

February 4, 2015

Dear Members of the Budget Committee:

With this year's proposed budget we are pleased to see a commitment to preparing the 20 year facilities master plan as well as the continuation of free recreation programming at select community centres. Similarly, we are pleased to see nearly \$28 million allocated towards land acquisition for new park space, including a much needed new downtown park at 11 Wellesley.

This year's operating budget, however, continues a trend of incremental increases that just manages to respond to cost of living adjustments, inflation, and the impacts of new and upgraded parks and facilities, but offer little in new or upgraded services (beyond temporary measures for the Pan Am Games).

We are two years into the 5-year Parks Plan with no new operating money allocated towards initiatives to meet its goals. As with the 2014 budget, it is noted that these initiatives will take "significant resources which will be considered in future operating budgets." The Parks Plan was developed with significant cross-city public consultation and contains many good ideas around community engagement, quality of park space, and horticulture that deserve to be acted on.

While we understand Parks, Forestry & Recreation is struggling with operating costs, we are also concerned to see the Special Event Permit fee raised by 10% due to the impact this may have on the over 100 volunteer-led park friends groups across the city who are already struggling with permit costs.

Some groups partner with their City Councillor to help address this issue, but others are left to raise funds from their neighbours to help pay fees for the free, open community events they host in their park. We suggest eliminating the 10% raise on the lowest tier (up to 200 people), which many volunteer-led community events fall under, while keeping it for larger crowds.

Overall, we believe this proposed budget for parks keeps our head above water, but it does not make the critical investments necessary to take our very good park system and make it great. If we are going to meet the needs of a growing city—building, upgrading, and maintaining new parks, operating new waterfront parks, meeting the goals set out in the Parks Plan, and bringing down the state of good repair backlog—we need to invest and give Parks, Forestry & Recreation the necessary funding to work with communities to meet those challenges.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed 2015 budget and we hope to continue to work together for better parks in Toronto.

Sincerely,



Dave Harvey  
Executive Director