



Staff Report for Committee of the Whole Meeting

Date of Meeting: May 29, 2024

Report Number: SRCS.24.10

Department: Community Services

Division: Recreation and Culture Services

Subject: **SRCS.24.10 - Lake Wilcox Boathouse**

Purpose:

To obtain Council endorsement for a proposed process to determine the future use of the Lake Wilcox Boathouse.

Recommendations:

- a) That SRCS.24.10 regarding the future use of the Lake Wilcox Boathouse be received.
- b) That Staff initiate a consultation process that includes an Expression of Interest to investigate a preferred partnership arrangement for future use of the Lake Wilcox Boathouse, and public engagement to better understand community desires for the site.
- c) That the Lake Wilcox Canoe Club Precinct Plan be moved further into the future in the City's 10 Year Capital Forecast pending determination of the future of the Lake Wilcox Boathouse.
- d) That, upon the recommendation the Commissioner of Community Services, the Mayor and Clerk be authorized to execute license agreements to facilitate Richmond Hill Canoe Club use of the Lake Wilcox Boathouse until such time as a decision is made regarding the future of the Boathouse.

Contact Person:

Donald Hearn, Director of Recreation and Culture

Report Approval:

Submitted by: Tracey Steele, Commissioner of Community Services

Approved by: Darlene Joslin, City Manager

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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.

Background:

The Lake Wilcox Boathouse

The Lake Wilcox Boathouse (the “Boathouse”) is a 2,098 square foot building located on the northeast shore of Lake Wilcox within Lake Wilcox Park. The Boathouse was constructed in 1985 and includes an office and reception area, a storage garage, and a smaller office space. A paved, roundabout driveway provides access to the Boathouse from Olde Bayview Avenue.

The Boathouse is a very basic structure predominantly intended for storage of non-motorized water vessels and other aquatic equipment. It has limited service connectivity (only hydro) and very few built-in amenities. The City’s Asset Management Plan indicates that the building is generally considered to be in poor condition and in need of significant capital repair and replacement over the near term. For example, the City’s Lifecycle Management System indicates that the Boathouse has a Facility Condition Index of 0.37, which means that 37% of building components are due for replacement within the next 5 years. It is estimated that the cost to fully restore the building in 2024 dollars would be in the range of \$300,000 to \$400,000.

The 2006 Oak Ridges Community Centre and Park Master Plan (the “Lake Wilcox Park Master Plan”) recommended that provisions be made for the expansion of the Boathouse, including addition of water and sanitary service (to facilitate public washroom facilities) and upgraded electrical service. As the Lake Wilcox Park Master Plan is now quite dated and certain Planning legislation and land ownership matters have evolved since the time it was approved, the City’s 10 year Capital Forecast currently contemplates initiating a Precinct Plan for the northeast precinct of Lake Wilcox Park in 2025.

Use of the Lake Wilcox Boathouse

Following construction of the Boathouse in 1985 a competitive process was run to determine use of the building. As a result the Boathouse was leased to a company called Silent Sports Marine, which used the Boathouse as a base for sailboard lessons along with the sale and rental of sailboards.

In the 1990’s the Richmond Hill Canoe Club was granted use of the Boathouse. The Richmond Hill Canoe Club (“RHCC” or the “Club”) is a sprint canoe and kayak racing club, affiliated with CanoeKayak Ontario and CanoeKayak Canada. The RHCC was founded in 1991 and is a not-for-profit organization operated by an elected board of volunteers, with a paid professional head coach and a team of experienced junior coaches. The Club offers training to develop youth athletes to become sprint canoe and kayak racers, provides beginner and recreation programs (including summer camps for

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kids and adult introductory programs), and operates a dragon boat rental program. In 2023 the RHCC had 146 members, 86 of whom were Richmond Hill residents, and approximately 2,500 people from across York Region participated in their programs and events (including competitive and recreational programs and dragon boat rentals).

Currently, the Club uses the Boathouse as a year-round base for their activities and for storage of their boats and equipment. The Club has also installed a dock on the shore of the Lake (at their cost) for securing and launching boats. Over the years, RHCC's storage needs have increased and they now also use 600 square feet of outdoor space to the east of the Boathouse for storage.

Since 2004, the lease of the Boathouse to RHCC has been guided by several different iterations of a license agreement. The current license agreement provides RHCC exclusive use of the building (with the exception of 100 square feet of space that the City uses for recreation programming) and in exchange, RHCC pays 100% of the Boathouse operating costs (approximately \$4,000 in 2022) and offers recreational and sporting programs that supplement the City's own recreational programs. The current version of the license agreement was executed in 2017 with a 5 year term, plus two optional one year terms. The first optional one year term expired in August 2023 and the second, and final optional term associated with the 2017 agreement will end in August of 2024.

Discussion:

Over the years, staff have received sporadic inquiries from other businesses and organizations regarding use of the Boathouse and potential opportunities to rent water sports equipment from the sandy shoreline (boat launch) area to the west of the Boathouse. Staff have also received concerns regarding the fact that RHCC has been granted exclusive use of the building for an extended period of time without consideration for other opportunities.

While RHCC provides a valuable recreational service and has had a long-standing and mutually beneficial relationship with the City for many years, it is an opportune time to assess the building's future given that:

- the existing license agreement between the City and RHCC has been renewed for its final optional one-year term ending August 31, 2024,
- the building is in need of repair and renewal, and
- the City's 10 Year Capital Forecast currently contemplates initiation of a precinct plan for the park area around the Boathouse in 2025.

Potential options for the future of the Boathouse include:

1. Repair the Boathouse and continue to lease it to RHCC. In this regard staff recommend that, at minimum, the RHCC be required to contribute to capital repair of the building similar to lease arrangements with other organizations.
2. Repair (and possibly improve) the Boathouse to facilitate a new future use. It should be noted that the Boathouse is located in the floodplain, and therefore the

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range of possible uses is restricted and there is limited potential to expand the building footprint.

3. Remove the Boathouse from the site entirely. This option could enable an expanded area for public launch of non-motorized water sports or shoreline naturalization.

The first logical step in determining the future of the Boathouse would involve public consultation, and it is recommended that two different types of consultation processes be initiated – an Expression of Interest (“EOI”) process to solicit interest in future use of the Boathouse by (a) partner organization(s), and public engagement to determine community desires for the Boathouse and surrounding area.

Expression of Interest Process

The EOI process will be similar to the process used to determine partnership programming offered at the David Dunlap Observatory. The EOI would invite organizations and businesses to present the City with proposed uses for the Boathouse and vicinity. The City would specify that it reserves the right not to select any of the proposals and instead remove the Boathouse from the site in its sole and absolute discretion. It will also specify that if the City finds that there is a proposal it would like to pursue, the City will undertake capital repair and replacement works for the Boathouse that will involve:

- Maintaining the existing building footprint,
- Repairing or replacing functional components of the Boathouse that are at end-of-life,
- Giving the Boathouse a “facelift” by updating several finishing elements of the building (e.g., counters, flooring and paint) which are due for renewal, and
- Assessing options to determine if there is a feasible and financially viable approach to add washroom facilities to the Boathouse as recommended in the 2006 Oak Ridges Community Centre and Park Master Plan.

Any other improvements to the building will be considered, but they must be outlined in the proposal and funded by the potential partner. Additionally, it would be made clear that it would be advantageous to any proposal to commit funding for the needed repair and replacement works listed above.

Community Consultation

Coincident with the EOI process, the City will survey the community to determine the type of use(s) that would be most desirable for the Boathouse. It is important to note, that since Lake Wilcox Park is a Destination Park, the consultation process should solicit opinion City-wide, not just from the immediately surrounding neighbourhood.

The consultation will explore whether the community would prefer to see the building continue to exist on the site with some sort of associated recreational programming or community sport use, or whether the preference would be for the building to be removed entirely from the site freeing up access to the shoreline. Note that the

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community will be asked to consider other potential uses contingent upon a partner organization providing the funding for any required renovations.

Selection of a Preferred Approach and Interim Measures

Staff will review the EOI proposals and evaluate them in the context of community feedback to determine the option that would be most beneficial for the community (both monetarily and non-monetarily in terms of the type of programming). A recommendation for the future use and timing of implementation steps will then be made to Council.

The existing arrangement with the RHCC will be renewed until such time as a decision is made. Staff have discussed this approach with RHCC. Additionally, the precinct plan process for the north precinct of Lake Wilcox Park will be moved further into the future of the 10 Year Capital Forecast to accommodate investigation into the future of the Boathouse.

Financial/Staffing/Other Implications:

In the City's current arrangement with RHCC, RHCC pays 100% of the operating costs of the Boathouse in exchange for exclusive use of the building to facilitate elite athlete canoe and kayak training, and recreational canoe and kayak programming available to Richmond Hill residents. While the City benefits from RHCC offering programs that compliment and supplement the City's own recreation and sport programs, the City is entirely responsible for any capital investments to the Boathouse and does not realize any operational revenue from RHCC programming.

The goal of the proposed process is to determine the optimal use of the Boathouse and surrounding area both in terms of community recreational opportunities and fiscal efficiency. It is possible that an EOI process will result in a continuation or the arrangement with RHCC, or a new use and partnership arrangement that provides additional financial or non-monetary benefits to the community. It is also possible that the consultation process will result in a recommendation to remove the Boathouse from the site, which would require a capital investment for demolition and site remediation but would minimize long-term operating costs.

The recommended consultation process can be undertaken using existing operating budget, but will require staff resources to execute.

Relationship to Strategic Plan:

Determining the future of the Lake Wilcox Boathouse is consistent with Pillar 2, Focusing on People. It relates to both Priority 1, Engage the community, stakeholders and City staff to support informed participation and to ensure that all voices can contribute toward effective decision-making; and, Priority 2, Support Richmond Hill's unique character and sense of community through programs, services and events.

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Climate Change Considerations:

Climate change considerations are not applicable to this staff report.

Conclusion:

For approximately three decades the Richmond Hill Canoe Club has been allocated exclusive use of the Lake Wilcox Boathouse for the purpose of operating canoe and kayak programming. For many years, RHCC programming focused on elite athlete training and facilitation of dragon boat regattas on Lake Wilcox, but more recently the Club has evolved to incorporate a greater level of introductory and recreational level programming available to Richmond Hill residents.

While RHCC provides a valuable recreational service to the community and has had a long-standing and mutually beneficial relationship with the City for many years, staff believe that it is in the best interest of the community to evaluate whether the RHCC continues to be the preferred use of the Boathouse. It is an appropriate time to assess the building's future given that the current license agreement between the City and RHCC expires in 2024, the Boathouse is in need of capital investment, and a precinct plan for the northeast area of Lake Wilcox is anticipated in the coming years of the 10 Year Capital Forecast.

To determine the optimal future use of the Boathouse, it is recommended that the City engage in consultation processes including both an EOI for use of the building, and public engagement to determine community desires for the Boathouse and surrounding area. Staff will review the EOI proposals and evaluate them in the context of the community feedback to determine the option that would be most beneficial for the community. A recommendation for the future use, implementation steps and timing will then be made to Council.

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.

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Report Approval Details

Document Title:	SRCS.24.10 Lake Wilcox Boathouse.docx
Attachments:	
Final Approval Date:	May 15, 2024

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

Tracey Steele - May 15, 2024 - 12:34 PM

Darlene Joslin - May 15, 2024 - 4:33 PM