

## **Jenner Jean-Marie Community Centre Needs Assessment (Programs and Facilities)**

**Date:** October 5, 2021

**To:** Economic and Community Development Committee

**From:** General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation

**Wards:** Ward 15, Don Valley West

### **SUMMARY**

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At its meeting on December 4, 5, and 13, 2018, City Council directed the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation, to initiate a needs assessment for additional community facilities in the Thorncliffe Park neighbourhood and the Deputy City Manager, Community and Social Services, in consultation with appropriate staff, to identify a site or sites which may be appropriate for acquisition for a new community centre in the Thorncliffe Park neighbourhood. In 2019, City Council further directed the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation to consider future facility improvements to the Jenner Jean-Marie Community Centre (CRC) and the potential for additional multi-purpose space to serve the Thorncliffe Park neighbourhood.

This staff report is a response to the above mentioned City Council directions.

The Thorncliffe Park neighbourhood, a Neighbourhood Improvement Area, is a very diverse community, home to a high proportion of immigrant and racialized residents who often face a unique set of barriers. With a mixed population of first generation immigrants, refugees, and longer established minority populations, 73 percent of Thorncliffe Park residents speak a language other than English at home. Thorncliffe Park has a relatively young population where 39 percent of its population is under the age of 24 (compared to 27 percent city-wide). The neighbourhood's population grew 10 percent from 2011-2016 to 21,108, compared to Toronto's average growth of 4.5 percent.

Jenner Jean-Marie is the Community Recreation Centre that serves the Thorncliffe Park community. It is co-located with Thorncliffe Park Library and Thorncliffe Park Daycare and serves as a vital hub for area residents. It is one of the city's 39 Free Centres to provide access without financial barriers to participation. The community's city-delivered recreation opportunities are also served by R.V. Burgess Park, nearby community pools such as Leaside Memorial Gardens Swimming Pool and other nearby community facilities located in Leaside and Flemingdon Park.

As per Council direction, PFR completed a Recreation Programming Needs Assessment with local residents, partners and agencies in mid-2019. More recently in 2021, a site acquisition scan and a facilities review was completed looking at opportunities to improve and/or expand Jenner Jean-Marie CRC to support enhanced programming at this facility.

This report summarizes the results of the Recreation Programming Needs Assessment, changes planned to program offerings at the community centre and other operational and capital recommendations, including enhanced coordination with local organizations and other City divisions on program offerings and the development of a local Recreation Advisory Committee.

Based on the findings of the facilities review, staff recommend prioritizing opportunities to expand the existing community centre in collaboration with other on-site service providers. This is in alignment with the Council Approved Facilities Master Plan Implementation Strategy. Staff will advance a technical feasibility study for the existing Jenner Jean-Marie CRC to determine improvement opportunities as well as the feasibility of future expansion of this facility. This work is planned for 2022 and is currently reflected in PFR's 2021-2030 Capital Budget and Plan. This work will ensure that recreation program and service expansion can be offered to the Thorncliffe Park neighbourhood and will continue to be focused at the Jenner Jean-Marie CRC.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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

1. The Economic and Community Development Committee receive this report for information.

## **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

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There are no financial implications as a result of the recommendation in this report.

The 2021-2030 Capital Budget and Plan for Parks, Forestry and Recreation includes a planned project to assess, design and construct additional space at Jenner Jean-Marie CRC, targeted for 2022-2024. The timing for all projects in the Capital Plan are dependent on available funds and the ability to proceed.

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed this report and agrees with the Financial Impact section.

## **EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT**

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Parks and recreational facilities and programs are integral to Toronto's success and well-being. They provide spaces for services and programs that benefit residents, are venues for community building, and contribute in a significant way to the city's social, economic and environmental priorities.

As a Neighbourhood Improvement Area, Thorncliffe Park requires dedicated support from Parks, Forestry and Recreation and the City through partnerships with residents, community agencies and businesses to invest in people, services, programs and facilities.

## **DECISION HISTORY**

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City Council, at its meeting of October 29 and 30, 2019, adopted the Implementation Strategy for the Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan 2019-2038. It requests the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation to consider future facility improvements to the Jenner Jean-Marie CRC and the potential for additional multi-purpose space to serve the Thorncliffe Park neighbourhood, based on the current needs assessment work being undertaken that considers population growth, cultural needs and opportunities both within the existing facility and the surrounding community, and to report out through future year's Capital Plans.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2019.EX9.5>

City Council, at its meeting of December 4, 5, and 13, 2018, directed the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation to initiate an urgent needs assessment for additional community facilities in the underserved Thorncliffe Park neighbourhood and directed the Deputy City Manager, Community and Social Services, in consultation with appropriate staff, to identify a site or sites which may be appropriate for acquisition for a new community centre in the Thorncliffe Park neighbourhood.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2019.MM1.13>

## **COMMENTS**

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Jenner Jean-Marie CRC, located at 48 Thorncliffe Park Drive, is approximately 12,000 square feet in size and is co-located with Thorncliffe Library and Thorncliffe Park Daycare. The CRC consists of multipurpose rooms, kitchen, fitness/weight room, gymnasium and a lounge. The facility is one of the City's 39 community recreation centres that offers free registered and drop-in programs so that more residents can access recreation programs.

Jenner Jean-Marie CRC is located at the centre of the residential area in Thorncliffe Park, a high density, diverse community whose population grew 10 percent from 2011-2016 (to 21,108) compared to Toronto's average growth of 4.5 percent. Adjacent to the CRC is R.V. Burgess Park that features a basketball court, a community garden, a splash pad, a bake oven and a children's playground. There are also a number of existing and planned recreation facilities in the surrounding area, including a large CRC inclusive of an indoor aquatic facility and arena complex. The Thorncliffe Park Community Hub at East York Town Centre, a 60,000 square foot multi-service space offering health and social services, programs and community spaces, will be fully operational by 2023 following its current use as a vaccination facility (see Appendix A).

In 2019, Jenner Jean-Marie CRC offered more than 5,500 hours of recreational programming (drop-in and instructional), 15,800 visits and 2,300 registrations in its instructional programming. The CRC provides a range of programs and services year-

round and makes community space available to local agencies, community groups and residents to optimizing the available spaces. Sports, arts, fitness and dance, summer camps, youth leadership and drop-in youth programming are all frequently requested and well subscribed instructional skills programs. Activities are scheduled throughout the week with a greater focus on the after-school period.

Trends indicate that community use of Jenner Jean-Marie CRC has increased by 38 percent from 2017-2019 (more than 3,100 hours of permitted uses in 2019). Examples of these uses include but are not limited to religious events, indoor/outdoor sports, community gatherings, and private meetings/events. While the Thorncliffe Park Community Hub will provide additional space in the community for such activities, PFR recognizes the importance of community access to flexible spaces in the neighbourhood. Working collaboratively with the Hub, these combined spaces will address current and future needs for space to support community programs and services.

### **Summary of Recreation Programming Needs Assessment**

The Recreation Programming Needs Assessment was completed with local residents, partners and agencies to develop a better understanding of how the Thorncliffe Park community wants to use its community centre, what programming enhancements can be implemented and how the CRC can more effectively outreach and engage local youth, volunteers and community partners.

Community members in the Thorncliffe Park area were engaged through a mix of broad and focused engagements. An online survey was available from October 7 to October 29, 2019, and received 269 responses. The survey was promoted using the City's social media and through postcards delivered to 9,487 mailboxes in the Thorncliffe Park community. In-person engagement sessions were conducted with seniors, adults, a local parents' group, Thorncliffe Women's Group, and elementary students from Valley Park Elementary School. Several themes emerged from these engagements:

- Opportunities for social engagement: There is a strong desire for Jenner Jean-Marie CRC to become a community gathering space for youth, parents and seniors. Stay-at-home parents indicated that they were looking for a space to connect with other parents in the colder months, youth want to spend time with their friends outside of school, and seniors want to connect with others.
- Progressive, cultural, flexible and family-centred programming: Residents expressed an interest in expanding the current program offerings at Jenner Jean-Marie CRC to include more academic enrichment programs, gender-specific and family centered programs including fitness, sport and swim. There is also interest in expanding the timing of program offerings to include weekday mornings and evenings for adults and weekday afternoons for seniors.
- Youth skills development and empowerment: Community partners, residents and youth all expressed interest in promoting youth skills development opportunities (e.g., Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics programs). Overall, the positive engagement of youth through recreation opportunities is important to

participants, recognizing that Jenner Jean-Marie CRC often serves as an informal social gathering place for youth in the area, provides safe and supervised space particularly in the after school hours and offers volunteer and employment opportunities.

- Building awareness of recreation program and services: Existing communication channels make it challenging for Thorncliffe Park residents to find information about the community centre. The City's commonly-used social media and communication tools (Facebook, Twitter) were found not to be as commonly used by residents in the neighbourhood. Furthermore, language barriers prevent some residents from understanding what programs and activities are offered at Jenner Jean-Marie CRC.

### **Planned Service Enhancements**

Parks, Forestry and Recreation is planning a number of changes to future program offerings at Jenner Jean-Marie CRC and increased opportunities for community engagement and access and collaboration with community partners. The resulting changes include but are not limited to:

- Collaborate with The Neighbourhood Organization and other local agencies to more effectively respond to the expressed recreational and community space needs that have been identified in the Recreational Programming Needs Assessment.
- Formalize a Recreation Advisory Committee, inclusive of youth, partners and residents, to identify trends and opportunities for service enhancement and advise on planned capital projects in the Thorncliffe Park area.
- Increase the availability of time for community use of space for local agencies and community groups to deliver programs and services in coordination with the Thorncliffe Park Neighbourhood Hub.
- Enhance daytime programming focused on caregivers and young children, women-only, cultural, culinary, health wellness and older adult programs.
- Enhance child and youth programming to be more focused on leadership development, social events and inter-generational programming, events and workshops.
- Enhance academic enrichment programs with a focus on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) program offerings for youth by partnering with local area schools and Toronto Public Library.
- Increase the availability of employment readiness programs to support local youth employment through partnerships with local agencies, including local area schools and Toronto Public Library.
- Participate in the development of SafeTO: Toronto's Ten-Year Community Safety and Well-Being Plan which prioritizes responses to community trauma and violence to help create a safer Toronto.

Related to supporting the needs of youth, PFR will continue to work in partnership with local community partners, schools, City divisions and agencies to provide and enhance youth outreach and engagement efforts inclusive of leadership development and employment readiness training. The community centre currently has a Youth Advisory Council, who implement events, workshops and programs. Contributing to economic and skills development opportunities, Jenner Jean-Marie CRC typically employs 50

youth in part-time recreation positions.

### **Facilities Review – Expansion Opportunities at Jenner Jean-Marie Community Recreation Centre**

The Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan (FMP) sets a target size for mid and large multi-component centres ranging from 45,000-65,000 square feet. At approximately 12,000 square feet, Jenner Jean-Marie CRC is smaller than the target size for new and replacement community centres. Accordingly, the FMP recommended adding new program space to address emerging trends and serve growth and demonstrated needs in the Thorncliffe Park area.

Jenner Jean-Marie CRC is co-located with a library and daycare centre providing integrated services for the Thorncliffe Park community, functioning as an important hub for residents in the area.

In accordance with the recommendations of the FMP, the 2021-2030 Capital Budget and Plan allocated \$4.5 million to support future facility enhancements at Jenner Jean-Marie CRC with construction targeted in 2023 and 2024. Starting in 2022, PFR will undertake a consultant-led technical feasibility study to identify and evaluate opportunities to expand the CRC. The review will determine facility options and funding requirements. Examples of facility enhancements may include the addition of functional space that can better support:

- Delivery of programs and community events (i.e. through the addition of multi-purpose spaces and kitchen facilities);
- Improved lobby design and casual use spaces for socializing and community events to occur; and
- Addition of a secondary entrance for the community centre to increase access and encourage connectivity to the park.

This work will ensure that Jenner Jean-Marie CRC has the physical space necessary to support the expansion of programs and services identified through the Recreation Programming Needs Assessment. During the design phase, there will be further opportunities for community agencies and residents to provide input.

### **Facilities Review – Alternative Facility Locations in the Thorncliffe Park Neighbourhood**

As directed by City Council, Parks, Forestry and Recreation conducted a scan of land acquisition opportunities for a potential new facility in the Thorncliffe Park neighbourhood. In this area, land use is a mix of high-density residential, commercial, industrial and office uses.

In accordance with the Official Plan, Community Recreation Centres are not a permitted use in Core and General Employment Areas, which make up a significant share of the lands in Thorncliffe Park. The acquisition and redevelopment of high-density residential properties designated as Apartment Neighbourhoods or Mixed-Use Areas would be costly. In Thorncliffe Park, these properties tend to be narrow with limited suitable space

to properly site a new CRC. Existing parkland is well-used, highly programmed and best maintained as outdoor public space.

In a few instances, the City has secured a new community centre facility as part of a large redevelopment proposal, through the use of Section 37 of the Planning Act. This is not currently an option in Thorncliffe Park as City Planning has advised that there are currently no proposed developments at the scale in which a community centre could be secured.

The FMP recommended an improvement to the existing Jenner Jean-Marie CRC and did not recommend a new build at this time. As there is both limited opportunity to purchase property at a reasonable cost and construct a new CRC within PFR's Capital Budget and Plan, PFR staff will continue to prioritize the improvement and assess opportunities to expand the existing centrally-located Jenner-Jean Marie Community Centre. This recommendation is in alignment with the Facilities Master Plan.

### **Conclusion and Next Steps**

The Jenner Jean-Marie CRC Recreation Programming Needs Assessment and facilities review confirms that improvements are required for both the programming offered in the centre and the facility itself.

In order to better optimize programs and services at Jenner Jean-Marie CRC, PFR will implement planned changes to program offerings at the community centre and increased opportunities for community engagement, access and collaboration with community partners.

In 2022, staff will initiate a technical feasibility study to examine opportunities to both improve and expand the community centre, in consultation with the Toronto Public Library, on-site child care provider and local residents, partners and agencies. Staff will report on implementation progress and facility expansion options and funding requirements in the Thorncliffe Park neighbourhood through the Capital Budget process and the five-year review of the Facilities Master Plan Implementation Strategy, as appropriate.

Furthermore, PFR will coordinate with other divisions who have programming and spaces in development within the Thorncliffe Park neighbourhood, to continue to improve service to the community and address issues and ideas identified in the Recreation Programming Needs Assessment. This will include ongoing coordination with Social Development, Finance and Administration and other partners at the new Thorncliffe Park Community Hub.

## **CONTACT**

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## **SIGNATURE**

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## **ATTACHMENTS**

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Appendix A: Thorncliffe Park Community Facility Map