



## STAFF REPORT INFORMATION ONLY

### Water Access in City Parks and Recreation Facilities

<b>Date:</b>	February 13, 2013
<b>To:</b>	Parks and Environment Committee
<b>From:</b>	Jim Hart, General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division
<b>Wards:</b>	All
<b>Reference Number:</b>	P:\2012\Cluster A\ PFR\PE19-030413-AFS#16112

#### SUMMARY

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This report provides information in response to the request made on May 18, 2012, by the Parks and Environment Committee regarding the state of existing drinking water fountains/filling stations in parks and recreation facilities, including existing standards for drinking water access, public education on water bottle use and plans for expansion for drinking water access in parks.

#### Financial Impact

Drinking water stations can be added as a component of park development, and installation costs would be included as part of the overall project budget. Drinking water stations cost in the range of \$4,000 to \$7,500, where water and sanitary lines are available.

The cost of supplying and installing 10 new water bottle filling stations is estimated at \$75,000 and can be accommodated in Parks, Forestry and Recreation's 2013 Capital Budget. The \$7,000 annual operating impact of this capital project will be absorbed within the Division's 2013 Operating Budget. Operating costs to open and test the water at a stand-alone water station in a park, to winterize the fountain in late fall, and repair the units due to vandalism or other malfunctions are approximately \$700 per unit annually.

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

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## **DECISION HISTORY**

At its meeting of May 18, 2012, the Parks and Environment Committee adopted PE13.4 and, in so doing, requested a report back to the Parks and Environment Committee on, among other things, a strategy to increase access to water in Toronto parks and recreation facilities in light of the City's water bottle ban.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2012.PE13.4>

## **ISSUE BACKGROUND**

In preparation for the City's water bottle ban, the Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division developed water bottle guidelines for permit holders of park sports fields encouraging the use of refillable water containers. Parks, Forestry and Recreation's Customer Service Unit began distributing this information to sports permit holders in 2010 (see Appendix A), and information on the guidelines and the upcoming ban were posted on the City's web site.

The ban also provides exceptions for public health and safety related situations, previous lease agreements, and authorized special events in City facilities and parks. To address these issues, the Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division compiled a comprehensive list of parks and park facilities that would qualify for exemption from the ban. As such, water bottles may still be sold or distributed at specific locations.

In 2012, updated information on the ban and the list of exempted parks were distributed to the public via the City's web site, in letters to park permit holders, and through Customer Service representatives. (See Appendix B and [http://www.toronto.ca/parks/permits/general-information/water\\_bottle\\_ban.htm](http://www.toronto.ca/parks/permits/general-information/water_bottle_ban.htm))

## **COMMENTS**

This report was prepared in consultation with Toronto Public Health, Toronto Water, Solid Waste Management and Facilities Management.

### **Existing Water Access, Maintenance and New Installation**

Presently, there are approximately 700 operating water fountains in parks that provide access to potable water for public users. In the Eastern Beaches, one pedestal and two wall-mounted water bottle filling stations were recently installed for this high-use area. The precise number of operating fountains fluctuates seasonally as the result of maintenance, water quality, closure or removal of fountains due to capital construction projects or damage as the result of vandalism. If a water fountain is reported as not functioning, it is repaired or replaced as funding is available as part of routine maintenance or state of good repair work. If a fountain is out of operation frequently due to location, age, water quality or other factors, Parks staff may remove, replace, or relocate the fountain to address the issue.

Most of the 200 recreation facilities in Toronto also have water fountains. Many of these facilities have sinks in activity rooms, and 85 of these buildings have kitchens, increasing the number of access points for water.

Fountains in parks are maintained and tested by the Parks Technical Services Unit. Water testing is conducted annually, before the fountains are opened each spring. Additional testing is done following repairs to any fountain.

Since 2008, there have been a limited number of new water access points (fountains and refilling stations) installed in City parks; the most recent installation being the 3 water bottle filling stations in the Eastern Beaches. Parks staff receive occasional requests for the installation of additional drinking fountains or access to potable water in parks. Most requests for additional drinking fountains are made through park redevelopment or capital projects. Access to drinking water did not emerge as a frequent issue through the Park Plan consultations or the sports field consultations.

## **Providing Access to Drinking Water**

No standards or guidelines exist that set a minimum requirement for access to safe drinking water in parks in Toronto. A review of other jurisdictions and professional bodies has identified water access guidelines for trails in Austin, Texas, and Saanich, British Columbia. These guidelines recommend standards for the spacing and placement of fountains or filling stations along trails. These resources provide a good reference point for Toronto Parks in future planning.

The list of exempted sites identifies priority locations for Parks, Forestry and Recreation to provide better access to potable water. There is an industry trend toward installing water bottle filling stations, rather than fountains, as the most environmentally sound way of supplying safe, clean drinking water.

Water fountains with low traffic typically have stagnating water, which can negatively affect water quality. Ideally, water fountains or filling stations should be affixed to facilities within parks to simplify maintenance, ensure more consistent use, provide for more efficient winterizing, and ensure access to existing water and sanitary lines.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation has begun piloting the installation of water bottle filling stations, and will continue with that pilot by installing an additional 10 water bottle filling stations in 2013, in a range of locations where no capital park development is planned. These stations will be monitored to determine their use and effectiveness in the field, which will inform future plans for long-term provision of water bottle filling stations City-wide.

The forthcoming Parks Plan will also introduce a Parks classification system which will be utilized to guide decision making in determining which parks require water access. Parks staff will then conduct a gap analysis in order to develop a long-term strategy to enhance water access in parks, including the potential installation of new

water bottle filling stations, pending the outcome of the ongoing pilot. This strategy will also consider the level of demand, the type of park uses, availability of sanitary lines, system-wide cost of maintenance, and other criteria for ensuring the reliable and safe provision of access to drinking water in parks.

## **Education and Public Information**

Education on the water bottle ban by the Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division has mainly taken the form of City web site postings, letters to permit holders, memos to internal staff, and distribution of information to 311. The water bottle guidelines for sports permit holders were developed to encourage groups to begin using reusable bottles.

Other educational efforts have been led by Toronto Water and Solid Waste Management. Toronto Water developed a series of advertisements about Toronto tap water and plastic water bottle waste that were last run in 2008.

(See: <http://www.toronto.ca/wesads/index.htm#water>)

Toronto Water also has two water trailers that are provided, when available, for potable water access at public events that meet the Toronto Water event criteria. The trailers are available for events from May 1 to September 1 and are typically in constant use and in high demand. The City's web pages for Toronto Water provide the process and criteria to request the water trailer (see: <http://www.toronto.ca/water/htotogo/>) and also feature a good deal of information and reference documents on tap water and water quality (see: <http://www.toronto.ca/water/supply/index.htm>).

Between 2009 and 2011, Solid Waste Management conducted a communications campaign to encourage the use of refillable bottles. This included newspaper ads, outdoor posters, transit shelter ads and feature pages in their single-family and multi-residential collection calendars. A copy of the main ad encouraging the use of refillable bottles can be seen in the following link:

[http://www.toronto.ca/wesads/solid\\_waste/pdf/2009\\_bottle.pdf](http://www.toronto.ca/wesads/solid_waste/pdf/2009_bottle.pdf)

## **CONTACT**

Richard Ubbens, Director, Parks Branch, Phone: 416-392-7911, Fax: 416-397-4899, E-mail: [rubbens@toronto.ca](mailto:rubbens@toronto.ca)

Carol Cormier, Manager, Standards and Innovation Unit, Parks Branch, Phone: 416-392-8147, Fax: 416-396-4957, Email: [cacormie@toronto.ca](mailto:cacormie@toronto.ca)

## **SIGNATURE**

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Jim Hart  
General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation

## **ATTACHMENTS**

Appendix A – Water Bottle Ban and Guidelines Letter to Permit Holders (June 11, 2010)

Appendix B – Water Bottle Ban Update Letter to Permit Holders (May 10, 2012)