

City Council

Motion without Notice

MM24.45	ACTION			Ward: 14
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Wonscotonach Parklands Naming Review - by Councillor Paula Fletcher, seconded by Councillor Frances Nunziata

** 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

Councillor Paula Fletcher, seconded by Councillor Frances Nunziata, recommends that:

1. City Council request the General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation and the Director of the Indigenous Affairs Office, with the support of the Waterfront Secretariat and the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, to engage an Indigenous Naming Circle to review the name “Wonscotonach Parklands” for the Lower Don Parkland system and report to the Infrastructure and Environment Committee in the second quarter of 2025.

Summary

An Indigenous parkland system name for the parklands within the Lower Don River area, from the Forks of the Don area south, has long been of interest for recognizing the long-standing relationship and relevance of the river valley for Indigenous peoples. In April 2018 (PE26.4), Council unanimously adopted the recommendation to consult on the name Wonscotonach for this parkland system.

Subsequently, through language circles and pop-up community consultation on Wonscotonach, while there was interest and engaging discussion, there was no clear consensus on the meaning, spelling and connection for the name Wonscotonach for Indigenous language speakers engaged through the process. This led to an unclear direction on how to proceed.

In 2024, a new naming process, the Port Lands Indigenous Place Naming Initiative, with a guiding philosophy of Akinomaagewin (the earth as our teacher), was undertaken for the island and park name in the Port Lands at the far south end of this parkland system. Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Keepers, language speakers, youth and community members connected over seven rich and engaging circles to culminate their process with raising the name Biidaasige Park, as well as the name Ookwemin Minising for the areas. Item EX18.3 was adopted unanimously by Council in November 2024.

Through the circle discussions of the Port Lands Indigenous Place Naming Initiative, the larger context of the river and watershed were discussed and the Anishnaabemowin spelling of the likely anglicized “Wonscotonach” name for the area of the Lower Don River was shared as Waasayishkodenayosh, (bright fire point or burning bright point or a point cleared by fire).

With additional knowledge, perspectives and stories regarding Indigenous languages and names for the area coming forward, there is the opportunity to engage Indigenous communities through a language circle, to review Wonscotonach and to determine the culturally appropriate name for the Lower Don Parkland system moving forward.

Funding for this is available from the Parks, Forestry and Recreation Capital Budget for Indigenous Placemaking. A collaborative planning process for the same parkland system area with Indigenous partners is proposed to follow, and be informed by, the naming review.

This matter is considered urgent as advancing Indigenous naming is essential to meet our Truth and Reconciliation commitments and to begin the work on the Master Plan for this exciting new park.

Background Information (City Council)

Member Motion MM24.45