

City Council

Motion without Notice

MM24.39	ACTION			Ward: 10
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Enhanced Water Taxi Access to Toronto Island - by Mayor Olivia Chow, seconded by Deputy Mayor Ausma Malik

** This Motion has been deemed urgent by the Chair.*

** This Motion is not subject to a vote to waive referral. This Motion has been added to the agenda and is before Council for debate.*

Recommendations

Mayor Olivia Chow, seconded by Deputy Mayor Ausma Malik, recommends that:

1. City Council authorize the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation, to negotiate and enter into licence agreements with private water taxi operators to allow operators to dock at designated locations at Toronto Island Park, for annual terms at market rates based on the existing published rate card with any inflationary or other justified rate adjustments, for the next five years (2025 to 2029), on terms and conditions acceptable to the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation, and in a form acceptable to the City Solicitor.
2. City Council direct the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation, to undertake discussions with private water taxi operators to understand any barriers related to maximizing water taxi service to and from Toronto Island Park, and to explore options for maximizing water taxi services to and from Toronto Island Park, with any outcomes of those discussions subject to future Council consideration, including any budget requirements.

Summary

Toronto Island Park is one of Toronto's top destinations, especially in the summer months, attracting approximately 1.4 million visitors each year. It is also home to Island residents and many businesses including marinas, yacht clubs and attractions.

For several years, in addition to the City's ferry services, privately operated water taxis have provided passenger transportation services to and from Toronto Island Park. In 2024, five operators with a total of 53 boats were granted licences to dock at Toronto Island Park locations. In 2023 (last year available), water taxis transported an estimated 486,066 passengers according to an operator survey conducted by the Waterfront BIA.

Licences are issued annually, expiring each year. Licence opportunities are advertised publicly on the City's website as business opportunities and are open to any supplier who meets the qualifications. The licence is for use of the City's docking locations on Toronto Island Park. Licence holders are responsible for securing mainland-side docking locations and infrastructure, and meeting Transport Canada regulations for water taxi service. Licence fees are based on market rates and advertised publicly.

With the growth in demand for water taxi services, the authority to grant licences has exceeded Parks, Forestry and Recreation's delegated authority under Municipal Code 608 to issue licences. We are recommending Executive Committee adopt a motion to provide the necessary authority, for the next five years, to issue annual licences to qualified water taxi operators. We are bringing the recommendation forward now to ensure a smooth start to the 2025 season in May.

Meanwhile, the City is acquiring two new higher-capacity ferries, currently under construction, to meet increased demand for visiting Toronto Island Park. They are expected to be delivered in late 2026 and early 2027. Prior to the arrival of the new ferries, Parks, Forestry and Recreation has been investing in ways to improve the ferry passenger experience, including improvements and upgrades in 2024, as well as responding to my motion GG14.8 passed at the July 24 and 25, 2024, meeting of City Council. That motion requested the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation, to explore opportunities to lease or otherwise retain relief vessels to provide additional service to and from Toronto Island while the new ferries are being procured.

As part of this effort, we are recommending Executive Committee also adopt a motion to give further direction to the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation, to undertake discussions with water taxi operators to understand any barriers related to maximizing water taxi service to and from Toronto Island Park and to explore options for maximizing water taxi service. Any outcomes from those discussions would be subject to future Council consideration, including any budget requirements.

Background Information (City Council)

Member Motion MM24.39