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## 2021 OPERATING BUDGET BRIEFING NOTE

### Enhanced Youth Spaces Virtual Programming

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#### Issue/Background:

- This briefing note responds to Budget Committee's motion, adopted on January 22, 2021 requesting the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation (PF&R) to provide a briefing note on the costs, if any, associated with Enhanced Youth Space Staff providing online/virtual programming for 2021.
- Using existing budgeted staff resources and equipment Parks, Forestry and Recreation has pivoted to a more virtual youth outreach and engagement model since the start of the pandemic hosting on-line leadership development workshops, youth council meetings and employment information sessions.
- Virtual programming has complemented in person services which were delivered in the summer through the Summer in the Six program and the re-opening of Enhanced Youth Spaces from September to November 2020 before they were closed again.
- Virtual programming is a relatively new model of service delivery for the Division and part of a longer term modernization and digitization approach that has been fast-tracked by the pandemic.
- In the short term, and with the extended closure of Enhanced Youth Spaces and youth recreation programs, the Division is implementing additional virtual outreach and engagement opportunities with a greater focus on marginalized youth.
- Parks, Forestry and Recreation and Toronto Public Library have developed integrated plans with respect to the expansion of Enhanced Youth Spaces and Youth Hubs and will collaborate on virtual programming for youth including cross promotion and effective digital outreach strategies.
- The Division is in the process of purchasing specialized equipment to produce more interesting, interactive and livestream content for youth and converting an existing staff position on a temporary basis to develop virtual content and implement innovative digital outreach approaches. These enhancements can be made using existing funding and staff complement.
- The Division will evaluate the effectiveness of this approach to determine what the longer term strategy is for a virtual youth engagement model and bring forward funding requests through the 2022 budget process, if required, for consideration.

## Key Points:

- Since the start of the pandemic and in an effort to outreach and engage youth, the Division has implemented virtual programming using WebEx and producing largely static content on the City's newly established Stay, Play and Learn site which provides residents with virtual at-home recreation programming ideas. These have been moderately successful in reaching a wide youth audience who would be more likely to respond to interactive content produced for and hosted on social media channels youth are more likely to access and engage with, post and share.
- Throughout the pandemic 31 Youth Outreach Workers (YOWs) & 10 Youth Recreation Programs (YRPs) continued to actively engaged youth across the City of Toronto, including youth that reside in Neighbourhood Improvement Areas through in-person and virtual programming and outreach initiatives.
- Virtual engagement complemented in person programming when these were suspended and this model will continue in 2021 recognizing that it will be some time before community centres, enhanced youth spaces and programming can fully recover
- Examples of virtual outreach include:
  - 26 youth councils met virtually throughout the year
  - 39,599 youth contacts were made and 11,607 referrals to virtual programs including partner programs through Toronto Public Library, as well as services to support youth employment, housing and mental health services.
  - 16 Employment Readiness Workshops were hosted virtually with resume writing support provided to 1349 youth resulting in 183 youth gaining part-time employment.
  - The AMPED Arts program piloted a virtual singing competition which will be replicated in 2021. It awarded the winning vocalist with a professionally recorded song and music video.
- It is important to note that full time staff also supported in-person programming that complemented virtual activities including:
  - Re-opening Enhanced Youth Spaces in the fall offering 5,961 program hours
  - Piloting Summer in the 6IX in partnership with Maple Leaf Sports & Entertainment which activated 33 City parks, to deliver 3,630 service hours for youth aged 13-24
- With Community Recreation Centres closed the 10 existing Enhanced Youth Spaces remain closed and the 10 expanded locations have yet to open.
- In 2021, PFR will build on the virtual model established last year, leveraging the existing social media channel used to promote youth programs (Youth REC TO), expanding reach, content and creating new live stream approaches to youth virtual outreach inclusive of arts, culture, leadership and employment readiness.

- Doing so with greater effectiveness, reach and production value requires the skills and equipment necessary to produce content, expand social media reach and host interactive programming with youth.
- In 2021 for example, Black History Month, Youth Week and STOMP (Toronto Urban Dance Competition & Showcase) are upcoming and annual youth events that are unlikely to be hosted in person. These can be produced virtually along with a wider range of employment readiness, leadership development and youth outreach programming over the course of the year.
- With the preference of youth to connect virtually even outside of the pandemic, building capacity in PFR to engage youth through various social media platforms will help the Division increase its reach and impact with youth audiences.
- PFR has engaged Toronto Public Library and will collaborate on effective approaches to outreach and engage youth using digital platforms, on opportunities for joint virtual programming and cross promotion particularly those initiatives that advance the Toronto Youth Equity Strategy.
- PFR will be expanding its virtual programming in 2021 using existing budget and staff resources and evaluating the effectiveness of these initiatives to determine a longer term digital outreach approach that may require enhanced funding in future years.

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