



Report to: General Committee

Meeting Date: May 2, 2016

SUBJECT: Draft Markham Parks Renaissance Strategy

PREPARED BY: Barb Rabicki, Director of Operations
Brett Lucyk, Public Realm Coordinator

RECOMMENDATION:

- 1) That the Report titled “Draft Markham Parks Renaissance Strategy” be received;
- 2) And that the Draft Parks Renaissance Strategy for the purposes of engaging our community and to guide the launch of a pilot program for 2016 be approved;
- 3) And that Staff be authorized and directed to do all things necessary to give effect to this resolution.

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this report is to review and approve the proposed approach to the creation and implementation of the Parks Renaissance Strategy. The Parks Renaissance Strategy has been identified as a significant initiative originating from the Public Realm Strategy. The goals, objectives and principles that will guide the Parks Renaissance Strategy have been aligned with those developed within the Public Realm Strategy. The Parks Renaissance Strategy will address the plan and methodology for enhancing and refreshing older parks and related infrastructure by employing “light touches” that are impactful and represent the needs of changing neighbourhoods.

BACKGROUND:

Markham’s parks and open spaces provide a wide range of varied recreational activities throughout its neighbourhoods and communities. Parks, open spaces and natural areas offer a sanctuary to escape the pressures of our everyday stress. These spaces offer the ability to walk, run, bicycle, participate in active sports, relax, volunteer in community activities, picnic with families, meet neighbours and, in doing so, enhance a sense of belonging and build community spirit. Shared Places, Our Spaces, Markham’s Public Realm Strategy established our goals and objectives when approaching the delivery of high quality public realm initiatives within the City. The goals, objectives and the principles within the Public Realm Strategy, as well as other corporate policies will guide and inform the Parks Renaissance Strategy.

The Parks Renaissance Strategy establishes a framework, complete with an implementation plan, for the re-imagination of, and reinvestment in, Markham’s existing parks and open spaces. Working alongside other aspects of the Public Realm Strategy and the City’s planning initiatives to stimulate urban growth and renewal, the Parks Renaissance Strategy provides the impetus for the rejuvenation of local parks in a creative, sustainable and fiscally responsible manner. The City of Markham Parks and

Open Space system has evolved over a significant time. Park, facility provision and implementation standards have changed resulting in uneven amenities.

Current parkland provisions are guided by the Planning Act and growth-related facility and amenities are financed in accordance with the Development Charges Act (DCA). The rehabilitation and replacement of facilities and amenities are typically funded through the City's Life Cycle Replacement and Capital Reserve Fund.

In addition, the facility distribution is guided by the current Integrated Leisure Master Plan (ILMP). The legislation is recent and the older areas of the City were developed without the benefits of the current legislation and funding sources. Further, neighbourhoods continue to change demographically, presenting new and different needs than when parks originally were constructed.

OPTIONS/ DISCUSSION:

Demographics within the older areas of the City have been changing and there is considerable resident interest in the modernization of older parks and facilities. The interest is to provide updated parks, facilities and infrastructure throughout the City that reflect unique neighbourhood needs.

Operations Department has prepared a Draft Parks Renaissance Strategy (Appendix A). This outlines the Vision, Objectives and Principles that will guide the Parks Renaissance Strategy.

Vision

The Parks Renaissance Strategy builds on the work completed for Shared Places, Our Spaces, with a focus on the need of parks in older communities. The vision statement for Markham's public realm is "a place for all that is engaging, sustaining and beautiful". As elements of the public realm, this simple but inspiring vision statement can apply equally to the Parks Renaissance Strategy.

Objectives

The Parks Renaissance Strategy provides a series of tools for identifying, evaluating and prioritizing improvements to the City's existing parks, open spaces, trails and pathways. Objectives include:

- Align with the vision prescribed in the Public Realm Strategy;
- Create guiding principles and a framework to identify and implement Parks Renaissance projects;
- Develop a strategy to engage Council, staff and the community;
- Implement recommendations of the Public Realm Strategy with respect to the renewal of existing parks;
- Develop an evaluation criteria, triggers and standards to assist with prioritizing initiatives;
- Establish a plan for undertaking and evaluating pilot projects;
- Develop an implementation plan, complete with a 5-year funding and phasing strategy.

Principles

Suggested principles for the Parks Renaissance Strategy that will need to be discussed and reviewed through the consultation process include:

- Inclusivity/Diversity. *Support opportunities for all demographics and encourage community engagement.*
- Connected. *Deliver projects that facilitate a connected City and community.*
- Innovative & Beautiful. *Create diverse, vibrant and memorable spaces.*
- Responsive. *Support a range of activities that respond to leisure and cultural needs and interests.*
- Sustainable. *Support the protection, enhancement and continued health of natural features and enhance stewardship and education.*
- Flexible. *Consider multi-functional spaces and future adaptability to changing needs.*
- Fiscally Responsible. *Consider long-term operational impacts as well as capital costs.*

Project Alignment and Scheduling

There are current and impending studies occurring in parallel to the Parks Renaissance Strategy that will inform and contribute pertinent data. These include the following:

1. Public Realm Strategy
2. Building Markham's Future Together
3. Official Plan
4. Parks Acquisition/Master Plan Strategy. Initiated. Led by Urban Design and the Planning Department
5. Integrated Leisure Master Plan Update.
6. Green Print
7. Development Charges Background Study Update

It is envisioned that Council will approve the appended Draft Parks Renaissance Strategy and permit it to be utilized in 2016 with pilot initiatives. In 2017, staff would report on results and any areas for refinement following which the final strategy would be approved. In particular, the Parks Acquisition/Master Plan Strategy and the Integrated Leisure Master Plan Update will generate data and information that will be useful to inform the eventual Parks Renaissance Strategy.

The anticipated completion schedule is as follows.

1. Q2, 2016 – Draft Strategy completed
2. Q2/Q3, 2016 – Inter-departmental consultation
3. Q3, 2016 - Public Engagement
4. Q3, 2016 - Commence Pilot Projects as identified
5. Q2/Q3, 2017 - Final Parks Renaissance Strategy to General Committee and Council
6. Q3/Q4, 2017 - Commence Projects as identified

There is Council approved capital budget funding that has been established to initiate pilot/demonstration project(s) based upon the development of the Parks Renaissance Strategy. These projects are intended to provide quick solutions to problems that have small financial impacts. "Light touches" will include amenities such as shade structures, seating, pathway improvements, interpretive signage, games tables etc. Project priorities, associated, alternate funding and associated magnitudes will be reviewed and defined through the development of the final Parks Renaissance Strategy. It is expected that the projects will be within the range of \$25,000 - \$50,000, but not to exceed \$100,000.

The process for project selection in 2016 will involve engaging community members, Council and staff to identify projects that can be readily initiated and completed. In 2017, future project priorities will be reviewed and defined as the strategy is developed and the pilot projects are evaluated. Evaluation criteria includes: park conditions, recreation needs, population or socio-demographic changes, park usage and engaging the community.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS AND TEMPLATE: (external link)

New parks design and construction are funded 90% from Development Charges and 10% from a non-growth related funding source. Replacement and/or rehabilitation requirements for existing parks are funded from the Life Cycle Replacement and Capital Reserve Fund.

The objective of the Park Renaissance Strategy is to provide additional amenities to existing parks in order to align to the standards of the new parks upon which 90% of the additional growth-related amenities to existing parks could be eligible for funding from Development Charges.

The approved budget for this initiative is \$1.180 million (Capital project #16170 "Growth Related Parks Improvement"), and is identified to be phased over 2016, 2017 and 2018 for projects and project management. The Draft Parks Renaissance Strategy will be completed through a temporary contracted staff member, funded by existing budget allocations identified in the existing 2016 Capital Project 16170 (Growth Related Park Improvements). The 2016, 2017 and 2018 Parks Renaissance projects will be funded through the same account.

The Parks Renaissance Strategy is a multi-year program that will require funding beyond 2018. The additional funding beyond 2018 will be considered as part the annual capital budget process. The funding allocation will be determined consistent with the project being undertaken (i.e. whether it relates to growth-related and/or rehabilitation and replacement works).

ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:


The Parks Renaissance Strategy is identified within Markham's Public Realm Strategy as an essential undertaking related to park facility and infrastructure provision within the City of Markham Parks and Open Space system. It will align with the Public Realm Strategy, Building Markham's Future Together, Integrated Leisure Master Plan

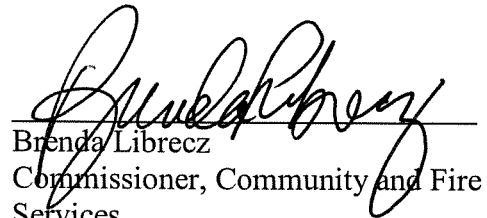
(impending update), the Parks Acquisition and Master Plan (currently initiated), Official Plan, Green Print and any other applicable policy.

BUSINESS UNITS CONSULTED AND AFFECTED:

The business units that will be affected will be the Operations and Recreation Departments within the Community and Fire Services Commission as well as the Urban Design Department within the Development Services Commission & the Finance Department within the Corporate Services Commission.

RECOMMENDED BY:


Barb Rabicki
Director of Operations


Brenda Librecz
Commissioner, Community and Fire
Services

ATTACHMENTS:

Appendix A: Draft Park Renaissance Strategy