



Staff Report for Council Meeting

Date of Meeting: October 23, 2017

Report Number: SRCS.17.23

Department: Community Services

Subject: Expression of Interest – For the Delivery of Educational & Public Outreach Programming, at the David Dunlap Observatory

Purpose:

The purpose of this report is to update Council and provide recommendations regarding the delivery of educational and public outreach programming at the David Dunlap Observatory.

Recommendation(s):

- a) That the Commissioner of Community Services be authorized to negotiate programming partnership agreements for the David Dunlap Observatory consistent with the Recommended Approach described in SRCS.17.23.
- b) That the Commissioner of Community Services be delegated the authority to:
 - i. execute all necessary agreements or other documentation necessary to effect the programming referred to in (a); and
 - ii. negotiate and execute all necessary agreements or other documentation to effect any future programming and other uses of the David Dunlap Observatory Park.

Contact Person:

Shane Baker, Commissioner of Community Services, Extension 2422

Submitted by:

"Signed version on file in the Office of the Clerk"

Shane Baker
Commissioner of Community Services

Approved by:

"Signed version on file in the Office of the Clerk"

Neil Garbe
Chief Administrative Officer

Background:

At the February 22, 2016 Council meeting it was announced that ownership of both the Observatory Dome facility and Administration Building on the David Dunlap Observatory (DDO) lands will be transferred from Corsica Developments to Richmond Hill. Staff were subsequently directed to begin negotiations with the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada - Toronto Centre (RASC-TC) for a lease or other arrangement for the Observatory Dome facility and Administration Building on the David Dunlap Observatory lands. The intent of the lease was for the continued exclusive use of the buildings and program outreach by RASC-TC after the Town assumes ownership of the site, which was expected before the end of 2016.

Richmond Hill staff met with RASC-TC representatives and negotiations were progressing well toward an agreement until July 20, 2016 when staff were advised that the RASC-TC Council (Board of Directors) voted to not enter into a lease with Richmond Hill for the exclusive use of the DDO. No explanation was given for this change in direction, except that RASC-TC Council felt that it was not in the Centre's best interests to continue the lease discussions. During this same meeting staff were further informed that the RASC-TC members who had been using, maintaining and programming the site wished to carry on doing so and were prepared to continue the negotiations under a new organization called the York Region Astronomical Association (YRAA). As Council direction to staff was to negotiate RASC-TC, staff respectfully declined negotiations with YRAA until we could seek Council's direction to move forward.

In September of 2016, Council directed staff to initiate a public proposal process for the provision of astronomical outreach and educational programming at the DDO and report back to Council for approval (SRCS.16.30). Staff determined that it would be best to undertake the public proposal process such that it would be completed after the ownership of the DDO buildings were expected to be transferred to the Town and therefore, issued a Request for Expressions of Interest (REI) on January 12, 2017, which required submissions by February 28, 2017. The ownership of the DDO buildings was transferred to the Town March 21, 2017.

Analysis

The Town invited over 35 organizations to bring forward proposals for the REI and ultimately the Town received 5 submissions. Staff reviewed all of the submissions and invited each group to make a presentation and answer questions regarding their proposal. The submissions varied from a summer Space Camp proposal from the Western University Centre for Planetary Science and Exploration, to an adult Maker Space and Educational proposal from YLab, to full astronomical outreach programs (similar to those previously offered at the DDO including school curriculum programs, Guide and Scout tours and events, public viewing nights, key speaker lectures and training workshops, etc.) from the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada – Toronto Centre (RASC-TC), the York Region Astronomical Association (YRAA) and the David Dunlap Observatory Defenders (DDOD).

As the proposals from Western University and YLab were not full astronomical outreach programs, staff focused on the more comprehensive proposals from RASC-TC, YRAA and the DDOD to meet the Town's primary programming needs. While each of these groups proposed similar programming, staff noted the following during the presentation meetings as significant matters for consideration:

1. The YRAA were proposing an exclusive use agreement of the DDO Administration Building and the Observatory while RASC-TC and the DDOD were proposing similar programming while leaving the site and buildings in the Town's control. For context, an exclusive use agreement of the site for programming could be compared to the former agreement with the Richmond Hill Arena Association for the programming of the Town's arenas. In this case, the Town is the owner of the property while another organization manages and programs the property. Alternatively, a non-exclusive use agreement would resemble the current programming partnerships for recreational programs. In these cases, the Town manages the facility space consistent with the Town's strategic plans and policies and the partner provides the program, expertise and staffing resources.
2. The YRAA proposed to undertake the necessary maintenance of the buildings (subject to negotiations) while RASC-TC and the DDOD did not have an interest in this type of an agreement.
3. Both RASC-TC and the DDOD noted that they had discussions which contemplated a joint proposal that would take advantage of their strengths in partnership with the Town.

As staff considered the DDO programming options, it was determined that to ensure the Town is able to manage the facilities consistent with the Town's strategic plans, policies and procedures, it would not be in the Town's best interest to enter into an exclusive use agreement. Also, while the YRAA noted in their presentation interview that they would be willing to host other users of the buildings such as Western University, YLab and the Town (providing it didn't conflict with their mission and programming), staff believe that due to the popularity of the site, it would be best for the Town to maintain ultimate control of the buildings to ensure the site remains a public space.

Similarly, as owners of the buildings, staff believe that the maintenance of the Administration Building and the Observatory should remain in the Town's control.

Recommended Approach

In light of the above, staff are recommending that the Town enter into non-exclusive use programming partnerships, to facilitate delivery of educational and public outreach programming at the David Dunlap Observatory.

Staff are recommending authorization to negotiate a joint partnership between the Town, RASC-TC and the DDOD to provide the primary astronomical outreach program which would be augmented by a separate partnership agreement between the Town and Western University to implement their summer Space Camp program as well as an agreement between the Town and YLab to continue their very successful adult Makers Space and Educational program.

Next Steps

If the recommendations in this report are approved, staff will work to negotiate and execute the partnership agreements described above.

The Environment & Infrastructure Services Department has recently completed a Conditional Assessment of the DDO Administration Building and Observatory which has identified work that is required at the DDO over the short and long term. Staff have determined that programming may begin once a Fire Safety Plan of the buildings is in place. The purpose of the Fire Safety Plan is to establish occupancy limits of floors and rooms as well as to ensure all individuals who are responsible for groups, etc., are fully trained in evacuation procedures as the buildings currently have unique features such as one exit.

The implementation of the recommendations of the Conditional Assessment report will be reported through the DDO Park Project Steering Committee and it is understood that programming may be interrupted and or restricted from time to time to allow works to be undertaken on the buildings.

Financial/Staffing/Other Implications:

There are no financial or staffing implications related to this report.

Relationship to the Strategic Plan:

The provision of astronomical outreach and educational programming at the David Dunlap Observatory is consistent with Goal One of the Strategic Plan – Stronger Connections in Richmond Hill by promoting the use of public spaces as places for people to assemble and connect as well as Goal Three by promoting the Town's heritage and celebrating the Town's unique places.

Conclusion:

The purpose of this report is to update Council and provide recommendations regarding the delivery of educational and public outreach programming at the David Dunlap Observatory Park.