

City Council

Notice of Motion

MM42.21	ACTION			Ward: 13
---------	--------	--	--	----------

Green Future Forward: Establishing an Effective Governance and Operating Model for Allan Gardens and the Palm House Conservatory - by Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam, seconded by Councillor Mike Layton

** Notice of this Motion has been given.*

** This Motion is subject to referral to the Infrastructure and Environment Committee. A two-thirds vote is required to waive referral.*

Recommendations

Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam, seconded by Councillor Mike Layton, recommends that:

1. City Council direct the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation to establish a process to review and evaluate the governance and operating model for Allan Gardens and all assets on the park, and to do this work in consultation with park users, stakeholders, Friends of Allan Gardens and the local ward Councillor and to report back to the Infrastructure and Environment Committee in the second quarter of 2023.

Summary

Allan Gardens Park and the Conservatory is a special destination in Toronto's park system for over 150 years. The park has been a dynamic place for social change, political protest, community gathering and holds significance in the Garden District Conservation District.

Unique to Allan Gardens, the urban park is also home to 1 of 3 municipally owned conservatories. The enchanting assembly of conservatories and the historic "Palm House" offer a rare and exuberant floral display all year round. The conservatory part of Allan Gardens is unique and is actually a complex of six glasshouses, each with its own distinct climate and associated plant collection featuring orchid exotic tropical plants and cacti as well as a Children's conservatory. As a result, the conservatory is a landmark destination attracting school groups, tourists and other visitors that is free and open to the public 365 days per year (prior to COVID-19 restrictions).

The urban park offers access to greenspace for the surrounding local community and includes an off-leash dog park and a vibrant and active playground. The urban park boasts over 300 trees representing 47 species. In fact, Allan Gardens contains one of the largest parcels of parkland downtown, which historically has lacked greenspace. The park acts as a meeting space for residents of all ages and backgrounds including vulnerable populations and hosts a myriad of community events.

The urban park and the conservatory have two competing sets of pressures and needs that require individual attention and commitment. On March 22, 2018, a report was submitted to the

Parks and Environment Committee identifying the need for a governance model that would reconcile the distinct uses and expectations of the urban park and the conservatory in Allan Gardens. As of now, a comprehensive and robust governance model is yet to be determined. 'Refresh: A Vision Document for Allan Gardens' was the guiding framework for the revitalization of Allan Gardens by the City and its partners such as Friends of Allan Gardens, a registered non-profit volunteer based organization that is dedicated to the stewardship and revitalization of the park and conservatory.

The 'Refresh: A Vision Document for Allan Gardens' highlights the need to explore park governance and operation. It is important to highlight that Friends of Allan Gardens has initiated governance conversations with the City in 2017 and there is a hybrid model where Park functions are shared between the two partners. Friends of Allan Gardens has committed to providing leadership on new areas of work including programming, animation, events partnership and outreach. To date, Friends of Allan Gardens has been tirelessly working on advancing the principles of the Refresh document. The City was tasked with the responsibility of facility operations, capital delivery, park booking and staffing of both the park and conservatory. In addition, the City has undertaken comprehensive review of the state-of-good-repair of the existing facility.

Despite the ongoing efforts, the question of an effective governance model remains opaque. The competing pressures from both the urban park and conservatory is evident of the need for separate oversight by the City. Currently, the Horticulture and Greenhouse operations are solely responsible for the conservatory and the urban Park. This current model has revealed deficiencies in the operations of urban amenities such as the off leash dog area. The deterioration of the off-leash area and the outstanding issues raised by the community related to long-term health and safety impacts including structural deficiencies and lack of maintenance is a clear example of the need to separate the operations of the urban park from the conservatory.

Responsibility, oversight and maintenance of the urban park should transfer over to purview of the City's Park Branch Division within the Toronto and East York district. The responsibility and maintenance can remain solely within Greenhouses and Plant Production.

Background Information (City Council)

Member Motion MM42.21