



Staff Report for Committee of the Whole Meeting

Date of Meeting: March 19, 2025

Report Number: SRPBS.25.023

Department: Planning and Building Services

Division: Policy Planning

Subject: **SRPBS.25.023 – Request for Approval - Dave Barrow Civic Square Park Plan**

Purpose:

The purpose of this staff report is to seek Council approval of the final Dave Barrow Civic Square Park Plan so that detailed design of this new Destination Park can commence.

Recommendation(s):

- a) That Staff Report SRPBS.25.023 regarding the Dave Barrow Civic Square Park Plan be received;
- b) That Council approve the Dave Barrow Civic Square Park Plan appended as Attachment A to Staff Report SRPBS.25.023;
- c) That all comments be directed to staff for consideration as part of the detailed design stage for Dave Barrow Civic Square Park;
- d) That a project be included in the Capital Plan Forecast to facilitate the evolution of Dave Barrow Civic Square as contemplated in Dave Barrow Civic Square Park Plan (Attachment A).

Contact Person(s):

- Anant Patel, Senior Planner (Parks), extension 2492
- Michelle Dobbie, Manager, Park and Natural Heritage Planning, extension 2467
- Maria Flores, Director, Policy Planning, extension 5438
- Gus Galanis, Commissioner of Planning and Building Services, extension 2465

Report Approval:

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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Key Messages:

- Dave Barrow Civic Square Park, located at the southwest corner of Yonge Street and Major Mackenzie Drive West, is envisioned to be “our gathering place on the hill.”
- The purpose of the Dave Barrow Civic Square Park Plan is to provide direction for park improvements for the City’s sixth Destination Park in accordance with the needs outlined in the 2022 Park Plan.
- Development of this Park Plan included background research, a Stage 2 Archaeological Assessment, a public open house, a public survey, and three focus group meetings to obtain input on draft options for the new park.
- Based on the feedback received, the Dave Barrow Civic Square Park Plan has been prepared for Council consideration and approval.
- Once the Dave Barrow Civic Square Park Plan is approved by Council, staff will begin the implementation stage, namely preparing detailed design and construction drawings to realize the park improvements.
- Staff will continue to investigate future grant funding, partnership, sponsorship, or other funding opportunities as they arise to evolve Dave Barrow Civic Square as per the direction in the Dave Barrow Civic Square Park Plan (refer to Attachment A), including adding the evolution project(s) to the Capital Plan Forecast.

Background:

Dave Barrow Civic Square is approximately 2 hectares in size and will become the City's sixth Destination Park. The park is located at the southwest corner of Yonge Street and Major Mackenzie Drive and to the south and east of the Central Library.

The 2022 Council approved Parks Plan directs that the City may convert the Mount Pleasant Community Park, including The Wave Pool lands (Lois Hancey Aquatic Centre) and the lands to the east of the Central Library lands into a Destination Park to establish a new civic gathering space at the southwest corner of Major Mackenzie Drive and Yonge Street.

At its meeting of June 28, 2023, Council directed that:

“Staff undertake a consultation process to confirm the design elements to be included in a passive park (i.e. a park with no permanent outdoor recreational facilities) on the portion of the Richmond Hill Civic Centre lands to the east of the Central Library to provide a central location for community gatherings and civic events in the short-term to be considered in the 2024 capital Budget discussion.”

The first phase of this project will be the creation of the City’s “gathering place on the hill” at Dave Barrow Civic Square. This first phase will establish park improvements on a portion of the future Destination Park in an effort to provide a much needed central location for community gatherings and civic events until the park evolves further. The

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creation of these park improvements are also intended to help create an anchor to aid in revitalizing the Village Local Centre to the north.

A four-stage process has been followed to complete the Dave Barrow Civic Square Park Plan as follows:

- Stage 1: Creation of Opportunities and Constraints Mapping and Draft Options (June to September 2024)
- Stage 2: Coordination and facilitation of public/focus group consultation on Draft Options (October to November 2024)
- Stage 3: Preparation of Draft Park Plan based on feedback received in Stage 2 (December 2024 to February 2025)
- Stage 4: Final Park Plan to Council for approval and implementation (March 2025 and beyond)

Discussion:

Public/focus group consultation and feedback on Draft Options

Stage 2 of the project included the creation of two draft options for public/focus group consultation:

- Option 1, entitled “RH Views”, proposed park improvements that were centralized around a plaza space to the east of the Central Library with a flexible structure that could host different temporary play opportunities like swings or art installations; it also included an amphitheatre with a plaza at the base that could host outdoor performances like concerts or movies; and
- Option 2, entitled “The Strip”, proposed park improvements to create outdoor spaces extending along the north side of Hopkins Street. This area was proposed to include a number of new structures like a game rental space and a new “porch” area that would provide views over a lower lawn area, that in turn could be used for recreational activities (such as frisbee or corn hole) or for hosting outdoor performances or events (such as concerts or artisan markets). This option also included the ability to host larger food-truck focused festivals or events.

These two draft options were presented at an in-person Open House held at the Central Library and attended by approximately 70 residents on October 10, 2024. A public survey was posted for approximately three weeks after the Open House for those not able to attend in-person and received approximately 420 responses. To promote the survey and Open House, the City undertook a social media awareness campaign, digital advertisements, and placed Curb-Ex signs with direct links adjacent to the Central Library entrances. In addition, virtual focus-group workshops were held with Library staff, Recreation and Culture staff and community group participants, and the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation to obtain feedback on the two draft options.

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Feedback received from the Open House, survey, and focus group workshops is summarized in the Dave Barrow Civic Square Park Plan (see Attachment A, Part 3 – The Process). Overall, a combination of the park elements outlined in the two draft options was preferred. The amphitheatre, upper plaza and eco-patches were the top three preferred park elements for the first option, while the eco-patches, preserved slope, and lower lawn area were the top three preferred park elements for the second option. The final Park Plan presented in this report (refer to Attachment A) represents a combination of the elements provided in the two draft options.

Dave Barrow Civic Square Park Plan

Staff and the City’s consultants utilized the information obtained through the public and focus group consultation process to prepare the final Dave Barrow Civic Square Park Plan (refer to Attachment A). Subject to Council approval, the final Dave Barrow Civic Square Park Plan will be used to develop detailed design and construction drawings for the park improvements. Approval for detailed design and construction was received as part of the 2025 Budget request as a multi-year project, with spending to be cash-flowed over 2 years (2025 and 2026).

The Dave Barrow Civic Square Park Plan provides direction for park improvements that will facilitate the establishment of the City’s sixth Destination Park in accordance with the needs outlined in the City’s 2022 Park Plan. Located at the southwest corner of Yonge Street and Major Mackenzie Drive West, this park is envisioned to be “our gathering place on the hill”. The park improvements aim to create a new park that promotes citizen’s health, happiness, and well-being, while being mindful of the financial implications of the proposed vision.

These park improvements are intended to create a seasonally changing “gathering place on the hill” with a range of elements that reflect Richmond Hill’s identity as a sustainable, resilient City. In particular, the proposed design integrates enhanced urban meadow and marsh ecologies with a series of new urban event and seasonal programming spaces, which are all connected by a network of new trails. The Dave Barrow Civic Square Park Plan is structured into six sections, including:

1. Introduction

Outlines the 2022 Parks Plan’s direction for this park to become the City’s sixth Destination Park, with a focus on creating a civic gathering place. It also outlines background related to the previous Civic Precinct Project undertaken for the larger City landholdings surrounding this new park.

2. The Existing Site

This section speaks to Dave Barrow Civic Square’s park context adjacent to the historic Village Core, the topography of the site, sun exposure throughout the year, and the cultural history of the site which was informed by a Stage 2 Archaeological Assessment (see TRCA clearance letter at Appendix 6).

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3. The Process

This section describes the project schedule, the two concepts consulted on through the public open house, the online survey and focus-group workshops, along with a consolidated summary of the feedback received.

4. Dave Barrow Civic Square

This section provides an overview of the park improvements, including plan drawings, renderings and photographic precedents by area. Direction for Cultural Design Elements, Activations and Events is also included in this section, as is a section on the Sustainability of the planned park elements. This section details the key park elements in the Upper Area of the park as well as the Lower Area of the park.

Upper Area of the Park

The Upper Area of the park includes the following key park elements:

- **Native Pollinator Meadow**, which is a no-mow area in the north-east corner of the park that will provide new habitat, especially for the bird fauna of the area. This element reflects an important consideration noted by the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and also aligns with the City's Bird-Friendly designation. The native pollinator meadow will decrease park maintenance needs in comparison to sodding this area. Educational signage will be used to help users of the park understand the importance of providing meadow species in urbanizing areas and to appreciate that the look and feel of this area of the park will be more natural than the more formal areas of the park where sod is planned to be installed/maintained.
- **The Teaching Garden**, which is an enclosed space for outdoor educational activities that will be cut into the slope of this area of the park to provide seatwalls around the perimeter. Companion seating opportunities will also be provided to ensure equitable access. Pending funding availability, a future cultural element is planned in this area, which could include using the materials and surface treatments of the Teaching Garden to tell the First Nation's story of the circle's representation of all life on earth, and that every person has an equal voice.
- **The "Richmond Hill Bowl"**, which is an amphitheatre area that includes a permanent stage to host events like Concerts in the Park, or programming like Movies in the Park throughout the year. This area may also be used for future group gathering requests received by the City on a permit basis. It may also become a key focus area for seasonal events that the City decides to host in this park.
- **The Spine**, which is a 3 metre wide pathway connecting the upper area of the park east of the Central Library to the new Events Lawn and Events Plaza areas in the lower portion of the park. The Spine will be designed to AODA standards, providing equitable accessible for all users to travel through the various areas of the park.

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- **An Upper Plaza**, which is sited to capitalize on the views of the surrounding cityscape from this location and expand the areas where people can sit comfortably outdoors in the park. This plaza will include seating, umbrella tables, lighting, and bicycle parking,
- **Tall Fescue Meadow**, which is used to clearly define the boundary for areas of programming and activity, particularly adjacent to the amphitheatre. Similar to the native pollinator meadow area described above, this element reflects an important consideration noted by the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and also aligns with the City's Bird-Friendly designation. The tall fescue meadow will decrease park maintenance needs in comparison to sodding this area. Educational signage will be used to help users of the park understand the importance of providing meadow species in urbanizing areas and to appreciate that the look and feel of this area of the park will be more natural than the more formal areas of the park where sod is planned to be installed/maintained.
- **Enhanced Eco-Patch**, which expands the existing wooded area at the north-east corner of the park, providing additional shade and habitat for fauna in the area. Maintaining the existing eco-patch will allow the existing diagonal pathway to Yonge Street to remain, along with the existing memorial bench and sandblasted quote from former Richmond Hill Mayor Dave Barrow.

Lower Area of the Park

The Lower Area of the park includes the following key park elements:

- **The Richmond Hill Sign**, which will be located between the central eco-patch and the southern area planned to become a tall fescue meadow just north of the intersection of Yonge Street and Hopkins Avenue. Siting the sign at this location will allow it to serve as a gateway element to the park and the Village Local Centre beyond. This sign will be designed to change colours in the evenings as an artistic element. Varied colour will also enable the City to utilize the sign to highlight specific cultural and community events.
- **The Slope**, which will preserve the sloped area used for tobogganing in the winter as a sodded slope with an added barrier landform at the base for increased safety. The staircase and lighting along The Axis Path to the east side of the slope helps to frame this area and provides a direct means of going up or down the slope.
- **An Axis Path**, which is a 3 metre wide pathway providing a direct connection between the existing sidewalk on Major Mackenzie Drive and the intersection of Yonge Street and Hopkins Ave where the VIVA Blue Line station is located. Pending funding availability, cultural elements in the form of Marker Trees and other design elements are planned intermittently along the Axis Path that would pay homage to the way people traveled (for example, bench backs that resemble backpacks, canoes, and/or sleds). These elements would tell the First Nations story of travel and celebrate the proximity of this site to the routing of the important historical Carrying Place Trail.

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- **Enhanced Eco-Patches**, which expands the existing wooded areas in the central and western portion of the park, providing additional shade and habitat for fauna in the area. These wooded areas will be further enhanced by removal of select invasive species and replanting native or salt tolerant species in their place.
- **Enhanced Marsh**, which will serve as habitat to bird fauna in the area and aid with site drainage. Similar to the native pollinator and tall fescue meadow areas described above, this element reflects an important consideration noted by the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and also aligns with the City’s Bird-Friendly designation.
- **An Events Lawn**, which can host smaller events or activations through the year, including a seasonal, artificially cooled “roll-out” skating rink in the winter months. Roll-out skating rink technology is a new technology already being used in other cities across the GTA, often on a pilot or interim basis. This technology will “roll out” annually for the start of the winter season on the event lawn. The Zamboni required to maintain this rink will be stored in one of the shipping containers adjacent to the Events Plaza. After the removal and storage of the rink infrastructure, an active lawn will be available to host rentable games and flexible programmed events during the spring, summer, and autumn months. Piloting the roll-out skating rink technology in this park offers a quick and cost-effective solution to provide winter skating, while enabling staff to determine whether a permanent skating rink is warranted as a future evolution of this park. Staff recommend that the roll-out skating rink technology be piloted for a period of at least 3 to 5 years to help inform future planning for the permanent skating rink needs outlined in the 2022 Parks Plan. If the pilot period determines that a permanent skating rink is warranted as a future evolution of Dave Barrow Civic Square, the roll-out skating rink can be moved to another park within the City.
- **An Events Plaza**, which is sited to form a new gateway to the park from the west and framed by a series of shipping container structures. The shipping containers provide a cost-effective method of providing a washroom facility, storage space including for the Zamboni, and concessions or rental space that could also be used for performance preparation. Murals are planned to be added to both the shipping containers and the pavement of the plaza as new cultural elements reflecting on Richmond Hill’s identity, past and future. Similar to the upper plaza, the events plaza will also include seating, umbrella tables, and lighting. It will expand the areas where people can sit comfortably outdoors in the park and provide places where users can lace up their skates in the winter or watch the activities on the events lawn in the summer.

Getting to Dave Barrow Civic Square

A parking analysis was prepared for the planned park improvements and is described in the sub-section titled “Getting Here”. Currently, there are 282 parking spaces and 42 bicycle parking spaces available at the Central Library, which is located directly adjacent to the VIVA Blue Rapid Transit Yonge Street line and YRT’s

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bus line 25 along Major Mackenzie Drive. The Dave Barrow Civic Square Park Plan recommends that, when planning for larger events or programs in the space, a traffic management plan be prepared to direct attendees to use alternative modes of transportation (i.e. walking, biking, transit) or to park at adjacent parking lots within a 5-minute (400 metre) walking distance (i.e. at the Lois Hancy Aquatic Centre and Elgin Barrow Arena/Town Park). The special event parking supply consists of on-site parking, off-site parking, as well as surrounding on-street parking. On-street parking, which would require temporary signage provides approximately 260 spots. Accessible parking will be provided on-site adjacent to the Events Plaza. When combined, implementing such a parking and movement management strategy could allow for the supply of over 1,100 parking spaces and 40 additional bicycle parking spaces to support the events and programming planned in this park.

5. Park Evolution

This section provides a high-level Cost Estimate for Dave Barrow Civic Square, which is within the budget approval for detailed design and construction received as part of the 2025 Budget request, with spending cash-flowed over 2 years (2025 and 2026). This section also provides recommendations on potential future park elements that the City could consider to evolve Dave Barrow Civic Square as funding, partnership, or sponsorship investment opportunities arise.

6. Appendix

The appendix is provided to assist the reader in understanding the sources for the images used throughout the document. It also includes the clearance letter, provided by TRCA, confirming that no further archaeological assessment of the property be required per the findings of the Stage 2 Archaeological Assessment completed for the lands.

Financial Implications:

The information outlined in the Dave Barrow Civic Square Park Plan (refer to Attachment A) is within the budget approval for detailed design and construction received as part of the 2025 Budget request as a multi-year project, with spending cash-flowed over 2 years (2025 and 2026). There are no immediate staffing or financial implications associated with this report.

Relationship to Strategic Plan 2024-2027:

The Dave Barrow Civic Square Park Plan helps to implement the 2024 – 2027 Strategic Plan Pillar 1, Growing a Liveable and Sustainable Community. Specifically, it supports Priority 1 by planning for park improvements based on background research and in collaboration with the community that support quality of life, community connection and resiliency. The planned park improvements also aid the City in implementing Strategic Plan Pillar 2, Focusing on People. It specifically promotes Priority 2 by providing new park elements that will support Richmond Hill's unique character and sense of community through programs and events.

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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.

- Attachment A – Dave Barrow Civic Square Park Plan

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Report Approval Details

Document Title:	SRPBS.25.023 - Request for Approval - Dave Barrow Civic Square Park Plan.docx
Attachments:	- SRPBS.25.023 - Attachment A - Dave Barrow Civic Square Park Plan_AODA.pdf
Final Approval Date:	Feb 26, 2025

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

Maria Flores - Feb 24, 2025 - 3:52 PM

Gigi Li - Feb 25, 2025 - 10:20 AM

Gus Galanis - Feb 25, 2025 - 10:21 AM

Darlene Joslin - Feb 26, 2025 - 9:36 AM