

**Consolidated Clause in Economic Development and Parks Committee Report 2, which was considered by City Council on April 25, 26 and 27, 2006.**

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**Request by the Task Force to Bring Back the Don  
to Undertake an Ecological and Hydrological  
Assessment of Chester Springs Marsh  
(Ward 30 Toronto-Danforth)**

*City Council on April 25, 26 and 27, 2006, adopted this Clause without amendment.*

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**The Economic Development and Parks Committee recommends that City Council adopt the staff recommendations in the Recommendations Section of the report (February 20, 2006) from the General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation.**

Purpose:

To respond to the request by the Task Force to Bring Back the Don to raise funds for and undertake an extensive ecological and hydrological assessment of Chester Springs Marsh.

Financial Implications and Impact Statement:

It is estimated that completion of the proposed study will require \$50,000.00. This has not been budgeted for in the current Capital Budget allocation for 2006. Parks, Forestry and Recreation will prepare a proposal for funding to be submitted as part of the 2007 Capital Budget process that may include revenues from external funding sources.

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

Recommendations:

It is recommended that:

- (1) the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation seek external funding to help support a Capital Budget request for 2007, and include the request for funding of an ecological and hydrological study of Chester Springs Marsh in the 2007 Capital Budget request; and

- (2) the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation consult with the Task Force to Bring Back the Don in the development of detailed terms of reference for the required study, and that such study be designed to offer insight and management strategy options for similarly impacted wetlands.

Background:

At its meeting held on November 9, 2005, the Economic Development and Parks Committee referred the communication (October 24, 2005) from the Task Force to Bring Back the Don to the General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation for consideration and report back to the Economic Development and Parks Committee as soon as possible. The communication (October 24, 2005) from the Task Force to Bring Back the Don requested the following:

- (a) the Economic Development and Parks Committee to direct the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation to include funds in the 2006 Operating Budget to commence a comprehensive study on Chester Springs Marsh, or, if funds were not available, to create a funding proposal specifically for this study; and
- (b) that the Habitat Restoration Team of the Task Force to Bring Back the Don be included in writing the Terms of Reference for this study.

These issues related to the wetland overlap between various Divisions and stakeholders. It was determined that a decision to initiate a comprehensive study relating to the current function and future management of Chester Springs Marsh should involve consultation with these groups. A meeting was held on January 23, 2006, between staff of Parks, Forestry and Recreation and John Wilson, Chair of the Task Force to Bring Back the Don, to discuss the details of this request and possible actions that may be taken to address the concerns. Subsequently, a meeting of stakeholders, including Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, was held. At the time the Budget Advisory Committee met to review 2006 Operating Budget requests in January, it was premature for staff to ask that the funding be included in the 2006 Operating Budget, given that the details of the request were still being discussed with stakeholders.

The Chester Springs Marsh (CSM) project started in 1993 and was completed in 1996. The design and construction of the site was a joint venture between the City of Toronto, former Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto, Metropolitan Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (now Toronto and Region Conservation Authority) and the Task Force to Bring Back the Don. The project included an extensive public consultation process.

Since project completion, the site has not progressed as planned, with water flow and invasive species both being key concerns. As Chester Springs Marsh reaches its tenth anniversary, the Task Force to Bring Back the Don is interested in a study that examines the original design and construction of the project, presents evidence that the wetland has or has not functioned as intended, indicates the current flow of water during all seasons, predicts future progression of the site, recommends invasive species management strategies, and offers viable management techniques for the future health of the wetland.

The details of the Task Force request are as follows, and include a review of the original plans and work completed, a summary of all work conducted by volunteers, staff, and community plantings, and a survey of volunteer concerns.

- (i) a list of the original objectives;
- (ii) a copy of the original design plans with verbal description of how the wetlands were intended to function hydrologically;
- (iii) a description of what actual major work was done;
- (iv) a description of any plan modifications made during the actual work;
- (v) a summary of past fluctuations of water levels as found in the CSM Reports;
- (vi) evidence of CSM as a viable wildlife habitat (through direct observation and CSM Reports);
- (vii) a summary of volunteer efforts to control invasive species;
- (viii) a summary of staff efforts to control invasive species;
- (ix) a summary of the plantings done and survival estimates;
- (x) a summary of the developing problems as perceived by volunteers and staff;
- (xi) a description of evidence that the wetland has or has not functioned as intended;
- (xii) photographic or field notes to indicate the current flow of water during mild and heavy rain events;
- (xiii) photographic or field notes to indicate the current flow of water a few days and a few weeks after mild and heavy rain events;
- (xiv) photographic or field notes to indicate what happens in the area during extended dry periods;
- (xv) a description of what is likely to occur in the area over the next 10 to 25 years if no action is taken;
- (xvi) a reasonably detailed description of three to four options we have assuming that we want to maintain a wetland with diversified habitat in this area and the financial implications of each option; and
- (xvii) recommendations based on all previous information or options.

Comments:

Chester Springs Marsh is a high profile site, the first wetland of its kind in Toronto. It is located in very close proximity to the location of the planned Don River Park, and to the mouth of the Don River, which is the subject of a proposed Environmental Assessment.

The Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, the Task Force to Bring Back the Don and Urban Forestry - Natural Environment and Community Programs staff agreed that the current ecological and hydrological state of Chester Springs Marsh warrants a study.

All agreed that a study of Chester Springs Marsh is justified. However, a study that looks exclusively at the wetland's specific concerns as originally proposed would not be of any benefit to other project sites. Instead, it is proposed that a study be done that would offer insight and management strategy options for similarly impacted wetlands. This would provide an opportunity to develop general guiding principles for management of similar projects.

The proposed study will achieve the following results:

- (a) an understanding of the existing ecological and hydrological conditions at the marsh;
- (b) an understanding of how, if at all, the ecology and hydrology of the marsh is different from the original long-term vision;
- (c) an analysis of the ecological and hydrological successes and failures resulting from the initial design and construction, including invasive species encroachment;
- (d) recommendations for short and long-term ecological and hydrological management; and
- (e) development of general guiding principles for management of similar ecosystems across the City of Toronto.

The proposed study is expected to affect future capital funding for this or other wetlands. Phasing and timing of this project depends on securing funds. Funds have not been allocated within existing capital budgets. Therefore, it is proposed that the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation seek external funding to help support a Capital Budget request for 2007, and will include the request for funding of an ecological and hydrological study of Chester Springs Marsh in the 2007 Capital Budget request. Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff will consult with the Task Force to Bring Back the Don in the development of detailed terms of reference for the required study, with the understanding that the study be designed to offer insight and management strategy options for similarly impacted wetlands.

Conclusions:

It appears that Chester Springs Marsh has ecological and hydrological conditions that differ greatly from the original project design. A study of Chester Springs Marsh will generate understanding of the current conditions, both positive and negative, and will produce recommendations for future management of this and other similar sites throughout the City. Funding is not available within the 2006 Capital Budget allocation, but will be included in the 2007 Capital Budget request.

Urban Forestry, Natural Environment and Community Programs, the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority and the Task Force to Bring Back the Don have agreed to the proposed approach described above.

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