

Update on the partnership with Evergreen and establishing an identity for the Lower Don parklands

Date: March 22, 2018

To: Parks and Environment Committee

From: General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation

Wards: Wards 26, 27, 28, 29, 30

SUMMARY

This report provides an update on the progress and next steps of the partnership with Evergreen to implement the Lower Don Trail Access, Environment and Art Master Plan and seeks authority to undertake community consultation on the proposed naming of the network of parks surrounding the Lower Don to the "Wonscotonach Parklands".

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. City Council direct the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation to undertake community consultation on naming the collection of parklands surrounding the Lower Don as the "Wonscotonach Parklands" and to report back to Toronto and East York Community Council with a recommendation based on the criteria and process outlined in the Property Naming Policy.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

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

The cost associated with the community consultation process are including within the Council Approved 2018 Parks, Forestry and Recreation Operating Budget.

If the proposed renaming is approved by Community Council, changes to existing signage would be completed as part of planned repair and replacement initiatives funded through the approved Operating and Capital Budgets which currently have a provision for the ongoing replacement and renewal of signage for City assets.

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

DECISION HISTORY

City Council, at its meeting of June 10, 11, 12 and 13, 2014 authorized the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation to enter into a fundraising agreement and to accept donations in support of the Lower Don Trail Access, Environment and Art Master Plan.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2014.PE27.1>

City Council, at its meeting on July 7, 2016, adopted the City of Toronto Property Naming Policy, which established the criteria and process for naming a City property.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2015.EX7.8>

The Aboriginal Affairs Committee, at its meeting on November 3, 2017, received for information a presentation entitled, "Incorporating Indigenous Place-Making in City of Toronto's Parks Capital Projects", which included the proposal to name the Lower Don parklands as the "Wonscotonach Parklands".

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2017.AA12.5>

COMMENTS

In September 2013, the City of Toronto and the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) published the Lower Don Trail: Access, Environment + Art Master Plan (<http://bit.ly/2IG754I>). Produced by landscape architecture and urban planning firm DTAH, the Master Plan reviewed previous work and laid out a logical and interconnected series of future projects that would support the ongoing revitalization of the Lower Don valley.

In February 2015, the City and Evergreen entered into a partnership agreement to raise third-party funding to be directed towards capital improvements, public programming, public engagement, temporary public art and special events as envisioned in the Lower Don Trail Access, Environment and Art Master Plan (Master Plan).

Partnership Progress

The agreement set a goal of \$5 million in donations to be raised by Evergreen, with donations shared between the City's capital program, and Evergreen's programming, temporary art and special events, subject to donor direction.

In the past three years, over \$6 million in capital investments have been made in the Lower Don, inclusive of the Evergreen contribution. Improvements and capital projects completed to date include the new Pottery Road Trail Bridge, the reconfigured Belleville Underpass, the Bayview Multi-Use Trail connection, a Design Study for the Don Landing, a Natural Heritage Impact Study and the Parks and Trails Wayfinding Pilot. At

the end of 2017, \$3.5 million had been raised by Evergreen, with \$1 million dedicated to these capital projects.

In addition to these vital capital investments, an innovative program of art and engagement has rolled out under Evergreen's leadership, featuring longer-term installations like Duane Linklater's "Monsters for Beauty, Permanence and Individuality" as well as short-term performance pieces such as Life of a Craphead's "King Edward VII Equestrian Statue Floating Down the Don River".

In the fall of 2015, Evergreen brought together over 75 landscape architects and designers, architects and urban planners, City of Toronto and Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) staff, artists and students from Ryerson University's Ecological Design Lab and the University of Toronto's Master of Landscape Architecture in a design charrette to 'Imagine a Don Valley Neighbourhood'. The groups were asked to address a big question: "How can the Lower Don landscape from Corktown Common to Evergreen Brick Works be the centrepiece for Canada's largest city and how can it inspire the world?"

Over three days, design teams strategized creative solutions to imagine a bold design vision for the Lower Don River – not as a linear corridor, but as a vast river valley in the centre of our city, a vibrant urban park with a coherent and strong identity, and the collective backyard for over 250,000+ Torontonians. The energy and ideas generated by charrette participants was outstanding and has significantly shaped the vision for the parklands adjacent to the Lower Don. The results of this forum will be used to further outline improvements and capital investments to be included as we review and update the existing Master Plan.

Naming and Place-Making

As progress has been made on the Master Plan, it has become apparent that a clear, singular and shared identity for this collection of parklands will be a necessary step in creating a sense of place and realizing the vision for the valley.

While all of the parkland from the mouth of the Don River north to the confluence of the Upper Don and Taylor Massey Creek are connected and contiguous, these connections are not well known by most park users. Place-making a network of named parks that includes Corktown Common, Riverdale Park East and West, Don Valley Brick Works Park, Todmorden Mills Park, Crothers Woods and E.T. Seton Park will require a concerted marketing and promotions effort, as well programming and other place-making approaches. First and foremost, however, this park network needs an identity.

Over time, the park network has adopted a variety of informal names, including the Lower Don Parklands, Don River Valley Park and the #SuperPark. Through stakeholder engagement and outreach, the name "Wonscotonach Parklands" has emerged as a potential official name that could be used moving forward. This name was also proposed for Corktown Common but was not ultimately selected.

Wonscotonach is understood to be the Anishinaabe place name for the Don River and likely translates to "burning bright point". This name may refer to the practice of torchlight salmon spearing on the river, where the Mississaugas of the New Credit had a

seasonal settlement and fished and hunted the marshlands for muskrat, duck and deer. The river was essential to the Mississaugas and other Indigenous people in Toronto and it provided connections to trail systems that are followed by present day Yonge Street, the gateway north.

This proposed naming would provide a unique opportunity to knit together this large urban green space and maintain the history and recognized identities of individual parks, while at the same time creating opportunity for Indigenous place-making and programming that reflects the City's commitment to reconciliation.

This proposal has been discussed at the Aboriginal Affairs Committee as well as at subsequent consultations with Indigenous community leaders, elders and knowledge keepers and has received positive response. Staff are seeking authority to move to the next stage in the naming process and undertake community consultation regarding the proposal.

Next Steps

If the recommendation is adopted by Council, staff would proceed to community consultation and would bring forward a final report for the naming of the Lower Don parklands to Toronto and East York Community Council, which has delegated authority for property naming.

In addition to the renaming, the City and Evergreen will continue to meet regularly to advance the principles of the Master Plan.

The Dundas and Gerrard Street staircases have been fully designed, and the Riverdale Park West switchback ramp from the Riverdale Park pedestrian bridge to the Lower Don Trail is in the final stages of design. Following the extended trail closure during the construction of the Belleville Underpass, any future work will be undertaken with strong consideration for park and trail access and to reduce the potential impact on user experience.

City staff are currently engaged in a review and refresh of the Master Plan to reflect the work accomplished to date, and to incorporate some of the new ideas and directions that have emerged since it was finalized. The updated Master Plan will become the basis for our ongoing planning and implementation efforts.

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