

To: Members of the Economic and Community Development Committee

**Re: EC 19.3**

Dear Councillors,

I write as the volunteer project manager/fundraiser when the first three park wood-fired bake ovens were built -- in 1995 and 2000 at Dufferin Grove and in 2000 at Christie Pits. That third oven was relocated to Fairmount Park on a flatbed truck in 2018. All three ovens were built in close collaboration with city staff, i.e. they were a partnership. In 2010, some bake oven recreation staff of the time, with my help, started a website called [publicbakeovens.ca](http://publicbakeovens.ca), which documents most of the existing park ovens.

Will the new policy reverse the fourteen-year decline in oven use that resulted in part from the previous policy? We'll see if this report can start the fix.

The secret remedy: breaking down the communication barrier that almost amounts to a firewall, between city staff and the friends of the individual ovens. I'm glad that this report made a start.

***My comments on the report:***

**COST TO THE COMMUNITY:**

Changing the permit cost to \$0 lines up with the mayor's action relating to other community permits. Good.

Insurance cost: still a minimum of \$33.48 every time. That cost should be covered by the city, IF it turns out that the risk to blocking community oven use is higher than the risk of damage claims for personal injury. The number and kind of actual claims need to be examined.

**OVEN TRAINING:**

Wood-fired bake ovens are hands-on, and there's a learning curve. For oven users, the formula "each one teach one" is the basis of good practice. The report recommends a better video, but that won't fix much. To learn how to cook and bake in a wood-fired oven, and help others, you need to get smoky.

For ovens without enough bakers for mutual help, the city can issue service contracts to experienced public-oven bakers.

Alternatively, experienced public-oven bakers on staff, if available, could be assigned to help with community use at some ovens.

**CITY PROGRAMS USING THE OVENS**



Oven programs used by city staff, for summer camps, public pizza days, etc., can't be run just by part-time youth staff as they are now. At Dufferin Grove, substantial oven damage was done last summer by teenage staff who lacked experience and supervision. City oven staff need to learn by experience and be well-supervised.

#### DATA COLLECTION

This is an area with a lot of room for improvement. The city report gives total income for only 4 ovens out of 10. My FOI application to discover the number of park outdoor-oven permits over the past 20 year was assessed a staff-search fee **\$1050**. (I dropped the question.) Oven permit usage should be available through Open Data from now on, in a similar way that staff Pcard use is now. That way, the effect of the new oven rules can be assessed quickly.

#### WHAT'S NEXT:

The report recommends adding a new player to the small world of oven friends: The non-profit **Park People** is to work with staff to create a *"Bake Ovens Champions Reference Group."* I assume this would be a consulting contract.

Rather than adding another layer, a working group could be created, including existing friends of public ovens and the Policy Development unit that has been doing the research since last July.

#### THE WORK THAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

By issuing service contracts for experienced oven friends, and tracking down any experienced city oven staff that still remain, it should be possible, in cooperation with policy development staff, to gather some rich oven-use data over the next year. This working group would have the task of both supporting oven use and monitoring the benefits/drawbacks of the new policy. A one-year follow-up report in April 2026 would be just in time.

Yours truly,

Jutta Mason

CELOS researcher

