



STAFF REPORT ACTION REQUIRED

Proposed Public and Stakeholder Consultation Strategy for the Parks Plan

Date:	June 9, 2011
To:	Parks and Environment Committee
From:	Brenda Patterson, General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation
Wards:	All
Reference Number:	P:\2011\Cluster A\PFR\PE05-062411-AFS#13446

SUMMARY

Parks, Forestry and Recreation is currently in the process of developing a five-year Parks Plan to guide decision-making in the acquisition, development, management and operation of the system of public parkland in the City of Toronto. Parks, Forestry and Recreation would like to gather as much input as possible from members of the public and key stakeholders to inform the development of the Plan. As such, this report recommends a consultation strategy, including public and stakeholder consultations, for the development of the Parks Plan.

The consultation strategy outlined in this report recommends five methods for engaging the public and stakeholders: a survey; public town hall meetings; focused stakeholder consultation sessions; focus group sessions; and self-directed consultations for groups that would like to hold their own meetings and submit their feedback to us.

The strategy proposed in this report follows a similar approach to what was adopted by City Council for the development of the Recreation Service Plan. Consultations for the Recreation Service Plan are currently underway, and a final report on the plan is expected to be submitted in the third quarter of this year.

Where there are overlaps between the two service plans, this report recommends a co-ordinated approach that will provide ample opportunities for input by stakeholders and interested members of the public in the development of these plans.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. The proposed consultation strategy for the Parks Plan, outlined in Attachment 1 of this report, be approved.

Financial Impact

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

DECISION HISTORY

In 2004, City Council approved a strategic plan "Our Common Grounds," for Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division, which set a direction for the future of Parks, Forestry and Recreation. The plan included 53 recommended actions in the areas of environmental stewardship, child and youth development and lifelong active living. In order to achieve these recommendations, the Division obtained approval from City Council to develop two service plans, the Recreation Service Plan and the Parks Plan, as outlined below.

Parks Plan

City Council at its meeting of February 22 and 23, 2010 approved the development of a multi-year Parks Plan. The Parks Plan originated from a recommendation in the Division's strategic plan, "Our Common Grounds" to develop a Parks Renaissance Strategy; however; the project scope was expanded to include seven guiding principles: parks and trails as city infrastructure, equitable access for all residents, supporting a diversity of uses, nature in the city, environmental stewardship, place making and community engagement.

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2010/pe/reports/2010-02-04-pe28-cr.htm#PE28.3>

Recreation Service Plan

At its meeting of January 14, 2008, the Community Development and Recreation Committee referred back to staff, for reconsideration, a proposed plan to improve access to recreation (CD12.7 – Improving Access to Recreation: "Everybody Gets to Play"). The General Managers of Parks, Forestry and Recreation and Children's Services were directed to develop a revised approach to this plan.

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2008/cd/agendas/2008-01-14-cd12-ar.pdf>

On August 5 and 6, 2009, Council approved the development of a five-year Recreation Service Plan founded on the principles of equitable access, quality, inclusion, and capacity building. (EX33.23 – Development of a City-wide Recreation Service Plan)

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2009/cc/decisions/2009-08-05-cc38-dd.htm>

COMMENTS

The Parks Plan will guide decision-making in the acquisition, development, management and operation of the system of public parkland in the City of Toronto. Through the development of the Plan, Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division will review its current

inventory of parkland, current programs and services that occur in public parks, and operational standards and establish future goals and objectives to meet the diverse needs of Toronto residents. The Plan will be guided by seven key principles that were adopted by City Council in 2010:

1. **Parks and Trails as City Infrastructure** – The system of parks and trails is part of a continuous city-wide green space system that also includes the natural heritage system, publicly accessible open spaces and streetscapes.
2. **Equitable Access for All Residents** – Parks and trails must be accessible to all residents in all parts of the City and must respond to the needs of a diverse population regardless of age, level of ability, income or cultural background.
3. **Nature in the City** – Natural spaces should be protected, restored and expanded.
4. **Place Making** – Visual appeal and a high standard of quality must be emphasized in the planning, design and ongoing management of public parks.
5. **Supporting a Diversity of Uses** – Parks should be able to handle a variety of uses, appropriate to their location and park type, ranging from active use to passive use, as well as balancing natural areas, tree canopy, community events, urban agriculture and cultural expression.
6. **Community Engagement and Partnerships** – Community involvement, through stewardship and volunteering, should be encouraged to complement existing city resources. Additional, engaging the community and business partners to complement existing funding should be explored and implemented.
7. **Environmental Goals and Practices** – Environmentally responsible practices and green initiatives should be incorporated into the daily planning, design, operation and maintenance of City parks and trails.

Based on the principles noted above, the Parks Plan will guide decision-making and investment in the City's system of public parkland and trails, ensuring that these spaces are available and accessible to all residents, and meet their diverse outdoor leisure needs. The Plan will set goals and objectives to maintain and increase natural spaces within public parks and trails, while incorporating high quality design standards that will make the City's parks attractive, comfortable and unique.

The use of space within City of Toronto parks is in high demand. The Parks Plan will recommend ways of balancing the competing interests of Toronto's diverse population to ensure that the needs of city residents are met. Strategies related to engaging the community and building and maintaining partnerships will be developed and opportunities to leverage various funding models will be explored. Additionally, Parks,

Forestry and Recreation will review its current operational and maintenance standards to ensure that environmentally responsible practices are incorporated, where feasible.

A "Park Classification System" has been developed to categorize the various city parks and the types of uses that occur within them. The classification system will allow operational and planning objectives to be set and will assist the Division in allocating resources and balancing the diverse needs and interests of park users.

Work to date has included an Environmental Scan phase whereby information related to the Division's current assets, programs, services, and operational and maintenance standards has been gathered. The information will be used to prepare information that will be presented at the consultation sessions, and will also assist with the development of the final report.

Proposed Consultation Strategy

Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division is currently in the process of developing a Recreation Service Plan to guide the decision-making and investment in the City's recreation and leisure services. As such, a consultation strategy for the development of the Recreation Service Plan was adopted by Council in April 2011, and consultations began in the spring.

The proposed consultation strategy for the Parks Plan follows a similar approach to the Recreation Service Plan consultation strategy. The consultations, to be held internally and externally, will seek input from the public and stakeholders and will help shape the goals and objectives of the Plan. Consultations are expected to be held in fall, 2011, and the final report on the plan is expected to be submitted to Committee early in the new year. The Mayor and City Council, members of the public, stakeholders and City staff will be notified about these consultations.

The Parks Plan consultation framework involves five methods of public and stakeholder engagement, including: a survey (available on-line and in hard copy); four public consultation sessions (one per district); several stakeholder consultations (one per district plus one city-wide stakeholder consultation session); some smaller focus group discussions with targeted groups; and community-led, self-directed consultations where community or other stakeholder groups can obtain consultation materials for their own meetings in order to provide Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division with their feedback. (The proposed consultation strategy is also outlined in Attachment 1.)

The five methods noted above are described in more detail below:

1. Survey:

Parks, Forestry and Recreation is developing a survey for the Parks Plan (similar to the survey that was developed for the Recreation Service Plan) to gather feedback from the public on their level of satisfaction with current

programs, services and operations and to obtain their opinions on any changes needed to achieve the key principles approved by City Council.

The survey for the Parks Plan is expected to be launched in October and will run until the end of November, 2011. Hard copies of the survey will also be available to participants at the public consultation sessions and at all recreation centres, all four civic centers and at all public libraries. Additionally, upon request, the survey will be available in one of the city's 10 most common language groups¹, as well as French.

2. Public Consultations (general public):

Similar to the Recreation Service Plan consultation framework, four large "town hall" style public meetings (one per district) will be held for the Parks Plan, in October and November, 2011. The public will be notified of these meetings through a variety of advertising methods – e.g. posting a notice on the City's website, distribution of flyers at recreation centres, civic centres and libraries, notification through the media, and through the use of social media (e.g. Facebook). As well, Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff will e-mail notices to all members of Council and all stakeholder groups, including permit holders.

At the town hall meetings, participants will be informed about the Parks Plan and its principles and how it will guide decision-making and investment for the next five years. Each meeting will involve a breakout session where participants can explore and discuss each of the key principles in detail and provide their input.

3. Stakeholder Consultations:

Parks, Forestry and Recreation will schedule consultations with various stakeholder groups (see Attachment 2). The discussions at these consultations will be focused on the specific interests of the groups in their local areas. The local stakeholder groups will be brought together in their respective districts; four in total; to ensure that a dialogue occurs on their multi-faceted interests and to foster a greater understanding of their park needs. Additionally, a fifth city-wide stakeholder session will be held with groups that have a broader city-wide interest in parks matters, e.g. environmental groups, urban agriculture groups, the design community, etc. Stakeholder groups will also be notified of the public consultation sessions.

4. Focus groups:

"Focus group" sessions will be held with community agencies, individuals and

¹ The language groups include: Chinese, Tamil, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Tagalog (Pilipino), Urdu, Russian, Farsi and Korean.

groups who may not have the capacity to otherwise provide their input into the plan. Our staff will reach out to these groups at both the local and city-wide level, in order to obtain their input. For example, staff will reach out to diverse communities, newcomer settlement organizations and other agencies that serve low income residents, seniors, youth and other targeted groups, in order to afford them an opportunity to provide their input into the development of both plans. Toronto's population is changing and is very diverse; therefore, the park programs and services that we provide need to be reviewed in order to meet both the current and future needs of our population.

We are anticipating two to three "focus group" meetings on the Parks Plan which will be conducted over a two-month period, in various parts of the City, in October and November. Similar focus group meetings were held in the spring for the Recreation Service Plan.

5. Self-directed Consultations:

Groups that are interested in providing their feedback independently, without direct involvement by City staff will be able to conduct their own meetings on the Parks Plan and submit their responses to the Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division. The Division will be preparing a consultation toolkit which will have a series of questions and a response form. Groups interested in conducting a self-directed consultation will be able to obtain a copy of the consultation toolkit from City staff or the Division's website, and will be given a deadline for completing the questions in the package and submitting their response forms. Submissions will be included in the final analysis of the Parks Plan.

Communications Strategy

Parks, Forestry and Recreation is hoping to achieve a high level of participation from the public and stakeholders to ensure that all voices and opinions are heard, and that the goals and objectives in the Parks Plan are representative of the needs of all park users. As such, the Division is developing a communications strategy to ensure that the launch of the survey and information about the public consultation meetings are well publicized.

The Mayor and all members of City Council will receive a communication on all of these meetings, and notices of these meetings will be posted on the City's website, as well as in recreation facilities, all civic centres, and public libraries. Media releases on these sessions and the survey will also be sent to all media outlets.

Stakeholder groups will be notified of the public meetings and will also receive invitations to attend stakeholder consultation sessions that are adapted to meet their specific needs and interests. In addition to the invitation to attend a scheduled consultation session, stakeholders will also be advised of the opportunity to hold their own self-directed meeting, and how they can obtain a consultation package.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation has identified approximately 1,800 stakeholder groups which are outlined in Attachment 2. Additionally, staff involved in outreach activities will communicate information about the Parks Plan and related consultations to targeted groups, agencies, and individuals (e.g. newcomers, low income residents, youth, seniors, and diverse groups) who may be interested in participating, but who may not normally participate in these discussions. Social media tools (e.g. Facebook) will also be utilized to enhance the Parks Plan consultation strategy by encouraging participants to attend the public meetings and directing them to the link to the City's website where people can access information about the Plan, access the survey and consultation toolkit to provide their input.

Conclusion

Parks, Forestry and Recreation is developing a Parks Plan that will guide the acquisition, development, management and operation of the system of public parkland in the City of Toronto. The Parks Plan will analyze current programs, services and operations that occur in public parks, and compare them against the principles approved by City Council. The Plan will also see the introduction of a "Park Classification System", identify gaps, and propose goals and objectives for the delivery of park services over the next five years. Consulting with the public and key stakeholders is an important step in the process to ensure that all voices and opinions are heard and considered, and that goals and objectives developed under the Plan are informed by these viewpoints.

The final report on the Parks Plan is expected to be submitted to the Parks and Environment Committee early in the new year.

CONTACT

Rick Powers, Director, Policy and Strategic Planning, Parks, Forestry and Recreation, tel: 416-395-6065, Fax: 416-397-4899, Email: rpowers@toronto.ca

Diane Stevenson, Manager, Policy and Strategic Planning, Parks, Forestry and Recreation, Tel: 416-392-0098, Fax: 416-397-4899, Email: dstevens@toronto.ca

SIGNATURE

Brenda Patterson,
General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – Proposed Consultation Strategy for the Parks Plan

Attachment 2 – Categories of Stakeholder Groups for Consultations

Attachment 1 – Proposed Consultation Strategy for the Parks Plan

The proposed consultation strategy framework for the Parks Plan involves five methods of public and stakeholder engagement, including:

- 1) An individual **Survey** (available both on-line and in hard copy);
- 2) Four large **Public Consultation Meetings** (one per Community Council district);
- 3) Five **Stakeholder Consultation Meetings** – one per Community Council district, and a fifth consultation session with stakeholder groups that have a city-wide parks focus;
- 4) Two to three **Focus group** discussions with targeted groups that staff will reach out to through a network of agencies and other contacts (e.g., newcomers, diverse communities, low income, youth and other marginalized groups) to obtain their views and identify their park program and leisure needs; and
- 5) **Self-directed consultations**, whereby interested stakeholder groups will be provided with consultation materials by Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff. These materials would be available both on-line and in hard copy format and mailed out upon request. Groups that prefer to hold their own meetings will be requested to provide their feedback by completing a response form and submitting it to Parks, Forestry and Recreation by November 30, 2011.

All of the consultation meetings will be fully accessible to all members of the public and the survey and consultation materials will be fully accessible to visually impaired persons.

Attachment 2 – Categories of Stakeholder Groups for Consultations

Group Focus / Mandate:	Approx. number of Stakeholders Identified to date
Disability Advocacy / Special Needs	60
Sports Groups	100
Diverse Groups & Community Agencies	100
Permit Groups	500
Older Adults / OA Agencies	100
Community Recreation / Community Centre Advisory Councils	150
Youth & Children	200
Arts & Culture	80
Environmental / Nature / Tree Groups	50
"Friends of" / Parks Advisory Groups	100
BIA / Design / Arts	120
Urban Agriculture / Horticulture	80
Dog Owners Associations and Commercial Dog Walkers	150
Total	<u>1790</u>