

Recreation Service Plan Public Consultation Framework

Date:	March 11, 2011
To:	Community Development and Recreation Committee
From:	Brenda Patterson, General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation
Wards:	All
Reference Number:	P:\2011\Cluster A\PFR\CD02-032511-AFS#12933

SUMMARY

This report recommends a strategy for conducting public and stakeholder consultations for the development of the Recreation Service Plan by Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division (PFR). These external consultations will occur this spring, in May and June, 2011. In order to obtain as much input as possible into the Plan, staff have developed a strategic framework for these consultations, which includes: the launch of a survey to obtain public feedback on our programs and services; four large public consultations, one per Community Council district; approximately 18 focussed consultation sessions with approximately 1400 stakeholder groups. Specific outreach will be made by staff to consult with some of these groups (e.g., newcomer, low income, diverse and other targeted groups) who may not have participated in our previous consultation activities and might not be aware of the division's recreational programs and services. Additionally, staff will provide consultation packages to groups who may want to do their own self-directed consultations and provide their feedback to us.

A similar consultation strategy will be used in the development of the Parks Plan, in order to hold consultations in the fall of this year. A staff report will be forwarded to the July, 2011 Parks and Environment Committee meeting on the public and stakeholder consultation strategy for the Parks Plan.

Where there are overlaps between the two service plans, the report recommends a coordinated approach that will provide ample opportunities for input by stakeholders and interested members of the public in the development of these plans.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation recommends that:

1. the proposed consultation strategy framework for the Recreation Service Plan, as outlined in Attachment 1 of this report, be approved.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There are no financial impacts resulting from this report.

DECISION HISTORY

In 2004, City Council approved a strategic plan "Our Common Grounds," for Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division, which set a direction for the future of parks, forestry and recreation services by the City. The plan included 53 recommended actions in the areas of environmental stewardship, child and youth development and lifelong active living. In order to achieve these recommendations, the Division obtained approval from City Council to develop two service plans, the Recreation Service Plan and the Parks Plan, as outlined below.

Recreation Service Plan

At its meeting of January 14, 2008, the Community Development and Recreation Committee referred back to staff, for reconsideration, a proposed plan to improve access to recreation (CD12.7 – Improving Access to Recreation: “Everybody Gets to Play”). The General Managers of Parks, Forestry and Recreation and Children’s Services were directed to develop a revised approach to this plan.

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2008/cd/agendas/2008-01-14-cd12-ar.pdf>

On August 5 and 6, 2009, Council approved the development of a five-year Recreation Service Plan founded on the principles of equitable access, quality, inclusion, and capacity building. (EX33.23 – Development of a City-wide Recreation Service Plan)

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2009/cc/decisions/2009-08-05-cc38-dd.htm>

Parks Plan

Direction was received from City Council at its meeting of February 22 and 23, 2010 to proceed with the development of a city-wide, multi-year Parks Plan. The Parks Plan originated from a recommendation in the Division's strategic plan, "Our Common Grounds" to develop a Parks Renaissance Strategy; however; the project scope was expanded to include seven guiding principles: parks and trails as city infrastructure, equitable access for all residents, supporting a diversity of uses, nature in the city, environmental stewardship, place making and community engagement.

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2010/pe/reports/2010-02-04-pe28-cr.htm#PE28.3>

COMMENTS

The Recreation Service Plan will guide decision-making in the management and delivery of the City's recreation and leisure services. Through the development of the Plan, the City will take stock of its current services and programs and develop future directions supported by a clear set of principles to meet the diverse recreational and leisure needs of Toronto residents. In 2009, City Council adopted four key principles to guide the plan:

1. **Equitable Access** - providing equitable recreation access on a geographic and demographic basis for all residents of Toronto.
2. **Quality** - providing the highest quality of programs and services to enhance the health, quality of life and well-being of residents.
3. **Inclusion** - ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to access and participate in programs and services that are planned, delivered, and managed to recognize diversity and encourage participation of marginalized people and groups.
4. **Capacity Building** - providing programs and services of social, economic and physical benefit to all participants and that create a sense of community, belonging, and vitality.

Based on the four principles outlined above, the Recreation Service Plan will guide decision-making and investment by the Parks, Forestry and Recreation in the provision of equitable, high quality community recreation opportunities to all city residents, regardless of their age, background, income level or ability. The Plan will examine ways to make our services more inclusive and develop approaches to reach out to newcomers, diverse communities and other under-served groups to build their capacity and enable them to more fully participate in our recreation programs and services. Ongoing measures to increase community engagement and involvement in our recreational activities will be included in the Plan.

The Plan will establish goals and objectives to achieve these principles and will set priorities for implementation over a five-year period, from 2011 to 2016. Performance standards for ongoing evaluation and monitoring will also be developed to ensure the plan's goals and objectives are achieved within this time frame. The plan will be reviewed and updated after five years.

A consultation strategy is being proposed for both the Recreation Service Plan and the Parks Plan. The consultations, both internal and external, will guide the development of both plans. The consultations for the Recreation Service Plan will occur this spring (May-June, 2011) with a final report on the plan scheduled for the third quarter, 2011. The consultations on the Parks Plan will occur in September and October, 2011, and the final report for that plan is anticipated by year end. The Mayor and City Council, members of the public, stakeholders and City staff will be notified about these consultations.

Recreation Service Plan Update

From the outset of this initiative, an inter-divisional steering committee was established which provides oversight to the development of the Recreation Service Plan. The Recreation Plan Steering Committee is comprised of senior staff from Social Development, Finance and Administration; Children's Services; Toronto Employment and Social Services; Shelter Support and Housing; City Manager's Office; Toronto Public Health; Strategic Communications, as well as, key staff from Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division. A divisional staff work team was also established to conduct all phases of work on the study.

Currently, development of the service plan is in the Environmental Scan phase, with documentation underway on the Division's current assets, programs and services. This information will be analyzed and compiled in a consultation "workbook" that will be posted on the City's web-site and provided to members of the public at the public and stakeholder meetings.

The workbook will be an information document that provides an overview of the Divisions' current recreation programs and services, as related to the four key principles of equity, quality, social inclusion, and capacity building. It is intended to stimulate discussions at the public and stakeholder consultation meetings in ascertaining the public's level of satisfaction with our programs and services, identifying issues and gaps and determining what actions are needed to achieve the plan's stated principles. Additionally, two public surveys (one for each plan) have been developed to obtain input from residents on an individual basis.

Proposed Consultation Strategy

The consultation framework includes five methods of public and stakeholder engagement, including: the development of a survey (both on-line and hard copy), four large public consultation sessions (one per district) for each plan; several stakeholder consultations (both district and city-wide), focus group discussions with targeted groups and community-led self-directed consultations, whereby community or other stakeholder groups will be provided with consultation materials, hold their own meetings, and provide PFR staff with their feedback. (The framework is appended to the report in Attachment 1).

The proposed consultation strategy is outlined in more detail below:

1. Surveys:

PFR Division has developed two surveys – one for the Recreation Service Plan and one for the Parks Plan, in order to elicit input from the public on their satisfaction levels with our current programs and services and to obtain their views on any changes needed to achieve the City Council approved principles through improvements in our service provision.

An online public survey for the Recreation Service Plan will be posted on the Parks, Forestry and Recreation website, in mid-April and will run until the end of May, 2011. Hard copies of the surveys will also be distributed to all recreation centres, all four civic centres and to all public libraries. In addition hard copies of the surveys will be available to participants at the public consultation sessions and upon request. Also, upon request, the surveys will be translated into one of the city's 10 most common language groups, as well as French. (These language groups include: Chinese, Tamil, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Tagalog (Pilipino), Urdu, Russian, Farsi and Korean).

The on-line Parks Plan survey will be launched in the fall and will run from mid-September to the end of October, 2011.

2. Public Consultations (general public):

Four large 'Town Hall' style public meetings (one per district) will be held in May and June, 2011, for the Recreation Service Plan. They will be widely advertised (through posting of a notice on the City's web-site, by means of flyers at our recreation centres, civic centres and libraries and through the media). Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff will also e-mail notices to all members of Council and all of our stakeholder groups, including permit holders.

These meetings will explain what a service plan is and how it will guide recreation programming and investment for the next five years. They will provide an opportunity to explain and illustrate the four Council-approved principles and validate their expression as a set of tangible objectives.

Each Town Hall will feature breakout sessions providing opportunity to explore the dimensions and implications of each principle in more detail.

In discussions about equitable access, participants will be shown statistics illustrating current service levels, including gaps in current service access geographically, across age groups and gender. Participants will be asked how best to fill them given a limited pool of resources.

Participants will be asked for their input on which aspects of quality are important, such as program curriculum and outcomes, instructor competence, physical environment, health and safety and overall customer satisfaction. Their input on priorities will guide the Service Plan's five year recommendations.

At these sessions, participants will be asked to identify the kinds of barriers they face in accessing services including cost, physical, and program barriers, as well as the relevance of Parks, Forestry and Recreation programming. They will identify practical and creative ways to eliminate these barriers over the next five years.

Finally, the discussions on capacity building will include the role of the City in helping communities to organize themselves to develop, nurture, and promote innovative services of interest to themselves and all residents.

The meetings will also provide an opportunity to position the City's services in the context of the entire domain of recreation and leisure services including city-operated, permitted, community based and privately-operated, and seek opinion on the role of the City in supporting other providers in this broader system of services.

3. Stakeholder Consultations:

A number of more focussed consultations will be held with various stakeholder groups, as indicated in Attachment 2. At these meetings, the presentations and the discussions will be more focussed on the interests of the particular groups in attendance. Attachment 2 lists the key stakeholder groups who will be provided with opportunities to attend these sessions. These groups will also be notified of the public consultation sessions.

The consultations with stakeholder groups who are interested in the Recreation Service Plan will occur this spring. Groups who are interested in the Parks Plan will be consulted in the fall. For those groups who are interested in aspects of both plans, such as art groups or sports organizations that use both indoor and outdoor sports facilities, they will be provided with an opportunity to attend stakeholder consultation meetings on both plans.

Overall, PFR staff will be holding approximately 18 consultation sessions to obtain input from the stakeholders on the Recreation Service Plan. Meetings will be held in each district for some of the larger stakeholder groups, who may be more interested in local matters, while some meetings will be held in a more central location for those groups that share a common, city-wide interest. Some additional stakeholder consultation meetings will be added, if needed.

4. Focus groups:

"Focus group" sessions will be held with community agencies, individuals and groups who may not have the capacity to otherwise provide their input into the service plan. Our staff will reach out to these groups at both the local and city-wide level, in order to obtain their input. For example, staff will reach out to diverse communities, newcomer settlement organizations and other agencies that serve low income residents, seniors, youth and other targeted groups, in order to afford them an opportunity to provide their input into the development of both plans. Toronto's population is changing and is very diverse; therefore, the recreational services that we provide, including our mix of programs, needs to be reviewed in order to meet both current and future needs of our population.

We are anticipating approximately four "focus group" meetings on the Recreation Service Plan which will be conducted over a two-month period, in various parts of the City, in May and June. Similar focus group meetings will be held in the fall for the Parks Plan.

5. Self-Directed Consultations:

Some communities and stakeholder groups may want to conduct their own self-directed meetings on the Recreation Service Plan and would prefer to do them independently, without direct involvement by City staff. For those groups, the Division is preparing consultation packages that include the Recreation Service Plan Workbook, an instruction sheet, a series of questions and a response form. These groups will receive notice of these workbook consultation packages and will be able to obtain them from City staff or the Division's website. They will be given a deadline for completing their response forms and submitting them to City staff, so they can be included in our consultation summary in the final report. A similar approach will be followed for groups that would like to hold their own self-directed meetings on the Parks Plan. They will receive Workbook packages in the fall during the Parks Plan consultation period.

Communications Strategy

A comprehensive communications strategy is being developed to ensure that the public consultation meetings and the survey launch are well publicized. The Mayor and all members of City Council will receive a communication on all of these meetings, and notices of these meetings will be posted on the City's website, as well as in our recreation facilities, all civic centres, and public libraries. Media releases on the survey and the consultation sessions, etc., will also be sent to all media outlets.

The Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division has compiled a listing of approximately 1800 stakeholder groups, which include permit holders. (See Attachment 2) These groups will receive notices of the public meetings and will also be invited to attend stakeholder consultation sessions that are geared to their interests. Additionally, PFR staff who are involved with community outreach activities will use their contacts and agency networks to reach out to targeted groups, agencies, and individuals (e.g. newcomers, low income residents, youth, seniors, and diverse groups) who might be interested in attending one of our focus group consultations, but who might not otherwise participate in these discussions.

Workbook packages will also be developed for those stakeholder groups or individuals who would prefer to hold their own self-directed discussions. Letters will be sent to all of our stakeholders inviting them to attend one of the staff-facilitated consultation sessions. In these letters, they will also be given the opportunity of holding their own self-directed meetings to discuss the plan. Groups that choose to hold their own meetings will be

provided with a package of Workbook consultation materials, questions and an answer sheet to complete. Upon request, these workbook materials would be translated into the 10 most common languages, including French. Groups who receive these packages will be given a deadline to submit their written responses (on-line, e-mail, fax, or mail), so that they are received in time for the staff analysis and summary of all of the consultation responses in the final service plan report.

Conclusion

The Recreation Service Plan will provide an analysis of current PFR recreation and leisure services and compare them against the principles set by City Council, as well as demographic trends. The Plan will identify service gaps and propose directions to guide services over the next five years. The aim of the proposed consultation strategy is to obtain extensive input from Toronto residents and stakeholders to inform the recommendations of the plan. The Recreation Service Plan is expected to be submitted to the Community Development and Recreation Committee in the third quarter of 2011.

CONTACT

Rick Powers, Director, Policy and Strategic Planning, Parks, Forestry and Recreation,
Tel: 416-395-6065, Fax: 416-397-4899, Email: rpowers@toronto.ca

Diane Stevenson, Manager, Policy and Strategic Planning, Parks, Forestry and Recreation, Tel: 416-392-0098, Email: dstevens@toronto.ca

SIGNATURE

Brenda Patterson,
General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – Proposed Consultation Strategy for the Recreation Service Plan
Attachment 2 – Categories of Stakeholder Groups for Consultations, 2011

Attachment 1 Proposed Consultation Strategy for the Recreation Service Plan

The proposed consultation strategy framework for the Recreation Service Plan includes five types of public and stakeholder engagement, including:

- 1) An individual **Survey** (both on-line and hard copy);
- 2) Four large **Public Consultation Meetings** (one per Community Council district);
- 3) Approximately 18 **Stakeholder Consultation Meetings** (both district and city-wide);
- 4) **Focus group** discussions with targeted groups that staff will reach out to through a network of agencies and other contacts (e.g., newcomers, diverse communities, low income, youth and other marginalized groups) to obtain their views and identify their recreation and leisure needs; and
- 5) **Self-directed consultations**, whereby stakeholder groups will be provided with consultation materials by PFR staff. These materials would be available both on-line and in hard copy format and mailed out upon request. Groups that prefer to hold their own meetings will be requested to provide their feedback by completing a response template and submitting it to PFR staff by June 15th, 2011.

All of the consultation meetings will be fully accessible to all members of the public and the survey and consultation materials will be fully accessible to visually impaired persons.

ATTACHMENT 2 Categories of Stakeholder Groups for Consultations, 2011

Group Focus / Mandate:	Approx. number of Stakeholders Identified to date
Disability Advocacy / Special Needs	60
Sports Groups	100
Diverse Groups & Community Agencies	100
Permit Groups	500
Older Adults / OA Agencies	100
Community Recreation / Community Centre Advisory Councils	150
Youth & Children	200
Arts & Culture	80
Environmental / Nature / Tree Groups	50
"Friends of" / Parks Advisory Groups	100
BIA / Design / Arts	120
Urban Agriculture / Horticulture	80
Dog Owners Associations and Commercial Dog Walkers	150

Total

1790