

Access to Outdoor Ovens in Parks: Progress Update

Date: April 20, 2026

To: Economic and Community Development Committee

From: General Manager, Parks and Recreation

Wards: All

SUMMARY

In response to City Council direction ([2025.EC20.1](#)), this report provides a progress update on steps taken to expand community access to outdoor ovens in parks by removing financial and administrative barriers. All of the actions directed by City Council in May 2025 have been implemented, with the majority completed.

To remove financial barriers, permit fees were eliminated for Toronto residents and non-profit organizations and insurance costs were reduced by thirty per cent for recurrent permit holders. This report recommends reimbursement of insurance costs for the non-profit organizations, charities and community groups that have been involved in the establishment and operation of an oven in a City park for recurrent public programming.

To remove administrative barriers, outdoor ovens can now be booked online for one or more dates at a time, and oven availability and usage information can be viewed online. Procedures for onsite staff support to oven users have been updated to deliver consistent, reliable service at all locations. The City's policy on Outdoor Ovens in City Parks was amended, as directed, regarding long-term agreements.

In 2026-2027, Parks and Recreation will build on these improvements in order to encourage wider public awareness and enjoyment of the City's outdoor ovens network.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The General Manager, Parks and Recreation, recommends that:

1. City Council authorize the General Manager, Parks and Recreation, to approve the following eligibility criteria to reimburse the cost of insurance to permit a park oven:

- non-profit organizations, charities, and community groups that have been involved in the establishment and ongoing operation of a park oven;
- operate the ovens for multiple public events during one or more seasons;
- provide opportunities for community education on oven use during public events;
- submit proof of payment for insurance; and

- submit a short report about the public events involving the oven.

2. City Council authorize the General Manager, Parks and Recreation to implement, on an annual basis, a process to allocate a maximum of \$10,000 to reimburse the costs of insurance to permit a park oven, in accordance with criteria set out in Recommendation 1 and on terms acceptable to the General Manager, Parks and Recreation, starting with the following organizations in 2026:

- *Centre for Local Research into Public Space (Dufferin Grove Park, Ward 9)*
- *Friends of Christie Pits (Christie Pits Park, Ward 11)*
- *Fred Victor as Trustee for Friends of Regent Park (Regent Park, Ward 13)*
- *Friends of Sorauren Park (Sorauren Park, Ward 4)*
- *Neighbours of Dentonia Park (Dentonia Park, Ward 19)*
- *Thorncliffe Park Women's Committee (R.V. Burgess, Ward 15)*
- *Second Rise (Alexandra Park, Ward 10)*

FINANCIAL IMPACT

The financial impact of \$10,000 will be managed through the through the Parks and Recreation 2026 operating budget.

The City will reimburse community organizations for the purchase of seasonal insurance to book outdoor ovens for recurrent public programming in 2026; the total amount of all reimbursements combined not to exceed \$10,000, with funding available through Parks and Recreation 2026 operating budget.

Three-month, bulk seasonal insurance coverage (\$2M liability) for residents and non-profit organization permits has been negotiated with the City's insurance supplier as follows:

- \$250 for 1-25 participants - one permit per week
- \$500 for 26-50 participants - once permit per week
- \$400 for 1-25 participants: unlimited permits
- \$800 for 26-50 participants: unlimited permits

Funding requests in future years would be considered through future annual budget cycles.

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

On May 21, 2025, City Council directed Parks and Recreation to: establish an Outdoor Ovens Community of Practice; explore annually renewable payment agreements including commitments on recurring days and times of use, bulk insurance options and training requirements with the non-profit organizations, charities and community groups that have been involved in the establishment and operation of a City park oven with

consideration for recurring dates of use, bulk insurance, oven use training and knowledge translation; collect and publish data on oven usage; explore opportunities to expand education and awareness of park ovens across the City; and report back in the first quarter of 2026.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2025.EC20.1>

On July 25, 2024, City Council directed the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation, to review the 2011 Outdoor Ovens in City Parks Policy and related procedures from a customer service and equity perspective and to identify opportunities, if any, to reduce administrative or financial barriers to the community use of outdoor ovens, while ensuring that public health and safety and liability considerations continue to be met.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2024.MM20.11>

On December 1, 2011, City Council approved the Outdoor Ovens in City Parks Policy, as outlined in a report from the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation.

<https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2011/pe/bgrd/backgroundfile-41502.pdf>

On June 24, 2011, the Parks and Environment Committee directed the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation to develop a policy on public bake ovens in parks and report back in September 2011.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/report.do?meetingId=4475&type=decisions>

On May 9, 2011, while reviewing the Toronto Food Strategy: 2011 Update, the Board of Health requested the Medical Officer of Health to consult with Parks, Forestry and Recreation on a policy for the construction and use of community bake ovens.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/report.do?meetingId=4493&type=decisions>

COMMENTS

Introduction: Community-Led Outdoor Ovens in Toronto Parks

An outdoor public oven is typically a wood-fired brick or cob-covered amenity designed for communities to bake and cook food together. Toronto also has one outdoor Tandoor public oven, which is made of clay and is used for Middle Eastern and South Asian cuisine.

As reflected in the City's Outdoor Ovens in City Parks Policy, adopted by City Council in 2011 and updated in 2025, outdoor ovens are not standard park amenities and are not delivered through the Parks and Recreation Capital Plan. An oven may be installed in a park after Parks and Recreation has approved a community-led application, with full funding secured by the applicants for construction and installation. Ovens that are installed in City parks become the property of the City and are available by permit for the public to use.

Over several decades, the grassroots efforts of Toronto communities have resulted in a network of eleven community-led, permissible public ovens in 10 City parks - more than in any other city in North America. The oldest oven, located in Dufferin Grove Park, was

funded and built over 30 years ago by local residents. Most recently, an outdoor park oven was established in Dentonia Park in 2022, with funding from the Partnership Opportunities Legacy Fund from the Social Development, Finance and Administration Division.

Toronto's community and resident leaders have been recognized nationally and internationally for establishing outdoor public ovens as vibrant community hubs in parks. The Dufferin Grove community-led oven and park activation received the Jane Jacobs Prize for Canadian urbanism in 2001 and has been endorsed by the international non-profit, Project for Public Space, as a case study in community-led "great public spaces". In 2025, Thorncliffe Women's Association received the World Urban Parks' Neighbourhood Parks Award for the Tandoor Oven and activations in RV Burgess Park.

Outdoor Oven Usage

The City's network of outdoor ovens in parks supports opportunities for community gatherings. Ovens are available to book from April-November, six days a week. Two ovens are also available in winter. Total bookings have been increasing steadily, from 150 in 2023 to 168 in 2024, and 247 in 2025 (see Table 1 - Attachment). In most parks, the majority of bookings are organized by the non-profits, charities and community groups that originally established the oven to deliver public programming. Some ovens are frequently booked in conjunction with farmers markets (e.g. Sorauren Park), or public festivals (e.g. Taste of Regent Park); or by the local Community Recreation Centre (e.g. movie nights at Edithvale).

Actions to Increase Community Use of Outdoor Public Ovens in Parks

In response to City Council direction to remove financial and administrative barriers to outdoor ovens, Parks and Recreation has completed the following, in preparation for the 2026 summer season.

Reducing Financial Barriers:

- Eliminated permit fees for outdoor ovens for non-profits and Toronto residents.
- Reduced insurance costs for recurrent permit holders by 30 per cent through introduction of new seasonal bulk rates. Three-month bulk seasonal insurance coverage (\$2M liability) for residents and non-profit organizations has been negotiated with the City's insurance supplier as follows:
 - \$250 for 1-25 participants - once per week
 - \$500 for 26-50 participants - once per week
 - \$400 for 1-25 participants: unlimited
 - \$800 for 26-50 participants: unlimited

Reducing Administrative Barriers:

- Transitioned the outdoor public ovens booking process to the City's new online registration and booking platform, enabling members of the public to access the calendar of oven availability and usage in real time and to easily secure an oven for one date or multiple dates at a time.
- Trained staff on revised onsite procedures to deliver consistent, reliable support across all oven locations so that permit holders and prospective oven users know

what to expect in terms of City support (e.g. locking and unlocking the ovens and cooking tools, oven maintenance).

- Cooking tools will be available at all outdoor oven sites so that permit holders do not need to bring their own (e.g. pizza peel with long handle, metal ash pail, oven brush with long handle and safety gloves).

Public Education and Information:

- Streamlined the City website content related to outdoor ovens. Public awareness about the outdoor ovens network will be promoted further during 2026 via the City of Toronto communication channels and materials distributable by City Councillors.
- New signage and training resources, including instructional videos for wood-fired and tandoor ovens, will be posted and available through onsite QR codes.
- Oven usage and availability data is now visible to the public via the City's online booking platform.
- Based on volunteer capacity, a Community of Practice will not be launched at this time, although local community groups deliver public education, including to residents of neighbourhoods that currently do not have a local oven.

Agreements with "Ovens Champions"

City Council directed Parks and Recreation to explore options for long-term agreements for "oven champions", defined as non-profit organizations, charities and community groups that have been involved in establishing and operating park ovens, with consideration for recurring dates of use, bulk insurance options, and training for communities and city staff.

Staff consulted with the following groups to explore options for formal agreements and to identify any remaining barriers they face to their continued, regular operation of park ovens:

Centre for Local Research into Public Space (Dufferin Grove Park); Friends of Christie Pits; Friends of Regent Park; Friends of Sorauren Park; Neighbours of Dentonia Park; Thorncliffe Park Women's Committee (RV Burgess Park); and Second Rise (Alexandra Park and other ovens).

Upon review, staff determined that formal agreements are not the preferred approach for supporting small, volunteer-run neighbourhood groups in the regular use of park ovens for community programming. Instead, most groups indicated that the barriers they previously faced are being addressed through the operational improvements outlined in this report.

Payments to Reimburse Insurance Costs for Recurrent Bookings

The remaining barrier identified by groups was the financial cost of purchasing insurance coverage, even at the lower, bulk rates described above, to support regular oven-use over the course of a season.

In response, this report recommends reimbursing eligible seasonal insurance costs incurred by non-profit organizations, charities and community groups involved in establishing and operating City Park ovens that would not exceed \$10,000, funded

through the Parks and Recreation 2026 operating budget. Reimbursements would be available only to organizations that:

- non-profit organizations, charities, and community groups that have been; involved in the establishment and ongoing operation of a park oven;
- operate the ovens for recurrent public events during one or more seasons;
- provide opportunities for community education on oven use during public events;
- submit proof of payment for insurance; and
- submit a complete program evaluation report about their public events.

In 2026, the groups eligible for this benefit are those listed above. In future years, other groups may become eligible if they are involved in establishing an outdoor oven, in alignment with Council's Outdoor Ovens in Parks policy, or in the ongoing operation of an oven for public programming.

Next Steps and Conclusion

Onsite pre-season meetings with oven champions and Parks and Recreation staff are scheduled to confirm roles, responsibilities and operating procedures at the oven locations for 2026. In addition, signage will be installed and new training videos to support new oven users, will be uploaded to the City's website for the 2026 season. Public awareness about the outdoor ovens network will be promoted via City of Toronto communication channels.

Toronto's community-led network of outdoor ovens is unique in North America. The City continues to remove administrative and financial barriers to the enjoyment of the ovens and is working with the community groups that first established and regularly operate these amenities, to help ensure the ovens remain welcoming and accessible gathering spaces in parks.

CONTACT

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SIGNATURE

Terry Ricketts
General Manager, Parks and Recreation

ATTACHMENTS

Table 1: Outdoor Ovens in Parks: Bookings 2023-2025

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Park	Year Established	2023 Bookings	2024 Bookings	2025 Bookings
Alexandra Park	2005	8	4	2
Christie Pits Park	2016	17	30	50
Dentonia Park	2022	1	2	6
Dufferin Grove Park #1	1995	4	(under construction)	29
Dufferin Grove Park #2	2000	4	(under construction)	(under construction)
Edithvale Park	2013	36	36	40
Fairmount Park	2019	10	10	8
Regent Park	2015	18	14	22
R.V. Burgess Park	2012	15	29	63
Sorauren Park	2017	40	43	27
Total Bookings		150	168	247