

September 13, 2024

Infrastructure and Environment Committee
City Hall, Committee Room 1
100 Queen Street West
Toronto ON M5H 2N2

Dear Chair and Committee Members,

RE: Growing with the City - Revitalising Allan Gardens Park and Conservatory

The Friends of Allan Gardens (“FOAG”) is a volunteer -based and registered charitable organisation working to imagine and lead the revitalization of Allan Gardens. FOAG facilitates public programming focusing on conservation and stewardship and celebrating horticulture, urban agriculture, and the natural environment. FOAG operates out of the historic Children’s Conservatory, Propagation House, and the new Teaching Garden, which it manages on behalf of the City of Toronto.

Over the past years, FOAG has positioned itself as a key stakeholder, playing an active role in the diverse social network that connects, integrates, shares resources and improves the resilience and the vitality of the community. In 2022, City Council directed the General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation to enter into a management agreement and a fundraising agreement with FOAG to keep with their original visioning document “Refresh”. This document has since been updated, the updated vision, Growing with the City (Fall 2023), highlights an ecosystem of initiatives that allows the park to evolve and grow, linked to the larger city. Working transparently and collaboratively with the community, through innovative partnerships and pilot projects, they work towards transforming the park into “a community centre without walls.”

Since 2021, FOAG has expanded its programming to include arts and culture, concerts and music, and family activities including the Mudday Morning program and craft sessions. From September 2023 to August 2024, FOAG has led over 200 programs, engaging over 10,000 people, including both public participants and volunteers. Audience demographics range from children and caregivers, Toronto residents, visitors, students, gardening enthusiasts of all ages, and more. Event attendance ranges from 75 to 1000 people.

Various community members, particularly families, have expressed a need and want to access the park. Allan Gardens is still experiencing the aftermath of COVID -19. While some community activity has rebounded after the pandemic, the community network is still fragmented with isolated events. FOAG plays an important role in engaging the local neighbourhoods and diverse populations by providing unique and accessible programming in the historic Children's Conservatory, recently expanded Teaching Garden, and North Lawn.

In early 2024, FOAG received a City of Toronto Main Street Innovation Fund grant of \$50k to activate Allan Gardens. The initial pitch focused on a Winter/Off Season Farmers' Market, paired with complementary programming. This initiative has recently evolved into a Community Market Series, a weekly Saturday activation. The Community Market Series will play an important role in social and economic life by establishing links between residents and small businesses, flowing more money into the local economy, and showcasing the abundance of products, at the same time activating the park.

In order to meaningfully activate Allan Gardens over the next year, FOAG is requesting permit fees be waived for their park programming until the pending management agreement is signed. This will assist FOAG in activating the park. The General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation does not have the delegated authority to waive permit fees. Therefore, this Motion is requesting the necessary authority from City Council. This will provide the flexibility and capacity to be able to appropriately activate the park with a variety of programs in a timely manner.

FOAG's activations will provide opportunities for the diverse local community to come together, enjoy the park, and participate in unique programming. All events will be free to the public. Events will fall into three categories: Recurring Events like the Community Market Series, Single Day Events, and Passive Ongoing Activations. These events will be run by FOAG staff with FOAG volunteers. A schedule will be presented to Parks, Forestry, and Recreation and will work collaboratively to ensure successful programming.

Attachment: "Growing with the City" (PDF)

Recommendations:

1. City Council endorse “Growing with the City: An Ecosystem of Initiatives for Allan Gardens” as an addendum to the "Refresh: A Vision Document for Allan Gardens" as adopted by City Council in 2018.
2. City Council request the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation to consult with the Friends of Allan Gardens and other key community stakeholders to advance and prioritize the initiatives outlined in “Growing with the City”.
3. City Council acknowledge the ongoing work of Friends of Allan Gardens, and request the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation, along with other relevant divisions, to continue to work with the Friends of Allan Gardens to prioritise any Council-approved projects as funding and other operational resources become available.
4. City Council request the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation, to prioritise the pending Management Agreement with FOAG and Parks, Forestry and Recreation (IE31.6) and to waive applicable permit fees for community -based events led by FOAG in Allan Gardens and on adjacent parkland.

Chris Moise
City Councillor
Ward 13 - Toronto Centre

Attachment: “Growing with the City”, November 2023

CM/mh