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2016 OPERATING BUDGET BRIEFING NOTE

Lawn Bowling Fees and Opportunities for Relief

This note responds to Budget Committee motion 16.1 #6 (b), adopted January 11, 2015 requesting a briefing note on what can be done for hardship cases with respect to fees for lawn bowling clubs, as some clubs are reporting hardship and some have closed down.

Issue/Background

- Permit fees are charged for third-party use of all sport fields and recreational facilities in Toronto and help to recover a portion of the operating costs for these facilities.
- In conjunction with the 2012 budget process, City Council approved the harmonization of several permit fee categories that were being inconsistently applied across the city.
- That year, the user fee for Lawn Bowling was set at \$3,000 per club, where previously the fee was as much as \$16,000 for some clubs, other clubs paid no fees, and many paid amounts in between.
- This harmonized fee, which has been subject to inflationary increases, aims to partially recover costs related to the exclusive use of the greens for the season, integrated plant care and maintenance on specialty turf, a clubhouse facility where applicable, hydro costs and water charges.

Key Points

- Fees for 2016 are proposed at a rate of \$3,359.83 per location.
- In the past year, one club has closed and one club has indicated that it may not be able to continue operating in future years.
- Clubs report decreasing participation in the sport city-wide and some have identified challenges meeting operating costs.
- Clubs may apply to the General Manager for relief of up to \$1,000 of that amount under current policy.

Lawn Bowling And Hardship Cases

- There are currently 14 lawn bowling clubs that use City of Toronto facilities.

- In the past year, one club has ceased operations due to declining membership and difficulty meeting operating costs, and one club has indicated that they may need to close in the coming years due to similar issues. In both cases, fees were/are only one of many factors in the decision to close.
- In 2013 City Council directed that one-time funding of up to \$30,000 for Lawn Bowling Clubs be set aside in the 2013 Parks, Forestry and Recreation Operating Budget. This was to provide emergency funding and transitional assistance to those clubs with a demonstrated need as the harmonized fee was implemented.
- Six of the then-15 clubs had their fees reduced for the 2013 season; reductions ranged from \$1,000 to \$3,000 and totaled \$11,710.
- In 2014, clubs were asked to report on their transition to the new user fees. Two clubs identified that they continued to face financial challenges due to the new fee implementation and they were granted fee relief totaling \$5,580.
- By 2015, each of these clubs had fully transitioned to the new fee and were no longer expressing challenges with the expense. Additionally, a club that had not required fee relief in the previous year identified that it was now struggling with declining membership and financial hardship and was granted a \$1,000 fee reduction.
- Requests for assistance are dealt with on a case-by-case basis, with the clubs providing a financial statement, a list of all active members and a complete list of all fees charged to members. Toronto Parks, Forestry and Recreation will continue to support clubs that experience economic hardship due to user fees and will consider future requests for fee relief.

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Date: January 13, 2016