

Community & Emergency Services
Kate Bassil, Deputy City Manager

Parks & Recreation
City Hall
100 Queen St. W.
Toronto, Ontario M5H 2N2

Tel: 416-392-8952
tom.azouz@toronto.ca
www.toronto.ca/parks

July 22, 2025

Mr. John Elvidge, City Clerk
City Clerk's Office
100 Queen Street West
12th Floor, West Tower
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

Dear Mr. Elvidge,

RE: Administrative Inquiry Regarding Parks and Recreation Funding Allocation

Councillor Matlow submitted an Administrative Inquiry to seek information regarding the increase to the Operating Budget for Parks and Recreation of \$2.0 million gross and net to provide locally responsive programming for youth in priority neighbourhoods. This letter provides a response to this request.

Introduction

At its meeting on February 14, 2024, City Council adopted the Mayor's Budget which included the 2024 Operating Budget for Parks, Forestry, and Recreation (now Parks and Recreation' – "PR").

The 2024 Operating Budget for Parks and Recreation included an increase of \$2.0 million gross and net to provide locally responsive programming for youth in priority neighbourhoods. This new investment was intended to:

- Increase the number of community recreation programmers to engage, outreach, and organize recreational and cultural programs;
- Increase and further support the Leadership and Employment Readiness Certification Program in order to increase leadership and employment opportunities in roles such as lifeguards, sports and camp counsellors for youth from these neighborhoods; and
- Re-instate hybrid registration to increase youth access to programming through a process that allows registrations in person locally in each new community centre before moving registration online.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2024.MPB15.1>

Response

Please find below responses to each of the questions submitted.

Question 1. How have these allocated funds been spent to advance the Mayor's stated priorities?

Response: Parks and Recreation took a phased approach to the implementation of this initiative to ensure the necessary consultation, planning and preparations were undertaken throughout the ongoing development of the program.

Phase 1: In 2024, approximately \$0.2M was spent to support the following key activities:

- Internal and external consultations to inform program design
- Development of a youth program framework which ensured input from local youth and groups who work with youth.
- Launch of Phase 1 locally responsive youth programs at two locations in late 2024.
- Delivery and expansion of Building Skills Through Recreation (BSTR), which supports the skill development of youth and connects them to City employment opportunities.

Phase 2: In 2025, PR allocated \$1.5M to support the following activities:

- Refining the Phase 1 model for expansion to 10 locations in Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs) across the city, among other streams, as described below:
- Development and implementation of weekly Community Youth Nights programs in NIAs.
 - There are currently five locations activated, with another five locations being activated by September 2025.
 - This program extends service hours on select nights from 7 p.m. to 11 p.m. to serve local youth and youth-led groups with a barrier free, safe space for passive and active recreation, including a meal and opportunities to access to employment and skill building workshops with local agencies and groups.
- Establishment of a Youth Hub, "Youth Space of Excellence" by repurposing a 10,000 square foot formerly Toronto Employment and Social Services office space in the Regent Park Community Centre.
 - The space is centered on locally responsive needs, including creative and media space, and space to support youth-led social enterprises and start-ups.
 - The space was activated in July 2025 and is operational. Further refinements to the space will be implemented to respond to the needs of users.
- Expanded delivery of BSTR program to approximately 20% more youth, especially NIA residents, including targeted hiring of local youth for local recreation job opportunities.
- Locally hiring up to 60 part-time rec staff to deliver locally responsive community pop up sports and special events in all districts, including NIAs.
- Hiring of up to 10 full-time staff to support the ongoing delivery of these spaces with an increase to staffing as the program and scope is expanded.

Further work is underway to establish additional certification, employment readiness, and recruitment opportunities for local youth, leveraging the balance of funds in 2025, in partnership with local agencies and service providers.

This will ensure employment readiness for youth in NIAs, ahead of the 2026 hiring period, which will get underway in Q1-2026. The 2026 hiring period will aim to represent the most local and youth-focused development, hiring and placement process PR has ever implemented.

Question 2. What positions have been created and hired for to assist with these programs? Have any front-line unionized community recreation workers been hired?

Response: Since mid-2024, two dedicated full-time staff leads have been in place to support the development and implementation of a locally responsive youth framework. Their work facilitates collaboration and assessment of local needs to ensure responsiveness to community-specific demands and service needs.

In 2024, as part of Phase 1, 12 part-time recreation worker positions were established and hired to support the initial launch of the two locally responsive youth program locations.

In 2024, City staff also held a job competition to hire 10 interim full-time positions to support the delivery of this initiative. The competition was subsequently paused following initial stakeholder consultation to allow additional feedback and consultation and time to establish the program vision and outcomes. This required a thorough needs assessment to establish full-time staffing needs, which PR conducted in late 2024 and into 2025. With the needs assessment now complete, the hiring process for these positions will resume in Q3 of 2025.

In 2025, with the full launch of all 10 locations in Phase 2, staffing levels will increase to 60 part-time recreation workers and up to 10 full-time staff will be hired to support this initiative.

Question 3. How have local communities been consulted for the development of any additional programming? Are there any records from those consultations?

Response. Site selection and implementation for the Youth Nights initiative were informed through consultations with local youth, organizations, and City partners, including Social Development and Toronto Community Housing Corporation. Site selection was also aligned with SafeTO zones and NIAs, PR's Free Centres, and indicators outlined in PR Equity Index Tool.

Local communities have been directly consulted through a range of engagement methods to inform the development of additional programming and to ensure decisions are responsive to the unique needs and priorities of each community.

Engagement methods included post-program debriefs with staff, feedback surveys, and community meetings with local youth-serving organizations. Critically, youth-led programming is itself an additional avenue for ongoing engagement - helping to build trust and co-create future recreational opportunities based on community input and to connect youth to other opportunities such as employment.

Records from these consultations are used to guide and inform ongoing program development.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom Azouz". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of each word being capitalized and prominent.

Tom Azouz
Interim General Manager
Parks and Recreation

cc: Kate Basil, Deputy City Manager, Community and Emergency Services