

Authorization to Amend and Extend the License Agreement with High Park Initiatives

Date: April 23, 2025

To: Infrastructure and Environment Committee

From: General Manager, Parks and Recreation and Executive Director, Corporate Real Estate Management

Wards: Ward 4 - Parkdale-High Park

SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to seek approval from City Council to amend and extend an existing license agreement with High Park Initiatives (HPI), the registered charity which operates the High Park Nature Centre in the High Park Forest School building and offers year-round nature-based programming throughout the park. The recommendations in this report will enable HPI to continue its programming while addressing operational impacts from recent and planned capital improvements in the park. These improvements include a renovation to the Forest School building and the completion of an outdoor nature education space adjacent to the Forest School. This report recommends amending the licensed area to formalize HPI's current use of the outdoor nature education space as well as the building at 440 Parkside Drive, which will house HPI's operations during the Forest School renovation. This report also recommends adjusting HPI's annual license fee and extending the term of the license.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The General Manager of Parks and Recreation and Executive Director, Corporate Real Estate Management recommends that:

1. City Council authorize the General Manager, Parks and Recreation, in consultation with Executive Director, Corporate Real Estate Management, to extend the existing License Agreement with High Park Initiatives (HPI) governing the use of the High Park Forest School for a term of 10 years from August 1, 2025 to July 31, 2035, with an option to extend for an additional 10 years to July 31, 2045, and to amend the Agreement to address the licensed area and license fees, substantially on terms and conditions as described in Attachment 1 to this report, and on such other terms and conditions deemed appropriate by the General Manager, Parks and Recreation, and Executive Director, Corporate Real Estate Management, and in form and content satisfactory to the City Solicitor.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

HPI currently pays the City a license fee of \$12,000 per year, which was established in 2015 for HPI's use of the Forest School building. Under the amended license agreement, the fee will increase to \$18,800 per year, which is the 2015 fee adjusted for inflation (\$15,300), plus cost recovery for services provided to HPI for use of 440 Parkside Drive (\$3,500). The amended license fee will take effect on August 1, 2025 and be adjusted for inflation annually at rate of 2%.

During months when HPI must vacate the Forest School building due to construction (an estimated eight-month period), the license fee will be prorated to \$292 per month to exclude the Forest School portion of the fee while maintaining HPI's payment for use of 440 Parkside Drive. Potential financial impact resulting from this will be accommodated within Parks and Recreation's Operating Budget.

The amended license will continue to allow HPI to raise and contribute third-party funds for capital improvements to the licensed facilities.

The 2025-2034 Capital Budget and Plan for Parks and Recreation includes \$6.4 million for the High Park Nature Centre Renovation sub-project (of the \$6.6 million approved project cost), in the Special Facilities project, funded from the following sources: \$0.723 million contribution from HPI (of the total \$0.775 million approved), \$4.3 million from the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program (ICIP), which is cost shared between the federal and provincial governments (of the total \$4.4 million approved); and the balance of \$1.4 million from city funding. There is no impact from the amended license agreement to this capital project and to the 2025-2034 Capital Budget and Plan.

The City will continue to provide the maintenance and State of Good Repair required for the licensed area.

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 meeting of May 22 and 23, 2024, City Council authorized the General Manager, Parks and Recreation to accept a donation from High Park Initiatives to implement an outdoor classroom and publicly accessible nature education space adjacent to the High Park Forest School building:

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2024.IE13.5>

At its meeting of October 2, 3, and 4, 2017, City Council authorized the General Manager, Parks and Recreation to extend a license agreement with High Park Initiatives governing the use of the High Park Forest School and to amend the agreement to enable a fundraising campaign for the improvements to the Forest School:

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2017.PE21.3>

COMMENTS

High Park Initiatives (HPI) is a registered charity and not-for-profit organization which operates the High Park Nature Centre. HPI offers a mix of free and paid nature-based programming for all ages, including walks, workshops, camps, school trips and special programs. HPI attracts 14,000 participants to its programs annually and is self-sustaining through program fees, grants, and donations.

In 2015, HPI moved the High Park Nature Centre from its original location at 440 Parkside Drive into the High Park Forest School building. The move provided more space for HPI's programs, which had outgrown the Parkside Drive facility.

The original High Park Forest School was established by the Toronto School Board and Department of Public Health in 1914 to provide outdoor education and meals for malnourished children exposed to cholera and tuberculosis. The current building was constructed in 1932, but the school board programs ceased in the 1960s. While habitable, the Forest School does not meet Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) requirements and has outdated washrooms and other aging infrastructure, which limits its potential as a programming space.

Beginning with a feasibility study in 2016, HPI and the City have been working collaboratively to advance a renovation to the Forest School building to improve accessibility, energy efficiency, and programming capacity, while protecting the building's heritage value. The renovation, which is being delivered by Parks and Recreation (PR), includes a public visitor centre within the building's existing footprint that would provide park information and interpretation to visitors.

This vision for an improved High Park Visitor and Nature Centre has been supported by a capital fundraising campaign led by HPI in collaboration with the City. The campaign has raised over \$5.2 million to-date, including \$0.775 million from HPI and a \$4.4 million contribution from the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program (ICIP), which is cost shared between the federal and provincial governments. This ICIP funding has enabled the first phase of the building renovation, with construction expected to begin in Fall 2025.

HPI will be required to vacate the Forest School building for a portion of the construction period and plans are in place to mitigate impacts to HPI's programming and operations. This includes construction timelines that will allow HPI to run full-capacity summer camps, which is a significant revenue driver for the organization, and facilitating a temporary move of HPI's offices into the 440 Parkside Drive facility, which HPI currently uses as a satellite programming location.

This report recommends adding the 440 Parkside Drive facility to HPI's licensed area to formalize HPI's current use of the space, enable HPI's temporary move during the Forest School renovation, and create a formal pathway for future shared uses of the facility, including by Indigenous-led groups who are active in High Park, through HPI's existing Space Sharing Policy.

Outdoor spaces in the park are also critical to the success of HPI's programming. Through a collaboration with PR and the Environment, Climate and Forestry Division (ECF), HPI developed an outdoor nature education space called the Outdoor Urban Restoration Space ("OURSpace") just south of the Forest School building. OURSpace has provided hands-on education about nature and helped to restore turf areas back to High Park's natural state with native plantings associated with the locally rare black oak savannah. In 2024, OURSpace was expanded through a \$75,000 donation from HPI. The expansion provides additional educational opportunities while reducing foot traffic into environmentally sensitive areas. The expansion leveraged existing work already being completed by PR and ECF to upgrade various trails and fences in High Park.

This report recommends adding the expanded OURSpace to the licensed area to formalize HPI's non-exclusive use of the space for programming and HPI's ongoing collaboration with the City for stewardship of the re-naturalized areas. OURSpace has been and will remain open and accessible to the public.

The amendments recommended in this report are further described in Attachment 1 to this report.

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SIGNATURE

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ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 - Amendments to the License Agreement with High Park Initiatives (HPI)

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Item	Existing License	Amendment
Licensed Area	HPI has non-exclusive use of the High Park Forest School building, located at 375 Colborne Lodge Drive.	Add non-exclusive use of the outdoor nature education space ("OURSpace") located adjacent to the Forest School building. Add non-exclusive use of the building located at 440 Parkside Drive (excluding the public washrooms). Add language to allow for future agreement amendments during the term, as deemed appropriate by the General Manager, Parks and Recreation, to address HPI's use of the Licensed Area following the renovation of the Forest School building, including to address operations of a new Visitor Centre, implementation of a temporary event rentals policy, and future shared uses of the 440 Parkside facility.
License Fee	\$12,000 +HST per year (established in 2015), paid in 12 equal monthly installments.	Adjust to \$18,800 +HST per year, which includes \$15,300 for use of the Forest School and \$3,500 for use of 440 Parkside Drive. The fee will be paid in equal monthly installments*, beginning on August 1, 2025, and adjusted for inflation annually thereafter at a rate of 2%. * During months when HPI must vacate the Forest School building due to construction (an estimated eight-month period), the license fee will be prorated to \$292 per month to exclude the Forest School portion of the fee while maintaining HPI's payment for use of 440 Parkside Drive.