



## STAFF REPORT ACTION REQUIRED

### Priority Access to Recreation Programs at John English Community School: Response to EYCC Motion EY13.50

<b>Date:</b>	May 20, 2016
<b>To:</b>	Etobicoke York Community Council
<b>From:</b>	General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation
<b>Wards:</b>	Ward 6- Etobicoke Lakeshore
<b>Reference Number:</b>	P:\2016\Cluster A\PFR\EY15-061416-AFS#23152

#### SUMMARY

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This report responds to the motion from Etobicoke York Community Council to ensure registration in recreation programs at John English Community School is comprised of Ward 6 residents, ensure program capacities are being maximized, and assess the impact of designating John English Community School as a centre where programs are free.

This report affirms Parks, Forestry and Recreation's commitment to the provision of equitable access to programs and services and highlights measures undertaken to maximize program attendance and participation.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. Etobicoke York Community Council receive this report for information.

#### Financial Impact

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

## **DECISION HISTORY**

At its meeting of April 5, 2016, Etobicoke York Community Council requested "the Director of Community Recreation, Parks, Forestry and Recreation to report to the June 14, 2016 meeting of Etobicoke York Community Council on a comprehensive strategy to ensure that registration in recreation programs at John English Community School is comprised of Ward 6 residents, that program capacities are being maximized, and that the 'Community Centres Where Programs are Free' designation is not negatively impacting the ability of Mimico-area residents to access programs at John English Community School".

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2016.EY13.50>

At its meeting of August 5 and 6, 2009, City Council adopted the development of a five-year Recreation Service Plan founded on the principles of equitable access, quality, inclusion, and capacity building.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2009.EX33.23>

At its meeting of July 16 2013, City Council adopted the 2013-2017 Recreation Service Plan Implementation Plan which sets out preliminary timelines, benchmark activities, and resource requirements to implement the actions contained in the Recreation Service Plan.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2013.CD22.1>

At its meeting of December 16, 17 and 18, 2013, City Council adopted the designation of 16 additional existing community centres as community centres where programs are free.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2013.CD25.5>

At its meeting of May 3. 2016, City Council adopted the 2013-2017 Recreation Service Plan Implementation Update which provides the implementation status of key recommended actions outlined in the Recreation Service Plan.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2016.CD11.2>

## **ISSUE BACKGROUND**

In 1999, Toronto City Council adopted a policy principle stating "the City of Toronto shall ensure all residents year-round accessibility to high quality community recreation and leisure programs regardless of their ability to pay". To advance this principle, Council approved the designation of community recreation program locations where programs would be offered free of charge. These centres, referred to as "Priority Centres," were established to increase access to recreation in neighbourhoods with high incidence of low income by eliminating program fees.

In November 2012, Toronto City Council unanimously approved the 2013-2017 Recreation Service Plan. The Plan guides Parks, Forestry and Recreation service priorities and policy development and lists equitable access as one of its four Council-

approved guiding principles. The Plan outlines steps to ensure all Toronto residents are "able to participate in recreation, regardless of their age, location, financial or other barriers".

The Recreation Service Plan recommended the "equitable distribution of free programs at designated recreation centres" as a key initiative to advance the principle of equitable access. To support this, in 2013, Toronto City Council approved the expansion of Priority centres and referred to them as Centres Where Programs Are Free (CWPAF). Today, there are 38 CWPAF located across the city with York Recreation Centre scheduled to open in fall of 2016 bringing the total to 39. John English Community School was designated as a CWPAF in fall 2014.

## **COMMENTS**

There are no City of Toronto policies in place that provide local residents exclusive access to recreation programs at paid or free program locations. Community capacity building, as one of the City's strategic goals under the theme of social development and inclusionary practices, is essential to the development of strong neighbourhoods. Equitable access and inclusion are also two of the four guiding principles of the current Recreation Service Plan.

Centres Where Programs are Free foster social inclusion. They offer a non-stigmatizing and welcoming space where residents can participate in recreation, regardless of their ability to pay. This aligns with City of Toronto's Strategic Action #11 which aims to ensure access, equity and diversity are advanced through all City services, policies and programs.

That said, research conducted by Parks, Forestry and Recreation in 2012 shows residents usually travel within their local area to participate in recreation. Preliminary analysis looking at catchment areas of CWPAF across the City is showing participation is primarily from the local area.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation is also taking steps to ensure program capacities are being maximized. Attendance in programs is regularly monitored and participants who do not attend are contacted to ensure future participation. Effective April 2016, a new attendance policy was implemented which allows staff to withdraw registrants who do not attend the first two classes of a program and have not provided notification. Doing so provides participation opportunities for waitlist clients.

The availability of high demand programs, including summer camps at CWPAF, is monitored by Parks, Forestry and Recreation. Program adjustments will continue to be made to respond to supply and demand issues, as funding permits.

The designation of John English Community School as a CWPAF has positively impacted access to this centre by reducing financial barriers. CWPAF are proving to be

an effective measure to provide opportunities to individuals who might not otherwise be able to access community recreation due to financial status. John English, in addition to 14 other recreation centres, was designated a free centre during the mandate of the current Recreation Service Plan. On average at these 15 centres, the following measures demonstrate improved access to recreation:

- 38% increase in program registrations (fall 2014 to summer 2015 over the same time period the previous year)
- 20% increase in visits to drop-in programs (fall 2014 to summer 2015 over the same time period the previous year)
- 13% increase in the registered course utilization rate (fall 2014 to summer 2015 over the same time period the previous year). Utilization is defined as the number of used spaces compared to the total available and is a key performance indicator used in service planning

Parks, Forestry and Recreation is reviewing the CWPAF model to ensure it is continuing to meet the stated objectives and to determine whether additional policy work is required to ensure programs are maximized – both in terms of registration and active participation.

## **CONCLUSION**

The 2013-2017 Recreation Service Plan's goals are being realized. The City has seen increased participation and improved access to recreation as evidenced by increased registrations, drop in visits, and course utilization rates. In an ongoing effort towards continuous improvement, Parks, Forestry and Recreation will continue to evaluate and monitor the CWPAF model and remains committed to providing quality recreation programming and optimizing program participation.

## **CONTACT**

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## **SIGNATURE**

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