

Clause embodied in Report No. 2 of the Southwest Community Council, as adopted by the Council of the City of Toronto at its meeting held on March 6, 7 and 8, 2001.

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**High Park and Lambton Park Management
Proposed Prescribed Burns
(Parkdale-High Park – Ward 13)**

(City Council at its meeting held on March 6, 7 and 8, 2001, adopted this Clause, without amendment.)

The Southwest Community Council recommends the adoption of the report (January 23, 2001) from the Commissioner, Economic Development, Culture and Tourism:

The Southwest Community Council reports, for the information of Council, having requested the Commissioner, Economic Development, Culture and Tourism, to consult with the local Councillor regarding the preparation of the fact sheets and other communications for distribution in the Lambton Park community, with respect to the prescribed burn scheduled to take place in Spring 2001.

The Southwest Community Council submits the following report (January 23, 2001) from the Commissioner, Economic Development Culture and Tourism:

Purpose:

The City, with help from the High Park Citizens' Advisory Committee, has been developing restoration and management proposals to preserve and restore High Park's terrestrial and aquatic systems. In 2000, the City planned and successfully implemented the first large scale prescribed burn in High Park, covering 8 ha. The beneficial effects on the plant communities were readily apparent following the burn. In a continuation of this management program, Forestry staff are planning prescribed burns at Lambton Park (3 ha) and High Park (15 ha) to be implemented in spring 2001.

Financial Implications and Impact Statement:

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

Recommendations:

It is recommended that:

- (1) that the City Forester be authorized to approve the Operational Prescribed Burn Plans, prepared by the Fire Boss and reviewed by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources Fire Supervisor, and proceed with implementation of High Park and Lambton Park burns in spring 2001; and
- (2) the appropriate City officials be authorized and directed to take the necessary action to give effect thereto.

Background:

High Park and Lambton Park contain some of the most significant natural areas in the City of Toronto and the Region of York. Ontario once supported over 10,000 ha of prairies and open woodlands known as savannahs. They were concentrated on the province's drier sand plains, where periodic natural fires kept back the forests. The largest prairies and savannahs in the greater Toronto region were found on the Humber Plains, including High Park and Lambton Park. Today, only 3 percent of the original extent of pre-settlement cover of prairie and oak savanna still exist. Savannahs and prairies are now considered one of the most endangered ecosystems on the continent. Many of the plants in High Park and Lambton Park are considered by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources to be "extremely rare". In addition, these Parks provide habitat for a wide variety of wildlife, including 252 species of migrant birds, and important habitat for rare breeding birds including Red-headed Woodpecker, Carolina Wren, Eastern Screech Owl, and Orchard Oriole. Lambton Park is noted for having the largest number of butterfly species (54) observed in the GTA during one day.

It is generally accepted that fire can be a beneficial, even essential, natural process to maintain fire dependent plant communities such as Dry Black Oak and White Oak Tallgrass Woodlands found in High Park and Lambton Park. The program of study and management in High Park was initiated at a meeting of Toronto Council in 1993. 2000 marks a year of major accomplishment with the initiation of the first large scale prescribed burn management and with the operation of a restoration crew in the park. The restoration crew helped to complete necessary maintenance including the removal of invasive plants, monitoring the results of management efforts, conducting current inventories of rare plants; and working with the Volunteer Stewardship group, they initiated new planting in the Park.

A report detailing the work of the restoration crew was prepared at the end of 2000. This report in combination with the High Park and Lambton Park Management Plans, as well as the Burn Plans and Monitoring Report, document the important work the City is doing to protect significant natural areas, and help to educate and invite comment on the methods of restoration being employed in the parks. A document titled High Park – A Jewel of Toronto's Park System is now also available to describe the restoration efforts to park users and staff.

Comments:

Parks and Forestry staff in conjunction with consultants and the High Park Citizens' Advisory Committee (HPCAC), Natural Environment Subcommittee, have studied some of the recent changes in plant and wildlife communities in High Park. Through this process, silvicultural management systems have been selected to address problems of invasive species introduction and restoration of degraded plant communities. Alternatively, invasive species could be controlled by increased use of herbicides, but this would not be in keeping with an integrated pest (weed) management approach, which seeks to limit use of herbicides except where there are no alternatives. Revitalization of the native fire dependent plant community can only be achieved by re-establishing fire disturbance to the ecological system. Studies have shown that the oldest trees in High Park are approaching 200 years, and that nearly half of these may be dead within 30 years. Failure to take appropriate management will result in the loss of the significant vegetation for which this park has been recognized.

Within an overall framework of vegetation management proposed for High Park and Lambton Park, Fire Management Plans have been prepared by Forestry staff, in consultation with HPCAC members and a qualified prescribed burn consultant/Fire Boss. The Fire Boss has also prepared an implementation plan, following strict protocols used by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (OMNR). These protocols ensure that all details are considered, to minimize any risk. The OMNR has reviewed the plan and approved it in principle although, since they are not actually conducting the burn, they have no authority to legally approve the plan.

Trained specialists hired by the Fire Boss will conduct the burn. The Fire Boss with whom Forestry staff are working was responsible for implementing the test plot burns in High Park in 1997 and 1998, while he was working with the OMNR, and he was responsible for implementing the first operational burn in High Park in 2000. Mr. Fred Bruin has also been responsible for preparing and successfully implementing annual burn plans for the City of Windsor, Parks Department. The OMNR have staff and financial limits that make them unable to conduct further burns in High Park. Toronto Parks and Recreation Officials will be responsible for notifying City staff and the public of the burn plan, and will oversee the implementation of the burn with Toronto Fire Services Division.

A few concerns were raised during the first operational burn in 2000. These issues have been addressed in the past year. A report which describes wildlife in High Park and its Response to Prescribed Burns was prepared by a qualified consultant to outline any concerns which might relate to the impact of the burn program on wildlife. Further the burn plans specifically address the need for special notice to be given to known or potential asthmatics in the area, asking them to take personal precautions on the day of the burn.

The proposed burn for 2001 in High Park is a continuation of the program started in 2000, where plans were put forward to burn approximately 15 ha per year for 5 years. Following a remedial phase of management, burns will be planned less frequently to maintain plant communities. In Lambton Park, it is expected that burning will be planned in two different years within the next 5 years. Given the relatively high quality of the plant community in this area, there is not a need to conduct remedial management in the same way as in High Park. The burn schedule has been planned to consider the need to spread out the areas of burn in a given year, both to address

public perception as well as maintenance of wildlife habitat. Weather permitting, burning will be completed in a one-day period on each site during the spring of each year. Park use will be partly restricted on this day to enable safe implementation of the prescribed burn operations.

As before, City staff will prepare fact sheets and associated communications literature to explain the plan to use controlled fire management to preserve and restore the unique and threatened oak woodlands. Flyers will be posted at locations where burning is proposed in spring 2001, at least one month in advance of the proposed date of burn. A media release will be issued to inform community newspapers about the event. Flyers will also be delivered to residences directly surrounding the two parks, providing basic information about the oak savannah, the burn and approximate timing of the burn.

Conclusions:

This report has been reviewed and approved in principle by the Fire Chief, Fire Services Division of Works and Emergency Services.

It is recommended that with the support of Council, the City Forester be authorized to review and approve the Operational Prescribed Burn for High Park and Lambton Park in the year 2001. Council will be advised on an annual basis of issues relating to the success of the prescribed burn management, and of plans to proceed with burns in future years.

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