

Improving Winter Access to Toronto's Parks for 2021/22

Date: October 6, 2021

To: Infrastructure and Environment Committee

From: General Manager, Parks Forestry and Recreation

Wards: All

SUMMARY

This report responds to recommendations 21 and 22 in EX21.2 - City Council request that the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation (PFR) report to the Infrastructure and Environment Committee by the third quarter of 2021 on the feasibility of expanding snow clearing on park pathways and trails and making more park washrooms operational for the 2021/2022 winter season.

In response to Council direction, PFR increased public access to Toronto's parks last winter by clearing more trails and opening more washrooms. In 2020/2021, an additional 64 kilometres of park pathways and trails were added to snow clearing operations in addition to the typical 270 kilometres, and 143 park washrooms facilities were provided over the usual 64, including portable toilets at 51 locations. To respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and associated increased need for access to outdoor space through the winter months, PFR also opened a number of other park assets typically closed through winter, including golf courses for snow loop trails.

In addition to continuing the expanded trail clearing, winter washroom access and additional portable toilets provided for winter 2020/2021, PFR proposes further winter access improvements for the 2021/2022 season through three initiatives, including:

- Alignment of winter maintenance activities with Transportation Services, which will allow PFR to expand winter maintenance within the current standards, clear pathways and trails in 40 new park locations and provide enhanced winter maintenance in 35 additional parks.
- A pilot for alternative winter maintenance that could be used in Environmentally Significant Areas (ESAs), in ravines and on bridges.
- Interim enhancements of up to 5 additional washrooms to allow for their operation through the 2021/2022 winter season.

PFR also proposes developing a washroom enhancement program, with the aim of identifying opportunities and advancing additional retrofits and new builds for 2022/2023 and future years. The washroom enhancement program will follow a similar process to

other capital enhancement programs, with construction following required technical assessments, planning and design for the specific project.

To continue, incremental costs and resources will be required on an ongoing basis based on preliminary estimates. PFR will prepare new and enhanced service proposals, including the washroom enhancement program, through its 2022 Budget submission.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. City Council request the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation to include a submission for Council's consideration in the 2022 Budget process for budget funding to support expanded winter maintenance and winter washroom access as implemented in 2020/2021, implement the pilot for alternative winter maintenance impacting Environmentally Significant Areas (ESAs), ravines and bridges, and develop a new winter washroom enhancement program.
2. City Council request the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation to implement the pilot for alternative winter maintenance impacting Environmentally Significant Areas (ESAs), ravines and bridges for the 2021/2022 winter season, subject to availability of funding through the 2022 Budget process.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

The existing 2021-2030 Council approved Capital Budget and Plan for Parks, Forestry and Recreation includes a total investment of \$11.009 million for the state of good repair rehabilitation of washroom buildings over the ten-year period under the Capital Asset Management Program (CAMP) for Outdoor Recreation Centres (ORC). For 2021, \$0.300 million is included in the CAMP ORC project for the upgrading of existing services and providing heating sources to allow for winter operation of up to five (5) additional washroom facilities. In addition, the 2021 Council approved Capital Budget includes \$3.361 million for the completion of three washroom facilities in 2021: \$2.557 million for the Allan Gardens Washroom Building Construction, \$0.629 million for the new Leslie Street Spit (Tommy Thompson Park) washroom facility, and \$0.175 million for upgrades to the High Park Washroom/Chess Clubhouse Building.

Through the 2022 Capital Budget submission, a service improvement initiative will be requested for consideration to develop a washroom enhancement program. It is anticipated that the Section 37 benefits and Section 42 Above 5 percent Cash-in-lieu funds will be used to develop the program, resulting in zero debt impact to the City.

Expanded snow maintenance to improve public access and additional park washroom maintenance, which are currently provided during 2020/2021, are being funded by one-time underspending as a result of COVID this year. There is no funding in the budget for

PFR to continue expanded trail clearing, winter washroom access, and additional portable toilets as provided for winter 2021/2022.

PFR staff will finalize anticipated 2022 costs for submission as new and enhanced service proposals as part of the 2022 Budget process, enabling consideration along with other City service priorities.

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has been advised of the financial impacts arising from the report to be considered along with other priorities in future budget processes.

DECISION HISTORY

At its February 18, 2021 meeting, City Council adopted item EX21.2, with the following requests of the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation:

- to report to the Infrastructure and Environment Committee by the third quarter of 2021 with an update on: the review of existing paved pathways and trails currently not maintained during the winter to determine if current infrastructure is suitable for snow removal; any alternate maintenance options for winter maintenance in Environmental Sensitive Areas, ravines and bridges, including environmentally friendly de-icers and equipment options to be piloted; and the feasibility of expanding snow clearing on park pathways in parks and trails for the 2021/2022 winter season;
- to report to the Infrastructure and Environment Committee by the third quarter of 2021 on the feasibility of making more park washrooms operational for the 2021/2022 winter season;
- to work with local Councillors interested in advancing the use of Section 37 and Section 42 Above 5 percent Cash-in-lieu funds to winterize washrooms where feasible, and to report back to the Budget Committee, as appropriate, to amend the Parks, Forestry and Recreation 2021-2030 Capital Budget and Plan and allocate the required funds from these funding sources for the purpose of winterizing washrooms; and
- to report to the Infrastructure and Environment Committee upon completion of the condition assessment of Outdoor Recreation Facilities on options to make more park washrooms operational for the upcoming winter season, and on options to ensure new park washrooms are winterized going forward.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2021.EX21.2>

At its November 25 and 26, 2020 meeting, City Council amended item CC26.9, "Update on Park Washrooms for Winter 2020/2021" to request the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation to develop a strategy to winterize more parks washrooms as part of the State of Good Repair and Capital Plan, and ensure that new parks facilities being developed be considered for winterized washrooms.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2020.CC26.9>

At its October 27, 2020 meeting, City Council adopted item HL22.1, directing the General Manager, Parks, Forestry, and Recreation to:

- report to the November 25 and 26, 2020 meeting of City Council on the impacts of, and options for, keeping more public washrooms open and fully accessible including clearing pathways of snow and ice in our parks through the upcoming winter; and
- evaluate the potential to retrofit all public washrooms to ensure they can withstand winter temperatures and remain open year-round.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2020.HL22.1>

COMMENTS

1. Park Pathways and Trails

There are approximately 690 kilometres of pathways, trails and park roads in the City's parks, comprised of surface materials that include asphalt, concrete, permeable pavers, limestone screening and other natural materials. Snow clearing operations in parks typically includes snow removal at parking lots at more than 250 PFR locations including parks, community centres and arenas, as well as on approximately 270 kilometres of park pathways, trails and park roads. Work is performed by staff that are also responsible for ongoing litter and general park maintenance. Snow cannot be cleared from all park pathways for the following reasons:

- Unpaved or natural trails cannot be cleared of snow as the surface is not conducive to clearing.
- Pathways in environmentally significant areas (ESAs), along watercourses and in ravines cannot be salted.
- Some park pathways cannot sustain snow removal equipment due to width, slope and surface material.

In 2020/2021, an additional 64 kilometres of park pathways and trails (including 22 km of hydro corridor maintained in partnership with Transportation Services) were added to snow operations as well as 56,000 square meters of parking lots. Locations were selected to increase access in high use destination and district parks with multiple assets available for winter use, such as outdoor rinks and washrooms. Snow clearing was also added for locations with expanded washrooms. Funding will be requested in Parks, Forestry and Recreation's 2022 Operating Budget submission to continue expanded snow maintenance.

Aligning Winter Maintenance Activities with Transportation Services

Currently PFR clears approximately 62 km of sidewalks adjacent to Parks. Transportation Services will assume this work for the 2021/2022 season and beyond, enabling PFR to clear snow on paths at an additional 40 parks and provide winter maintenance enhancements to 35 additional park locations. PFR will continue to work with Transportation Services to identify additional hydro corridors, trails and pathways to further enhance winter access for these locations.

Pilot Project to determine an Alternative Winter Maintenance option that could be used in Environmentally Significant Areas, Ravines and on Bridges

Pathways in ESAs cannot be salted. Following consultation with Transportation Services, the TRCA, and Risk Management, PFR will implement a pilot project in two locations (one each in Etobicoke York District and North York District) for winter 2021/2022 that will evaluate an alternative winter maintenance option that could then be used in ESAs, ravines and bridges. The two pilot locations comprise approximately nine kilometres of trails and bridges and will test the use of an organic and non-corrosive natural traction aid, compatible for use in ESAs.

If successful, the results of this pilot will inform expansion of winter maintenance to areas with ESAs, ravines and bridges that will be captured in future year operating budget requests.

2. Park Washrooms

PFR maintains 187 stand-alone washrooms in its parks. Most of these washrooms were planned to be seasonal and were not built for winter use. Generally, seasonal park washrooms lack insulated plumbing and sufficient electrical or fuel source for heating the building. These washrooms must be closed before temperatures drop below zero, resulting in damage to the pipes from freezing and bursting.

In response to council direction, last winter PFR worked to increase public access to 143 park washrooms over the usual number of 64. In addition to the 17 winterized stand-alone washrooms and washrooms at 47 outdoor artificial ice rinks (AIRs) typically open throughout the winter months, a further 28 stand-alone washrooms were opened for winter 2020/2021. Portable toilets were provided at 51 locations to augment washroom availability.

2021/2022 Park Washroom Improvements

Staff assessed the opportunity for completing improvements to additional park washroom locations to support the 2021-2022 winter season within the existing approved budget and considered:

- The availability of suitable infrastructure to allow for the timely winterization to advance for the coming season without significant investment;
- Park winter use level and presence of complementary amenities or activities (e.g. toboggan hill);
- Distance from other public washroom options (e.g. arenas, community centres);
- Winter maintenance of neighbouring pathways and trails; and
- Geographic distribution.

PFR proposes completing improvements to up to 5 washrooms to allow for their winter operation.

Where required, improvements will include:

- Installation of heat source suitable for winter operations;

- Minor upgrades to infrastructure (e.g. electrical panels);
- Minor insulation improvements; and
- Frost proofing of water services.

The washroom improvements, estimated to cost up to \$0.300 million in 2021, will be funded through the 2021-2030 Council Approved Capital Budget and Plan for Parks, Forestry and Recreation. Funding will be requested in Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division's 2022 Operating Budget submission to operate the additional 33 stand-alone washrooms and portable toilets annually as well as standardizing the season for the remaining stand-alone washrooms.

Washroom Enhancement Program 2022

While some interim improvements have been successful in allowing PFR to increase public access to washrooms over the past and upcoming winter season, a long-term solution to winter washroom access is required.

In addition to the improvements proposed for this coming winter, PFR will request new capital funding through the 2022-2031 Capital Budget and Plan submission to develop a washroom enhancement program. A washroom enhancement program will ensure that future investments deliver permanent improvements beginning in 2022 and planning for additional capital improvements in 2023 – 2024 and beyond. The work will also:

- Address best practices and lessons learned in other cold-climate cities, including potential off-the-shelf winterization improvements used elsewhere;
- Outline criteria to identify and prioritize locations for permanent winterizations, including condition, existing services, current use level, adjacent amenities, location and equity; and
- Identify funding and staff resource implications for broader implementation of the program.

The washroom enhancement program will follow a similar process to other capital enhancement programs, with construction following required technical assessments, planning and design for the specific project.

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SIGNATURE

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