

Limits of Use to Queen's Park North

Date:	December 14, 2011
To:	Toronto and East York Community Council
From:	General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation
Wards:	Ward 27 – Toronto Centre-Rosedale
Reference Number:	P:\2012\Cluster A\PFR\TE12-011012-AFS#14800

SUMMARY

This report provides information on how the Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division is addressing the impacts of repeated use of Queen's Park North by large permitted events. The park is now serving a growing residential community, and these events have exceeded the threshold of sustainability for the park's ecosystem, resulting in damage to the turf, monuments and trees in the park.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation has already cancelled all permits for 2012 to accommodate restoration work. Beyond 2012, Parks, Forestry, and Recreation plans to limit the number and size of events taking place in this park, and will make those decisions based on assessments of ecosystem sustainability and progress of the restoration work. These decisions will also be informed by the Parks Plan that will be presented to City Council in 2012.

Financial Impact

In 2010, the overall operating revenue from 20 permits in Queen's Park North was \$16,605.07. In 2011, the revenue was \$17,814.95 from 14 permits. There is no anticipated loss of revenue for 2012 from a reduced number of permits in Queen's Park North due to the expectation that the majority of permits can be accommodated in other parks.

Funds for the restoration work in Queen's Park North are Council approved and coming from Capital Projects as follows: 1) \$208,000 approved in 2010 under PARK 576, Queen's Park Improvements S45, and 2) \$125,000 approved in 2011 under PARK 594, Queen's Park Improvements S45. Another \$345,000 under PARK 614, Queens Park

Improvement FY2012 S42 has been included in the 10-Year Capital Plan for Parks, Forestry and Recreation, and is subject to Council approval in January 2012.

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

DECISION HISTORY

On August 17, 2010, Toronto and East York Community Council adopted a motion requesting that Parks, Forestry and Recreation develop recommendations for a usage policy for Queen's Park North and report back to the Toronto and East York Community Council. The intent of the recommendations was to address the great number of large public events held annually in the park and the resulting damage to the park's ecosystem and amenities, as well as amplified noise.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2010.TE36.119>

This report provides information on the direction that Parks, Forestry and Recreation is taking with respect to activities within Queen's Park North.

ISSUE BACKGROUND

In March of 2010, the Toronto and East York Parks Manager met with permit holders for Queen's Park North and advised them that restoration work for the park was scheduled to begin as early as 2011 and would impact availability for permitted events. This would include a moratorium on new permits and a cap on the existing size of permits in the park.

In early 2011, many permit holders who had been hosting increasingly large, successful, high impact events were informed through individual meetings and written correspondence that the City of Toronto would not be issuing event permits for the coming season. These permit holders had held past events that had been excessively noisy, with many permit violations that put the City of Toronto at risk of serious liability, including:

- Putting stakes and equipment in the ground without stakeouts;
- Excessive garbage and failure to clean up in an acceptable time frame;
- Public Health complaints regarding food safety;
- Turf damage resulting from hot oil being improperly disposed of by dumping in the park;
- Lack of fencing and protection of statues to avoid damage;
- Violation of private property surrounding the events;
- Installation of an unapproved amusement park, including roller coaster, ferris wheel and large inflatables;
- Bicycles chained to oak trees and causing damage;
- Unauthorized vehicles driving and parking on the turf and causing soil compaction; and
- Public urination

Following additional discussions with these groups, they were allowed to submit revised permit applications and hold smaller, scaled down versions of their events in 2011. This was done with the understanding that they would need to relocate to larger, more suitable park venues in following years.

On October 14, 2011, all permit holders were sent a letter indicating that in 2012, long overdue rejuvenation of the Park would begin, including renovation of the turf and repair work on the King Edward monument (see Attachment 1). The letter outlined that due to the nature and scope of the work, the City of Toronto Permits Office had been directed by the Parks Branch not to issue permits for special events to be held in Queen's Park North for the entire 2012 year, and that the scope and timelines of the rejuvenation work are subject to change and expansion, potentially into the year 2013.

Decisions regarding future use beyond 2012 will be determined following an evaluation of the restoration work in Queen's Park North, together with an assessment of permit requests, the size of individual permits, the impact of previous permit holders and ongoing audits of the park's condition throughout the spring, summer and fall seasons. The new Parks Plan will guide this decision making process and will be presented to Council in 2012.

COMMENTS

Each park in the City of Toronto represents its own complex mini-ecosystem. Each time an event takes place within a park, stress is placed on that ecosystem from human activities. These activities include sitting, walking and driving on the turf, installing stages, display booths, tents and portable toilets, hanging banners from trees, disposing of distributed literature, selling and disposing of food, wrappers and food containers, moving park furniture (benches) and amplifying music from speakers.

When these activities are intensified through ongoing permitted events in the park on an annual basis, the impact on the park ecosystem is significant. The impacts include soil compaction, soil erosion, trampling of plants, damage to tree root systems, bark, branches and foliage, damage to park amenities, including monuments, fountains, benches, water fountains and paths, destruction of animal and insect habitat, and disruption of seasonal ecosystem patterns (e.g. bird migration).

At some point, the collective load of these activities will damage a park beyond the point of repair. That point cannot be accurately pinpointed in terms of time, however it is clear that at Queen's Park North, the ecosystem is suffering from heavy use, is under intense stress and cannot recover from that stress during the winter season.

Queen's Park North is a significant heritage site and an urban arboretum. A major "Trees for Toronto" initiative, in partnership with the Royal Ontario Museum, involved planting 58 large growing native shade trees throughout the park between 2005 and 2007. This initiative also included installing interpretative signage and tree identification plaques and creating a tree education website. The project further incorporated an inventory of

Queen's Park North's 300 trees, identifying 45 tree species, with 38% of the trees in the later stages of life and more susceptible to damage, disease and decay.

Due to ongoing stress on the park's ecosystem, Queen's Park North has already lost 24 trees since 2007. Another 8 to 12 additional trees are scheduled to be removed in 2012/2013. Urban Forestry has emphasized that the damage to trees in this park is an urgent matter and has already spent over \$41,000 since 2005 to contain this damage through tree pruning, removals and planting 58 new trees. However, small, tree saplings are never an adequate replacement for large, mature trees in a park.

The park's prominent placement next to the Ontario Legislative Building further signifies its importance as a well cared for public space. Since 2009, Parks, Forestry and Recreation has spent \$20,000 to maintain the site due to stress placed on the park from overuse. This has included post-event litter clean-up, surface repair due to vehicle damage and top dressing and seeding damaged turf.

Adding to this, the residential neighbourhood around Queen's Park North has transformed significantly, with thousands of new residents calling this area home. Local residents have complained that the noise generated by these events is exceedingly disruptive. Residents have further complained that their ability to enjoy this neighbourhood park is very limited due to the number and size of these events, some in excess of 50,000 people. Complaints have also been received from the Provincial Legislature and the University of Toronto.

Restoration of Queen's Park

The restoration work to be completed in Queen's Park North during the 2012/2013 season will do much to support rehabilitation of the park ecosystem. However, it is critical that once these improvements to the monuments, turf, soil and paths take place, that great numbers of large permitted events do not occupy the space on an annual basis, as the park was not designed for and cannot sustain such heavy use.

Throughout each calendar year, Park staff will judge the capacity of the park to sustain permitted events. Staff will determine whether to approve permit applications or require that they downsize, relocate or cancel these events based on various ecological markers, the condition of park amenities, soil and weather conditions and overall use levels.

Parks Plan

Parks, Forestry and Recreation is in the midst of public and stakeholders consultations to inform the development of a multi-year Parks Plan, as approved by Council.

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2011/pe/bgrd/backgroundfile-38983.pdf>.

The plan will guide decision making in the management and operation of parks. Upon completion, this plan will support Parks, Forestry and Recreation in making informed decisions with respect to limits of use to parkland in the years to come.

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SIGNATURE

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