



REPORT FOR ACTION

Allan Gardens Park and Conservatory: Planning and governance

Date: March 22, 2018

To: Parks and Environment Committee

From: General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation

Wards: Ward 27 - Toronto Centre-Rosedale

SUMMARY

This report responds to Council direction to report on possible governance, programming, place-making projects and funding models to help realize "Refresh: A Vision Document for Allan Gardens", which was published as a framework for the future of Allan Gardens in 2017 and adopted by Council in 2018.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. The Parks and Environment Committee receive this report for information.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There are no financial implications resulting from the adoption of the recommendation in this report.

Costs for current planning and programming efforts needed to implement the vision document can be accommodated within the Council-Approved 2018 Parks, Forestry and Recreation Operating Budget.

The 2018 and 2019-2027 Council Approved Parks, Forestry and Recreation Capital Budget includes Section 42 Alternate Cash-in-lieu, 37, and 45 funding for the restoration of the Allan Gardens Washroom Building of \$1.402 million (plus an additional \$0.356 million in carry forward funding from 2017); and the design and construction of the Artists Garden for \$0.318 million.

Detailed estimates for other features in the vision document have not been prepared and are not included in the 2019-2027 Parks, Forestry and Recreation Capital Plan. As planning work progresses, projects will be submitted through the annual budget processes.

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

DECISION HISTORY

City Council, at its meeting of January 31 and February 1, 2018 adopted MM36.13, "Refresh: A Vision Document for Allan Gardens" and directed the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation to report on possible governance, programming, place-making projects and funding models to help realize this vision.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2018.MM36.13>

COMMENTS

Allan Gardens Park and Conservatory ("the Park") has been a jewel of Toronto's park system for more than 150 years. The City of Toronto owns the Conservatory located in the gardens. It has been known not only for its excellent horticultural displays, but also as a gathering place for activists, artists, residents and visitors.

In recent decades, the park has struggled to evolve in a coherent manner, due in part to two competing sets of pressures. On the one hand, Allan Gardens acts as a neighbourhood park serving the local community, while at the same time, it is a regional destination featuring a landmark conservatory that attracts tourists, school groups, and other visitors. Reconciling these distinct uses and expectations for the park underscores the need for a clear guiding vision. Allan Gardens, like many downtown parks, was designed to serve a smaller, less complex city.

Refresh: A Vision Document for Allan Gardens

What does horticulture mean in modern-day Toronto? What should a 21st century horticultural garden in our urbanizing downtown look and feel like? What cultural traditions and practices might it reflect and what could you do there? These were the questions posed in the development of "Refresh: A Vision Document for Allan Gardens" ("Refresh").

This vision document acts as a guidepost and framework for the work the City and its partners as we work to revitalize Allan Gardens together. Developed by the Friends of Allan Gardens, supported by City staff and Councillor Wong-Tam and formally adopted by Council, Refresh provides themes, principles and opportunities to focus our efforts and our energies.

Some of these opportunities, like exploring models for governance and partnering with Indigenous groups to live out reconciliation, are already underway in and around the Park. Others will require additional planning and funding strategies.

Collaborative Governance Model

Under the theme of "Stewardship", Refresh highlights the need to explore models for Park governance and operation. Referencing a 2014 report by the Martin Prosperity Institute and Park People that encouraged the Friends of Allan Gardens ("the Friends") to pursue a new collaborative relationship with the City, Refresh envisions a public space supported and owned by the City of Toronto with spaces, facilities and programming delivered through partnership.

With the work of Refresh behind them, the Friends initiated governance conversations with the City in 2017. Together, we have begun to implement a hybrid model where Park functions are clearly shared between the two partners within an established system of governance. During this initial phase of collaboration, facility operations, capital delivery, park booking and staffing remain the sole responsibility of the City. The Friends have committed to providing leadership on new areas of work including programming, events, partnership and outreach, and fundraising. All other functions including public access, communications, indoor and outdoor displays, and future visioning and planning for landscape and capital projects will be managed through a leadership team and a working group comprised jointly of City staff and the staff and senior volunteers of the Friends. This shared approach creates an environment of collaboration and adaptation, and will be reviewed annually as we gain experience working together.

This is consistent with the approach that Parks, Forestry and Recreation has taken with all of its collaborative governance relationships — at Riverdale Farm, in High Park, in the Lower Don parklands, at Edwards Gardens-Toronto Botanical Gardens and in Grange Park. The City of Toronto does not have a one-conservancy-fits-all model. Instead it develops tailored responses to the specific strengths, skills and interests of its partners, while recognizing that as a City government it has unique skills in parks operations that need not be replicated.

Early Successes and Next Steps

Implementing the vision outlined in Refresh is well underway.

This year, the Friends welcomed their first employee, funded by an Ontario Trillium Foundation grant. Through the work of the Friends a new volunteer program has been launched, with hundreds of potential volunteers expressing interest and dozens already at work in and around the Park and conservatory.

In December, the Friends undertook their first direct mail membership and fundraising campaign, receiving hundreds of expressions of support and over \$10,000 in donations from first-time donors. A new visual identity for the Park and Conservatory, and a

shared marketing and communications plan is being developed by the City and the Friends in order to provide a single, unified visual and digital presence for visitors and residents.

Planning efforts are also underway to formalize some of the landscape and facility concepts outlined in Refresh. The City has undertaken a comprehensive review of the state-of-good-repair of the existing facility, is leading a review of the programming needs that should be considered in a future link building, and will develop a landscape plan to formalize the design elements that should be considered moving forward. Together with the Friends the City continues to work with the Indigenous Place-Making Council to develop spaces within the Park that create space for our City's commitment to reconciliation to take form.

Finally, the Friends will take a more active role in programming in the space beginning this spring, including show openings, programming in the Children's Conservatory and pop-up programming in the Park.

Allan Gardens Park and Conservatory is experiencing a refresh, thanks to the leadership of the Friends of Allan Gardens, and with the enthusiastic support of City staff and the local Councillor. In the coming years, we expect this model of partnership will become a prominent example of how strength-based collaborations between community organizations and the City can make our parks better.

CONTACT

Matthew Cutler, Manager, Office of the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation, Tel: 416-395-6065, Email: Matthew.Cutler@toronto.ca

SIGNATURE

Janie Romoff
General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation