



Staff Report for Committee of the Whole Meeting

Date of Meeting: April 3, 2024
Report Number: SRPBS.24.028

Department: Planning and Building Services
Division: Policy Planning

Subject: **SRPBS.24.028 – Request for Approval – Mill Pond Park Revitalization Master Plan**

Purpose:

The purpose of this staff report is to present the final Mill Pond Park Revitalization Master Plan to Council.

Recommendation(s):

- a) That staff report SRPBS.24.028 regarding the Mill Pond Park Revitalization Master Plan be received; and
- b) That Council approve the Mill Pond Park Revitalization Master Plan (Appendix A).

Contact Person:

Michelle Dobbie, Manager, Park and Natural Heritage Planning, phone number 905-771-2467
Maria Flores, Director, Policy Planning, phone number 905-771-5438

Report Approval:

Submitted by: Gus Galanis, Acting Commissioner of Planning and Building Services

Approved by: Darlene Joslin, 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:

Mill Pond Park is one of five existing Destination Parks identified in the City's 2022 Parks Plan. Destination Parks vary considerably in terms of the recreational opportunities they provide, but are similar in that they contain features and facilities not found anywhere else in the City. Mill Pond Park offers a unique destination within the City as a natural oasis and cultural destination in the heart of Richmond Hill along with a variety of scenic landscape and programmatic experiences that change with the seasons, supporting a year round destination for residents.

Since 1970 when the original Mill Pond Park Master Plan was developed, the City has invested significant effort to realize the vision of a natural destination park, including significant woodland, marsh, and valley landscapes as well as more formal park spaces that provide active and passive recreational opportunities throughout the park. While there have been many improvements since the 1970 Master Plan was approved, many of the facilities are approaching their "end of life". At the same time, given the growth occurring around Mill Pond Park, strategic improvements are needed such as the establishment of a unified trail system, the creation of a more visible and functional entrance at the northern edge of the park on the 71 Regent Street lands, and rehabilitation and restoration of the aging stormwater management infrastructure and the valleyland areas in the park.

To address these opportunities comprehensively, the City initiated the preparation of Mill Pond Park Revitalization Master Plan (the "Master Plan") and an associated Mill Pond Stormwater Management Rehabilitation Environmental Assessment (EA). A Notice of Completion for the EA was mailed to adjacent residents and published on the project webpage on December 20, 2023. The Master Plan was prepared in conjunction with the EA to determine the best solution to manage stormwater, drainage, and the valleyland systems in order to improve water quality and reduce flooding and erosion, while establishing a revitalization vision and strategic direction to guide the future enhancement, management and programming of Mill Pond Park.

A four-stage process has been followed to complete the Mill Pond Park Revitalization Master Plan project as follows:

Stage 1	Research Stage
Stage 2	Options & Preferred Master Plan Stage through public consultation
Stage 3	Preparation of Draft Master Plan for consultation
Stage 4	Approval of Final Master Plan & Implementation Stage

Details related to each stage were outlined in SRPBS.23.013 (received by Council on December 13, 2023).

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Key Themes Expressed on the draft Mill Pond Park Revitalization Master Plan:

As part of the public consultation process on the draft Mill Pond Park Revitalization Master Plan (i.e. through the comments received from December 18, 2023 to February 2, 2024), the following key themes were expressed:

Overall Support for the Master Plan

The public expressed overall support for the Master Plan, noting that they like the City's proactive efforts to improve Mill Pond Park. In particular, they feel that the Master Plan respects and preserves the integrity of Mill Pond's natural environment while allowing for good access to the trails and facilities. They feel the needed improvements will enhance the park's use and are excited for all the community spaces the revitalized park will host. Support was also expressed for how the new trails better connect the surrounding parks (i.e. Stavert Park, 71 Regent Street lands, Upper Mill Pond Park) to Mill Pond Park itself. The public also expressed support for the new bridge over the pond and the new boardwalk across the significant wetland in the middle area of Mill Pond Park. They noted that the Master Plan provides a good balance of maintaining the history while refreshing it, without it being a radical departure in any area. Support for maintaining the pond and its habitat was also noted.

Phasing Outlined in the draft Master Plan

The public expressed a desire for alternative phasing plans, noting a strong desire for the project to be brought to completion sooner than was noted in the draft Master Plan's phasing strategy. Staff reviewed these comments in the context of the Stormwater EA works, which need to precede the park revitalization works. To enable the park revitalization works to be completed sooner than was noted in the draft Master Plan, the detailed design and construction phases are recommended to be consolidated, which will require appropriate funding to be allocated in the 2025 Capital Budget and 10-year Capital Plan. To address the desire for the park revitalization works to be completed sooner, the final Master Plan includes the following changes:

- The detailed design of all phases of the park revitalization works are now recommended to occur at the beginning of the project (versus being completed phase by phase as was proposed in the draft Master Plan). Designing the phases together creates some efficiencies in terms of the length of time allocated to design, the length of time required for any associated approvals/permits, along with allowing for the creation of a shovel-ready project in the event grants become available. As noted above, additional funds that are currently forecasted in the Capital Plan for design in 2025 will need to be approved by Council as part of the 2025 Capital Budget process;
- The construction of Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the project is now recommended to occur in tandem given the inter-dependencies between the construction works in these two phases. This will require a change to the funding allocations in the 10-year Capital Plan.

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The above changes result in a 7 year design/construction timeframe for the park revitalization works versus the over 10 year design/construction timeframe noted in the draft Master Plan. Verbiage has also been added to note the dollar figures outlined in the Master Plan cost estimate are in 2023 dollars and that inflation and other required cost of living adjustments will be incorporated in the relevant Capital Budget and Capital Plan forecast over the lifespan of the project.

Other Comments

The public expressed a desire for an off-leash dog area to be included in the Mill Pond Park Revitalization Master Plan. The City’s 2022 Parks Plan directs as follows with respect to off-leash dog areas:

“The City will plan to achieve a service target of one off-leash dog area per 40,000 residents by planning to add four additional off-leash dog areas, which should be met through the following approach:

- a. Plan to construct an off-leash dog area in the south part of the City;
- b. Plan to construct an off-leash dog area in the Oak Ridges area;
- c. 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.”

As was noted when comments were raised at previous stages of this project, an off-leash dog area is not recommended as part of the Mill Pond Park Revitalization Master Plan given the sensitive and significant ecologies in many portions of the park (i.e. significant wetland and woodland ecologies) and the proximity of adjacent low-rise residential dwellings. Staff will continue to analyze other park spaces more suitable to siting an off-leash dog area per the direction in the 2022 Parks Plan.

Financial/Staffing/Other Implications:

The Mill Pond Park Revitalization Master Plan (Appendix A to Staff Report SRPBS.24.028) has been used to inform the City’s Capital Forecast, as displayed in the following chart:

Forecast (in millions)	2025	2027	2028	2030	2031	2033	Total
Park Revitalization Master Plan	0.65	6.50	0.50	5.00	0.70	7.00	20.35
Stormwater Management	1.00	3.00	4.00	-	-	-	8.00
Forecast by Year	\$ 1.65	\$ 9.50	\$ 4.50	\$ 5.00	\$ 0.70	\$ 7.00	\$28.35

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The Capital Forecast is updated annually and presented for evaluation during the annual budget prioritization process. Budget recommendation is contingent upon review by the Capital Sustainability Steering Committee and consideration of funding availability.

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 Mill Pond Park Revitalization Master Plan is a key project intended to aid in implementing the 2022 Parks Plan, which 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 Mill Pond Park Revitalization Master Plan provides for a phased build-out to ensure the planning, design/construction, and maintenance/operational aspects of the facilities and programs outlined in the Master Plan account for all costs from project inception through to construction/program formulation, and operation/maintenance.

Sense of Belonging

The Mill Pond Park Revitalization Master Plan aids in establishing a sense of belonging by revitalizing an aging park space to serve the changing demographics of this growing neighbourhood adjacent to the Yonge Street growth corridor while providing elements that reflect on and enhance the unique cultural history of the park and area. Placemaking will be integrated not just through the proposed wayfinding and signage but also through the design elements. Placemaking may draw upon the industrial history of the site, the indigenous knowledge of the land, and the natural heritage of the site. For example, the industrial history of the site as a sawmill could be drawn upon to integrate industrial materiality into the architecture of the new park centre proposed as part of the South of Mill Street section of the park, the renovated gazebo, the gateway signage and public art, as well as through the materiality of the proposed bridge and boardwalks.

Getting Around the City

The Mill Pond Park Revitalization Master Plan directs for the creation of a primary trail connection between Mill Street and Regent Street, through Mill Pond Park. New enhanced crossings are proposed across Regent Street to the existing Mill Pond trail and Karindon Park to the north, along with realigning the Mill Street crossing to enhance

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pedestrian safety. These enhanced connections include improved streetscaping in the form of new trees, seating and/or paving materials along Mill Street and between Mill Street and Regent Street along the new primary trail. The enhanced connections will allow residents and visitors who wish to access Mill Pond Park by foot or bicycle to enjoy a seamless travel experience when 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 2022 Parks Plan provides direction that a climate change lens be applied to the development and redevelopment of parks, like Mill Pond Park. The Mill Pond Park Revitalization Master Plan proposes the following elements to aid in creating a more resilient Richmond Hill by combating climate change and reducing its impacts:

- Enhanced connections between Mill Street and Regent Street through Mill Pond Park and enhanced crossings at Regent Street to the existing Mill Pond trail and Karindon Park to the north, along with realigning the Mill Street crossing to enhance pedestrian safety, allowing residents who wish to access Mill Pond Park by foot or bicycle to enjoy a seamless travel experience when using park facilities, promoting exercise and providing alternatives to getting around by car;
- Extensive natural heritage enhancements, particularly on the 71 Regent Street lands where a new naturalized meadow will be created, and in the central portion of the park where the existing significant woodlands, and significant wetland (i.e. marsh and swamp) ecologies will be restored and invasive species managed to reduce the need for park maintenance and enhance biodiversity within the park;
- Expanded Pollinator Garden areas south of Mill Street to enhance biodiversity and provide opportunities for pollinator species to thrive within the park;
- Permeable paving and bioswales to aid with providing a low impact approach to stormwater management;
- Downcast/low-impact lighting, reducing light pollution.

Conclusion:

It is recommended that this staff report be received and that Council approve the Mill Pond Park Revitalization Master Plan (Appendix A). Following Council approval of the Mill Pond Park Revitalization Master Plan, staff will aim to bring forward a 2025 Capital Budget request to initiate detailed design of all phases of the Mill Pond Park Revitalization project.

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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- Appendix A – Mill Pond Park Revitalization Master Plan

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Report Approval Details

Document Title:	SRPBS.24.028 - Request for Approval - Mill Pond Park Revitalization Master Plan.docx
Attachments:	- SRPBS.24.028 - Appendix A - Final Mill Pond Master Plan-AODA.pdf
Final Approval Date:	Mar 18, 2024

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

Maria Flores - Mar 13, 2024 - 8:19 PM

Task assigned to Gigi Li was completed by delegate Lisa Chen

Lisa Chen on behalf of Gigi Li - Mar 15, 2024 - 9:35 AM

Gus Galanis - Mar 15, 2024 - 9:52 AM

Darlene Joslin - Mar 18, 2024 - 7:47 AM