



Staff Report for DDO Park Project Steering Committee

Date of Meeting: May 25, 2021

Report Number: SRPI.21.061

Department: Planning and Infrastructure
Division: Infrastructure and Engineering Services

Subject: Richmond Hill David Dunlap Observatory Park
Early Priorities Project Update

Purpose:

To provide an update on the status of the Richmond Hill David Dunlap Observatory Park early phase priorities.

Recommendation(s):

- a) That Staff Report SRPI.21.61 be received;
- b) That the David Dunlap Observatory Council Steering Committee recommend continued support of the David Dunlap Observatory Project;
- c) That the 10 Year Capital forecast include the early priorities identified in SREIS.19.007 with an extended timeframe for implementation following the outcome of the Capital Sustainability Steering Committee review;
- d) That staff continue with the implementation of the early priorities as well as the woodlot restoration work approved through the Corsica development agreement.

Contact Person:

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Paolo Masaro, Executive Director Infrastructure and Engineering Services, extension 6540

Report Approval:

Submitted by: Kelvin Kwan, Commissioner of Planning and Infrastructure

Approved by: Mary-Anne Dempster, City Manager

All reports are electronically reviewed and/or approved by the Division Director, Treasurer (as required), City Solicitor (as required), Commissioner and City Manager. Details of the reports approval are attached.

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Background:

Timeframe for implementation of the RHDDO Early Priorities was extended following outcome of Capital Sustainability Steering Committee meeting.

On February 25, 2019, Council approved the Committee of the Whole recommendation to establish a Capital Sustainability Steering Committee (the Committee). The mandate of the Committee is to evaluate opportunities to deliver long-term capital investments that are in line with community expectations and fiscal sustainability.

A presentation on the sustainability of the Richmond Hill David Dunlap Observatory (RHDDO) was brought to the Committee September 24, 2019 summarizing how the City intends to implement the vision outlined in the RHDDO Master Plan, as well as the cost impacts associated with this plan. In recognition of this potential financial impact and the overall cost to deliver the project, four alternatives aimed at addressing concerns regarding financial sustainability of the sources reserves were explored and presented to the Committee for consideration:

- Option 1 – Continue Early Priorities as Planned
- Option 2 – Extend Timeframe for Implementation of Early Priorities
- Option 3 – Maintain Passive Park Indefinitely following the Completion of the Early Priorities
- Option 4 – Temporary Deferral of all RHDDO Master Plan work.

The consensus of the Committee was to proceed with Option 2 as it extends the timeframe for implementation of the RHDDO Early Priorities. This option was favoured as a sustainable approach to delivery as it achieves the vision of the Master Plan Early Priorities over a longer timeframe and results in a smoothing of the yearly capital budget expenditures.

In recognition of the financial impact and the overall cost to deliver the project, the timeframe for implementation of the RHDDO Early Priorities has extended from 5 years to 8 years

The RHDDO Park Master Plan is a visionary plan that highlights the cultural heritage landscape, Observatory and Administration Building and will contribute to the City's identity. The Master Plan recommends implementation of individual components of the plan within three priority groups. Each of the three priority groups (Early Priority, Medium Priority and Late Priority) includes specific projects to be implemented over the planned horizon.

In view of the considerable capital funding required to implement the master plan the RHDDO Staff Steering Committee undertook to prioritize projects within each group. The Staff Steering Committee identified that 'Early Priorities' projects were essential in establishing the RHDDO as a working passive park, accessible to all residents.

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In recognition of the financial impact and the overall cost to deliver the project, the timeframe for implementation of the RHDDO Early Priorities has been extended from 5 years to 8 years. This results in a change to the timeframe for implementation of all three phases of the Master Plan.

- Phase 1 - Early Priorities (1-8 Years)
- Phase 2 - Medium-term Projects (8-15 Years)
- Phase 3 - Long-term Projects (15+ Years)

Following the direction received from the Capital Sustainability Steering Committee staff undertook a review of the early priorities to better inform a detail 10 year capital forecast

The RHDDO Staff Steering Committee ranking of the Early Priorities Projects included in staff report **SREIS.19.007 David Dunlap Observatory Park Early Priorities Project Update (Attached as Appendix A)** underwent further review following the outcome of the Capital Sustainability Steering Committee process. The review included the advancement of the Observatory Land Pedestrian Rail Overpass and re-design of 16th Avenue entrance / feature to the Early Priorities Phase.

The purpose of this review was to gain a greater understanding of the impact of extending the timeframe for implementation, the logical sequencing of the projects and to better inform the 10 year Capital Forecast.

Below is a summary of the Early Priority Projects and their anticipated timeframes for implementation as detailed in the RHDDO Park Steering Committee Minutes (**Attached as Appendix B**).

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Early Priority Projects Timeframe for Implementation

Project	Implementation
Assignment 1 Interim Trails	2021
Assignment 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traffic and parking study • Wayfinding and signage study • Archeological study • Perimeter fencing • Park entrance features and signage • Main, supporting and nature trails 	2022 - 2023
Assignment 3 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Site servicing • Observatory Lane pedestrian overpass 	2023-2024
Assignment 4 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Playground • Water element / feature • Great lawn 	2025
Assignment 5 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-design of 16th Avenue entrance including entry feature • Refurbishment of Elvis Stojko Arena parking lot 	2026
Assignment 6 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Picnic area and covered pavilions • Observatory parking lot 	2027
Assignment 7 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Washroom facility • Park Operations maintenance facility 	2028

The implementation of the master plan is ambitious, multi-faceted and will require 15 – 20 years to fully realize the vision of the plan. Since the last RHDDO Park Project Steering Committee meeting held on April 19, 2019 several projects of this multi-year implementation have been completed and/or are ongoing.

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At the April 19, 2019 meeting, the RHDDO Park Project Steering Committee (DDOP#01-19) identified next steps for the RHDDO Park. The table below identifies the progress made since that meeting and the status of each project to date.

RHDDO Implementation Status

Project	Status
Purchase of land on the west side of the CNR tracks	Completed
Woodlot Restoration Phase 1 and 2 (multiyear process)	Ongoing
Delivery Educational and Public Outreach Programming Report	Completed
Relocation of overhead electrical services to underground	Completed
Restoration of Observatory and Administration Building	Completed
Interim Trail design	Completed
Commencement of RHDDO Park Assignment 2 Design	Summer 2021
Interim Trail Construction	Fall 2021

Financial/Staffing/Other Implications:

Extending the timeframe for implementation of the Early Priorities smoothens the capital costs of construction over additional years while maintaining the vision of the Master Plan.

The majority of capital costs are eligible for funding from Cash-in-Lieu of Parkland Reserve Fund (92%) and the Outdoor Recreation Development Charges Reserve Fund (8%) reserves. Implementation of the Early Priorities and future phases of RHDDO may have an impact on the sustainability of these reserves. The approach to implement the Early Priorities over a longer period results in the spreading out of the yearly capital budget expenditures into more manageable amounts.

Alternative sources of Funding.

There are other potential sources of funding available including revenue from the federal Gas Tax Fund for municipal infrastructure, grants or loans from senior governments or agencies, private sponsorships or partnerships and community fund-raising. It is recognized that given the magnitude of the project and the number of elements that have been earmarked for the Park, financing will be problematic. On this basis Staff have been and will continue to explore alternative sources of funding.

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Relationship to Council's Strategic Priorities 2020-2022:

Implementation of the Early Priorities is consistent with the Relationship to Council's Strategic Priorities 2020-2022 – **Fiscal Responsibility** given that the extension to the timeframe for implementation of the Early Priorities follows the direction of the Capital Sustainability Steering Committee to smoothen the capital budget expenditures over additional years to help maintain a strong financial position for the City.

The Early Priorities includes the implementation of the CN rail overpass, a system of gateways and trails that facilitates **Getting around the City** and builds a **Strong Sense of Belonging** with the surrounding community. In addition, the Early Priorities includes a playground, water play element, great lawn and picnic area to promote a wide variety of recreational, educational and leisure experiences for the residents of Richmond Hill.

The ongoing woodlot restoration project **Balances Growth and Green** by preserving and enhancing natural areas within RHDDO Park. This multi-phased long-term plan to restore and create healthy woodlands throughout the park includes enhancing the woodlands by removing hazardous trees, removing and applying herbicide treatments to invasive species, native tree and shrub planting and monitoring. Through this work, the RHDDO woodlands will be enhanced and expanded in order to create beautiful, accessible and diverse natural spaces that can be enjoyed for generations to come.

Climate Change Considerations:

The proposed connections to sidewalks and trails at RHDDO will contribute to climate change mitigation by enabling more walking and cycling through the community, reducing the need for vehicular transportation and helping to lower Green House Gas (GHG) emissions in Richmond Hill. In addition, the planting of trees and vegetation contributes to climate change mitigation by combating urban heat island effect by absorbing / filtering carbon emissions in the air.

Conclusion:

The implementation of the Richmond Hill David Dunlap Observatory (RHDDO) Park will showcase the sites significant cultural heritage landscape and contribute to the City's identity. The Early Priority Projects are a major component of the overall Master Plan and include main and nature trails, CN rail overpass, park entrances and feature, playground, water play element, picnic facilities, great lawn, washroom facility, Operations Maintenance Facility, and additional parking. The capital expenditure to implement the Early Priorities is approximately \$18.5 million and required careful review to ensure the implementation of the Master Plan is fiscally responsible. Staff recommends continuing with the Capital Sustainability Steering Committee's direction to proceed with the implementation of the Early Priorities with an extended the timeframe from 5 years to 8 years to smoothen the capital expenditure in addition to the woodlot restoration work approved through the Corsica development agreement.

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Attachments:

The following attached documents may include scanned images of appendixes, maps and photographs. All attachments have been reviewed and made accessible. If you require an alternative format please call the contact person listed in this document.

- SRPI.21.61 – Appendix A - SREIS.19.007 David Dunlap Observatory Park Early Priorities Project Update
- SRPI.21.61 – Appendix B – RHDDO Park Steering Committee Minutes

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Report Approval Details

Document Title:	SRPI.21.061 RHDDO Park Project Steering Committee Update.docx
Attachments:	- SRPI.21.061- Appendix A- SREIS.19.007 DDO Park Early Priorities Project Update - Committee of Council - April 24, 2019.pdf - SRPI.21.061-Appendix B-RHDDO Staff Steering Committee Meeting Minutes- 30 Mar 2021.pdf
Final Approval Date:	May 19, 2021

This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:

Bob Levesque - May 18, 2021 - 3:16 PM

Paolo Masaro - May 19, 2021 - 7:50 AM

Kelvin Kwan - May 19, 2021 - 3:00 PM

MaryAnne Dempster - May 19, 2021 - 6:04 PM