

## **Response to Information Request Related to Solid Waste Trucks for IE22.5 – Authorized Vehicles in Parks Report**

**Date:** September 12, 2025

**To:** Infrastructure and Environment Committee

**From:** General Manager, Parks and Recreation

**Wards:** All

### **SUMMARY**

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This report provides information requested by City Council on the number of solid waste trucks used in parks, where the trucks are required to drive on the turf to pick up waste in parks, and the estimated costs from the Parks and Recreation budget to repair turf.

Solid Waste Management Services (SWMS) provides waste collection services to approximately 1,175 parks across the city with a total fleet of 33 small waste collection vehicles. In most parks, waste can be collected without entering the park or by staying on paved pathways within the park. In certain situations, SWMS operators are required to temporarily drive off the paved surfaces to access waste bins and/or to avoid pedestrians and cyclists using the paved paths. In 186 parks (15.8 per cent of total parks serviced), waste station locations require operators to travel outside of paved pathways for waste collection.

The majority of turf repairs due to solid waste trucks are minor to medium in scale. The estimated cost from the Parks and Recreation budget for a minor repair is approximately \$500, for a medium repair approximately \$1000, and for a large repair approximately \$2500 or more. There are very few instances of large-scale turf damage in parks.

SWMS and Parks and Recreation continue to work together on new park designs to minimize or eliminate the need for waste collection vehicles to travel off paved pathways.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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The General Manager, Parks and Recreation recommends that:

1. The Infrastructure and Environment Committee receive this report for information.

## **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

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

Minor and medium turf repairs are included in the overall parkland maintenance operating budget of Parks and Recreation.

Costs for any new park designs to minimize or eliminate the need for waste collection vehicles to travel off paved pathways is included through the 2025-2034 Capital Budget and Plan for Parks and Recreation.

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**

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At its meeting on June 26, 2025, City Council directed the General Manager, Parks and Recreation and the General Manager, Fleet Services, working with other relevant Division Heads, to implement Updated and Consolidated Guidance on Vehicle Operation in Parks by: (1) Updating template terms and conditions for future third-party agreements; (2) Developing public communications about vehicle operation in parks; (3) Identifying opportunities for enhanced reporting of damage caused by vehicles in parks through the Parks/311 integration; and (4) Developing and rolling out an enhanced training module for City Fleet operators and a staff education campaign on vehicle operation in parks; and to report to Infrastructure and Environment Committee in the fourth quarter 2025 on implementation progress and standard timelines for repairing damage caused by vehicles in parks. City Council also directed the General Manager, Parks and Recreation to report to the September 26, 2025 meeting of the Infrastructure and Environment Committee with information on the number of solid waste trucks used in parks, where the trucks are required to drive on the turf to pick up waste in parks, and the estimated costs from the Parks and Recreation budget to repair these turfs.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2025.IE22.5>

At its meeting on July 24 and 25, 2024, City Council requested the General Manager, Parks and Recreation (formerly Parks, Forestry and Recreation) and the General Manager, Fleet Services Division, in consultation with other relevant City divisions and the Toronto Police Service, to report to the Infrastructure and Environment Committee in the first quarter 2025 on a review of standard operating procedure that governs the use

of permitted vehicles under Chapter 608 of the Toronto Municipal Code in areas of City-owned parks without formal road systems, and to provide an update on efforts to acquire and implement alternative vehicle and equipment types (such as Kei trucks, golf karts, cargo bicycles, and handcarts) for work functions that occur in City parks. <https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2024.IE15.7>

At its meeting on June 10, 2014, City Council adopted criteria to determine when special event permits may allow for temporary parking in areas within parks that are not designated for parking and authorized the General Manager of Parks and Recreation to apply criteria. <https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2014.PE27.3>

## COMMENTS

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### Introduction

Parks and Recreation (PR) manages over 1,500 parks, encompassing over 8,000 ha of land across the City of Toronto. Solid Waste Management Services (SWMS) provides waste collection services to approximately 1,175 parks across the city, servicing from one to 100 waste station locations in each park (other parks do not require or cannot accommodate waste bins in the park). This report provides information requested by City Council on the number of solid waste trucks used in parks, where the trucks are required to drive on the turf to pick up waste in parks, and the estimated costs from the PR budget to repair damaged turf.

### Solid Waste Vehicles in City Parks

Within the SWMS fleet, 33 vehicles are dedicated to servicing waste (garbage, Blue Bin recycling, and Green Bin organics) bins in parks. These vehicles collect waste with a specific servicing schedule for each park, which can range between one and 11 times per week depending on the site-specific amenities, bin usage, seasonal activities in the park, and the time of year.

### *Waste Collection from the Street*

In many parks, waste stations are positioned near entrances or along perimeter pathways, allowing for efficient servicing without the need for vehicles to enter the park interior. As such, these parks do not require collection vehicles to drive within the park itself, as the bins can be accessed from the street for servicing.

### *Waste Collection via Paved Park Paths*

For parks that require waste station locations within the park itself, SWMS and PR Divisions work together to determine optimal locations for bin placement that balance accessibility, efficiency, and the protection of park assets, including turf.

When SWMS vehicles must enter parks for collection, operators are trained to minimize impact to soft surfaces (e.g., turf, sand, soil) by staying on paved paths as much as possible, avoiding sharp turns that may damage turf edges, and refraining from driving

on soft ground during wet or snowy conditions. When waste station locations are not accessible by paved pathway but are within walking distance, operators must stop the vehicle on the paved area, walk to the bins, and bring them to the vehicle to empty.

### ***Situations Where SWMS Vehicles Leave Paved Paths***

In some areas and instances, SWMS vehicles must temporarily leave the paved pathways and drive on soft ground to service waste stations located within parks. These include:

- *Narrow Paved Pathways*: Areas where the vehicles do not completely fit on the paved pathway. This situation often occurs in parks where the paved paths have not been updated to the current standard width of three metres.
- *Remote Bin Placement*: Areas where waste stations are located a significant distance (at least 150 ft one-way) from a paved pathway to meet park needs (e.g., to serve large sports fields, picnic areas), so operators must drive on soft ground to access the bins.
- *Clustered Waste Station Locations with Limited Path Access*: Areas where many waste stations are located a significant distance from the paved pathway and there is an operational efficiency to enable waste collection from multiple bins in a single trip by driving on the grass.
- *High Pedestrian and Cyclist Usage on Paved Pathways*: In instances where waste stations are located along paved pathways that are heavily used by pedestrians and cyclists; it is safer for operators to drive the vehicle partially or fully on adjacent soft ground, when conditions allow.
- *Encountering Pedestrians and Cyclists on Paved Pathways*: Encountering pedestrians or cyclist on a paved pathway, may require an operator to safely pull the vehicle over, either partially or fully, onto soft ground for a short distance and time to allow them to pass.
- *Incomplete or Transitional Path Infrastructure*: Areas where a paved path does not extend fully through a park, such as a park that terminates at a sidewalk and there is a grass boulevard on the street side, or a path that changes from pavement to dirt or gravel where operators must drive on soft ground.

Even in these areas and instances, weather conditions are a factor in determining whether operators drive off path to collect from the bins. When conditions are wet and grass is saturated, operators either walk to the waste stations that would otherwise require them to drive on the grass or return later to collect the bin if it is not accessible or not full.

SWMS has reviewed all parks that have waste station locations within the park to identify instances where operators drive on soft surfaces to service bins. Of the 1,175 parks that are serviced by SWMS, 186 parks (15.8 per cent) have waste station locations that require operators to travel on soft surfaces for waste collection because of the above-listed factors.

SWMS continues to work closely with PR on new park designs to accommodate SWMS vehicles or enable waste collection that minimizes driving off of paved pathways or eliminates the need to drive into a park when servicing the waste locations altogether.

## Costs of Park Repairs

Turf damage caused by SWMS vehicles is heavily influenced by weather conditions. Wet conditions increase the likelihood and severity of turf damage, as soft turf is more susceptible to rutting and compaction.

The majority of turf repair is minor to medium in scale. Minor and medium-sized repairs have slightly different staffing, equipment, and material requirements:

- A minor turf repair (200 square feet or less) is approximately \$500 to repair including staff, materials and equipment.
- A medium turf repair (500 square feet or less) is approximately \$1,000 to repair including staff, materials and equipment
- A large turf repair is approximately \$2500 or higher, depending on size and scope of the repair required.

There are typically very few instances of major turf damage in parks as a result of SWMS vehicles. Since 2022, there have been three instances that required the assistance of a tow truck as a result of a SWMS vehicle being stuck in the soft ground. When large-scale turf damage is identified, SWMS staff may lay topsoil and will notify PR to rehabilitate the turf.

It is important to note that turf repairs are typically scheduled and completed in bulk to maximize the efficiency of available labour and resources. Spring and Fall are the ideal planting seasons as grass does not grow well in extreme cold or heat. As turf repair is a seasonal activity, repair work is typically coordinated once multiple damaged areas have been identified. Crews are then deployed to address multiple impacted locations.

## CONTACT

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## SIGNATURE

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