

## **Accepting a Donation and Entering into Agreements with the Chinese Cultural Centre of Greater Toronto for an Asian Garden Project at Cynthia Lai Park**

**Date:** November 20, 2025

**To:** Infrastructure and Environment Committee

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

**Wards:** Ward 23 Scarborough North

### **SUMMARY**

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This report responds to City Council direction ([2022.MM45.9](#)), which endorsed in principle the use of parkland at Cynthia Lai Park (1051 Progress Avenue) by the Chinese Cultural Centre of Greater Toronto (CCC) for the implementation of an Asian Garden Project, subject to approval of design by Parks and Recreation staff and provided the project be fully funded by the CCC and at no cost to the City.

Staff were also authorized to conduct community engagement on the proposed design and directed to report back to the Infrastructure and Environment Committee on the results of community engagement and negotiations with the CCC, and to seek any required authority for future agreements to implement the project.

The CCC is a non-profit cultural organization dedicated to promoting Chinese culture and fostering intercultural understanding. The CCC proposes to design, fund, and construct an Asian Garden as a new cultural and community landmark celebrating Chinese heritage and multicultural exchange. The project also adds additional parking to help alleviate the limited capacity currently available at the adjacent Scarborough Community Complex.

In response to Council direction, City staff collaborated with the CCC and the local Councillor on a comprehensive engagement process, including a community consultation meeting on September 11, 2025, attended by more than 120 participants and an information flyer that was distributed to 1,200 nearby households. Feedback was broadly supportive, with comments focused on design, operations, funding, and programming. Additional outreach materials produced by the CCC included an information booklet, a video overview of the proposal, and a survey that generated over 200 responses, along with ongoing updates via a project webpage managed by the CCC.

This report summarizes the findings of community engagement and status of negotiations with the CCC and seeks Council authority to accept the in-kind donation of the Asian Garden from the CCC, and to negotiate and enter into a Fundraising Agreement and a Construction and Donation Agreement to support project implementation. In addition, staff recommend that Council authorize the City to negotiate and enter into a Management Agreement with the CCC to manage, operate, and maintain the Asian Garden following its completion for a 20-year term, with an option to extend for an additional two 10-year terms.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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The General Manager, Parks and Recreation, recommends that:

1. City Council authorize the General Manager, Parks and Recreation to accept the in-kind donation of up to \$15.0 million from the Chinese Cultural Centre of Greater Toronto for the purposes of constructing an Asian Garden including amenities such as an atrium, tea houses, horticulture and greenhouses, on a portion of parkland at Cynthia Lai Park as shown in Attachment 1, in compliance with the Donations to the City of Toronto for Community Benefits Policy.
2. City Council authorize the General Manager, Parks and Recreation to negotiate and execute a Construction and Donation Agreement with the Chinese Cultural Centre of Greater Toronto to facilitate the construction of an Asian Garden on a portion of parkland at Cynthia Lai Park, on terms and conditions satisfactory to the General Manager, Parks and Recreation, in a form and content satisfactory to the City Solicitor, and in accordance with City policies relating to capital projects, including compliance with the City's Fair Wage Policy and the City's Labour Trades Contractual Obligations in the Construction Industry, if applicable.
3. City Council authorize the General Manager, Parks and Recreation to negotiate and execute a Fundraising Agreement with the Chinese Cultural Centre of Greater Toronto Foundation to raise funds for the construction and management of an Asian Garden on a portion of parkland at Cynthia Lai Park, on terms and conditions satisfactory to the General Manager, Parks and Recreation, and in a form and content satisfactory to the City Solicitor.
4. City Council authorize the General Manager, Parks and Recreation to negotiate and execute a Management Agreement with the Chinese Cultural Centre of Greater Toronto, for a term of 20 years, plus two 10 year renewal options, commencing after the construction of the Asian Garden has been completed to the General Manager's satisfaction, at the General Manager's discretion after consultation with the Chinese Cultural Centre of Greater Toronto, for the purposes of managing an Asian Garden to be constructed by the Chinese Cultural Centre of Greater Toronto on a portion of parkland at Cynthia Lai Park, on terms and conditions satisfactory to the General Manager, Parks and Recreation, and in a form and content satisfactory to the City Solicitor.

## FINANCIAL IMPACT

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The City is not responsible for any future costs in relation to the Asian Garden project. Specifically, there are no future financial implications to the City resulting from execution of the Construction and Donation Agreement, the Fundraising Agreement, or the Management Agreement, aside from staff resourcing necessary to establish and manage the agreements.

The Asian Garden is currently estimated to cost \$10.2 million to construct. In 2019, the CCC received \$5.2 million from Federal and Provincial governments to support the Asian Garden project. Grant funding is contingent on completion of the project by July 2027. The CCC is required to raise an additional \$5 million for construction of the project and is solely responsible for all costs associated with the ongoing operation, maintenance and programming of the Asian Garden.

Through their self-established fundraising committee, the CCC will be responsible for securing funds for the project. Pending approval of the report, the City of Toronto will enter into a Fundraising Agreement with the Chinese Cultural Centre of Greater Toronto. The Fundraising Agreement will help the CCC demonstrate to donors that the City has endorsed this project.

The Asian Garden project is contingent upon CCC's ability to demonstrate financial capacity to fulfill their contractual obligations to the City. Construction will only move forward once the CCC has raised the necessary funds to construct the project.

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed this report and agree with the information as presented in the Financial Impact section.

## DECISION HISTORY

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At its meeting on June 15 and 16, 2022, City Council adopted [2022.MM45.9](#) "Moving Forward on the Asian Garden Project to be situated at Rosebank Park, 1051 Progress Avenue" that endorsed in principle the use of the parkland at 1051 Progress Avenue by the Chinese Cultural Centre of Greater Toronto for the implementation of an Asian Garden project at Rosebank Park (renamed Cynthia Lai Park in 2025), authorized the General Manager, Parks and Recreation to engage the community on the proposed design, and directed the General Manager, Parks and Recreation to report back to the Infrastructure and Environment Committee on the results of community consultation and negotiations with the CCC, and to seek authority for any future agreements to implement the project.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2022.MM45.9>

## COMMENTS

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### Background

Established in 1988, the CCC is dedicated to promoting Chinese culture and fostering multicultural dialogue. The CCC, the former City of Scarborough, and CMS Investments Inc. entered into a Tripartite Agreement in 1993, establishing the Scarborough Community Complex, which includes the CCC, Burrows Hall Community Centre and a Toronto Public Library branch. Together these facilities form a key cultural and recreational destination in Scarborough.

The CCC owns their 85,000 square foot building (5183 Sheppard Avenue East) and the land it occupies. The building supports educational, recreational, and cultural programs and resources for approximately 250,000 visitors each year. The main portion was completed in 1998 (Phase I) and a performing art theatre with 626 seats and multi-purpose hall added in 2006 (Phase II). An Asian Garden - referenced in the 1993 Tripartite Agreement - is envisioned as Phase III.

Surrounding the Complex is Cynthia Lai Park; primarily open turf with City-managed pathways, parking lots, a playground, and an outdoor basketball court. Most of the park is City-owned, except for a portion managed by the City on behalf of the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB). The portion of parkland contemplated for the Garden is used by casual park users and is rarely permitted for events. Burrows Hall Community Centre uses this portion of parkland for programming, such as summer camps. Staff are actively identifying alternative locations within the park to ensure continued support for Community Recreation programs, and there is sufficient remaining parkland available on site to accommodate current programming.

Three parking lots serve the Complex; however, parking demand frequently exceeds supply, particularly during major events. Maintenance responsibilities at the park are shared among City divisions: Parks and Recreation provides turf, litter, and winter maintenance; Environment, Climate and Forestry maintains trees; and Solid Waste Management Services oversees waste collection.

### **CCC's Asian Garden Proposal**

In Spring 2022, the Chinese Cultural Centre of Greater Toronto (CCC) presented City staff with an initial design proposal for the Asian Garden to be built on a portion of parkland adjacent to the CCC and featuring bridges, covered walkways, pavilions, gardens, an amphitheatre, and gathering areas, as well as additional parking. City staff expressed support for the concept and identified key considerations related to long-term maintenance costs and design feasibility for further review. City Council subsequently adopted a Member's Motion that endorsed the project at its meeting in June 2022.

Following further discussions with the City and design refinements, the CCC submitted an updated concept in 2025. The CCC also requested the City consider a management framework that would allow the CCC to oversee the Asian Garden's operations and maintenance once constructed.

The updated design includes park features such as a meandering brook, ceremonial tower, atrium, tea houses, and horticultural garden and greenhouses. The proposal also includes 75 new parking spaces, improving capacity and convenience for visitors. This

expansion will help meet the high parking demand, especially during major events at the CCC. Staff support the additional parking as it will ease current pressures and enhance accessibility for the increased number of visitors once the Asian Garden is constructed.

As directed ([2022.MM45.9](#)), City staff in Parks and Recreation worked with the CCC and the local Councillor's office to establish a path forward. A Working Group, comprising City and CCC representatives, was formed to guide discussions and advance key implementation steps for the Asian Garden, including design, funding, operating model, and community consultation.

## **Community Benefit and Engagement**

The Asian Garden creates a space for cultural education, recreation, and community gathering while remaining a publicly accessible park. It provides partnership opportunities for joint programming between the CCC, Burrows Hall Community Centre, and the Toronto Public Library, expanding cultural and recreational offerings for the community. The Asian Garden and its programming will highlight the importance of environmental stewardship and sustainability for future generations.

City staff worked with the CCC and local Councillor to develop a community engagement plan that responded to the 2022 Council direction. On September 11, 2025, the CCC, City staff and local Councillor hosted a community consultation event at the CCC that was attended by over 120 people, including representation from all levels of government and representatives from the Indonesian and Malaysian governments. Approximately 1,200 flyers were circulated to residents located within 500 metres from the CCC for notification and promotion of the consultation.

To further support engagement efforts, the CCC produced a promotional booklet and video, and circulated a survey that generated approximately 200 responses and 100 unique comments from residents and community members on Garden design and programming. Project information is available via CCC's dedicated project webpage and the CCC's newsletter and social media platforms.

Consultation feedback was generally favourable, with questions and comments across themes of design, operational logistics, funding, and programming. Consultation and survey feedback was mostly positive, with majority of comments focused on Garden design features and programming. A small number of comments focused on concerns around funding for operations and maintenance, size of the space and ensuring additional parking was included in the design.

## **Implementation and Agreements**

The completed Asian Garden would be donated to the City of Toronto upon completion. Under the Donations to the City for Community Benefits Policy, Council approval is required for the acceptance of any donation exceeding \$50,000. While the Asian Garden, as public space, would be owned by the City through this donation, its construction, programming, operations and maintenance would be the sole responsibility of the CCC through the agreements authorized in this report, pending Council approval.

A Fundraising Agreement will formalize the CCC's fundraising activities and help secure donor confidence in its fundraising plan to facilitate significant gifts towards the project. The Fundraising Agreement will further ensure that funds raised by the CCC are put towards project implementation and that the project will proceed only after sufficient funding and all required approvals have been secured.

A Construction and Donation Agreement will outline roles and responsibilities of both parties in delivering the project, including compliance with City policies such as the Fair Wage Policy and Labour Trades Obligations. The CCC will be wholly responsible for funding and constructing the project, with design to be approved by the City. To ensure the City's ability to accept a completed project, staff are seeking authority to accept an in-kind donation valued at up to \$15 million to account for any potential increase in overall project value.

A Management Agreement will provide a framework for the CCC to manage and maintain the Asian Garden while ensuring it remains City-owned parkland open to the public. The agreement will grant the CCC authority to operate programs and events, generate revenue through program fees and use of space permits to support maintenance costs, and preserve the Garden's culturally significant elements. The CCC will assume full responsibility for maintenance, programming, and state-of-good-repair activities, with no impact on existing City staffing or budgets.

This approach mirrors successful partnership models such as the Toronto Botanical Garden at Edwards Gardens and Friends of Allan Gardens. Staff recommend a term of 20-years plus two 10-year renewal options to demonstrate commitment to the grant funding provided by higher orders of government, to instill donor confidence and reflective of the proposed level of investment. The term provides opportunities to evaluate the partnership at established milestones, modernizing or updating the agreement as required, while providing reasonably long-time horizons to establish horticultural features, robust programming and to rationalize capital investments. The current Garden Working Group would transition to a Liaison Committee to support collaboration and oversight throughout the term of the Management Agreement and ensure the success and longevity of the partnership.

This report comments on the additional parking capacity (75 spot) proposed as part of the project, to help alleviate parking congestion when events take place at the Scarborough Community Complex. Future management of the parking lot will be subject to ongoing negotiations and, if required, may result in a future report to Council.

## **Conclusion and Next Steps**

The proposed Asian Garden at Cynthia Lai Park builds on Council direction and a long-standing relationship between the City of Toronto and the CCC.

The proposed agreement structure establishes a clear framework for collaboration, ensuring the project is implemented in accordance with City policies, supported by external funding, and maintained sustainably by the CCC. This approach reflects the

City's commitment to working with community partners to expand access to diverse cultural and recreational experiences with minimal impact to operating budgets.

Through ongoing coordination between City staff, the CCC, and local stakeholders, the Asian Garden has the potential to become a lasting community legacy that strengthens the cultural and social fabric of Scarborough while enhancing Toronto's network of inclusive public spaces.

## **CONTACT**

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## **SIGNATURE**

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Terry Ricketts  
General Manager, Parks and Recreation

## **ATTACHMENTS**

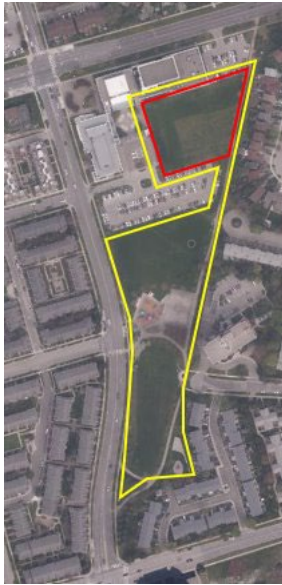
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Attachment 1: Site Maps



## Attachment 1: Site Maps

Cynthia Lai Park (yellow border) and proposed site for Asian Garden (red border)



Current state (left) and proposed Asian Garden site and expanded parking (right)

