

Monitoring Update: Alcohol in Parks

Date: March 25, 2025

To: Economic and Community Development Committee

From: General Manager, Parks and Recreation

Wards: All

SUMMARY

In response to City Council direction ([2024.EC11.4](#)), this report presents a status update on the findings of the monitoring and evaluation from August 2, 2024 to October 20, 2024 in parks where alcohol is permitted for personal consumption.

The Alcohol in Parks Program continues with a high level of satisfaction among park visitors, with few issues arising, and minimal operational impacts across all parks included in the program.

Monitoring and evaluation findings of the parks allowing personal consumption of alcohol did not reveal any major concerns or issues. Findings showed that over 80 per cent of park visitors who responded to a survey were satisfied with their visit and felt safe and welcomed. The majority of park visitors said people drinking in parks were considerate, and there were no significant increases in service requests for amplified noise, disruptive behavior, or overflowing garbage/recycling bins, nor an increase in calls to Toronto Police Services, including in parks most recently included in the program. Moving forward as a permanent program, staff will address any issues that may emerge related to the program through established channels and processes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The General Manager, Parks and Recreation recommends that:

1. The Economic and Community Development Committee receive this report for information.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There are no financial impacts resulting from the adoption of the recommendations in this report.

Operational impacts of allowing alcohol in parks will continue to be monitored by Divisions and accommodated within the existing budgets, and any new or emerging financial impacts will be addressed through future budget processes, as needed.

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial implications as identified in the Financial Impact section.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meetings on April 17 and 18, 2024, City Council approved 45 parks where personal alcohol consumption is allowed on a permanent basis, with restrictions for health and safety, approved an administrative process to add and remove parks to Schedule A of Chapter 608, such that at least one park in each Ward is designated for the personal alcohol consumption; and directed the General Manager, Parks and Recreation (formerly "Parks, Forestry and Recreation") to continue to monitor and evaluate park locations where alcohol is permitted for personal consumption and report the Economic and Community Development Committee in 2025 with a status update.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2024.EC11.4>

At its meeting on November 8, 2023, City Council amended Toronto Municipal Code Chapter 608, Parks, to prohibit alcohol consumption within two metres around artificial and natural ice rinks for the Alcohol in Parks pilot extension.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2023.CC12.15>

At its meeting on October 11, 2023, City Council approved an extension of the Alcohol in Parks Pilot Program; and directed the General Manager, Parks and Recreation to consult with Councillors part of the pilot program on their interest in opting out of the extended pilot and report to City Council at its November 2023 meeting on amendments to Toronto Municipal Code Chapter 608, Parks, to implement an updated pilot park list based on consultations conducted and additional safety restrictions for winter.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2023.MM11.22>

At its meeting on July 19, 2023, City Council approved a time-limited Alcohol in Parks Pilot Program, from August 2, 2023 to October 9, 2023, in 27 parks; and directed the General Manager, Parks and Recreation to report to the Economic and Community Development Committee on the evaluation results of the pilot program in the first quarter of 2024.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2023.EC5.1>

At its meeting on May 10, 2023, City Council directed the General Manager, Parks and Recreation to: (1) consult interested councillors on hosting a pilot park in their ward and, (2) consult the Executive Director, Municipal Licensing and Standards, the City Solicitor and the Medical Officer of Health, to report to the July 6, 2023 meeting of the Economic and Community Development Committee with a recommended approach, including required by-law amendments, for a pilot from August 5, 2023 to October 9, 2023, that was informed by experiences of Canadian jurisdictions, and considered public health, public safety, enforcement, operations and cost; (3) in consultation with the Medical Officer of Health report on harm reduction, treatment or education programs that should

be in place prior to the approval and implementation of any pilot location; and (4) provide Councillors with a list of parks most suited to be in the pilot in each ward. <https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2023.DM6.5>

COMMENTS

In 2023, City Council approved a pilot program that allowed people aged 19 and over to consume their own alcoholic beverages at select City parks. Following a successful pilot and winter extension, City Council approved a permanent alcohol in parks program and confirmed that at least one park in each City ward will be designated for personal alcohol consumption, with restrictions for safety and/or sensitive use areas, including: outdoor swimming pools or decks, playgrounds, wading pools, splash pads, skateboard parks, and ice rinks.

Following City Council's adoption of a permanent program in April 2024, staff updated the program website and signs to include the parks recently included in the program. Starting in Spring 2025, staff will begin transitioning from program specific signs and will update park entrance signs to indicate that personal alcohol use is allowed in the park.

Monitoring and Evaluation

After reporting on the evaluation of the pilot program in April 2024, City Council directed staff to continue to monitor and evaluate park locations where alcohol is permitted for personal consumption including new parks added since the pilot. Similar to the evaluation approach used for the pilot program, multiple data collection methods and sources were used once again to assess park use and access, park experience and cleanliness, safety, and the communication of program rules for the parks included in the program. Data was collected during approximately the length of time as the pilot, using consistent questions and methods.

Method and Data Sources

A number a data sources were used as part of monitoring and evaluation. The online public park experience survey reopened from August 1, 2024, to October 20, 2024, to collect feedback from park users and adjacent neighbours about their experiences at parks allowing the personal consumption of alcohol. The survey was promoted on the City of Toronto's webpage, and links to the survey were provided on park signage via QR code. A social media campaign targeted people who live and work around parks that had been recently added to the program since the pilot launched to further promote public feedback. A total of 683 respondents participated in the survey, and 560 of those respondents said they visited a park allowing personal alcohol consumption. Despite promoting the survey in areas with parks new to the program since the pilot, only 58 of the 560 park visitors said they visited one of the recently added parks to the Program.

Administrative data was also collected, including service calls from Toronto Police Service and 311 service requests for amplified noise, disruptive behavior, and overflowing recycling/garbage bins.

Key Findings

A summary of the evaluation findings can be found in Appendix 1. Key evaluation findings include:

- Park visitors' satisfaction with their park visit continues to be high at 87 per cent, and the majority of parks, including recently added parks, received a satisfaction rating of over 80 per cent. The majority of survey respondents did not see or experience any issues.
- The primary reasons people visited a park continues to be because it is the park they usually go to and to socialize and enjoy nature. The majority (88 per cent) visited their park either by foot, bike or transit.
- Overall, park visitors felt safe (85 per cent) and welcomed (82 per cent), and 73 per cent of park visitors said people drinking alcohol in parks were considerate.
- The majority of park visitors (83 per cent) agreed that the park they visited was clean.
- Data from 311 shows that there were no major issues or concerns. Service requests for amplified noise, garbage/recycling bins, and behaviour in parks where alcohol is allowed decreased on average in 2024 compared to the same time period in 2023.
 - It is important to note that it is not possible to determine a direct correlation between 311 service requests and allowing personal consumption of alcohol in parks, as there are many factors that can influence the number of service requests, including weather, special events, and public gatherings.
 - Municipal Licensing and Standards did not issue any tickets related to alcohol in these parks.
- Toronto Police Service data showed no notable differences in calls for service attended in the parks compared to before the program, and no tickets were issued related to alcohol.

Conclusion

The Alcohol in Parks Program continues with a high level of satisfaction among park visitors, few issues arising, and minimal operational impacts across all parks included in the program.

Monitoring and evaluation findings of the parks allowing personal consumption of alcohol did not reveal any major concerns or issues. Findings showed that over 80 per cent of park visitors who responded to a survey were satisfied with their visit and felt safe and welcomed. Most park visitors said people drinking alcohol in parks were considerate, and there were no significant increases in service requests for amplified noise, disruptive behavior, or overflowing garbage/recycling bins, nor an increase in calls to Toronto Police Services, including in parks most recently included in the program. Moving forward as a permanent program, staff will address any issues that may emerge related to the program through established channels and processes.

CONTACT

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SIGNATURE

Howie Dayton
General Manager, Parks and Recreation

ATTACHMENTS

Appendix 1: Monitoring and Evaluation Findings

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Park Use and Access

Park use and access were similar to the 2023 pilot, where survey respondents said they visited the park because it is their usual park or to relax and enjoy nature.

- Of the 683 survey participants, 560 (84 per cent) said they visited a park allowing personal alcohol consumption.
- The top reasons for visiting a park included that they usually go to that park (60 per cent), to relax and enjoy nature (52 per cent), and to socialize/gather with friends (49 per cent).
- About a third of respondents said they visited the park to enjoy an alcoholic beverage.
- The majority of park visitors who responded to the survey travelled to the park by foot (55 per cent), transit (19 per cent), or bike or scooter (14 per cent); 10 per cent drove to the park. These findings were similar to the pilot.

Park Experience

Park visitors' satisfaction was high at over 80 per cent for most parks, including new parks. The majority of survey respondents did not see or experience any issues, and 311 data shows that service requests for amplified noise in 2024 decreased on average compared to the same time period in 2023.

- **Satisfaction** was high: 87 per cent of park visitors who responded to the survey said they were satisfied with their park visit, including 59 per cent who were very satisfied. This is similar to the findings from the pilot period.
- The majority of parks received a satisfaction rating of over 80 per cent.
 - 83 per cent of survey respondents who visited one of the recently added parks said they were satisfied with their park visit.
- 83 per cent of park visitors who completed the survey agreed or felt neutral that being able to enjoy an alcoholic drink in a park improved their park experience. This is similar to the findings from the pilot period.
- **311 data shows that service requests for amplified noise in 2024 decreased on average compared to the same time period in 2023.**
 - Of the 60 service requests received, only nine were in recently added parks since the pilot.
 - There was an average of 1.1 service requests for amplified noise in parks that allow personal consumption of alcohol from August 1 to October 20, 2024 (a total of 60 in 15 of the 54 parks) compared to 2.1 service requests for noise per park in a similar time period in 2023 (56 in 11 out of 27 pilot parks) in 2023.
 - It is important to note that it is not possible to determine a direct correlation between 311 service requests and allowing personal consumption of alcohol in parks, as there are many factors that can influence the number of service requests, including weather, special events, and public gatherings.

Park Cleanliness

The majority of park visitors (83 per cent) agreed that the park they visited was clean. Service requests for overflowing garbage/recycle bins were relatively low and comparable to 2023.

- Most park visitors (83 per cent) agreed the parks they visited were clean; however, 17 per cent stated they saw more litter than usual in the park area of their community, compared to eight per cent in 2023. Nonetheless service requests for overflowing garbage/recycling bins decreased on average compared to the same time period in 2023.
- Over the evaluation period, there were 13 service requests for overflowing garbage/recycling bins in 11 of the 54 parks allowing alcohol consumption (compared with 11 service requests in 8 out of 27 pilot parks in 2023). Eight of the 13 service requests were in new parks. Solid Waste Management Services responds to each call within 24 hours.
- At the remaining 43 parks, no 311 calls related to garbage/recycling bins were received.

Safety

Park visitors reported feeling safe and welcome, with the majority agreeing that people drinking in parks were considerate. Data from 311 and Toronto Police Service data supports that there were no major issues or concerns.

- Survey respondents who visited parks said they felt safe (85 per cent) and welcomed (82 per cent) at the park they visited.
- The majority of survey respondents (74 per cent) said they did not see or experience any issues in the park area of their community as a result of drinking in parks, compared to 89 per cent in 2023.
- There were nine service requests in five parks for disruptive behavior over the evaluation period compared with three in 2023; one of the service requests was in a recently added park. Based on 311 call details, however, the service requests were not linked to alcohol consumption. Municipal Licensing and Standards did not issue any tickets related to these service requests.
- In addition, 90 per cent of park visitors agreed or felt neutral that people drinking in parks were considerate. This is similar to findings from the pilot, when 93 per cent of people agreed or felt neutral.
- Toronto Police Service data showed no notable differences in calls for service attended in the parks compared to before the program, and no tickets were issued related to alcohol.

Communication of Rules and Guidelines

Similar to during the pilot, the majority of survey respondents knew where to find information on the program and found the website clear; however, fewer were aware of when and where drinking was not allowed (i.e. park hours and restricted areas).

- Most survey respondents (70 per cent) agreed information on the program website was clear, and 67 per cent said they knew how to find information about the program and parks. Just over half (56 per cent) said information on signs was easy to understand.
- Only 40 per cent of survey respondents said they knew when drinking was allowed in parks, and 39 per cent said they knew where within parks they were not allowed to drink.
- Respondents who said they visited parks were more likely to agree with statements regarding clear communications than those who said they did not visit a park allowing the personal consumption of alcohol.