

Clause embodied in Report No. 5 of the Economic Development and Parks Committee, as adopted by the Council of the City of Toronto at its meeting held on May 21, 22 and 23, 2002.

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Goose Control Program (All Wards)

(City Council on May 21, 22 and 23, 2002, adopted this Clause, without amendment.)

The Economic Development and Parks Committee recommends the adoption of the following report (April 10, 2002) from the Commissioner of Economic Development, Culture and Tourism, subject to adding that the Commissioner of Economic Development, Culture and Tourism be requested to:

- (a) expedite the comprehensive report on this matter, such report to address health concerns and outline initiatives that will protect the health of swimmers in Lake Ontario this summer; and
- (b) work closely with the General Manager & CEO of the Toronto Zoo to provide as many geese needed as part of the animal exchange program with other zoos around the world:

Purpose:

To respond to the Economic Development and Parks Committee request of January 25, 2002 for options on how to control the problems associated with geese in City parks.

Financial Implications and Impact Statement:

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

Recommendations:

It is recommended that:

- (1) the Commissioner of Economic Development, Culture and Tourism continue to implement the geese control measures currently utilized to control geese in city parks;
- (2) the Commissioner of Economic Development, Culture and Tourism further develop an enhanced goose control program aimed at reducing the impact of the Canada Goose on the public's use of parkland and that the funds necessary to implement the program be included for consideration in the Parks and Recreation 2003 Operating Budget submission; and

- (3) the appropriate City officials be authorized and directed to take the necessary action to give effect thereto.

Background:

At its meeting of January 25, 2002, the Economic Development and Parks Committee requested the Commissioner of Economic Development, Culture and Tourism to report on options for controlling the goose problem in former Etobicoke.

The problems generated by geese affect parks all along the City's waterfront, the Toronto Islands and a number of the golf courses operated by the Parks and Recreation Division. Since the problem is a City-wide concern, this report provides options for controlling geese throughout the City, rather than just focussing on one area.

Comments:

In the mid-1960's the Canada Goose was nearing extinction. The Ontario Waterfowl Research Foundation and the Ministry of Natural Resources began a program to reintroduce the geese to Southern Ontario. The program was successful, however, the population has increased dramatically beyond expectations as a result of abundant food, access to open water and a lack of natural predators. It is estimated that there are 250,000 geese in Southern Ontario, with the potential for the population to double every three to five years.

There are two categories of geese found in our parks: Resident Geese - those who live in our parks year round and do not migrate; Migrant Geese – those birds that fly into the parks during the four week moulting period at the end of May, shed their flight feathers and remain throughout the summer until migrating south for the winter.

Toronto is not the only local municipality experiencing problems with geese. Mississauga and Oakville both have taken measures to control the geese in their parks and have been consulted in the preparation of this report. Since 1995, Mississauga estimates they have spent over \$1 million on goose control measures and have achieved success in reducing the number of both Resident and Migratory geese. They have employed a number of alternative approaches, some of which Toronto already employs and others that are being investigated further. Additional information on the different approaches and programs are set out below.

Impact on Parkland

The substantial number of geese occupying our parks impacts their use in a number of ways. The physical existence of the geese prevents some park users, particularly small children, from enjoying the parks. As the geese become accustomed to being near humans they lose their fear and will remain in a park even when used by the public. This leads to aggressive behaviour by the geese and increases the opportunity for injury to the public.

Geese are prolific producers of fecal waste which fouls the area and often makes it unusable. This eliminates usage of some park areas and decreases the enjoyment value of permit holders who have paid for use of a picnic area or sports field. The feces can also do sufficient damage to warrant total reconstruction of a field, resulting in increased capital and maintenance costs.

Public Education

Educating the public on the damage done to parks by geese and the costs necessary to repair it, is an essential component of goose control. Parks and Recreation is installing additional signage aimed at discouraging the practice at locations where the public feed geese, such as High Park and the Toronto Islands. The signage and pamphlets inform the public of the consequences of feeding the geese, including the increased risk of botulism in the birds, aesthetically unappealing parklands and poor water quality. This supplemental feeding also teaches geese to be less afraid of people and they become less likely to migrate.

New innovative signage and storyboard plaques have been installed at the new Woodbine Park in the downtown's east-end. The plaques are aimed at children and explains the impact of feeding the geese in a story book form. It is recommended that the public education component of the program be expanded, including installation of additional signage and printing and release of pamphlets.

Egg-Oiling

The Toronto Region and Conservation Authority obtains an annual permit from the Canadian Wildlife Service to apply oil to the eggs of a number of bird species, including the Canada Goose and Mute Swans. Typically, Resident Geese begin breeding when they are two to three years old and nest every year until they die. They produce about five eggs per nest, nearly 50 in a lifetime, half of which survive to become free flying birds in autumn. Oiling the eggs prevents them hatching.

This program started in the early 1980's in some of the former Metro Toronto parks. The program was initiated in High Park in 1997 and since it's inception the population of geese in the park has dropped from 1,500 to approximately 100. Subsequently, the program was expanded to include other parks and City run golf courses, including Marie Curtis, Humber Bay East and West, Coronation, the Toronto Islands, Woodbine Beach and Bluffers Park and the Scarlett Woods, Humber Valley and Tam O'Shanter golf courses. In 2001, they treated 461 goose eggs in 121 nests and 86 swan eggs in 14 nests. This program has been initiated for 2002 and will be continued annually, adjusting target locations as information arises.

Habitat Modification and Strategic Park Development

By modifying the habitat the geese have access to and reducing the amount of desirable breeding and nesting sites, we can reduce the number of geese in our parks. Geese require a sheltered area adjacent to open water to nest. The size and number of these areas can be reduced by planting shrubs and other plant materials, eliminating mowing of abutting turf areas and installing fencing, stonework or other barriers to water access.

This type of program requires planning and proper design in order to avoid eliminating enjoyable public recreation opportunities while addressing the goose control issue. Parks and Recreation will work with Policy and Development to develop a comprehensive program, including costing, for habitat modification of significantly affected parks. The costs necessary to implement the program will be included in the 2003 budget submission.

The habitat modifications referred to are necessary to correct an existing problem. Recognition of the potential for this problem in the early design stages of new parks can avoid the problem arising. Park plans which avoid the installation of turf areas, such as sports fields, near open water can reduce subsequent repair and modification costs. This pre-emptive approach is employed in the design of new parks.

Use of Trained Dogs and Birds of Prey

The use of trained dogs and Birds of Prey are used to control geese in several Toronto Parks. Trained dogs (most often Border Collies), similar to the way they handle sheep, use the power of their “eye” to round up geese from parklands. Under the command of a trained handler, the dogs will use their natural instincts to gather the geese, move them off-site and into flight. Birds of Prey are used in some parks under the supervision of trained handlers. The presence of these natural predators in the area force the geese to relocate and are a strong deterrent to nesting in the patrolled area. These practices are common across North America where airports, golf courses, marinas and resorts employ dogs and Birds of Prey for this purpose.

Staff will assess this option and pending a satisfactory conclusion, funds for implementation will be included as part of the comprehensive program to be initiated in 2003.

Goose Relocation Program

Recent amendments to the Migratory Bird Act have granted the Canadian Wildlife Service the authority to issue permits to municipalities to relocate geese to other locations, outside or away from the nesting locations. Prior to obtaining a permit the municipality must identify and secure a location such as a game farm or a wildlife sanctuary which will accept the geese. There are a number of locations in Southern Ontario which currently accept geese. The City of Mississauga has employed this approach, successfully relocating 1,500 to 2,000 birds to a game reserve in 2001 at a cost of approximately \$10,000.00.

Another option is the establishment of a “goose camp”, a fenced area to which the geese could be transported and kept until they migrate. The City of Oakville has constructed a goose camp on lands owned by a private cemetery which accommodates up to 400 birds.

Both these options have proven to reduce the number of birds returning to the original location the following year since the birds more often return to the area at which they ended the year. Parks and Recreation is investigating these options further through discussions with both municipalities and the Canadian Wildlife Service. The feasibility and costs of implementing one or both options will be included in the comprehensive program to be developed in time for inclusion in the 2003 budget cycle.

Parks and Recreation currently spends approximately \$5,000.00 annually to participate in a goose egg-oiling program with the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA). There are opportunities to expand the current goose control measures and augment them with innovative approaches such as a goose relocation program, increased habitat modification or dog patrols. A comprehensive program will be developed and the funds necessary to implement the program will be requested in the 2003 Parks and Recreation Budget.

Conclusions:

Parks and Recreation currently employs the use of a public education program, egg-oiling, strategic park development and site specific habitat modification as methods of controlling geese in the City's parks. Expanding these initiatives and developing a comprehensive City-wide program, including an expanded habitat modification program and the potential opportunities provided by a Goose Relocation Program would supplement the existing efforts and further reduce the geese inhabiting the parks. This comprehensive program will be completed in time for the inclusion of any funds necessary to implement the program to be requested through the 2003 budget cycle.

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