

Feasibility Review: Improvements to Paul Martel Park

Date: May 13, 2024

To: Infrastructure and Environment Committee

From: General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation

Wards: University-Rosedale – 11

SUMMARY

Paul Martel Park is a City park that features native-plant gardens, trees, seating areas and a gathering space. The park has a long history tied to community advocacy and stewardship and has been a gathering ground for the Indigenous group Earth Helpers Garden Inc. to conduct cultural and environmental activities with a focus on cultivation and restoration of native plants. Parks, Forestry and Recreation has worked collaboratively with Earth Helpers to improve the park and support the programming.

This report responds to member motion from the March 20, 2024 City Council meeting, requesting a feasibility study on park renaming, yurt installation, lighting improvement, raised flower beds, and a washroom facility.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. The Infrastructure and Environment Committee receives this report for information.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

The improvements noted in the feasibility study such as park renaming, yurt installation, lighting improvement, raised flower beds, and a washroom facility will have financial implications. Preliminary cost estimates are included in this report while PFR staff continue to evaluate and assess the cost associated with these improvements. PFR is reviewing potential funding opportunities and any improvements that could not be accommodated through the existing budget will need to be included in the 2025 budget submission for consideration.

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed this report and agrees with the information as presented in the Financial Impact Section.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting of March 20, 2024, City Council adopted a Member Motion requesting staff report on the feasibility, timing and potential funding to upgrade Paul Martel Park, and to enter into a License Agreement with Earth Helpers Inc.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2024.MM16.10>

COMMENTS

Background

Paul Martel Park is a small and well-loved park located on the east side of the Spadina Subway Station in the Bloor-Spadina neighbourhood. Formerly known as Ecology Park, this space became a City park in 2003 and was renamed in 2014 to commemorate Paul Martel, the community champion who designed and built the park.

In 2020, a group of Indigenous tradespeople and Elders known as Aki Wiidookaagewin (Earth Helpers) took over the restoration and maintenance of the park, including works to remove invasive species, improve soil conditions, and install an Indigenous Storytelling mural. The group also collaborated with Parks, Forestry and Recreation in recent years on an Indigenous gardening training program with the primary focus on native plant cultivation and related activities. Earth Helpers recently incorporated as a non-profit corporation.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation is finalizing a new agreement with Earth Helpers for a three-year term, renewable at the General Manager's discretion for one additional three-year term (six years total) to April 30, 2030, to facilitate Indigenous participant horticultural training, gardening and cultural programming at Paul Martel Park.

At the March 2024 City Council meeting, a Member Motion was adopted that directs Parks, Forestry and Recreation to undertake a feasibility study on the following improvements in the park:

- renaming Paul Martel Park as an Indigenous Botanical Garden
- installing a yurt or a similar meeting structure in the locked, fenced rear area for Indigenous cultural and environmental activities
- improving soil quality and reducing trampling of plant material by installing raised beds in the park and adjacent boulevard
- improving the lighting
- installing and maintaining a public toilet once the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) has completed its construction work

On April 24, 2024, City staff met with a representative from Earth Helpers onsite to further discuss the details of the requests.

Redesignating Paul Martel Park

Earth Helpers has requested that the Paul Martel Park be redesignated to more effectively communicate the function of the park to the public. Suggestions provided by Earth Helpers for consideration include Paul Martel Ecology Gardens and Paul Martel Indigenous Habitats Garden. Redesignation can be achieved through updating the park ID sign, updating the existing interpretive signage, and updating the web page.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation will continue to work with Earth Helpers, in consultation with the Indigenous Affairs Office on how best to reflect this function change through signage change, interpretive signs and website updates. The estimated cost is approximately \$2,000 to update the signage, timing pending the work with Earth Helpers and Indigenous Affairs Office; and an estimated cost of \$4,000 to update the existing interpretive sign that can be implemented in the third quarter of 2024. These costs can be accommodated within Parks, Forestry and Recreation's 2024 Operating Budget.

Installing a Yurt or Similar Meeting Structure

Earth Helpers has requested Parks, Forestry and Recreation install a yurt structure to conduct Indigenous cultural and environmental activities and staff are investigating options. Earth Helpers have expressed that an off-shelf temporary structure would fulfill the current and near future needs to deliver Indigenous cultural and environmental activities. City staff have reviewed this option and based on the size of the park and maintenance requirements and deem that a temporary structure is feasible.

The proposed temporary yurt structure measures in 17ft by 17ft. However, as yurts are not typical parks infrastructure, City staff continues to review the design and installation specifics as they must meet the City's standards for health and safety, operations, and maintenance. Ongoing monitoring is also required to assess the how the asset withstands regular public use. Depending on the use, size and design of the structure, a building permit may be required to demonstrate compliance with the Ontario Building Code and all applicable law. Parks, Forestry and Recreation will work with Toronto Building to facilitate any required approvals.

An order of magnitude estimate for supply, delivery and installation of an off-shelf yurt structure is at minimum \$30,000. Costs associated with maintaining the yurt are expected to be minimal.

There is currently no funding allocation from the 2024 Operating Budget for Parks, Forestry and Recreation for a temporary yurt structure. Parks, Forestry and Recreation will work in consultation with the Ward Councillor, to include considerations for installation of a yurt as part of the renewed collaboration with Earth Helpers Inc. and review potential funding sources through the 2025 Operating Budget process and any potential partnership opportunities.

Improving Soil Quality and Installing Raised Beds

Earth Helpers requested raised beds around the perimeter of the park to be used as visual deterrents to protect its soil quality. This request is feasible in all areas unobstructed by light poles or tree trunks.

Based on durability and cost-effectiveness, stonewall is recommended as the installation material. These walls meet Parks, Forestry and Recreation standards and typically last anywhere between twenty and thirty years. Stonewall requires significantly less excavation, which is suitable for a site with active Toronto Transit Commission's construction.

City staff continue to evaluate and assess the cost required for this improvement and is expected to have this work complete a full assessment of costs by June 2024, and any cost associated will be accommodated in Parks, Forestry and Recreation's Operating Budget. Work is anticipated to complete prior to TTC starting construction work in the fourth quarter of 2024.

Improving Lighting

Earth Helpers has indicated a need to improve lighting in the park. There are two existing light posts on the north and south end of the park. City staff have inspected and concluded that any improvements would require the complete replacement of the poles and fixtures.

The estimated cost to replace the existing light poles with new LED light fixtures is \$10,000. As there is no funding currently allocated for this work, Parks, Forestry and Recreation will review this request through the 2025 Budget Process.

Installing and Maintaining a Public Washroom

To deter public behaviours that have caused damages to the plants and soil in the park, the Earth Helpers has requested a washroom facility to protect the quality of the soil and vegetations.

TTC is planning to undertake streetcar platform extension work at the adjacent Spadina Station, which will impact Paul Martel Park. This work is anticipated to commence in the fourth quarter of 2024 and complete by the first quarter of 2027. While a permanent washroom request is not immediately feasible due to TTC's construction work, and pending Parks, Forestry and Recreation's Ten-Year Capital Budget and Plan for this park, it was determined that a portable washroom is feasible as a short- to medium-term solution.

The estimated cost of an accessible portable washroom including delivery and installation is \$378.80 per month for rental and cleaning. The cost of the portable washroom can be accommodated in Parks, Forestry and Recreation's 2024 Operating Budget and may be installed by June 2024. City staff will continue to work with Earth Helpers on a permanent washroom design solution that can be considered in future capital budgets.

Conclusion

In response to Item [2024.MM16.10](#), Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff have evaluated the feasibility of implementing changes requested to the park. Through this

feasibility review it was determined that Parks, Forestry and Recreation will continue to work with Earth Helpers and the ward councillor to:

- Redesignate of the park by updating the park ID sign, existing interpretive signage, and the web page, in consultation with the Indigenous Affairs Office in the third quarter of 2024.
- Include considerations for installation of a yurt as part of the renewed collaboration with Earth Helpers Inc. and review potential funding sources through the 2025 Operating Budget process and any potential partnership opportunities.
- Evaluate and assess the cost required to install raised beds around all areas unobstructed by light poles or tree trunks by June 2024, within Parks, Forestry and Recreation's Operating Budget.
- Review the request to replace the existing light poles with new LED light fixtures through the 2025 Budget Process.
- Install a portable washroom by June 2024 and continue to work with Earth Helpers on a permanent washroom design solution that can be considered in future capital budgets.

CONTACT

Donna Kovachis, Director, Parks, Forestry and Recreation, 416-392-7911, Donna.Kovachis@toronto.ca

Christina Iacovino, Director, Client and Business Services, Parks, Forestry and Recreation, 416-392-8578, Christina.Iacovino@toronto.ca

Jessie Gresley-Jones, Director, Capital Projects Design & Delivery, Parks, Forestry and Recreation, 416-338-8675, Jessie.Gresley-Jones@toronto.ca

SIGNATURE

Howie Dayton
General Manager, Parks Forestry and Recreation