

## Section I – Items for Board of Directors Action

**TO:** Chair and/ Members of the Board of Directors  
Meeting #8/19, Friday, September 27, 2019

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

**RE: TORONTO DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD OUTDOOR EDUCATION CENTRE CLOSURES**  
Update on closures of Toronto District School Board Outdoor Education Centres.

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### KEY ISSUE

Update on closures of Toronto District School Board Outdoor Education Centres located on Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) lands.

### RECOMMENDATION

**WHEREAS TRCA provides greenspace for the purposes of out-of-classroom natural science learning experiences to school boards, as enabled under Section 197 of the Education Act (R.S.O 1990), through formal lease agreements;**

**WHEREAS Toronto District School Board operates the Etobicoke Field Studies Centre at Claireville Conservation Area and the Etobicoke Outdoor Education Centre at Albion Hills Conservation Area under lease agreements with TRCA for the purposes of the provision of out-of-classroom natural science learning experiences for students;**

**WHEREAS Toronto District School Board, as part of the Board of Trustees approved June 19, 2019 Operating Budget Plan for 2019 - 2020, are proposing to close both the Etobicoke Field Studies Centre and the Etobicoke Outdoor Education Centre;**

**WHEREAS Toronto District School Board provided written notice on July 3, 2019 to Toronto and Region Conservation Authority of the closure of the Etobicoke Field Studies Centre, effective August 31, 2019;**

**WHEREAS TRCA, upon termination of the lease agreements with Toronto District School Board, will assume the education facilities and has an interest in ensuring future student access and use of said facilities;**

**AND WHEREAS TRCA's Outdoor Education Task Force convenes on October 7, 2019 with an eighteen (18) month mandate to develop a strategic framework for the long-term provision of out-of-classroom natural science learning experiences, including the optimization of school board and conservation authority outdoor education assets;**

**THEREFORE LET IT BE RESOLVED THAT a Request for Expressions of Interest be undertaken to explore alternative uses for the Etobicoke Field Studies Centre;**

**THAT TRCA staff provide a report to the January 24, 2020 Board of Directors meeting on the results of the Request for Expressions of Interest;**

**AND FURTHER THAT the Board of Directors request that TDSB reconsider closure of the Etobicoke Outdoor Education Centre to ensure long-term student access to out-of-classroom natural science learning experiences.**

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### **BACKGROUND**

Since 1953, TRCA has partnered with schools and school boards within the Toronto region to provide natural science and conservation education programs to students as part of their formal learning curriculum. The foundation of school boards and conservation authorities collaborating to provide outdoor learning experiences for the students of Ontario was laid through a unique partnership between Humber Valley Conservation Authority (predecessor to TRCA) and York Memorial Collegiate Institute in May of 1953. This ground-breaking partnership introduced the concept of students taking their learning out of the classroom and into the natural environment, where they could share in the expertise and experience of conservation professionals applying the science of watershed management.

Since that initial camp school in 1953, the partnership between TRCA and local school boards became a model for how public agencies such as school boards and conservation authorities can leverage their respective assets to benefit students and young learners, with TRCA providing greenspace and natural science expertise to support school board student learning outcomes. Currently TRCA has leases or other formal agreements with Toronto District School Board, Toronto Catholic District School Board, York Region District School Board and Durham District School Board for the provision of out-of-classroom natural science learning experiences located within TRCA conservation areas and greenspace, while also providing learning opportunities to over 75,000 students from school boards across the Greater Toronto Area at TRCA owned and operated outdoor education centres. Currently TRCA is one of the largest providers of curriculum-linked out-of-classroom natural science learning opportunities for schools and students in Canada.

On June 19, 2019, the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) approved an Operating Budget Plan for the 2019/2020 school year that required a reduction of \$68.7 million in expenditures, resulting in program changes. Among the included program changes were the closure of two TDSB operated outdoor education centres, both located within TRCA conservation areas. TDSB currently operates ten (10) outdoor education centres, and the resulting closures would bring this number down to eight operating outdoor education centres: four day-use centres and four overnight centres. The affected centres are:

#### **Etobicoke Field Studies Centre (Claireville Conservation Area)**

Constructed in 1993 by TRCA for the former Etobicoke Board of Education, the Etobicoke Field Studies Centre at Claireville Conservation Area was built using proceeds from the sale of land to the Province of Ontario for the construction of Highway 407. The current outdoor education centre replaced a previous centre that was located within the Hwy 407 right-of-way.

The Etobicoke Field Studies Centre at Claireville Conservation Area is used by schools from TDSB for student day visits that provide natural science-based learning experiences utilizing the unique ecological features of Claireville Conservation Area. The Centre is a two-story structure with classrooms and offices on the main and second floor and with an additional classroom and storage in the basement level. The facility is owned by TRCA but operated and staffed by TDSB. TRCA provides snow clearing and drinking water on a cost-recovery basis and TDSB pays a base rent for use of the facility, in addition to providing ongoing building maintenance and upkeep. TRCA utilizes a separate portion of the lower level of Etobicoke Field Studies Centre at Claireville Conservation Area for program equipment and file storage.

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### **Etobicoke Outdoor Education Centre (Albion Hills Conservation Area)**

Opened in 1982 under the terms of a forty-year lease agreement, the Etobicoke Outdoor Education Centre is an overnight education centre adjacent to TRCA's Albion Hills Field Centre, within Albion Hills Conservation Area. The Etobicoke Outdoor Education Centre was built by the former Etobicoke Board of Education for student overnight visits up to five days in length that provide natural-science-based learning experiences utilizing the unique ecological features of Albion Hills Conservation Area.

The Etobicoke Outdoor Education Centre at Albion Hills Conservation Area is an overnight centre with capacity for 64 visiting students and accompanying teachers. The facility has multiple classrooms, dormitory accommodations, a central lounge, and gathering spaces. It is owned, operated and staffed by TDSB, with TRCA providing food service for visiting TDSB students at the Albion Hills Field Centre Dining Hall on a cost-recovery basis. Additionally, TRCA provides snow removal, turf maintenance and drinking water on a cost-recovery basis. The lease with TDSB for the Etobicoke Outdoor Education Centre expires in June 2022.

### **Other School Board Leases and Agreements**

In addition to the above TDSB-operated outdoor education centres, TRCA has agreements with York Region District School Board, Durham District School Board and Toronto Catholic District School Board for the provision of natural-science learning experiences for students. TRCA has received no indication from York Region District School Board, Durham District School Board or Toronto Catholic District School Board that these programs are under review.

The following is a summary of current school board outdoor education centre agreements:

- York Region District School Board: Swan Lake Outdoor Education Centre
  - Located within the Swan Lake Centre
  - Agreement to provide facility and greenspace for School Board-operated Outdoor Education Centre
  - 10-year term expiring in 2023, with options to renew for two further five year terms.
  
- York Region District School Board: Burlington Outdoor Resource Centre
  - Located adjacent Nashville Conservation Reserve
  - Agreement to provide for greenspace adjacent to School Board-operated Outdoor Education Centre
  - 1-year term renewed annually.
  
- Durham District School Board: Duffins Creek Outdoor Education Centre
  - Located within Claremont Forest and Wildlife Area
  - Land lease for a School Board-operated Outdoor Education Centre
  - 5-year term expiring in 2022, with option to renew for one further five year term.
  
- Toronto Catholic District School Board: Lake St. George Field Centre
  - Agreement to provide overnight out-of-class natural science learning experiences at TRCA-operated Lake St. George Field Centre
  - 2-year term expiring in 2021, renewed biennially.

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### **RATIONALE**

TRCA received written notice from TDSB on July 3, 2019 regarding the closure of the Etobicoke Field Studies Centre at Claireville Conservation Area, effective August 31, 2019, at which point the building and environs under lease to TDSB revert to TRCA. On July 31, 2019, TRCA staff completed an inspection of the facility to view and assess the condition of the facility prior to TDSB relinquishing the building.

TDSB has not provided any written notification regarding the Etobicoke Outdoor Education Centre at Albion Hills Conservation Area, however, the June 19, 2019 Operating Budget Plan approved by TDSB's Board of Trustees, indicated that this centre was slated to close in September 2020.

In order to ensure future use of the Etobicoke Field Studies Centre, TRCA staff are proposing to conduct a Request for Expressions of Interest for potential school board or community partners to assume operations of this facility for the purposes of providing out-of-classroom natural science-based learning experiences for Toronto region students, or similarly compatible uses.

### **Relationship to Building the Living City, the TRCA 2013-2022 Strategic Plan**

This report supports the following strategies set forth in the TRCA 2013-2022 Strategic Plan:

**Strategy 3 – Rethink greenspace to maximize its value**

**Strategy 5 – Foster sustainable citizenship**

**Strategy 7 – Build partnerships and new business models**

### **FINANCIAL DETAILS**

Under the terms of the current lease agreement with TDSB for the Etobicoke Field Studies Centre at Claireville Conservation Area, the base rent for this facility is \$87,000/annum. The cost recovery services for snow removal and water was \$9,600 in 2018. These costs will no longer be recoverable upon termination of the lease, resulting in a \$96,600 net loss to TRCA's Operating Budget. Additionally, upon assumption of the Etobicoke Field Studies Centre from TDSB, until a new tenant is secured, TRCA will be responsible for building maintenance, security and other state of good repair costs, estimated at \$25,000 annually.

Under the terms of the 1982 lease agreement with TDSB for the Etobicoke Outdoor Education Centre at Albion Hills Conservation Area, the base rent is the nominal fee of \$1/annum. The cost recovery from TDSB for services rendered in 2019 is projected to be \$197,000 for food services and \$15,000 for snow removal, turf management and drinking water. Should TDSB terminate the lease, this \$213,000, less the cost of consumables, would no longer be recoverable, resulting in a projected \$75,000 net loss to the Albion Hills Field Centre Operating Budget. Additionally, should TDSB terminate the lease for the Etobicoke Outdoor Education Centre, TRCA assumes ownership of the facility and would be responsible for building maintenance, security and other state of good repair costs, estimated at \$50,000 annually, until a new tenant or partner can be secured for use of the facility. Should a new tenant not be secured, under the terms of the 1982 lease there is no demolition or removal clause and the condition of the facility is not known, so any demolition or removal costs would be borne by TRCA, should TDSB terminate the lease.

The overall potential financial impact to TRCA from the closure of the two TDSB-operated education centres is \$246,600, which will affect TRCA's staffing complement and require an additional source of funding for ongoing facility maintenance. TRCA staff are working to secure new partnerships and revenue streams that would offset the impact budgets.

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

A Request for Expressions of Interest for the future use of the Etobicoke Field Studies Centre will be released that invites proponents to submit proposed uses for the Field Studies Centre that meet the following objectives:

- Provides a minimum of market rent to TRCA for use of the facility;
- Includes provisions for ongoing maintenance of the facility;
- Enhances community and public use and programming within the facility and Claireville Conservation Area.

The Request for Expressions of Interest will be posted online and circulated to local school boards, area municipalities, social service agencies and other similar organizations. With Board of Directors approval of TRCA proceeding with a Request for Expressions of Interest, TRCA staff will provide a report on the Request for Expressions of Interest results to the Board of Directors at the January 24, 2020 Board of Directors meeting.

TRCA staff will continue to work with TDSB to ensure the continued use of the Etobicoke Outdoor Education Centre at Albion Hills Conservation Area, including advocacy to TDSB Trustees.

TRCA's Outdoor Education Task Force convenes an eighteen (18) month term starting October 7, 2019 and the work of the Task Force is intended to provide a framework for the long-term provision of out-of-classroom natural science learning experiences for students in the Greater Toronto Area, including the optimization of the current school board and conservation authority operated outdoor education system.

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**Date: August 14, 2019**