

Consolidated Clause embodied in Report No. 9 of the Economic Development and Parks Committee, as adopted by the Council of the City of Toronto at its regular meeting held on November 26, 27 and 28, 2002.

**11a****Goose Control Program  
(All Wards)**

*(City Council, at its regular meeting held on November 26, 27 and 28, 2002, amended this Clause by adding thereto the following:*

*“It is further recommended that the Commissioner of Economic Development, Culture and Tourism, in consultation with the General Manager and Chief Executive Officer of the Toronto Zoo, be requested to work with Zoos in sister cities and other cities, with a view to relocating some of the Canadian geese to Zoos in other countries.”)*

(City Council on October 29, 30 and 31, 2002, deferred consideration of this Clause to the next regular meeting of City Council scheduled to be held on November 26, 2002.)

**The Economic Development and Parks Committee recommends the adoption of the following report (September 27, 2002) from the Commissioner of Economic Development, Culture and Tourism; subject to adding that the Goose Management Strategy be expanded to include the use of trained dogs at the Toronto Zoo:**

**Purpose:**

To respond to City Council's request of May 21, 22 and 23, 2002 to submit a report outlining options to control the problems associated with geese in City parks.

**Financial Implications and Impact Statement:**

The expansion of the current goose control program to a City-wide Goose Management Strategy in 2003 will require \$195,000.00 in funding for implementation.

The Chief Financial Officer and City Treasurer has reviewed this report and concurs with the financial impact statement.

**Recommendations:**

It is recommended that:

- (1) operating funds for the expanded Goose Management Strategy in the amount of \$195,000.00 be considered as part of the Parks and Recreation Division 2003 Operating Budget;

- (2) the Commissioner of Economic Development, Culture and Tourism be directed to implement the comprehensive Goose Management Strategy set out in this report conditional upon the approval of funds in the 2003 Operating Budget and report back in the fall of 2003, prior to the 2004 Operating Budget process, on the results of the strategy and the requirements for any future funding; and
- (3) the appropriate City officials be authorized and directed to take the necessary action to give effect thereto.

Background:

At its meeting of May 21, 22 and 23, 2002, City Council adopted the April 10, 2002 report on controlling the goose problem in former Etobicoke from the Commissioner of Economic Development, Culture and Tourism, as amended by the Economic Development and Parks Committee. The Committee requested that the Commissioner report back on the comprehensive program.

The report addresses the request of the Commissioner to work closely with the General Manager and CEO of the Toronto Zoo regarding participation in the zoo's animal exchange program and outlines initiatives to minimize the risk to the health of swimmers in Lake Ontario.

Comments:

As noted in the previous report, the problems generated by geese affects parks all along the City's waterfront, the Toronto Islands and a number of the golf courses operated by the Parks and Recreation Division. The Management Strategy reflects a comprehensive City-wide approach for managing the issue and minimizing the impact of geese, rather than just focussing on one area.

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. Estimates suggest that there are over 7,500 geese spending a portion of the year in Toronto City parks.

The substantial number of geese occupying the 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 behavior by the geese and increases the opportunity for injury to the public.

Geese are prolific producers of fecal waste that 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.

Management Strategy

There are two categories of geese found in the parks: resident geese - those who breed and live in our parks year round; and migrant geese – those birds that fly into the parks at the end of May after breeding elsewhere and remain throughout the summer until migrating south for the winter. Resident and migrant geese both lay eggs in late spring (end of March through April), molt (lose their flight feathers) in early June and regain their flight feathers toward the end of August. The fact that resident geese breed and live in the City year round, while migrants leave, necessitates different approaches to managing their impact. Certain control methods are applicable to both types of geese, while others are more effective on a specific type of goose.

### Equipment

An inventor in western Canada has developed a piece of equipment that attaches to a range of park maintenance equipment and is used to sweep up goose feces. The equipment can be used on both soft and hard surfaces. Although the equipment is relatively new, there are indications that the use of the equipment has reduced the impact of the goose feces on the parkland where it has been employed. The East, West and South Parks and Recreation Districts all experience goose control problems, the acquisition of the Goose Buster equipment for each district is recommended. Funds in the amount of \$15,000.00 per district, \$45,000.00 in total, are required for this acquisition.

### Public Education

Educating the public on the damage done to parks by both resident and migrant geese and the costs necessary to repair it, is an essential component of goose control. The department recommends installing additional signage aimed at locations where the public feed geese, such as High Park and the Toronto Islands.

There are approximately 15 key locations where the geese predominate. Installing two informational signs at these locations will cost approximately \$3,000.00. The signage will educate the public about the impact of feeding on parkland.

New innovative signage and storyboard plaques such as those installed at the new Woodbine Park are an informative and unique method of informing children about the impact of feeding geese. The plaques explain the impact of feeding the geese in a story book form. The storyboards are unique and provide an opportunity to target children directly. The storyboards consist of a number of pages and include five seats. They cost \$25,000.00 each, including seating and installation. The storyboards would be appropriate for installation at two key locations: the ferry docks on the Islands and in High Park near the ponds. Total cost will be \$50,000.00.

A communication strategy consisting of signage and pamphlets should be developed to inform the public of the consequences of feeding the geese, including information on the increased risk of botulism in the birds, aesthetically unappealing parklands and the impact on water quality. The pamphlets should be circulated to residences near parks where goose control issues are a problem. Printing and distribution costs are estimated at \$12,000.00 for the production and distribution of a combination of 100,000 flyers and/or pamphlets.

A promotional program should be developed for use by various television and radio media outlets serving the City. A film depicting trained dogs that herd and relocate the geese is currently being used by the Parks and Recreation Division staff, and this could serve to draw attention to the issue.

### Strategic Park Development

Geese require a sheltered area adjacent to open water to nest. Modifying the habitat by planting shrubs and other plant materials, eliminating mowing of abutting turf areas and installing fencing, stonework or other barriers to water access will reduce the number of geese in the parks.

Geese prefer a habitat which permits unobstructed access to water from the land they feed from. Existing problems can be addressed by planting grasses or altering the shoreline. Recognition of the potential for this problem in the early design stages of new parks can avoid the problem arising. Strategic park development plans which avoid the installation of turf areas, such as sports fields, near open water, can reduce subsequent repair and modification costs. Park design staff employ this strategy when designing where geese are currently or may be a problem. This type of program requires planning and proper design in order to avoid eliminating enjoyable public recreation opportunities while addressing the goose control issue.

The modification of existing habitats is necessary to address situations which are currently problem areas. Funds in the amount of \$50,000.00 are required to address five key locations (High Park, Bluffers Park, Toronto Island, Western Beaches and Marie Curtis Park) throughout the City.

### Use of Trained Dogs

Trained dogs (most often Border Collies) 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. One City-owned dog currently works in High Park and has been successful in reducing the damage caused by the geese.

A dog has also been acquired for three City-owned golf courses (Scarlett Woods, Humber Valley, Tam O’Shanter) impacted by geese. Prior to acquiring the dog, a number of the greens on the courses were virtually unplayable, resulting in frustrated customers, additional maintenance fees and a loss in revenue. By successfully keeping the geese from spending too long in one location, the dog has successfully minimized the geese control problem at these courses.

The Strategy recommends the acquisition of two additional dogs at a cost of \$10,000.00 for use on the Toronto Islands and on the other two golf courses. The funds will cover acquisition costs, along with the construction of a year-round shelter for the dogs.

### Birds of Prey

Birds of prey, such as the falcon, 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. Parks and Recreation proposes to expand the program to cover additional parkland, funds in the amount of \$15,000.00 are required to supplement the current program.

### Egg-Oiling

The TRCA obtains an annual permit from the Canadian Wildlife Service to apply oil to the eggs of the resident geese. Typically, resident geese produce about 5 eggs per nest, nearly 50 in a lifetime, half of which survive to expand the geese population. 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 its 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.

The importance of implementing this program diligently has been demonstrated this year. Unfortunately, a large number of nests were missed and the population in the parks where this occurred has increased dramatically. Expanding the program to cover the parks more comprehensively will cost \$10,000.00. The Parks and Recreation Division is investigating the reallocation of staff to work with the TRCA to oversee and support implementation of the program. This is one of the most effective programs available.

### 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.

The City of Mississauga has employed this approach, successfully relocating 1,500-2,000 birds to a game reserve in 2001 at a cost of approximately \$10,000.00. Unfortunately there are very few locations in Southern Ontario which currently accept geese. A location willing to accept the geese has not been identified at this time. Parks and Recreation will continue to investigate this option.

Another option is the establishment of a "goose camp", a fenced area where geese could be relocated to for the summer months and kept until they migrate. The camp is an enclosure made of chain link fence, with a framework to support a canopy, which can be rolled out to prevent the geese from flying away. The camp can be located anywhere the geese have access to water and food and can be inspected daily to ensure they are healthy. The on-call veterinary responsibility for the goose camps could be assumed by the Veterinarian currently on call to handle illnesses in animals at the High Park Zoo, Riverdale Farm or Toronto Island.

Relocating the geese to these temporary camps from the time they lose their flight feathers until they regain them will reduce the number of geese in the parks during the peak summer period and therein the amount of damage they can do to the parks. The City of Oakville has constructed a goose camp on lands owned by a private cemetery, which accommodates up to 400 birds.

Parks and Recreation will continue to investigate the option of establishing a goose camp in Toronto.

Conclusions:

Parks and Recreation currently employs the use of a public education program, egg-oiling, strategic park development, habitat modification and trained dogs as methods of controlling geese in the City's parks. These are the same methods used by the Metro Zoo and other agencies for controlling this problem. Unfortunately, with the Zoo also encountering similar problems, they have more than enough geese to provide as part of the animal exchange program.

The expansion of these programs as recommended in this report will reduce the impact of the geese on City parkland, as well as our waterfront and the lake. By reducing the amount of goose waste produced on land, we improve the water quality by reducing the amount that can runoff into the lake during storms.

The Management Strategy is a long-term program. Although some components will generate results immediately, it should be anticipated that a long-term commitment is necessary to increase the long-term success of the Management Strategy. Department staff will evaluate the results of the program during 2003 and report back prior to the 2004 Operating Budget process on the results of the strategy and the requirements for any future funding.

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The Economic Development and Parks Committee also had before it, during consideration of the foregoing matter, a communication (October 9, 2002) from Ms. Liz White, Director, Animal Alliance of Canada and Environment Voters, in support of the Goose Control Program.