

Progress Report on the Regent Park Swim Pilot and Engagement Efforts

Date: November 8, 2023

To: Economic and Community Development Committee

From: Acting General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation

Wards: Toronto Centre - 13

SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to provide a progress report on Parks, Forestry and Recreation's Regent Park swim pilot program.

The Regent Park swim pilot program was created in response to community feedback regarding local access to recreation services including aquatic programs at the Pam McConnell Aquatic Centre. In addition to providing access to aquatic instructional program opportunities for children aged 6-12 who reside within Regent Park, the pilot program was intended to provide youth employment readiness workshops and community engagement opportunities for local resident feedback on recreation programming in the Regent Park neighbourhood.

Given the success and popularity of the pilot program, Parks, Forestry and Recreation will continue offering it to local residents of the Regent Park community as part of the base service level in 2024. Staff will continue collaborating with the Access to Recreation Working Group as well as other members of the community to further understand recreational needs and interests, develop locally responsive programming and provide employment readiness opportunities within the community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. The Economic and Community Development Committee receive this report for information.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

During the 2019 budget process, City Council increased the 2019 operating budget for Parks, Forestry and Recreation by \$0.080 million gross and \$0 net fully funded by a one-time decrease in the 2019 Capital from Current Contribution, to develop a Regent Park swim pilot program to increase access for those experiencing complex barriers to program registration, in partnership with Lord Dufferin Junior and Senior Public School, Nelson Mandela Public School and local community organizations.

The aquatic instructional programs were paused in March 2020 due to the pandemic and resumed in April 2022. As Parks, Forestry and Recreation continues to recover to pre-pandemic service levels, the impact to deliver this program in 2024 is \$0.080 million and is included within Parks, Forestry and Recreation's Base Operating Budget.

The Interim Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial impact information.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting on December 4, 2019, the Economic and Community Development Committee directed the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation to report to the Economic and Community Development Committee with a year-end progress report on the Regent Park swim pilot program.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2019.EC10.5>

At its meeting on March 7, 2019, City Council increased the 2019 Operating Budget for Parks, Forestry and Recreation by \$80,000 gross and \$0 net to develop a Regent Park swim pilot program to be offset by a decrease in the 2019 Capital from Current Contribution of \$80,000.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2019.EX2.5>

At its meeting on January 16, 2019, the Economic and Community Development Committee directed the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation to continue to work with the Access to Recreation Working Group in Regent Park to address local access to recreation services and to provide a status report to the Economic and Community Development Committee in 2019.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2019.EC1.7>

COMMENTS

In 2019, City Council directed the implementation of a swim pilot program in the Regent Park community. The Regent Park swim pilot program was developed in collaboration with the Access to Recreation Working Group, comprised of residents and local agencies interested in strategies that facilitate greater local access to recreation programs and facilities. The program provided learn-to-swim opportunities for students attending Lord Dufferin Junior and Senior Public School and Nelson Mandela Park Public School, two schools in the Regent Park community.

Regent Park Swim Pilot Program

Planning of the pilot program began early 2019 and launched in summer 2019. The program was paused from March 2020 to March 2022 as a result of the pandemic. The program re-started in April 2022 and has been operating for a total of 19 months. The objectives of the pilot program were to:

- increase opportunities for inexperienced or new swimmers to learn aquatic competencies
- provide greater access to those experiencing barriers to traditional means of program registration
- provide opportunities for youth to gain pre-requisite certifications that lead to employment opportunities in Parks, Forestry and Recreation
- provide ongoing engagement opportunities for the Regent Park community

The pilot program was comprised of three key components:

Component 1: Learn-to-Swim

Participants are provided the opportunity to increase their knowledge of water safety and develop swimming skills in a safe environment both during and after school hours. Programs designated for girls-only and students with Autism Spectrum Disorder are also available. This program was delivered in 2019-2020 and 2022-2023.

Participation

- 1,201 students were registered in the pilot program

Successes

- Participants received an average of 4.5 hours of instruction per session
- Over 500 students participated in more than one Learn-to-Swim program
- 50 per cent of participants were in an aquatic program for the first time
- 42 per cent of participants identified as girls
- 126 youth received First Aid certification
- 100 per cent of participants reported significant improvement in swim skills and competencies

Component 2: Employment Readiness

Youth participants attend employment readiness workshops which provide the skills and certifications required to pursue part-time employment opportunities in Community Recreation, at no cost. This program was delivered in 2022-2023.

Participation

35 youth completed the Building Skills through Recreation (BSTR) employment readiness workshops in 2022 which includes free pre-employment certifications such as First Aid, resume writing and job application supports for recreation jobs, as well as workshops on communication, leadership, and problem solving.

Success

- 18 youth from the community were hired as Recreation Workers in Parks, Forestry and Recreation

Component 3: Engagement

Staff continue to collaborate with the Access to Recreation Working Group and engage with members of the community through the following:

- The first of three community consultations was held in May 2023 to further assess community needs with additional consultations scheduled to take place in 2023 and 2024
- Since 2019 a town hall was held and a community survey to garner feedback on programming opportunities, access to facilities and park spaces was distributed.

Participation

- The Access to Recreation Group originally began meeting with staff in 2017 and have been meeting on a quarterly basis since the pilot launched.
- 65 participants attended a community consultation held in May 2023
- Annual registration information sessions were held to provide information on registration and permitting space

Successes

A work plan was developed in consultation with the Access to Recreation Working Group outlining a list of shared goals and objectives. As well, an employment table was established for youth serving organizations in the community to learn about hiring processes and timelines.

Conclusion

The Regent Park swim pilot program successfully supported the development of aquatic competencies for local residents and introduced pathways to employment for local youth. Participant and caregiver feedback indicated a positive overall experience with the registration process, Learn-to-Swim program and the opportunities provided to residents to share feedback.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation will continue delivering a local Learn-to-Swim program for students attending the Lord Dufferin Junior and Senior Public School and Nelson Mandela Park Public School. As well, employment readiness support and collaboration with residents and stakeholders on developing and delivering responsive programs, services and facilities will continue to be provided to local residents of the Regent Park community, while monitoring for changing demands and trends over time.

CONTACT

Cathy Vincelli, Acting Director, Community Recreation, Parks, Forestry and Recreation
Tel. 416-392-7252 Email: Cathy.Vincelli@toronto.ca

SIGNATURE

Howie Dayton
Acting General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation