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May 24, 2012

Attn: Parks and Environment Committee

Re: Lawn Bowling Clubs and Park Permit Fees

BACKGROUND:

On April 10, 2012, City Council voted to waive new sports field fees in 2012 for children and youth programs. Lawn bowling clubs, and in particular some seniors groups that operate lawn bowling clubs, will also be disproportionately impacted by these new fees. However, they were not included in the 2012 fees exemption which specified application for children and youth sports field fees only. New park permit fees for lawn bowling clubs will range between \$3,000 and \$7,000 depending on the group in question and other factors regarding their funding situations.

This situation is compounded by the fact that lawn bowling clubs have traditionally been supported either through Community Recreation grants, a program within the Community Partnership and Investment Program funding, administered by Social Development, Community Funding Unit. Others had their lawn bowls maintained by the Parks, Forestry and Recreation Department.

The Community Recreation grants program (formerly Minor Recreation grants), supported lawn bowling clubs with small grants for many years. The Community Recreation grants program underwent a review to bring its funding practices in line with City policy for investment program funding which is now intended to support short term activities rather than ongoing funding of programs.

This, along with the City's enforcement of standards of accountability (including practices such as audited financial statements, organizational structures for community and service accountability, such as incorporation) means that small grants requests from organizations for ongoing programs and groups without effective accountability structures, will rank low on assessment of fit and priority for grant funding in 2012. City staff have confirmed that lawn bowling clubs are expected to fit into this low priority category, and therefore not be recommended for funding.

In some cases, the grants awarded represent over 50% of some organizational budgets. The loss of the grants in addition to the new fees structure will mean that some lawn bowling clubs may cease to exist as a result of the drastic financial hardship and impact of both these measures.

Senior recreation and support for opportunities for active healthy lifestyles for seniors are part of Toronto's commitment to ensuring recreation is accessible to all. Many of these groups are grassroots in nature, coming together to enjoy a social and active sport that is one of the few opportunities available to seniors in particular parts of the City. It is integral that the City afford the same opportunities to identify sustainable ways forward for such groups that provide much needed social and recreational opportunities for Toronto residents, and in particular, seniors.

In addition, no support has been provided by the Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division to assist seniors in outreach, advertising and membership recruitment for the sport.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

To ensure that lawn bowling clubs are able to continue to support seniors in Toronto this summer, while developing longer term operational plans for sustainability, I recommend that:

1. City Council request the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation, to permanently eliminate the Park Permit Fees for lawn bowling clubs; and
2. City Council instruct the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation, to work with groups servicing seniors to increase, enhance and improve accessible and affordable recreation opportunities across the City of Toronto for seniors.

Respectfully yours,

Kristyn Wong – Tam
Councillor, Ward 27
Vice Chair, Seniors Strategy Subcommittee
Toronto Centre – Rosedale

KWT/ac