

Parks Plan 2013-2017

Date:	March 27, 2013
To:	Parks and Environment Committee
From:	General Manager, Parks Forestry and Recreation
Wards:	All
Reference Number:	P:\2013\Cluster A\PFR\PE20-041513-AFS#15985

SUMMARY

This report seeks approval for the City of Toronto Parks Plan 2013-2017. The Parks Plan will guide the City of Toronto's delivery of parks services over the next five years. The Parks Plan aims to connect people and communities with parks, advance greening and environmental sustainability, improve the quality of parks, and strengthen the parks system as a legacy for Toronto. The plan also outlines the current state of Toronto's parks system.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation plans to improve the parks system by increasing opportunities for residents to get involved in their local parks. The Division will enhance its capacity to engage communities, and improve access to permits. Parks quality will improve with a focus on new and refurbished amenities like gathering spaces that combine seating with other amenities to make parks more welcoming, washrooms, horticulture displays, and community gardens across the city. Parks, Forestry and Recreation will also continue to implement standards for parks and trails, so Toronto residents can expect a high and consistent degree of accessibility, design, maintenance and natural area management. The Parks Plan also includes a parks classification system that will guide planning and decision-making across the large system of Toronto's parks.

The Parks Plan was developed in accordance with principles adopted by Council in February 2010, and the public consultation process adopted by Council in July 2011.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. City Council adopt the attached Parks Plan 2013 - 2017; and
2. City Council direct the General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation to report back through the 2014 Budget process with a detailed implementation plan based on the direction from Council provided through their consideration of this report.

Financial Impact

The Parks Plan is a tool to guide the funding and management of Toronto's parks services over the next five years. It acts as a framework for budget and resource allocation. The 5-year Parks Plan spans between 2013 and 2017, and the financial cost of implementing the plan is built up over a five year period from 2014 to 2018 to reflect the timing of the financial requirement.

Should Council adopt the Parks Plan, there will be no financial impact in 2013. New Operating Budget funding of \$1.180 million gross and 14.8 approved positions will be required in 2014 to fund and deliver a city-wide urban park rangers program, increase park maintenance and quality management, enhance horticulture and urban agriculture, and to improve natural environment trails.

The annual Operating Budget expenditure will increase to \$5.420 million by 2018 requiring 49 approved positions. The detailed implementation plan will be submitted as part of the 2014 through 2018 Operating Budgets for review and consideration.

The Operating Parks Plan directions' future year financial impacts are summarized in the following table:

Operating Budget Impact (\$000's)					
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Incremental Expenditure	1,180.2	1,600.3	703.6	932.3	1,003.6
Annual Expenditure	1,180.2	2,780.5	3,484.1	4,416.4	5,420.0
Incremental Approved Positions	14.8	13.2	5.2	7.7	8.1
Total Approved Positions	14.8	28.0	33.2	40.9	49.0

Capital Budget funding of \$2 million will be required in 2014 to fund city-wide upgrades and improvements to park amenities such as benches, picnic tables, shade areas, to create new social gathering spaces, and for washroom improvements.

The annual Capital Budget expenditure will increase to \$5.750 million by 2018 for a total of \$21.625 million over 5 years. These capital expenditures are not included in the 2013

Parks, Forestry and Recreation 10-Year Capital Plan. A detailed implementation plan, including proposed phasing, will be included as part of the 2014 Capital Budget process for consideration.

The annual capital funding requirements for the Parks Plan are summarized in the following table:

Capital Budget Impact (\$000's)						
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Total
Annual Expenditure	2,000.0	3,500.0	5,000.0	5,375.0	5,750.0	21,625.0

In addition to the above-noted impacts there are some Parks Plan directions that relate to existing Capital IT and Infrastructure initiatives that will require additional review within the 2013 Parks, Forestry and Recreation 10-Year Capital Plan.

The Deputy City Manager and Chief Financial Officer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial impact information.

DECISION HISTORY

City Council at its meeting on February 22 and 23, 2010 approved the development of a multi-year Parks Plan. The Parks Plan originated from a recommendation in the Division's strategic plan, *Our Common Grounds*. That project's scope grew to include seven guiding principles: parks and trails as city infrastructure, equitable access for all residents, supporting a diversity of uses, nature in the city, environmental stewardship, placemaking and community engagement.

(City Council Decision – PE28.3)

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewPublishedReport.do?function=getCouncilDecisionDocumentReport&meetingId=3286>

At its meeting on July 12, 13 and 14, 2011, City Council approved the consultation strategy for the development of a Parks Plan through the adoption of the report "Proposed Public and Stakeholder Consultation Strategy for the Parks Plan."

(City Council Decision – PE5.2)

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewPublishedReport.do?function=getCouncilDecisionDocumentReport&meetingId=4419>

ISSUE BACKGROUND

The 2013-2017 Parks Plan is built on *Our Common Grounds*, a strategic plan for Parks, Forestry and Recreation adopted by Council in 2004. The Parks Plan will guide Parks,

Forestry and Recreation's policy, funding and management of parks services over the next five years.

At its meeting on February 22 and 23, 2010 Council adopted the following principles in the development of the Parks Plan:

1. Parks and Trails as City Infrastructure
2. Equitable Access for All Residents
3. Nature in the City
4. Placemaking
5. Supporting a Diversity of Uses
6. Community Engagement and Partnerships
7. Environmental Goals and Practices

On June 12, 13 and 14, 2011, Council approved the Parks Plan Public and Stakeholder Consultation Strategy. This launched an engagement process with Toronto residents and park and trail stakeholder groups. The City hosted one public meeting in each City district. Five meetings were held for parks system stakeholders, some of which also provided written submissions. Self-directed consultation toolkits were available to groups wanting to conduct their own sessions, and seven focus group sessions were held to ensure the involvement of newcomers, youth, people with disabilities as well as park donors and sponsors. A survey was widely promoted, available online and in hard copy at all civic centres, recreation centres and public libraries, and provided in Toronto's 10 most common language groups and French. Over 3,700 people participated in the online survey. The over 14,700 comments from the consultation process provides the foundation for the Parks Plan directions and recommended actions.

The key themes stemming from the public and stakeholder consultation, based on the principles, provides structure to the Parks Plan. The four themes are:

1. Communicate and connect with users
2. Preserve and promote nature
3. Maintain quality parks
4. Improve system planning

COMMENTS

Toronto's parks system consists of approximately 8,000 hectares of parkland, covers 12.7% of the city's land base, and includes over 1,600 parks. Parks are essential to making Toronto an attractive place to live, work, and visit. Toronto's parks offer a broad range of outdoor leisure and recreation opportunities, transportation routes, and places for residents to interact with nature, and with one another. Parks also provide important economic benefits: they attract tourists and businesses, add value to neighbourhoods, and help to build a healthy workforce. They provide ecological services such as shade, oxygen production, and rainwater storage. Parks are necessary elements for individual, community, economic and natural habitat wellbeing.

Parks Plan theme - Communicate and connect with users

Demand for public participation in parks is increasing. Toronto residents, friends of parks organizations and other community groups have expressed increasing desire to volunteer, donate, fundraise and influence decision-making with regard to parks. At the public and stakeholder consultations, Parks, Forestry and Recreation heard that people want easy access to information, especially online, about the City's parks and trails. They also want to be able to get permits, purchase ferry tickets and book golf tee times with greater ease.

Over the next five years, Parks, Forestry and Recreation will develop a comprehensive communications and outreach strategy to improve the website, enhance signage in parks, and describe strategies for communicating with underserved communities. A key feature of this plan is the development of an urban park ranger program. The rangers will strengthen the parks system through enhanced community engagement and proactive outreach. They will help make it easier for residents and groups to get involved in their parks by connecting people to existing opportunities, and by facilitating the development of community-led initiatives. The rangers will also support park monitoring and educating users on City bylaws. The program will mean that Parks, Forestry and Recreation will have a greater capacity to resolve issues and engage communities in contributing to their local parks and to the entire parks system.

Increased engagement in parks will also be achieved by better supporting volunteers, partners, and donors. A new volunteer management system will ensure that residents can be connected with appropriate and meaningful volunteer opportunities in parks, as well as ensure that volunteers are supported and recognized for their efforts. Parks, Forestry and Recreation will also work to clarify and streamline the process for making donations and partnering with the City to enhance parks. Another important aspect of enhancing park use is to improve the permitting system to make the process easier and to remove barriers to enjoying parks, including reviewing fees to ensure access, equity, and customer service goals are being met.

New annual Operating Budget funding will be required as follows: \$0.551 million gross and 8 approved positions in 2014; and \$1.539 million gross and 14 approved positions in 2015. Funding will be spent on a city-wide urban park ranger program that includes twelve urban park rangers working at the community level to improve and increase community engagement and customer service. The detailed implementation plan will be submitted as part of the 2014 and 2015 Operating Budget review processes.

Parks Plan theme - Preserve and promote nature

Toronto's ravines, waterfront, forests, meadows trails and parks contribute to the city's natural environment. Together these natural areas make up 13.5 per cent of the city's land area. Almost half of the publicly accessible/owned natural area land is City-owned

parkland. Along with the Toronto Region and Conservation Authority (TRCA), other divisions and levels of government, Parks, Forestry and Recreation works to preserve Toronto's natural heritage. Through coordinated efforts, Parks, Forestry and Recreation plans, plants, protects and maintains natural areas to address issues such as invasive species, climate change, inappropriate use and encroachment. The Division also uses environmentally sensitive practices for its buildings, fleet, maintenance tools, as well as for turf and plant care. These activities will continue to ensure safe, usable and sustainable parks today and for future generations.

A key investment required to protect, restore, and enhance natural areas is a program to plan, design, and manage natural environment trails. There are more than 300 km of these largely unmanaged trails through ravines and natural areas, and they are well used by hikers, bikers, and others. The appropriate use, planning and maintenance of these trails will protect the natural environment by directing users away from sensitive areas and creating opportunities to engage the community through stewardship. This work will also reduce erosion and compaction of soil, protect sensitive vegetation from trampling, and address risks to the City from unauthorized trail use.

Annual Operating Budget funding will be required as follows: \$0.163 million gross and 1.5 approved positions in 2014; \$0.420 million gross and 4.6 approved positions in 2015; \$0.551 million gross and 5.6 approved positions in 2016; \$1.019 million gross and 10.6 approved positions in 2017; and \$1.408 million gross and 13.6 approved positions in 2018. Funds will be spent on the development of trail management plans at priority locations across the city, and to conduct related ecological assessment and community engagement. Funds will also be used to initiate trail construction, along with additional trail maintenance and community environmental stewardship. The detailed implementation plan will be submitted as part of the 2014 through 2018 Operating Budget review processes.

New Capital Budget expenditures of \$0.250 million is also required in each year from 2015 to 2018 for a total of \$1 million for the development of trail management plans, trail construction and trail infrastructure. The required funds will be requested and considered during the 2015 to 2018 Capital Budget processes.

Parks Plan theme - Maintain quality parks

High quality parks are vibrant, welcoming, safe and sustainable spaces. They benefit residents, communities and cities by creating social, cultural, environmental and economic value. The Parks Plan consultation identified the elements of park quality that are important to the public. Quality parks are clean, in good condition, safe, and have the amenities to meet basic needs, such as a place to sit. High quality parks contribute to a sense of place in individual neighbourhoods, and for the city overall.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation will improve park quality by consistently achieving its standards. By investing in improving and maintaining basic park infrastructure, the public will be greeted by cleaner parks and higher-quality amenities. The Division will also

invest in additional maintenance in heavily used parks and parks facilities, such as litter picking in waterfront parks during the summer to provide a better visitor experience.

Toronto residents use parks as places to gather. In the consultation, residents expressed the need for an increase in the number and quality of amenities that invite small group social gatherings, such as benches, picnic tables, fire-pits, and barbeques. The Parks Plan recommends that, over the next five years, Parks, Forestry and Recreation build and upgrade social gathering spaces that combine seating with other park amenities, increase the availability of shade and drinking water, and improve washroom access to support the social role parks play for all Toronto residents.

Quality parks also mean beautiful parks. Toronto residents love to see flowers and community gardens. The demand for public participation in park horticulture and new community gardens has also been growing. To meet this demand, Parks, Forestry and Recreation plans to develop programming to engage the enthusiasm of volunteers through public education and training, and through new and improved locations for horticulture and small-scale urban agriculture. Additional resources will increase the number of community gardens that can be added to parks, create new allotment garden sites and rejuvenate flower beds in areas of high visibility.

New annual Operating Budget funding will be required as follows: \$0.467 million gross and 5.3 approved positions in 2014; \$0.822 million gross and 9.3 approved positions in 2015; \$1.394 million gross and 13.5 approved positions in 2016; \$1.858 million gross and 16.2 approved positions in 2017; and \$2.473 million gross and 21.3 approved positions in 2018. This funding will be used to increase summer maintenance in highly used parks, for horticulture bed rejuvenation and maintenance improvements, and to develop a program to engage residents in park horticulture. Existing community and allotment gardens will be upgraded and enhanced. In subsequent years, funds will also support the creation of new community and allotment garden sites to meet high demand.

New Capital Budget expenditures of \$2 million in 2014, \$3.250 million in 2015, \$4.750 million in 2016, \$5.125 million in 2017, and \$5.500 million in 2018 for a total of \$20.625 million over the 5 year period (2014-2018) is also required to fund the installation, upgrading and improvement of benches, picnic tables, shade areas, drinking water stations and other basic park amenities in order to improve park spaces. This will include the creation of new social gathering spaces to make parks more attractive and welcoming.

Parks Plan theme - Improve system planning

Every park is part of a system of parks that must respond to a growing and changing city. Population growth and changing activity patterns present a challenge to planning and managing a sustainable and vibrant system. There is also a need to develop policies that will guide fair and consistent decision making regarding the increasing demands for park uses. Planning for the future must also meet the challenge of making parks accessible to all by investing in meeting accessibility requirements, as well as planning to acquire parkland in areas with insufficient parkland.

The Parks Plan includes a classification system to guide park planning, development and operations. The five park types are parkette, neighbourhood, community, district, and city parks. A park's type is based on its size, its catchment area and other factors, and will help guide decisions about what uses, park-specific plans, and amenities are appropriate.

Park classification will provide a foundation for further service planning that Parks, Forestry and Recreation will undertake over the next five years. It will inform the comprehensive inventory and mapping of parks, trails and facilities to provide timely information about parks to both staff and the public.

The Division also needs to address the challenges presented by a growing and changing city. In the next five years, Parks, Forestry and Recreation will develop approaches to responding fairly and consistently to requests for exclusive uses in parks (e.g. for permits and leases), commercial activity (e.g. events with advertising), and restricting access (e.g. for environmental protection) in parks.

Parks benefit everyone, and the parks system needs to be accessible to everyone. Parks, Forestry and Recreation will continue to work with disability stakeholder groups to improve universal accessibility, meet or exceed provincial accessibility standards, and to ensure that information about the accessibility of parks and trails is available.

In conjunction with the *Recreation Service Plan*, the Parks Plan also recommends the development of a long-term plan that will guide parks acquisition, and facility provision to support service delivery and community needs. Acquiring new parkland in order to meet the needs of a growing and changing city is a parks system priority, which involves meeting the challenges of scarce, fragmented, and costly land in many areas of the city. This work requires collaboration with City Planning and other partners to expand and connect the parks system.

CONCLUSION

The Parks Plan will guide the service improvement and planning efforts of Parks, Forestry and Recreation over the next five years. Implementation will begin in 2013, with financial costs distributed over a five year period from 2014 to 2018. The directions and recommended actions are based on significant input from residents and stakeholders, the documented benefits of parks, the demographic trends, and the current state of Toronto's parks system. When implemented, the Parks Plan will help connect people and communities with parks, advance greening and environmental sustainability, improve the quality of parks, and strengthen the parks system to create a legacy parks system for Toronto.

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SIGNATURE

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ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1- Parks Plan 2013 - 2017