

### Section I – Items for Board of Directors Action

**TO:** Chair and Members of the Board of Directors  
Friday, April 28, 2023 Meeting

**FROM:** Darryl Gray, Director, Education and Training

**RE:** **DEVELOPING A SUSTAINABLE FUNDING MODEL FOR BLACK CREEK PIONEER VILLAGE**  
Update on ongoing efforts to secure additional funding for modernization of Black Creek Pioneer Village.

---

#### **KEY ISSUE**

Update to Toronto and Region Conservation Authority's (TRCA) Board of Directors on funding required for modernization and ongoing sustainability of TRCA's Black Creek Pioneer Village (Black Creek Pioneer Village).

#### **RECOMMENDATION:**

**WHEREAS** TRCA, in partnership with the Government of Ontario and local municipalities, established Black Creek Pioneer Village in 1960 to preserve and share the built and cultural history of Ontario and the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) through the form of a living history museum;

**AND WHEREAS** BLACK CREEK PIONEER VILLAGE consists of one of Ontario's largest collections of historic buildings with local, provincial and national significance from the pre- and post-confederation period;

**AND WHEREAS** TRCA has undertaken efforts to modernize and improve programming and service offerings at BLACK CREEK PIONEER VILLAGE to reflect both the diverse history of the GTA from the Indigenous pre-colonial era through to the current multicultural metropolis of Toronto and surrounding regions;

**AND WHEREAS** BLACK CREEK PIONEER VILLAGE is the only museum or cultural institution of its size, scope and scale that does not have a dedicated source of funding to sustain collections management or cultural programming from any level of government;

**AND WHEREAS** changes to the Conservation Authorities Act limit TRCA's ability to allocate municipal operating levy to support museum programming or operations;

**THEREFORE LET IT BE RESOLVED THAT** a formal budget request to support program, service and operational revitalization and transformation at Black Creek Pioneer Village be made to the City of Toronto;

## Item 8.9

**THAT TRCA'S BOARD OF DIRECTORS continue to advocate for enhanced municipal, provincial and federal funding for Black Creek Pioneer Village;**

**AND FURTHER THAT staff report back in November 2023 on progress related to financial support for Black Creek Pioneer Village.**

### **BACKGROUND**

Established in 1960 through a partnership between TRCA, Metropolitan Toronto, local municipalities, and the Government of Ontario, Black Creek Pioneer Village is one of Ontario's leading living history museums, boasting over forty (40) heritage buildings of local, provincial, and national significance, and caring for 50,000 artifacts of material culture.

Historically TRCA has sustained the museum operations and programming at Black Creek Pioneer Village with a mix of user fees, license agreements, sponsorships, grants, and municipal levy. With over 140,000 annual visitors, Black Creek Pioneer Village is the only museum or cultural institution of its size, scale and nature that does not receive dedicated, sustained program funding from any level of government. The following is a budget chart for Black Creek Pioneer Village showing annual operating revenues, including TRCA operating support:

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Total Revenue	3,085,978	2,858,832	1,023,539	1,573,774	2,420,167
Total Expenses	<b>4,545,907</b>	<b>4,571,582</b>	<b>2,208,571</b>	<b>2,117,474</b>	<b>3,022,168</b>
Operating Levy Allocation	1,459,929	1,712,750	1,185,031	500,000	500,000
<b>Excess of expenses over revenue</b>	-	-	-	<b>43,700</b>	<b>102,000</b>

While previously TRCA has allocated operating support for museum operations and programming at Black Creek Pioneer Village, recent changes to the Conservation Authorities Act limit the ability of TRCA to do so. Municipal levy in support of Black Creek Pioneer Village is to be used solely for the purposes of state of good repair of assets and infrastructure, and as such programming, exhibit development and interpretation no longer receives any public funding. As a result, in 2022, which was partially constrained due to COVID-19, Black Creek Pioneer Village generated 80% of its operating budget through user fees, license agreements, sponsorships and grants, an increase of 18% over 2019 levels, with this expected to increase further in 2024 and beyond.

## Item 8.9

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Revenue to Expense Recovery Ratio	60%	66%	67%	62%	46%	74%	80%

By their very nature, museums are not profit-making ventures as the expenses related to safeguarding the community's-built heritage and material culture exceed the revenue that can be earned through programming. The industry average revenue generation as a ratio of total operating costs for other comparable supported institutions is approximately 40%, with variations of that ranging from 14% for City of Toronto Museums to 68% for the Toronto Zoo. At 80% cost recovery, Black Creek Pioneer Village is an industry leader in unlocking innovative revenue solutions, however, by relying heavily on revenue, grants and other fee-based tools, there is a limit to TRCA's ability to advance strategic goals related to Black Creek Pioneer Village without continuing to impact both collections and built heritage management, along with animation and interpretation of the historic village.

What Revenue, Grants and Other Fee-Based Tools Can Cover:

- Fee for service event and program delivery;
- Program supervision and administration;
- Minor exhibit development and artifact upkeep;
- School programs delivery; and
- General operations, including utilities, cleaning, basic grounds maintenance and minor upkeep.

What Revenue, Grants and Other Fee-Based Tools Cannot Cover:

- Major exhibit development and core museum functions, such as curatorial services, collections management and others related to the overall preservation of artifacts of material culture;
- Transformational activities such as the creation of Indigenous Hubs and Galleries and modernization of the museum function, role and capabilities;
- Major maintenance and asset management of heritage buildings and structures;
- Museum management and sector leadership activities; and  
Equitable access programs, such as lower user fees for schools or residents, or targeted outreach activities to local communities.

To fundamentally transform Black Creek Pioneer Village and modernize, revitalize and restore its place in the cultural heritage fabric of the City of Toronto, TRCA requires approximately \$3.2 million a year in new funding. As noted above, fees alone cannot advance key strategic goals related to museum modernization, inclusive story-telling and equitable access. Enhanced support would be targeted towards specific high-impact areas, including the following:

## Item 8.9

- Indigenous Engagement and Placemaking: Enhanced and expanded engagement of Indigenous communities in the development and ongoing programming of Indigenous exhibits, programs, installations, and events at the Village.
- Collections Management and Modernization: Improved collections care and management, including strengthening virtual access to TRCA's heritage and Indigenous artifacts.
- Enhanced Public Programming: Enhanced heritage, cultural and community programming, interpretation and exhibits, and restoration of full operating hours.
- Inclusive Storytelling through Partnerships: Nurture and grow partnerships to tell stories reflecting the diversity of Toronto.
- Equitable Access: Enhanced equity of access for all residents to explore and reflect upon Toronto's history.

This funding would allow TRCA to fundamentally transform the next generation of user experiences at Black Creek Pioneer Village while also ensure that the communities of tomorrow can tell their story in an inclusive, welcoming environment that represents the multitude of perspectives that make up the City of Toronto and Ontario.

### **RATIONALE**

With the recent reductions in funding necessitated by changes to the Conservation Authorities Act, an increasing reliance on user fees, and a lack of direct government support for museum operations, including exhibit development and cultural programming, Black Creek Pioneer Village has fallen further behind other comparable attractions both in the level of public funding available to sustain and maintain the important cultural heritage and public collections function of the museum, as well as the operating hours and competitiveness in a regional tourism marketplace.

The financial model of a museum that is reliant almost solely on user fees and revenue is not sustainable, and to maintain and grow Black Creek Pioneer Village into the future, and enable a new vision that integrates perspectives of Indigenous communities and the broader multicultural fabric and stories of Toronto residents, dedicated government funding is essential. As a significant cultural heritage attraction and museum, Black Creek Pioneer Village requires approximately \$3.2 million in ongoing annual operating support to modernize, revitalize, and restore its place in the cultural heritage fabric of the City of Toronto.

The Ontario Museum Association, in a 2020 study, found that museums in Ontario provide a return on investment of \$3.70 for every dollar spent on programming and operations. An increased public investment of \$3.2M in the public institution of Black Creek Pioneer Village, coupled with the current \$2.5M in expenditures related to fee-based programs, will have an immediate multiplying economic benefit of approximately \$21M. With 5 million residents within a 40-minute drive, a bold new vision coupled with strong government support will allow Black Creek Pioneer Village to continue to serve as a catalyst for change and economic renewal with the Black Creek and University Heights Neighbourhoods by strengthening an already exciting and vibrant anchor

## Item 8.9

attraction, while creating community hub and centre for the democratization of local and global stories in Ontario and the GTA.

As one of the key tourism attractions in the north-west portion of the City of Toronto, Black Creek Pioneer Village is located within the York University Heights Neighborhood Improvement Area and directly adjacent to the Black Creek Neighborhood Improvement Area. More than 60% of residents in the Black Creek Neighbourhood Improvement Area live in an apartment setting, and more than 80% identify as a visible minority. The place and potential of Black Creek Pioneer Village in both the local and GTA community, along with TRCA's role in leading a SNAP (Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Plan) program in the Black Creek community also provides a unique opportunity within this part of the City of Toronto to leverage enhanced funding for Black Creek Pioneer Village and serve as a catalyst for the development of a Cultural District that accelerates community vitality and development.

Cultural Districts, as part of the emerging economic development agenda in the City of Toronto and around the world, require both an anchor and momentum to fully realize the potential of communities. By applying a wider lens to the work of Black Creek Pioneer Village in the context of TRCA and community-based partnerships and activities in the Black Creek neighbourhood and along the Black Creek Ravine, an opportunity exists to accelerate efforts related to the development of Cultural Districts in this part of the City of Toronto.

Stable funding creates the opportunity to take bold new steps to reposition Black Creek Pioneer Village as a key cultural institution and museum in Ontario and the Greater Toronto Area that serves as a catalyst for community development and Indigenous engagement. Community interests are changing and evolving, and expectations of living history museums and attractions are evolving with them. It is no longer enough for museums to simply install exhibits and deliver programming – the museums of tomorrow will be anchors of innovation, economic and community development and reflective of the communities they serve by giving voice in the first person to the histories and stories of the people who live there.

Building on the legacy of Black Creek Pioneer Village as an essential element of the cultural fabric of the GTA and the Black Creek community, TRCA will work with its partners to transform this significant tourism and learning attraction into a signature museum and cultural commons where communities from across Toronto come to live, learn, work, explore and create.

### **Relationship to TRCA's 2023-2034 Strategic Plan**

This report supports the following Pillars and Outcomes set forth in TRCA's 2023-2034 Strategic Plan:

#### **Pillar 3 Community Prosperity:**

3.2 A culture of diversity, equity and inclusion contributing to community well-being

### **Pillar 3 Community Prosperity:**

3.3 Informed citizens are conservation champions

### **Pillar 4 Service Excellence:**

4.2 Provide and manage an efficient and adaptable organization

## **FINANCIAL DETAILS**

### Museum, Exhibit and Programming Funding Requirements

As indicated previously, in order to sustain and realize the potential of Black Creek Pioneer Village as a significant, signature attraction and museum within the Black Creek and University Heights Neighbourhoods of the City of Toronto, dedicated government funding of \$3.2M is necessary. This funding would be leveraged with \$2.5M in generated revenue through current programming, with an anticipated future growth of an additional \$500,000 in program revenue annually by 2027 through new programming, partnerships, and grants, putting Black Creek Pioneer Village at an earned revenue ratio of approximately 50%, still above the industry average. Additional future growth is expected as programming matures, and the attraction regains its prominence and place within the tourism attraction sector.

Since changes to the Conservation Authorities Act have limited the ability of TRCA to allocate municipal levy to support programming and operations, TRCA has been required to reduce daily operating hours at Black Creek Pioneer Village, close the heritage village on Mondays and Tuesdays during the regular operating season, as well as eliminate 6 full-time and 25 part-time staff positions. Without stable funding into the future, TRCA will be required to continue to reduce operating hours, services, staffing and interpretation of key cultural heritage features at Black Creek Pioneer Village, in addition to potential closure of portions of the heritage village, or elimination of certain programs or services. Stable, sustained funding would allow TRCA to reverse that trend and realize the full value of Black Creek Pioneer Village in an underserved portion of the City of Toronto.

### Capital Funding Requirements

To fully realize the future potential of Black Creek Pioneer Village, a multi-year capital investment plan is required that facilitates and enables the transformative new vision for Black Creek Pioneer Village that aims to reclaim its place as a vibrant, vital attraction that melds the exciting future of the City of Toronto and Ontario with the history of our communities, from pre-colonial Canada through to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. This would include development of a Master Plan that takes into consideration current and future development and programming of the site and surrounding environs. Currently the City of Toronto budget provides \$375K in direct support for basic capital expenditures of the facility, however this is not sufficient to advance strategic goals and objectives of renewal of the heritage assets and facilities.

TRCA maintains a comprehensive Unfunded Priorities List, which is reported to TRCA's Board of Directors annually and includes the built elements of Black Creek Pioneer Village. The 10-year capital (2022 – 2032) forecast for state of good repair of the Visitor Centre is approximately \$9.8M, which is currently unfunded. Additionally, the second

## Item 8.9

phase of work to assess and quantify the state-of-good-repair requirements for the 40 heritage and historic that make up the village itself is underway, which will inform the development of a capital asset management plan for the buildings that comprise the built collection of Black Creek.

### **DETAILS OF WORK TO BE DONE**

TRCA staff continue to raise awareness of the funding challenges that Black Creek Pioneer Village faces in fulfilling its mandate and role as a cultural institution and museum. Staff continue to have discussions with all levels of government of the important role that Black Creek Pioneer Village plays in the local community and the importance of sustained funding. As noted above, it is the only museum of its size, scale and scope that does not have dedicated programming and operational funding. With direction from the Board of Directors, TRCA staff are prepared to develop suitable materials for a formal budget submission to the City of Toronto.

**Report prepared by: Darryl Gray**

**Email: [darryl.gray@trca.ca](mailto:darryl.gray@trca.ca)**

**For Information contact: Darryl Gray, (416) 791-0327**

**Email: [darryl.gray@trca.ca](mailto:darryl.gray@trca.ca)**

**Date: March 1, 2023**