006

#### Development of a Draft Parks Renaissance Strategy

The results of the consultation will be packaged and published by the consultant team and used to refine the framework into a Draft Parks Renaissance Strategy.

#### Best Practices and Funding Research

Appropriate research on best practices or lessons learned from other cities, with particular reference to funding models, will be undertaken to support the strategy.

### Phase 4: September 2006

#### Open Houses on the Draft Parks Renaissance Strategy

A follow-up consultative phase will focus on presenting and receiving feedback on the draft Parks Renaissance Strategy through an Open House format that will be open to the general public.

## Refinement and Development of final Parks Renaissance Strategy

The results of the Open House consultation will be used to refine the Draft Strategy and develop a Final Parks Renaissance Strategy to be reported to Economic Development and Parks Committee in early 2007.

### Conclusions:

The Parks Renaissance Strategy will address Recommendation 14 of Our Common Grounds, which requires the preparation of a Parks Master Plan to guide the renaissance of our parks and trails across the city. By building on the foundation of Our Common Grounds, the PRS will effectively set out the tools necessary to implement the community vision for our parks, trails and open spaces.

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