

Toward Environmentally and Culturally Sensitive Dispersal of Funeral Ashes

Date: May 6, 2021

To: Infrastructure and Environment Committee

From: General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation

Wards: All

SUMMARY

At its meeting on May 5, 2021 City Council directed the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation to report to the May 25, 2021 meeting of Infrastructure and Environment Committee on the feasibility of creating designated areas for the scattering of ashes along the City's waterfront.

This report seeks direction to consult stakeholders on options for the environmentally and culturally sensitive dispersal of funeral ashes at Toronto parks and waterways. Stakeholder consultation will assist City staff to develop recommendations for balancing diverse religious practices, site specific environmental issues, and the heavy, varying uses of waterfront parks and beaches.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. City Council direct the General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation, in coordination with the City Solicitor and appropriate City divisions, to engage Toronto Region and Conservation Authority, other municipalities, faith groups, environmental experts, other stakeholders and the general public in the review of options for the environmentally and culturally sensitive dispersal of funeral ashes at municipal parks and waterways and to provide an update to Infrastructure and Environment Committee in Q1 2022.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There are no financial impacts resulting from the adoption of the recommendations in this report. Upon completion of a comprehensive research and consultation process,

City staff will report back with recommendations for City Council, including associated costs, if any, of implementation. The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial impact information.

DECISION HISTORY

On May 5, 2021, City Council directed the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation to report to the May 25, 2021 meeting of the Infrastructure and Environment Committee on the feasibility of creating designated areas for the scattering of ashes along the City's waterfront.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2021.IE21.19>

COMMENTS

Dispersal of funeral ashes into waterways is a common end-of-life practice for a number of faith groups. Across Canada, including in Toronto and the surrounding region, there is interest in accessing municipal parks and waterways for this purpose. However, provincial regulations, city bylaws and local policies related to the scattering of ashes and associated practices, such as the leaving of offerings, do not provide clear direction to residents on what is permitted. More guidance is needed to support park patrons and municipal staff to respond respectfully to community conflicts that can arise in relation to this use of parks, beaches and waterways.

To meet the needs of their diverse communities, some Ontario municipalities, including the cities of Mississauga, Pickering, and Sarnia, have spent a number of years working with local partners, including faith groups and Conservation Authorities, to develop environmentally and culturally sensitive options for dispersal of funeral ashes on municipal property. Local attention to their work increased this spring, following the release of a March 2021 report by the [Toronto Region and Conservation Authority \(TRCA\)](#). The City of Toronto can learn from and draw upon examples of other GTA cities to develop sensitive approaches that meets the needs of the residents of Toronto. Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division has already held initial meetings with the TRCA, City of Mississauga and City of Pickering to begin this learning process and help inform a stakeholder engagement process for Toronto.

Research and Consultation:

A comprehensive research and consultation process is needed to inform a policy framework on dispersal of funeral ashes on City of Toronto property. In other GTA cities, developing environmentally and culturally sensitive approaches to this issue have required at least a year of stakeholder engagement.

Consultation Principles:

This is a sensitive issue for many stakeholders. Utmost care must be taken as the City embarks on the consultation work to establish project terms of reference and principles that reflect the City's commitments to anti-racism, diversity, equity and inclusion, and to the protection and stewardship of the natural environment and habitat.

Consultation Process and Activities:

- Formation of a Stakeholder Advisory Group inclusive of representatives of faith groups, environmental groups, recreational park uses, TRCA, City Councillors and other committed stakeholders to approve and oversee a project workplan;
- Assess the relevant legislation and authorities governing decisions regarding scattering of ashes on or from municipal land;
- Conduct a jurisdictional review of models and lessons learned in neighbouring cities and larger cities across the country;
- Launch sensitive stakeholder and partner engagement with Toronto Region and Conservation Authority, key faith groups and other relevant stakeholders including recreation groups and environmental groups;
- Based on research and consultation, define principles, ecological criteria and programming criteria for any site identification and policy development (TRCA has proposed a draft set of principles which the City and partners could consider and adapt - see examples summarized in Attachment 1);
- Report to Infrastructure and Environment Committee with recommendations.

CONTACT

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SIGNATURE

Janie Romoff
General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 - Examples of Principles to Consider When Identifying Sites along Watercourses for the Purposes of Scattering Funeral Ashes

Attachment 1

Examples of Principles to Consider When Identifying Sites along Watercourses for the Purposes of Scattering Funeral Ashes

- Compliance with relevant legislation.
- There must be evidence there is no negative impact on the watercourse. This may be through investigatory studies, ongoing monitoring, or added restoration to mitigate potential impacts or create an added benefit to the aquatic system.
- Provided there is no negative impact, infrastructure to minimize damage to shoreline should be considered.
- Archaeological sites along watercourses should be considered to prevent the contamination of those sites.
- Cultural appropriateness and physical accessibility of sites.
- Outreach to the community requesting access.
- Given the sensitive nature of dispersing the funeral ashes of loved ones, an appropriate agency or organization with appropriate experience should administer the customer services aspects of this work.