



Monday, March 15, 2021

Infrastructure & Environment Committee
City Hall, Committee Room 1
100 Queen Street West
Toronto ON M5H 2N2

Dear Chair and Council Members,

RE: Protecting and Supporting Frontline Parks, Forestry, and Recreation Staff

Over the past year, the pandemic has presented unprecedented challenges for us as a City, but one of the biggest challenges that have presented themselves is the health, safety, and wellbeing of our public servants and those who are working on the frontlines in our parks.

Even prior to the pandemic, Parks, Forestry and Recreation (PFR) had trouble filling vacancies because of the chronic issues in the Downtown East but these issues have been exacerbated by the pandemic.

Gardeners, Parks Handy Workers, the Downtown East Crew, and other frontline Parks, Forestry, and Recreation staff have expressed that on a daily basis, they experience workplace violence, witness drug overdoses, and are exposed to a significant amount of used needles, condoms, masks, and other biohazards and debris as they carry out their duties to clean city parks. As a result of these traumatic experiences on the job, their stress levels, mental health, and overall health, safety and wellbeing are greatly affected.

When a Gardener, for example, applies for a career with the City they are expected to perform work duties that bring them pride and fulfillment by utilizing their specialized skills to beautify public parks and green spaces. They are arborists, horticulturalists and other accredited tradespeople. However, due to the conditions present in parks across the City, exacerbated by the mental health, affordable housing, and addiction crises that the City of Toronto faces and is actively working to address, frontline PFR workers are in need of more support and new specialized training to address the crises.

As an employer, the City of Toronto is responsible for preventing workplace illness and injury, both physically and mentally. We need to ensure we are providing all frontline staff with the training, protective equipment, and mental health supports they need to work safely to ensure their personal health & wellbeing.

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that:

1. The Infrastructure & Environment Committee requests that the General Manager of Parks, Forestry, and Recreation report back to the April 28, 2021 Infrastructure & Environment Committee meeting with a presentation outlining the immediate workplace health and safety plan, including any request for resources, to ensure the safety and wellbeing for frontline Parks, Forestry, and Recreation workers.

Respectfully submitted,

Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam
Ward 13, Toronto Centre