



STAFF REPORT ACTION REQUIRED

Parks Plan 2013-2017 – Report on Various Requests

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| Date: | August 30, 2013 |
| To: | Parks and Environment Committee |
| From: | General Manager, Parks Forestry and Recreation |
| Wards: | All |
| Reference Number: | P:\2013\Cluster A\PFR\PE22-091613-AFS#18027 |

SUMMARY

This report responds to six Committee and Council requests following the 2013-2017 Parks Plan's adoption. It contains updates on discussions with CUPE Local 416 around enabling volunteers in parks, updates on bake ovens and fire pits, and various issues regarding solid waste collection in parks. Finally, it recommends a new procedure for responding to pumpkin parade requests.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. City Council direct the General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation to implement the procedure for pumpkin parades in parks, and waive fees for non-profit groups that commit to obtaining a permit and cleaning the park afterwards.

Financial Impact

There are no financial impacts resulting from the adoption of this report. Any adjustment to user fees proposed in this report are expected to have little or no financial impact overall.

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

DECISION HISTORY

At its April 22, 2013 meeting, the Parks and Environment Committee referred a request for a staff report on the use of bake ovens in the City of Toronto to the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2013.PE20.7>

At its meeting on May 7, 2013, City Council requested the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation:

- a. Consult with members of Local 416 to identify and report back on transparent and collaborative ways to best engage and utilize volunteers, local residents and past advocacy groups such as "Friends of" and Toronto Park People to achieve Parks Plan 2013-2017 objectives.
- b. Consult with the General Manager, Solid Waste Management Services on the feasibility of supporting Pumpkin Parades in Toronto Parks each November 1 by waiving permit fees for local parks groups that lead park clean ups in the annual April clean-up.
- c. Consult with the General Manager, Solid Waste Management Services on the impact of turf maintenance and repair, safety on Parks roads, parks aesthetics and overall costs associated with the use of plastic "toters" for solid waste pick up.
- d. Report back on issues related to the establishment, operation and permitting of fire pits in City Parks.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2013.PE20.1>

At its June 24, 2013 meeting, the Parks and Environment Committee requested the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation, in conjunction with the General Manager for Solid Waste Management Services, to report with options to immediately re-integrate solid waste operations in City parks into the mandate of the Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2013.PE21.14>

ISSUE BACKGROUND

The recently approved Parks Plan 2013-2017 aims to connect people and communities with parks, advance greening and environmental sustainability, improve park quality, and strengthen the parks system as a legacy for Toronto. In reviewing the plan, City Council made a variety of requests for information and new procedures. The requests include reports to Parks and Environment Committee on discussions with CUPE Local 416 around enabling volunteers in parks, updates on bake ovens and fire pits, and various issues regarding solid waste collection in parks. Finally, the Committee requested a report on the feasibility of supporting pumpkin parades in parks by waiving permit fees for local parks groups that lead park clean-ups.

COMMENTS

Collaborating with CUPE Local 416 to best engage and utilize volunteers

Parks, Forestry and Recreation met with several representatives from TCEU, Local 416 on August 21, 2013. The parties agreed to on-going meetings to ensure transparency and proactive communication with the Union in the City's plan to use volunteers in parks. Both groups recognize that volunteers are an effective way to involve the community in enhancing and animating parks. Volunteers contribute time, effort and energy to augment and support the work of staff. Volunteers do not displace staff. Ongoing communication between the parties will ensure that staff, Local 416, volunteers, residents, "Friends of" groups and Toronto Park People are aware of the plan to use volunteers in parks.

A consistent procedure for pumpkin parades in parks

Pumpkin parades are events where residents arrange their Halloween jack-o'-lanterns for public display, and as an opportunity for social gathering. In 2012, Parks, Forestry and Recreation, with support from Solid Waste Management Services, issued 17 social gathering permits for pumpkin parades, resulting in \$478.69 in permit revenue. A new, consistent procedure to pumpkin parades is proposed in Appendix A. The new procedure requires organizers to obtain a permit to coordinate the collection of the pumpkins and to reserve the park space for the event. The permit fee will be waived for non-profit groups that commit to clean the park following the event.

Fire pits in city parks

The *Ontario Fire Code* and the City of Toronto *Municipal Code, Chapter 608, Parks* prohibit all open air burning in City parks except when authorized by permit. There are two kinds of fire pits in Toronto's parks – designated and undesignated. Designated fire pits are pre-approved locations with annual inspection from both Parks, Forestry and Recreation and Toronto Fire Services. Undesignated locations are temporary or single event locations, pending inspection by both responsible divisions. Issuance of all fire pit permits requires users to follow basic safety protocol, attaining insurance and paying a small permit fee.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation encourages fire pit permit holders to use designated fire pits for reasons of safety and environmental protection. Conversely, unlike designated fire pits, permits at undesignated locations require a site review before and after each event by Parks, Forestry and Recreation and Toronto Fire Services. These visits represent additional costs, which is discouraged through higher fees.

To establish new designated fire pit locations, residents can contact their local park Supervisor, who will determine, along with Fire Services, if a new location is safe and appropriate.

Currently, Parks, Forestry and Recreation provides permits for over 40 fire pits in 20 parks. Most of these fire pits are "designated." The provisional fire pit permit fees are between \$23.74 and \$77.83, plus the cost of insurance – for groups that do not already have their own insurance, which is either \$27 or \$54. Both permit fees and insurance are determined based on the expected attendance. In 2012, Parks, Forestry and Recreation issued 194 permits for fire pit gatherings, generating \$9,655.20 in revenue. The average fire pit is permitted eight times per year, leaving adequate availability for other users to permit the sites. Parks, Forestry and Recreation will review these fees to encourage social gathering in parks in the context of the Parks Plan principles, and as part of an integrated process for other divisional fees, Parks, Forestry and Recreation will report through the budget process on any proposed fee changes.

Improving solid waste collection in parks

In 2009, the City Manager directed Solid Waste Management Services to negotiate a Service Partnership Agreement with Parks, Forestry and Recreation that transferred the responsibility for providing waste and recycling pickup services in parks to Solid Waste Management Services. This service transfer began in 2010 in Scarborough and North York in 2011. Etobicoke –York and Toronto and East York districts followed beginning in 2012, and Waterfront parks beginning in 2013. Overall, and after some adjustment, the new arrangement constitutes improved service for Toronto residents and visitors. Staff from both divisions work closely at all levels to work out any issues arising from the transition. The new arrangement helps the City achieve four key goals:

- *Operating efficiently*
The divisions responsible for solid waste and parks are now able to focus more consistently on their core responsibilities. The parks system and its users benefit from Solid Waste Management Services' mission to be a leader in providing innovative waste management services to residents, businesses and visitors within the City of Toronto in an efficient, effective and courteous manner, creating environmental sustainability, promoting diversion and maintaining a clean city. The introduction of the bins has allowed for continued collection but with fewer bins, as each bin has more volume and compaction ability. In fact, the total number of waste receptacles in parks is nearly 30 per cent less, from 14,000 wire baskets to 10,000 bins, with no net volume decrease. Moreover, solid waste is now handled only once, rather than by Parks, Forestry and Recreation followed by a transfer to Solid Waste Management Services.
- *Increasing diversion from landfill*
Even before Solid Waste Management Service took responsibility for waste collection in parks, side-by-side recycling and garbage bins became the norm, making it more convenient for park users to recycle. Since the transfer of responsibility, parks bins have a similar design to residential bins. This transposes Solid Waste Management Services' residential education program efforts into

recycling compliance in parks. As a result, recycling rates in parks continues to increase since the transfer of responsibility and is approaching 20 per cent in parks. Moreover, the change from wire baskets with plastic bag liners to bins has eliminated the need for plastic bags, saving roughly \$270,000 per year. This change also avoids the mess associated with bags filling with rain, and waste or recycling blowing out of the bags from strong winds.

- *Maintaining clean and safe parks*
After a few months of adjustment, many parks staff have commented that the new program is more effective in keeping parks clean. Staff spend less time picking up litter as the bins have greater capacity to handle solid waste, and because waste is now less likely to blow out of the bins. Collection frequency ranges from daily to biweekly, depending on the park, season, dates and special events. Solid Waste Management Services tracks special events to service bins before events. The shift in solid waste collection responsibility has had no change in the safety of parks users.
- *Improving worker health and safety*
Solid waste collection is now automated in parks and throughout the city. This has significantly reduced incidents of staff injuries, particularly from lifting injuries associated with waste collection. Since 2008, Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff reported 24 injuries from lifting garbage or other waste, 20 of them preceding the transfer to an automated service. Over that time, staff missed 144 days from these reported injuries.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation and Solid Waste Management Services are implementing the following improvements to solid waste collection in parks:

- *Reducing turf and path damage*
Turf and path damage from solid waste trucks has been an issue. At the beginning of the transfer of responsibility, the damage resulted from either the age or designs of pathways not geared for heavy equipment. Through training and experience, this damage has significantly decreased, and ongoing work with Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff continues to minimize this issue. The ongoing planning for bin locations and solid waste collection routes has two important benefits. First, it improves service by ensuring bins are located in the most visible and needed locations, such as along paths and near picnic areas. Second, it determines where Solid Waste Management trucks operate, such as on paved surfaces or other pathways. Collection routes for parks will be complete by spring of 2014. Bins will be secured to a fixed post and have a GPS coordinate to facilitate routing and asset management. In the fall of 2013, Solid Waste Management Services will service some parks with smaller collection trucks.
- *Improving efficiency by eliminating bin duplication near sidewalks*
Solid Waste Management Services continues to remove garbage and recycling bins from parkettes and park perimeters, where appropriate, by replacing parks

bins with street furniture bins on road allowances adjacent to parks. These bins streamline solid waste collection: a single waste bin is accessible for both park and sidewalk users, reducing the need for bins – and separate solid waste collection – in parks.

- *Aesthetic options for bins in parks*
Parks and Solid Waste Management are open to improving the appearance of bins in parks. Aesthetic options should be considered within the context of other design needs such as ease of use, visibility, consistency with residential bins, and staff safety. Several options have been reviewed by staff and bin suppliers. This work is ongoing.

Overall, the transition of responsibility for solid waste collection in parks from Parks, Forestry and Recreation to Solid Waste Management Services is working well. Park users and the city as a whole benefit from improved efficiency, diversion rates, worker safety and park cleanliness. The two divisions work closely toward continual improvement both at the local and system-wide levels. Solid Waste Management Services has reviewed this report and agrees with its direction.

Bake ovens in city parks

Toronto has 11 permanent outdoor ovens, six are on properties managed by Parks, Forestry and Recreation, including Alexandra Park, Riverdale Farm, Dufferin Grove Park, Christie Pits Park, Edithvale Park, and R.V. Burgess Park (tandoor oven). The remaining sites, managed by other bodies, include: Falstaff, Lawrence Heights, Montgomery Inn, The Stop Community Food Centre (Davenport site) and The Stop's Green Barn (located in Wychwood Barns). The plan for the new park in the Regent Park neighbourhood also includes a bake oven.

In November 2011, City Council adopted the "Outdoor Ovens in City Parks Policy", which sets out a framework for managing requests for the operating outdoor ovens in City parks. In 2012, Parks, Forestry and Recreation implemented operational procedures that include provisions for issuing permits to use an oven in a City park. Details on how to book an oven can be found at www.toronto.ca/parks.

CONTACT

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SIGNATURE

Jim Hart,
General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation

ATTACHMENTS

Appendix A – Pumpkin Parade Revised Procedures

APPENDIX A – PUMPKIN PARADE REVISED PROCEDURES

1. Pumpkin Parade event organizers obtain a social gathering permit through their local permit office indicating the estimated number of pumpkins and people in attendance, and in accordance with the established permit fee schedule.
2. Parks, Forestry and Recreation will waive the permit fee for local non-profit groups (including "Friends of" groups) that commit to clean the park following the pumpkin parade. This includes placing all pumpkins in the provided bins.
3. The permit will reserve space for the event, to avoid conflict for the same space.

The permit process informs Parks, Forestry and Recreation and Solid Waste Management Services on the event's time, date and location so bins for pumpkin waste collection can be planned. Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff will inspect each location the day following the pumpkin parade to ensure all pumpkins are in the bins prior to bin collection.

For permit holders that fail to meet the conditions, Parks, Forestry and Recreation will send a letter to event organizers and note it in the permit system. If a pumpkin parade permit is requested for the following year at the same location, the permit fee will not be waived.