



Staff Report for Council Meeting

Date of Meeting: June 22, 2022

Report Number: SRPI.22.083

Department: Planning and Infrastructure

Division: Policy Planning

Subject: SRPI.022.083 - Request for Approval - 2022
Parks Plan

Purpose:

This report responds to Council's direction by providing an updated Parks Plan which will guide parkland needs and acquisition, outdoor recreation facility planning, and park revitalization to 2032. It also provides the necessary background information to bring forward an updated Parkland Dedication By-law which must be enacted by September 18, 2022 per the legislative timeline outlined in the *Planning Act* and its associated Regulations.

Recommendation(s):

- a) That Staff Report SRPI.22.083 be received and that Council approve the 2022 Parks Plan (Appendix A).
- b) That staff report back to Council in September 2022 with an updated Parkland Dedication By-law that reflects the needs outlined in the 2022 Parks Plan to ensure the City can meet the September 18, 2022 legislative timeline outlined in the *Planning Act* and its associated Regulations.

Contact Person:

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Report Approval:

Submitted by: Kelvin Kwan, Commissioner of Planning and Infrastructure

Approved by: Darlene Joslin, Interim 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.

Page 2

Background:

On March 9, 2022, Council endorsed the key directions for the Parks Plan, Recreation Plan and Culture Plan (see SRPI.022.021). Council also provided the following direction related to the Parks Plan:

That staff report back to Council before the 2022 summer recess with an updated Parks Plan, which provides necessary background information to bring forward an updated Parkland Dedication By-law and to inform the Community Benefits Charge Strategy and By-law, both of which must be enacted by September 18, 2022 per the legislative timeline outlined in the *Planning Act* and its associated Regulations.

The key directions endorsed by Council on March 9, 2022 were used to create a draft Parks Plan, which was released for public review and comment on May 12, 2022. A virtual public Open House was held on May 26, 2022 to obtain public input and feedback on the draft Parks Plan. The virtual public Open House was advertised to the public between May 12, 2022 and May 26, 2022 using a variety of communications channels including but not limited to social media, a Public Service Announcement, print and multilingual digital advertising and signage. Fifty-eight members of the public registered for the virtual public Open House. The public was also encouraged to send comments directly to the City using the Planning@Richmondhill.ca email account until the end of May.

Project Process and Timeline

This project follows the same four stage process used in other long-range planning projects. The four stages are:

- Stage 1: Background Research (Spring 2021 to Summer 2021)
- Stage 2: Community engagement and preparation of Key Directions Report (Summer 2021 to Winter 2022, endorsed by Council March 9, 2022)
- Stage 3: Preparation of Draft Parks Plan, including virtual Open House on the Draft Plan (draft released May 12, 2022, Virtual Public Open House held May 26, 2022)
- Stage 4: Preparation of Final Parks Plan (Summer 2022)

Page 3

Key Themes Expressed on the draft Parks Plan

As part of the public consultation process on the draft Parks Plan (i.e. the May 26th Open House, comments received, or meetings held with stakeholders), the following key themes were expressed:

Need for additional Pickleball Courts

The public expressed a desire for additional pickleball courts across the City – both in individual parks throughout the neighbourhoods so residents do not have to drive as far, and clustered together in a park to create a community pickleball hub over which an air-supported structure could be installed in the future. Section 4.3 of the final Parks Plan provides the following direction in relation to this matter:

- The City will undertake a data collection exercise to determine tennis court usage levels during daytime, evening, weekend, and weekdays with an intended outcome being the identification of courts suitable to be re-lined for both tennis and pickleball and/or repurposing of underutilized tennis courts to dedicated pickleball courts to improve overall court utilization. Depending on the outcome of this analysis, the City will consider updating the Tennis Strategy to be a combined Tennis/Pickleball Strategy. A provision rate for dedicated pickleball courts may be established following the completion of the tennis court usage analysis.
- In advance of the usage analysis, the City will continue to monitor the supply and demand of pickleball courts and should demand continue, the City will plan to construct dedicated pickleball courts, preferably at Community or Destination Parks, and the City may establish temporary/seasonal “pop-up” pickleball courts in Community or Destination Parks where there are limited impacts to adjacent residential lots, or re-line existing tennis courts to facilitate both tennis and pickleball subject to community consultation.
- The City will investigate the location, design and construction of a multi-court pickleball hub or hub(s) that provides an opportunity to be covered with an air-supported structure to facilitate year-round play.

Tennis Courts

Tennis Canada requested a meeting with City staff, which was held on June 1, wherein support was expressed for the direction outlined in the Parks Plan to undertake a data collection exercise to determine tennis court usage. Tennis Canada expressed support for the use of a data-driven approach to decide how best to provide both tennis courts and pickleball courts to the growing community. Tennis Canada expressed an interest in partnering with the City to undertake the usage analysis noted in Section 4.3 of the Parks Plan and offered to have further discussions regarding obtaining grant funding to aid the City with this analysis. Tennis Canada also noted that they are working in

Page 4

partnership with Pickleball Canada to help grow the sports together and that a joint letter would be issued shortly recommending that municipalities provide both dedicated tennis courts and dedicated pickleball courts, rather than multi-lined courts, in order to recognize the critical differences between the sports (i.e. court size, net height, social aspects, noise aspects, etc.).

Additional space for Archery

The public expressed a desire for additional space for archery. Section 4.14 of the final Parks Plan provides the following direction in relation to this matter:

- Public requests for other recreation facilities should be supported by demonstrated demand, available resources, partnership opportunities, and other factors (i.e. disc golf, outdoor lawn bowling, BMX/dirt bike jump track, beach volleyball facilities, table tennis, archery, arboretums, forest bathing trails).

Additional Off-leash Dog Areas

The public expressed a desire for additional off-leash dog areas, particularly in park spaces close to the Yonge Street growth corridor. Section 4.10 of the final Parks Plan provides the following direction in relation to this matter:

- Plan to construct an off-leash dog area in the south part of the City;
- Plan to construct an off-leash dog area in the Oak Ridges area;
- Evaluate potential opportunities for two smaller off-leash dog areas within proximity of planned centres and corridors as part of an existing park revitalization project or along an existing or new trail.

Outdoor Skating Areas

The public expressed a desire for additional outdoor ice hockey rinks in an effort to provide an alternative for residents who have begun to create hockey rinks on small ponds, creating safety issues. Section 4.12 of the final Parks Plan provides the following direction in relation to this matter:

- The City will plan to provide three additional artificially cooled skating areas, taking into consideration the distribution of existing locations, park type, supporting amenities and other site factors, with preference given to placing these facilities in Community or Destination Parks.
- The City should undertake an investigation to review the options and standards for community and neighbourhood ice applications (e.g., artificial rinks, portable refrigeration kits/systems, natural rink kits, etc.). This review should identify supporting amenities, associated costs, and operational resources. Based on the park classification, the investigation should identify the appropriate application and standards to be applied as demand warrants. These standards can then be applied to new parks, park revitalization and park master plans projects as they

Page 5

are undertaken to supplement demand for outdoor skating areas given the changing climate and the fact that the artificial outdoor skating rinks planned will likely be phased in over the long-term.

Interest in the Provision of an Arboretum or Forest Bathing Trails

The public expressed a desire for an Arboretum like exists in Aurora or a Forest Bathing Trail like exists in Markham, namely a trail that allows people to absorb the forest atmosphere and encourages people to simply spend time in nature and help to educate people about the many health and wellness benefits of trees. Section 4.14 of the final Parks Plan provides the following direction in relation to this matter:

- Public requests for other recreation facilities should be supported by demonstrated demand, available resources, partnership opportunities, and other factors (i.e. disc golf, outdoor lawn bowling, BMX/dirt bike jump track, beach volleyball facilities, table tennis, archery, arboretums, forest bathing trails).

The matter of a Forest Bathing Trail will be further explored as part of the on-going Transportation Master Plan project (separate project).

Open Space Lands

BILD provided comments requesting that the City confirm whether or not open space lands and trails have been included in the estimate of active parkland given that the City's 2021 DC Study includes a charge for passive open space (including trails). BILD noted that if these passive open space lands are considered parkland for the purposes of calculating the City's DC rates, the City's approach to parkland should treat these lands as parkland as well.

As was noted in the Key Directions report endorsed by Council, the definition of active parkland does not include open space lands that sometimes support trails. As such, the estimate of active parkland does not include open space lands that could otherwise be described as "conservation lands" (i.e. lands which are meant for preserving environmentally sensitive areas, pose user risks, are hazard lands, or serve stormwater management purposes.) Open space lands are not included in the estimate of active parkland because they serve a different purpose than the municipality is seeking to achieve by securing and providing active parkland. Active parkland is land where the municipality can build and construct active park facilities such as splash pads, playgrounds, soccer fields, baseball diamonds, tennis courts, pickleball courts, or off-leash dog areas close to where people live.

The DC By-law has separate categories to provide funding for:

- parks and the facilities within them; and
- open space lands and the facilities within them.

Page 6

The open space category is used to fund the provision of recreational trails, which are being planned as part of the City's on-going Transportation Master Plan project. The on-going Transportation Master Plan project covers all modes of travel used by residents to get around the City, including recreational trails.

Transit Oriented Communities (TOCs)

BILD provided comments regarding whether the City had any lands that would qualify as Transit Oriented Communities (TOCs) as Bill 109 requires that TOCs have a capped Parkland amount. The City has one TOC around the future subway station lands in Richmond Hill Centre and the Province has capped parkland in this area.

Optimizing the Use of Parkland

BILD provided comments questioning how the City plans to account for the fact that certain areas of the City have a higher amount of parkland per person than others (as is shown on Figure 3.2 of the Parks Plan) so as to optimize the use of public parkland and minimize the need to impose unnecessary costs on new housing. BILD also noted that it appears that the Parks Plan is based on the achievement of the current City-wide parkland provision of 15.6 m² per person, with areas below this average targeted for additional parkland acquisition to bring those areas up to the City-wide average.

The Parks Plan proposes to optimize the use of public parkland by planning for parkland at the City-wide scale, not at the traffic zone scale as Figure 3.2 illustrates. As per Council's endorsed Key Directions, a parkland service level of 1.37 persons per 1,000 people (or 13.7 m² per person) is planned to 2031 – this parkland service level maintains the same parkland service level as was established in the 2013 Parks Plan. By choosing to plan for parkland at the City-wide scale, certain traffic zones across the City will continue to have a parkland service level that is lower than others (see Figure 3.3 of the Parks Plan). To optimize the use of parks within areas with higher parkland service levels, Section 6.1 of the Parks Plan (Planning for a connected Urban Open Space System) provides direction for how the municipal park system within and adjacent to the growing centres and corridors can move towards a unified interconnected network that serves the public at large. This direction will be realized by enhancing the parks system through the addition of new parks in the growth areas that are currently not served by parkland, revitalizing older parks, and providing connections to existing and new parks through streetscape enhancements and bridge crossings.

Consideration of Permeable Paving in Parking Areas in Parks

The public expressed a desire for the City to consider permeable paving in parking areas in parks. Section 6.3 of the final Parks Plan provides the following direction in relation to this matter under the climate change lens entitled "Advancing resiliency initiatives in Park Projects":

- Opportunities should be provided to allow for the appropriate use of green infrastructure such as low impact development techniques or permeable pavers

Page 7

and to educate park users on design elements that have been introduced to make the municipal park system more resilient.

Parkland Dedication By-law

BILD provided comments regarding whether the City can provide details regarding its likely approach to Parkland Cash-in-Lieu. The City recently (May, 2022) retained consulting services to assist in its Parkland Dedication By-law Review. As part of this project, a market analysis will be completed to inform stakeholders and Council what options are available to the City to ensure the integrated lifecycle approach to planning, designing and maintaining park assets outlined in the Parks Plan can be funded effectively using the tools at the City's disposal. Meetings will be held with stakeholders like BILD over the summer months and a recommendations report will be brought to Council on September 14, 2022 in order to meet the legislative deadline of September 18, 2022.

Development Charges (DC) By-law

BILD had a number of questions regarding the list of "Park Development Projects" outlined in the 2021 DC Background Study. As is noted in the Parks Plan, the City's Development Charges By-law has not been comprehensively updated to reflect the list of park projects in the Capital Plan since 2014. As a result, the DC By-law does not currently reflect the full funding envelope for outdoor recreational needs that the City could collect through this funding tool. To ensure appropriate funding for the growth-related park needs outlined in this Plan, a DC By-law update is on-going and scheduled to be brought to Council in 2023.

Park Ambassador Volunteer Program

The public expressed an interest in the City considering re-establishing its park ambassador volunteer program so that residents can help to keep the parks clean and safe. The City's previous Park Ambassador Program was identified as a discretionary program as part of the 2013 Core Services Review associated with the reorganization of the Public Works Operations (PWO) Division and recommended to be reviewed to assess its value and effectiveness. The later evaluation determined that the Park Ambassador Program was not meeting intended goals and there was a tendency for the volunteers to focus on, and report minor park maintenance concerns (e.g., garbage, cracks in sidewalks etc.) outside regular operational schedules, which was causing workload and scheduling issues for PWO.

Similar to the recommendation being brought forward as part of the Park Use By-law review (see SRCS.13.22), the Parks Plan provides direction for the City to re-evaluate the potential to reinstate this program and request necessary budget through the Operating Budget process if it is determined that such a program is recommended in the future.

Page 8

2022 Parks Plan

The 2022 Parks Plan is organized using the same seven Chapter format that was used to organize the 2013 Parks Plan. A brief description of the content of each of these Chapters is outlined below.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

This Chapter provides an introduction to the Parks Plan and defines the purpose of the Plan, the background research and consultation used to inform the Plan, and the Plan's organization.

Chapter 2 - Richmond Hill's Park Planning Context

This Chapter presents the planning context for the Parks Plan in terms of the City's broader strategic policy direction and framework, anticipated growth in Richmond Hill, key socio-demographic trends with potential to influence future park and recreation facility needs, and recreation and leisure trends being experienced in the City and across the broader region.

Chapter 3 - Existing Park System

This Chapter provides an overview of the existing municipal park system in Richmond Hill, with an emphasis on the role and function of the various types of parks in the inventory.

Chapter 4 - Outdoor Recreation Facilities

This Chapter summarizes the City's stock of outdoor recreation facilities and makes recommendations for the future provision of these facilities. The service level standards for the majority of the outdoor recreation facilities that the City provides will be maintained as compared to the 2013 Parks Plan (i.e. the service level standards for splash pads, playgrounds, tennis courts, soccer fields, ball diamonds, basketball or multisport courts, skateboard/BMX facilities, outdoor fitness equipment, community allotment and collective gardens, picnic areas, and off-leash dog areas).

There are six outdoor recreation facilities that the Parks Plan provides direction for increased service level standards in response to changing demographics and trends, namely:

- Pickleball courts
- Outdoor skating areas
- Smaller off-leash dog areas
- Smaller outdoor fitness stations
- Small-scale splash spots
- Small-scale skateboard spots

Page 9

Chapter 5 - Parkland Needs

This Chapter summarizes the City's future parkland needs in terms of park typology. As per Council's endorsed key directions, the parkland service level of 1.37 hectares per 1,000 people that was established in the 2013 Parks Plan is maintained to 2031.

This parkland service level establishes a need of slightly over 53 hectares across the parkland hierarchy which will allow the City to provide parkland to serve the majority of the areas that do not currently have access to parkland within a 400m walking distance.

The City has already secured slightly over 24 hectares through the Planning Approvals for North Leslie and West Gormley, leaving a residual of slightly over 29 hectares to secure over the horizon of this Plan.

Chapter 6 - Improving and Enhancing our Park System

This Chapter sets out a vision for an Urban Open Space System that provides the framework for connecting new parks and enhanced streetscapes within the intensification and infill areas to existing and planned trails and open spaces within the City's larger Greenway System. It also provides the methodology that will be used to identify and prioritize park revitalization projects, and the direction for how the City will apply a "climate change lens" to the overall planning, design, maintenance and operations of the municipal park system to ensure the system will be more resilient in the face of a changing climate.

Chapter 7 - Implementation – Making it all Happen

This Chapter recommends a series of implementation tools that will be used to realize the parkland and outdoor recreation facility needs outlined in this Plan, namely:

- Reviewing the Development Charges By-law and Parkland Dedication By-law to ensure they align with the updated parkland and facility needs;
- Incorporating park and trail assets into the City's Enterprise Asset Management Tool and Planning approach;
- Using the Community Benefits Charges By-law to fund a portion of the cultural and placemaking elements associated with park projects, parkland acquisition needs beyond what the Parkland Dedication By-law enables the City to acquire, and providing an in-kind credit for privately owned, publicly accessible spaces (Urban Plazas or POPS);
- Engaging in and using partnerships, pilot projects and interim park projects to achieve the municipal park system envisioned in this Plan, particularly within the centres and corridors.

Page 10

Financial/Staffing/Other Implications:

The 2022 Parks Plan attached as Appendix A to Staff Report SRPI.22.083 will be used to inform the City's Capital Forecast and the annual Capital Budget process. There are no immediate staffing or financial implications associated with this report.

Relationship to Council's Strategic Priorities 2020-2022:

Balancing Growth and Green

The Parks Plan is identified as a major project intended to recognize the critical balance between economic development and environmental stewardship. Stewardship of green spaces such as parks and trails and longer-term sustainability planning and climate action initiatives associated with parks and the facilities within them aid the City in balancing growth and green.

Fiscal Responsibility

The direction in the Parks Plan provides for an integrated lifecycle planning approach to ensure the planning, design/construction, and maintenance/operational aspects of the facilities and programs outlined in the Plan account for all costs from project inception through to construction/program formulation, and operation/maintenance.

Sense of Belonging

The Parks Plan aids in establishing a sense of belonging by providing equitable access to parks and outdoor recreation facilities and by directing that these facilities be located within close proximity to residential units or in prominent locations in the community to ensure parks, recreation and cultural experiences build a sense of place within the community.

Getting Around the City

The Parks Plan directs for the creation of improved connections to the parks system through enhanced streetscapes, bridge crossings, and trail connections. These enhancements will allow residents to access parks by foot or bicycle, providing ease of access for those using park facilities.

Climate Change Considerations:

The way we plan, design and maintain parks and the facilities within them impacts the City's larger greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and how vulnerable the City is to the impacts of climate change. The Parks Plan provides direction for that a climate change lens be applied to the development and redevelopment of parks. For example, in parks this might mean including open space naturalization areas, planting more native species, enhancing tree canopies, establishing pollinator gardens or rain gardens, or restoring habitat including invasive species management to enhance biodiversity.

Page 11

Applying a climate change lens consistently could help the City to better leverage the development and redevelopment process for these facilities to combat climate change and reduce its impacts.

Conclusion and Next Steps:

It is recommended that Council approve the 2022 Parks Plan (Appendix A).

The 2022 Parks Plan provides the necessary background information to bring forward an updated Parkland Dedication By-law and to inform the Community Benefits Charge Strategy and By-law by the legislated deadline of September 18, 2022. The updated Parks Plan and updated By-laws (together with the Development Charges By-law) work as tools that ensure that the City is collecting an appropriate and reasonable amount of land and/or revenue to fund its future parkland and facility needs in order to continue to serve residents over the long-term.

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.

- Appendix A – 2022 Parks Plan

Page 12

Report Approval Details

Document Title:	SRPI.022.083 - Request for Approval - 2022 Parks Plan.docx
Attachments:	- Appendix A_2022 Parks Plan - 2022-06-02 - AODA.pdf
Final Approval Date:	Jun 8, 2022

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

Patrick Lee - Jun 7, 2022 - 3:52 PM

Kelvin Kwan - Jun 7, 2022 - 4:32 PM

Gigi Li - Jun 8, 2022 - 8:20 AM

Darlene Joslin - Jun 8, 2022 - 5:35 PM