



STAFF REPORT ACTION REQUIRED

Making City Playgrounds Fully Accessible

Date:	May 21, 2010
To:	Parks and Environment Committee
From:	Brenda Patterson, General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation
Wards:	All Wards
Reference Number:	P:\2010\Cluster A\PFR\PE31-061710-AFS#11800

SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to provide information on making existing City playgrounds fully accessible to the benefit of all.

The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)*, 2005 requires the province to be accessible by 2025 through the development of five mandatory accessibility standards. One of the five standards to be developed, the Accessible Built Environment Standard, is expected to provide direction on new construction and extensive renovations.

Currently Parks, Forestry and Recreation (PF&R) has an inventory of over 850 playgrounds located in every park category city-wide and has limited resources to maintain these assets. Although PF&R is already incorporating a number of accessible initiatives for new playgrounds and renovations to existing ones, PF&R will finalize a strategy based on the financial impact of retrofitting current playgrounds and constructing new ones when the new standards are announced.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. upon its legislation by the Government of Ontario, Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff review the Built Environment Standard and determine the applicable components of the standard that apply to playground design.

Financial Impact

Financial impact, if any, to modify or replace current playgrounds will be determined once the Built Environment provincial legislation has been passed and by the results of any planned audits based on the new standard.

In order to develop an effective accessibility strategy, a playground accessibility audit will need to be completed by industry approved professionals to identify the baseline of the current inventory. It is anticipated that the audit results will determine that the cost to modify or replace the current playground inventory could be substantial.

The 2010 Capital Budget for Parks, Forestry and Recreation includes \$5.281 million for playground renovation projects that will incorporate various accessible features, including \$1.094 million for a fully accessible playground at Oriole Park. Furthermore, PF&R's 2011-2019 Capital Plan includes \$12.600 million in future playground renovation projects.

The Deputy City Manager and Chief Financial Officer has reviewed this report and agrees with financial impact information.

Equity Statement

Parks, Forestry and Recreation is committed to identifying, removing and preventing barriers to universal accessibility for people with disabilities in new and renovated playgrounds. The division has already incorporated a number of innovative accessibility features in new playground designs. Provincial legislation under the Accessible Built Environment standard may provide additional design and construction requirements that will further guide the division in continuing to remove barriers by making future improvements/renovations to playgrounds. An accessibility audit of our playground will, therefore, need to be conducted to determine any necessary accessibility upgrades to existing play structures to meet the anticipated legislative standard. Success will ultimately be measured by increased participation of children of various ages and abilities.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting on Monday, April 20, 2009 (Decision Document Item PE23.4, Decision Advice and Other Information a.(i.)) Parks and Environment Committee requested that the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation report back on the City's strategy for making all City playgrounds fully accessible to all children, youth and adults, disabled or not.

Link to Decision Document:

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2009/pe/reports/2009-04-20-pe23-cr.htm>

ISSUE BACKGROUND

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act

The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (AODA), 2005 requires the province to be accessible by 2025 through the development of mandatory accessibility standards in five areas: customer service; information and communications; employment; transportation; and the built

environment. The standards are being implemented in stages enabling businesses to plan for and incorporate them into future practices.

The period for public review of the initial proposed Accessible Built Environment Standard ended on October 16, 2009. The standards development committee is expected to reconvene to review public input and submit a final proposed standard for consideration as law.

The Accessible Built Environment Standard is expected to provide direction on new construction and extensive renovations. When the final proposed standard is released, PF&R will review and determine its applicability to our facilities and amenities. The Built Environment Standard will not only impact all existing and new playground development but also the development of the park itself such as the accessibility of pathways and trails, washrooms and park buildings, and parking facilities. The financial impact to the City will also have to be considered; the Province has not made a commitment to assist with any capital costs resulting from the impending AODA regulations.

COMMENTS

CURRENT ACCESSIBLE PLAYGROUND INITIATIVES

Playground Accessibility Initiatives:

PF&R is already pro-active with regards to universal accessibility in new and renovated playgrounds. In cooperation with the local councillor, community groups and stakeholders, staff work with play equipment manufacturers to incorporate new and innovative accessibility features into new playground projects.

Some accessible initiatives are already being incorporated into new playground construction and renovations and include:

Accessible Playground Surfacing

Better accessible playground surfaces are being installed. Surfaces such as sand make it difficult for users requiring wheelchairs or walkers to access the play area; whereas a surface such as an engineered wood fibre is better suited for wheelchair access.

Accessible Ramps

To improve accessibility for those with mobility concerns, the installation of ramps from the ground into the play structure or ramps adjoining two play areas is valuable. Also the use of berms and natural structures in the landscape are incorporated into the playground design in order to take advantage of varying ground grade levels. All users can access the entire structure instead of being confined to ground level activities.

Transfer Stations

Transfer stations allow some users requiring a wheelchair or walker with enough strength and mobility to leave their assistive device, to climb up into some appropriately designed sections of a play structure.

Inclusive Components/Activities at Ground Level

Interactive playground features are installed at ground level surrounded by an accessible surface allowing all users, regardless of age or ability, to play.

Accessible Swings

Swing seats equipped with special harnesses are available that allow children with disabilities or requiring support to enjoy this popular activity with the assistance of a caregiver.

Sensory Activities

Sensory activities encourage exploration and discovery and are a necessary part of development for anyone including those with autism or sensory processing impairments. Playground design needs to consider all facets of the sensory experience that include auditory, visual, kinesthetic, smell and tactile. Examples of sensory stimulating activities might consist of the use of bright colours, and spinning, colourful gears, labyrinth and kaleidoscope panels, the use of different textures, music panels, drums, and other sound generating devices.

Play Enhancement Program:

In 2004, PF&R developed the Play Enhancement Program as a long-term city-wide playground replacement/ enhancement initiative. Playgrounds identified to be replaced first through the program were based on district priorities and need. Funds were made available starting with the 2005 council-approved PF&R Capital Budget to replace 12 playgrounds per year; 3 per each of the 4 districts. Since 2005, 12 playgrounds each year have been replaced with new and more challenging play structures and when possible have incorporated various accessibility features, including those noted above.

NESHAMA PLAYGROUND

Located in Oriole Park, the design implements a state-of-the-art accessible playground that creates an enriching experience for all children, regardless of ability. This playground is made possible thanks to a \$700,000 donation from a private group with matching funds from a local Section 37 agreement from and the City.

EARL BALES PARK PLAYGROUND

Recently, PF&R received a generous \$1,000,000 donation from a local resident to fund the design and construction of a water-themed playground and sensory garden in Earl Bales Park.

Both will be designed for the benefit of all with special features that enhance the development through play for those living with cognitive, developmental, physical and sensory impairments.

DEVELOPING A STRATEGIC ACCESSIBLE PLAYGROUND PLAN

In order to develop an effective strategy, a playground accessibility audit will need to be completed by industry approved professionals to identify the baseline of the current inventory. An audit will identify playgrounds already accessible and those requiring modifications. Audit results will need to evaluate various factors including, but not limited to, park type, location, number of local residents, number of visitors from outside of immediate neighbourhood, local agencies, housing, consumer base, etc.

It is expected that the audit results will determine that the cost to modify or replace the current playground inventory could be substantial.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation makes every effort to develop priorities equitably throughout each of the districts. However, with limited resources to maintain these assets, in addition to providing upgrades to make play structures more accessible, we must create a reasonable and responsible approach to address this issue.

CONTACT

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SIGNATURE

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