

Authorization to Amend Licence Agreement with High Park Initiatives to include Third-Party Fundraising for High Park Forest School Renovations

Date: August 21, 2017

To: Parks and Environment Committee

From: General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation

Wards: Ward 13 - Parkdale-High Park

SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to seek approval from City Council to amend an existing Licence Agreement with High Park Initiatives, the charitable, non-profit organization operating the High Park Nature Centre in the High Park Forest School building. The Agreement governs the use of the building by High Park Initiatives for its year-round Nature Centre programming. The building is 85 years old and requires renovations to improve accessibility and modernize washrooms, mechanical systems and space usage. The vision is to create, through these renovations, the High Park Visitor and Nature Centre. High Park Initiatives, in collaboration with Parks, Forestry and Recreation wishes to launch a fundraising campaign to raise the necessary funds. To accomplish this, this report recommends amending the Licence Agreement to include an agreement to raise funds for capital improvements for the High Park Forest School building. The Agreement term also needs to be extended to cover the period of the fundraising campaign. This report also seeks Council authority to accept donations raised through the fundraising campaign.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. City Council authorize the General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation (the "General Manager") to amend the existing Licence Agreement with High Park Initiatives governing the use of the High Park Forest School building to include an agreement to raise third-party funding for capital improvements to the High Park Forest School building, and to extend the term of the Agreement for five years to March 31, 2025, with an option to renew for an additional five years expiring on March 31, 2030, at the General Manager's discretion, to cover the period of the capital fundraising campaign, on terms and conditions satisfactory to the General Manager and in form and content satisfactory the City Solicitor.

2. City Council authorize the General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation to accept third-party funds raised through the High Park Forest School capital fundraising campaign, as described in the Agreement, and to contribute the funds as they become available to High Park Forest School capital projects in Parks, Forestry and Recreation's Capital Budget and Plan for the purpose of capital improvements to the High Park Forest School, subject to the budget process.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

The High Park Forest School capital fundraising campaign has a target of \$5 million over an estimated five-year campaign. The actual contributions will be contingent upon High Park Initiative's ability to raise the funds in partnership with the City. Capital projects will only proceed after full funding is received by the City, subject to the budget process.

High Park Initiatives is a registered charity and will issue receipts to donors for income tax purposes.

The Parks, Forestry and Recreation 10-year Capital Plan includes \$0.62 million for accessibility improvements and a further \$0.2 million in funding for the Forest School from Section 37 funds which will contribute to the campaign goal. There are no additional annual operating costs associated with the planned improvements as the High Park Forest School building is an existing asset, and as such, is part of Parks Forestry and Recreation's base operating, maintenance and inspections budgets.

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

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting of October 30, 31 and November 1, 2012, City Council amended its Donations to the City for Community Benefits policy:

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2012.EX23.17>

At its meeting of September 25, 26, 27 and 28, 2006, City Council adopted its Donations to the City for Community Benefits policy.

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/2006/agendas/council/cc060925/pof7rpt/cl003.pdf>

COMMENTS

In spring 2015, the High Park Nature Centre moved from the 700 sq. ft. Parkside Drive building it had occupied for 10 years into High Park's 9,000 sq. ft. Forest School building. The move relieved Parks, Forestry and Recreation (PFR) of a budget pressure at the High Park Forest School with the ending of the previous tenant's lease, while providing better space for the Nature Centre's programs, which had outgrown the Parkside Drive facility.

While habitable, the High Park Forest School building is old (1932), does not meet Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) requirements, and has outdated washrooms and other aging infrastructure.

The original High Park Forest School was established by the Toronto School Board and Department of Public Health in 1914. The idea was that fresh air, away from the city core, was essential for children, especially those exposed to tuberculosis. The program was expanded to become a summer outdoor nature and activity school for underprivileged and undernourished children. The current building was constructed in 1932, but the school board programs ceased in the 1960s.

The High Park Nature Centre began in 1999. It offers a mix of free and paid programming for all ages, including walks, summer and March Break camps, school trips and special programs, with a special focus on nature, in the tradition of the old forest school program. It attracts participants and school groups from across the city and is self-sustaining through program fees, grants and donations. Last year it served more than 12,000 participants, a 30% increase from 2014-2015.

The move by the High Park Nature Centre to the High Park Forest School led to a vision for renovating the High Park Forest School to become the High Park Visitor and Nature Centre. The plan would respect the building's historical purpose, its heritage, and its harmonious relationship with the park, while retaining its existing footprint.

In December 2016, a feasibility study for a renovation was completed by ATA Architects Inc. The study, High Park Visitor and Nature Centre: Cultural Heritage Evaluation Report & Feasibility Study, was funded by Ward 13 Section 37 funding through the Council-approved 2015 PFR Capital Budget, and managed by PFR's Parks Development and Capital Projects branch.

With the completion of the feasibility study, the partnership project is ready to take the next steps by launching a capital fundraising campaign in collaboration with High Park Initiatives.

The project has two broad goals:

1. To renovate building systems so the building meets modern codes, is more energy efficient, and has the capacity to meet community needs for the next several decades, including the programming needs of the High Park Nature Centre.
2. To create a flagship centre for urban nature in a flagship park that serves to fulfill the goals set out in Chapter 5 of the [2013-2017 Parks Plan](#), "Preserve and Promote Nature."

One of PFR's key challenges is "limited public awareness of how to respect the natural environment and the value of natural areas" (page 37, [Parks Plan](#)). This is certainly true in High Park. Scattered signage throughout the park provides some natural environment education, and a bulletin board beside the men's washroom in the Grenadier Restaurant offers some information about park events. But unlike our best provincial parks, High Park has no visitor centre or education centre to be a hub for this important mission.

With Toronto's population estimated to grow to 3.2 million by 2031, and GTA population to 10 million by 2036, the need for increased education about our urban natural environment is crucial.

Implementation

Parks, Forestry and Recreation and High Park Initiatives would work collaboratively on the High Park Forest School capital fundraising campaign with the shared purpose of renovating the 85-year-old Forest School building to become the High Park Visitor and Nature Centre.

Capital projects or sub-projects (such as design) would only proceed once the required funds have been raised, subject to the budget process.

All work will be conducted in accordance with all City by-laws, policies and contractual requirements. All construction work will be performed by or tendered in accordance with City policies and procedures.

CONTACT

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SIGNATURE

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