



REPORT FOR ACTION

Parks Ambassador Service Level

Date: December 19, 2017

To: Parks and Environment Committee

From: General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation

Wards: All

SUMMARY

This report responds to the request from the Parks and Environment Committee to report on the service levels of the Parks Ambassador Program, including budget allocations which would be required to increase service in 2018 and beyond.

The Parks Ambassador program was introduced in 2003 to proactively provide support and opportunities to vulnerable persons interacting with the city's park system. Through the use of mobile crews, the Parks Ambassador program connects park users and vulnerable populations with agencies and divisions that are equipped to provide appropriate support. The program also conducts park visits, community night walks and safety audits across the city as needed.

The Parks Ambassador program does not have a specific service level as approved by Council. The staff and work is included in general service levels of parks operations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. The Parks and Environment Committee receive this report for information

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There is no financial impact from the adoption of the recommendation in this report.

There would be financial impacts from approving the increases to the program discussed in this report.

The current program is supported by one permanent full-time position and one seasonal position requiring base budget support of \$0.149 million in 2018.

The program proposed in the comments in this report would require additional 2018 funding of \$0.350 million which would include one additional permanent full-time Parks Ambassador, three seasonal positions, as well as increasing all seasonal positions from six months to nine months.

Approval of all of the proposed increases would result in a total budget for Parks Ambassadors totalling \$0.499 million with two permanent full time positions and four seasonal nine-month positions.

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

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting of October 16, 2017, the Parks and Environment Committee, through PE22.1, requested the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation, to report to the Parks and Environment Committee meeting on the service levels of the Parks Ambassador Program, including budget allocations which would be required in the 2018 Parks, Forestry and Recreation Operating Budget to close any service level gaps or deficits.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2017.PE22.1>

COMMENTS

Parks Ambassadors are a responsive, mobile crew whose day-to-day work involves ensuring that parks remain welcoming for passive and recreational use and work to resolve conflicts between patrons of the park system. Parks Ambassadors work to ensure the city's parks are accessible, equitable and safe places for all. The Ambassadors ensure that permitted areas are cleared and ready for events, and work to resolve conflicts in those areas if they arise. Their presence works to mitigate illegal activity in parks on a daily basis and as well as being involved with individuals living in parks.

As part of their work, Parks Ambassadors identify issues and opportunities to connect homeless and street involved individuals with programs and services in other city divisions and agencies, including Shelter, Support and Housing Administration (SSHA), Facilities Management, and Transportation Services. They also work closely with Toronto Police Service (TPS) on the identification and management of a variety of illegal park use issues.

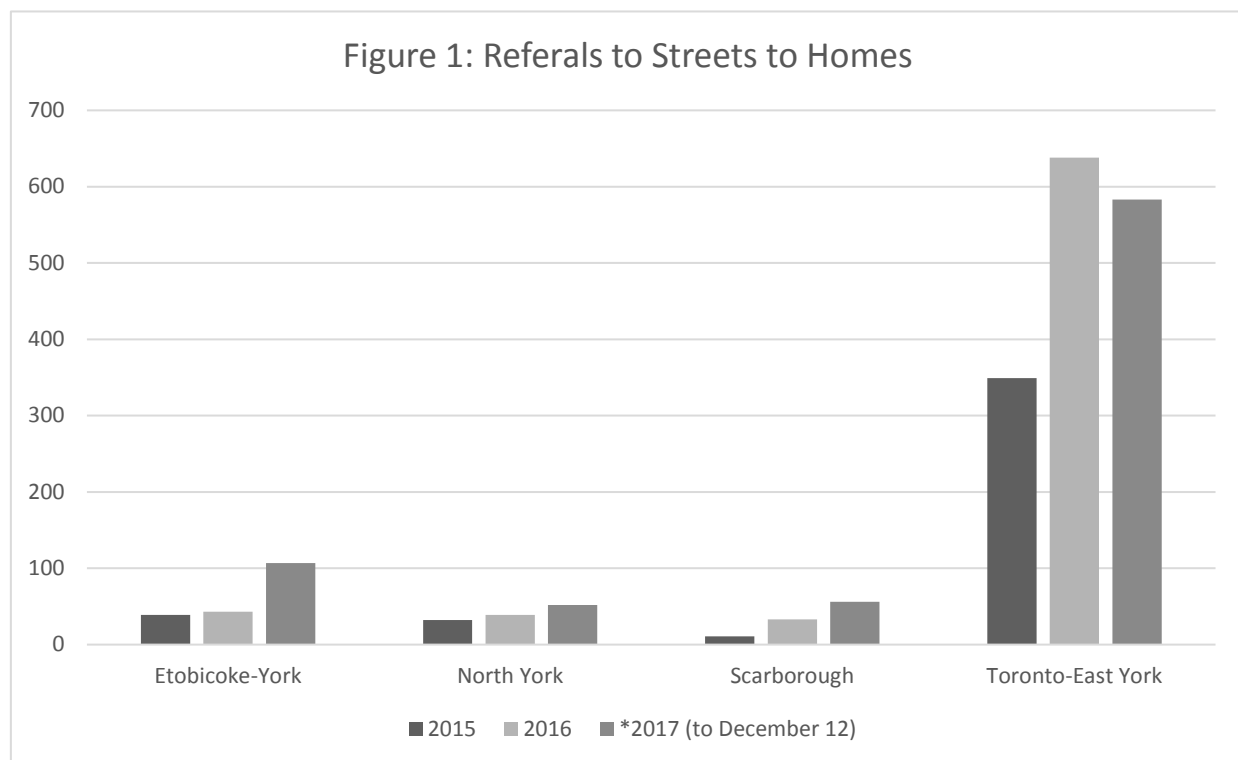
Parks Ambassadors work cooperatively with Streets to Homes to clear homeless encampments as well as providing referrals to shelters, housing and supports. These coordinated efforts are guided by the City Council-approved Inter-divisional Service Protocol (IDP) which assists and encourages people living in public spaces to access

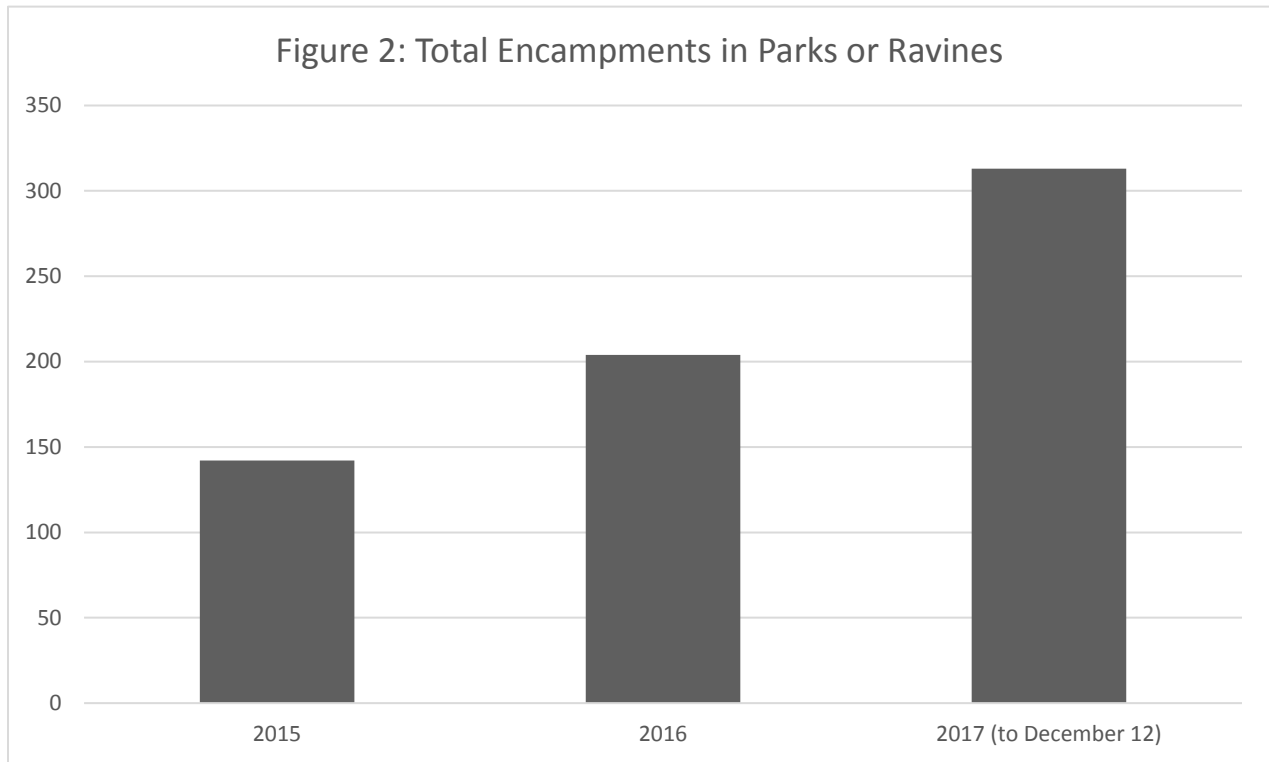
safer and healthier alternatives for housing. It outlines the process and steps for staff to assist those living outdoor to safer, longer term housing solutions.

Current Service Level

The program is supported by one full time Parks Ambassador, and one seasonal Parks Ambassador. Due to increasing demand in 2016 and 2017, the program was temporarily increased by two seasonal staff using existing staff and budget resources within PFR. In 2017, \$0.143 was allocated to the program through the budget. As there is only one full time Parks Ambassador, some health and safety concerns have been raised with respect to working alone in the winter months.

There is no City Council-approved service level for this program, it is responsive to demands as they occur. The program has seen a consistent increase in tracked interactions with park patrons over the past several years. Some of this increase is attributable to the temporary increase in seasonal staff in 2016 and 2017, but the upward trend predates these staff. Based on experience in recent years, the program could increase its capacity to respond to both the day-to-day interactions with individuals in parks, as well as less frequent, but more involved removal of encampments and illegal dump sites. In addition, an expansion of the program could provide for better geographic distribution of resources. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the growth of referrals to Streets to Homes from Parks Ambassadors and number of encampments dealt with respectively.





Information about the scope of the Parks Ambassador program in 2017 is provided below. It should be noted that the numbers below reflect the interactions with the Parks Ambassador program only, and cannot be extrapolated broadly to trends in other social services including, shelters, homelessness or other housing issues. The Parks Ambassadors interact daily with a variety of different people, such as stakeholders in the community (e.g. BIAs, community groups), as well as mitigating illegal activity in parks such as pan-handling, drinking and illegal substance abuse. Each occurrence is tracked and is showing a year over year increase. Although this does not capture the total number of unique individuals to whom the Ambassadors have provided support, it does provide a lens into the level of effort required by the team to fulfil their mandate of supporting a public space system that is welcoming, accessible, equitable and safe places for all.

In 2017, the Parks Ambassadors:

- logged over 14,000 work actions: follow-up required after interactions with residents, street involved individuals, internal or external stakeholders.
- made over 700 referrals to Streets to Homes – note that some individuals may have been referred on more than one occasion
- conducted 16 safety audits in parks – completed through combined Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) and Metropolitan Action Committee on Public Violence Against Women and Children (METRAC) evaluation – with the community and/or TPS and/or the local councillor
- assisted Streets to Homes and/or Parks staff with removal of 313 encampments in parks or ravines.

Options for Service Expansion

The 2018 proposed operating budget provides for the existing 2017 service level for the Parks Ambassador Program. In order to expand the program to address increasing demand, two additional crews, with one full time Parks Ambassador and three seasonal staff would be required. This would allow for three crews in the summer months from the current Council-approved program of one, and two full time staff year round. During the summer, two crews would be dedicated to the downtown core, with the third crew having the ability to respond to issues in other areas of the city. To further expand the program, seasonal staff positions could be extended from six to nine months to allow for greater coverage during shoulder seasons, especially in the fall when the weather is getting colder. The additional funding that would be required to implement this crew structure is \$0.350 million.

2017 Approved - base budget core program staff

Program Structure	2017 Approved budget	Forecasted Actual 2017	2018 incremental (Inflation)	2019 incremental (Inflation)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One Permanent, full time Parks Ambassador One Seasonal Parks Ambassador at six months 	\$0.143 million	\$0.263 million	\$0.006 million	\$0.006 million

Option for Service Expansion

Program Structure	2017 Approved budget	New (2018)	2019 incremental
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One new Permanent, full time Parks Ambassador starting April 1, 2018 	Nil	\$0.069 million	\$0.027 million
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Three seasonal Parks Ambassadors at nine months, and extension of existing seasonal position from six to nine months 	Nil	\$0.242 million	\$0.012 million
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Non-salary expenditures 	Nil	\$0.039 million	-\$0.006 million (equipment purchase for 2018 only)
Total proposed new		\$0.350 million	\$0.033 million

Program Structure	2017 Approved budget	New (2018)	2019 incremental
Total cost of program proposed for 2018 (including existing base budget + new)		\$0.499 million	\$0.538 million

Conclusion

Parks Ambassadors contribute to fulfilling the experience of city parks as happy, enjoyable places to be. The demands for the program have increased over the last several years and this trend is expected to continue. This report outlines options and costs to expand the program in future years to more adequately respond to demand.

CONTACT

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SIGNATURE

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