

# **Audit of Parks Branch Operations – Phase 1: Improving Oversight of Day-to-Day Maintenance Helps to Ensure City Parks are Beautiful, Clean and Safe**

**Date:** September 30, 2024

**To:** Audit Committee

**From:** Auditor General

**Wards:** All

## **SUMMARY**

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The Auditor General's 2023 Work Plan included an operational review of how the Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division manages and maintains over 1,500 parks in the City of Toronto. This report presents the first phase of the operational review, which focuses on the efficiency of daily park maintenance activities, compliance with the established service level standards, and identifying opportunities for improving how the Parks Branch performs day-to-day maintenance to help keep parks beautiful, clean, and safe.

The Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division's mission is to improve the quality of life of Toronto's diverse communities by providing safe, beautiful parks, a healthy, expanding urban forest, and high quality, community-focused recreational experiences. The Parks Branch is responsible for on-going care and maintenance of City-operated parks, including various amenities found in each park.

Our audit identifies opportunities for the Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division to improve parks crew productivity, supervision of maintenance activities and measuring the achievement of service level standards by:

- A. Leveraging technology and improving scheduling, tracking, and monitoring processes
- B. Strengthening monitoring and on-site supervision of daily maintenance activities
- C. Setting performance expectations and measuring outcomes

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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The Auditor General recommends that:

1. City Council request the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division, to fully utilize the Global Positioning System technology available, to improve parks maintenance crew productivity and to help plan, assign and monitor work by:
  - a. maximizing the amount of time spent actively working on parks maintenance activities (i.e., grass cutting, washroom cleaning, litter picking, etc.)
  - b. reducing the time spent on supporting activities where possible (i.e., driving, time spent at the yard, etc.)
  - c. minimizing non-productive time (i.e., idle time, unreported stops and breaks, etc.)
2. City Council request the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division to reinforce clear guidelines and allowances for acceptable stop times, break times, and the valid operational reasons for taking these stops and breaks.
3. City Council request the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation to:
  - a. implement monitoring and accountability procedures that include a regular review of a sample of parks maintenance crews' Daily Activity Sheets (DAS) together with the Global Positioning System (GPS) reports to verify that crews accurately record information (including locations, activities, and times) on their DAS
  - b. review additional DAS and GPS reports where issues are noted to determine whether further follow-up is needed to ascertain the accuracy and reliability of work reported on the DAS
4. City Council request the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation in collaboration with the General Manager, Fleet Services to ensure that Global Positioning System devices are installed onto all vehicles used by the Parks Branch.
5. City Council request the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation to provide additional training and ensure staff are consistently following the Division's operational policies and procedures and have a clear understanding of their responsibilities for completing the Daily Activity Sheets.
6. City Council request the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division, to require supervisory staff to conduct thorough reviews of Daily Activity Sheets to ensure crews are properly documenting their daily activities including locations, time in and out for each location, lunch/break times, tasks completed at each location, and travel time.

7. City Council request the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division, in collaboration with the Chief Technology Officer, to digitalize and modernize processes, adopting technology-enabled tools to:

- a. improve tracking, recordkeeping and monitoring of daily maintenance activities
- b. support the Parks Branch's ability to collect and analyze data to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the parks' maintenance operations

8. City Council request the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division, to strengthen supervision, monitoring and quality assurance processes over park maintenance activities by:

- a. establishing clearer guidelines for Supervisors for what should be observed when conducting on-site monitoring / review of completed parks maintenance activities
- b. providing periodic training to Supervisors on guidelines and good practices for conducting on-site monitoring
- c. ensuring on-site monitoring and observation are conducted on a surprise basis at different times of a workday for crews at work locations being reviewed
- d. summarizing and analyzing results from quality assurance reviews to identify trends or themes that indicate where more guidance, training, and supervision of crews may be warranted

9. City Council request the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division, to:

- a. review the current service level standards to ensure they are realistic and reasonable, taking into account the budget and resource constraints of the City and benchmarking against service level standards being delivered by other relevant jurisdictions
- b. create and maintain a standardized service level for each park classification
- c. develop key performance indicators to measure the achievement of the existing service level standards
- d. develop the necessary processes to periodically measure and report service level performance and to identify and address gaps between service level expectations and actual performance

## FINANCIAL IMPACT

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Addressing the recommendations in this report will enable the Parks Branch to improve crew productivity and the effectiveness and efficiency of its procedures and processes for conducting parks maintenance activities. The resulting financial implications of improved productivity and any anticipated efficiencies and/or resources needed could not be determined at the time of this report.

## DECISION HISTORY

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The Auditor General's [2023 Work Plan](#) included an operational review of how the Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division manages and maintains over 1,500 parks in the City of Toronto.

This report presents the results of the first phase of the operational review, which focused on the efficiency of daily park maintenance activities and compliance with the established service level standards.

The second phase of the audit will review the processes related to parks inspections and repairs and maintenance of various amenities in the park.

## COMMENTS

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A high-level summary of key audit findings is provided in the Audit at a Glance.

The attached audit report provides the Audit Committee and members of Council with the detailed audit results and recommendations together with management's response. Management has agreed to all nine recommendations.

## CONTACT

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## **SIGNATURE**

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Tara Anderson  
Auditor General

## **ATTACHMENTS**

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Attachment 1: Audit of Parks Branch Operations – Phase 1: Improving Oversight of Day-to-Day Maintenance Helps to Ensure City Parks are Beautiful, Clean and Safe