

Section I – Items for the Board of Directors Action

TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Directors
Meeting #6/20, Friday, September 25, 2020

FROM: Richard Ubbens, Director, Parks and Culture

RE: **BLACK CREEK PIONEER VILLAGE UPDATE**

KEY ISSUE

To provide an update on the operations of Black Creek Pioneer Village (BCPV), as a standalone program of Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA).

RECOMMENDATION

THAT TRCA staff be directed to work with Federal and Provincial governments and partner municipalities to establish an updated financial model for BCPV that will ensure the long-term viability of the heritage site, recognizing potential changes to the *Conservation Authorities Act* (CA Act), while pursuing any immediate funding opportunities including grants from senior levels of government, and report back to TRCA's Board of Directors in 2021;

AND FURTHER THAT this report be forwarded to the Minister of Environment, Conservation and Parks Ontario, the Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism, and Culture Industries Ontario, the Minister of Infrastructure Ontario, the Minister of Heritage Canada, the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities Canada, and the Federal and Provincial Members of Parliament in TRCA's jurisdiction.

BACKGROUND

Shortly after the formation of the Metropolitan Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, BCPV was created in 1960, to share the story of the Toronto region in the 1800s, showcase the region's material culture, and preserve greenspace in the region's urbanizing area. Over the last 60 years, millions of people have explored the history of the Toronto region at BCPV, which has developed into the region's largest living history museum. Today, visitors can explore 42 historic buildings, a collection of rare and heritage breed animals, gardens featuring heirloom flowers and plants, costumed educators, and educational programs that engage people of all ages. BCPV uses its collection of 50,000 artifacts, interactive offerings, and educational events to encourage visitors to explore the past while reflecting on the present.

Located adjacent to BCPV on the northwest corner of Jane Street and Steeles Avenue, the Black Creek Pioneer Village North Lands (BCPVNL) is home to an additional five 19th century buildings, including the 1809 Schmidt-Dalziel Barn, which is unique in Ontario due to its age, size, and provenance. This barn, along with the 1808 Schmidt-Dalziel House, are two of the oldest existing buildings in the Toronto region and all five buildings are designated under Part IV of the *Ontario Heritage Act*. Surrounded by 16 hectares of woodlands and greenspace, the property is primarily used for film shoots, special events, and educational programming. The BCPVNL are south of the Highway 407 TTC subway station and west of the Black Creek Pioneer Village TTC subway station. The lands are included within the Province's 1978 Parkway Belt West Plan and are designated as Natural Areas and Countryside within the City of Vaughan Official Plan.

Item 8.12

BCPV and BCPVNL are situated on the vibrant border area between Vaughan and Toronto, next to the York University and Jane Finch communities, and just south of the burgeoning Vaughan Metropolitan Centre (VMC) (Attachment 1). Notwithstanding COVID-19 pressures, demands for access to greenspace are growing as society seeks to engage in active, healthy lifestyles. TRCA, through its Trail Strategy and relationships with its partner municipalities, academic partners (e.g. York University) and community organizations (e.g. Foodshare), has placed emphasis in recent years to build connections, such as programming and community uses within BCPV including the Black Creek Community Farm on the west side of the property, and events including festivals and large-scale outdoor events on the north side of the property. TRCA has conducted habitat restoration and created new trail linkages between BCPV and the broader parks system to BCPV with plans to connect a trail from Downsview Dells Park to the Jane 407 Station and the VMC along the corridor of the Black Creek (Attachment 2).

The cost of operating the facilities, including upkeep of 47 historic buildings and preservation of its artifact collection, is a unique financial challenge for TRCA. As a museum and heritage facility, operating costs have been impossible to fully fund through admissions, memberships, and grant opportunities. BCPV has therefore relied heavily on support from its partner municipalities. Given imminent changes to the CA Act, the municipal funding mechanism has become an area of interest. This would require formal municipal support through the development of Service Level Agreement(s) to continue supporting non-mandatory programs, which BCPV, other heritage sites, and associated programming operated by Conservation Authorities, will likely be categorized as.

The City of Toronto has established Toronto History Museums, a collective of 10 museums owned and operated by the City of Toronto, featuring over one million archaeological specimens, 150,000 artifacts, and 3,000 works of art that reflect the 11,000-year span of human occupation in the Toronto region. It is possible that a closer collaboration with the City of Toronto would be beneficial for both parties. However, preliminary discussions with the City of Toronto have identified that their ability to take on BCPV related programming without additional senior government financial support would be challenging. Additionally, there are 39 historic sites operated by the Federal government within Ontario and 26 heritage sites held by the Ontario Heritage Trust. Working collaboratively could further an integrated approach to heritage and environmental conservation as effective stewardship of the environment and the creation of sustainable and resilient communities are central concepts in both conservation movements.

Community Museum Operating Grant

TRCA receives funding annually from the Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries through the Community Museum Operating Grant (CMOG) for museum operations, provided BCPV meets criteria established in the *Ontario Heritage Act* and the Ministry's Standards for Community Museums in Ontario. In both 2019 and 2020, TRCA received \$220,744 through CMOG.

Through the annual application process, staff demonstrates how BCPV's operations meet the Ministry's standards and the criteria outlined in the *Act*. Annual reporting is required on areas of operations including but not limited to collections management, artifact preservation, exhibits, educational programming for schools and families and/or individuals, historical research, community engagement, physical assets, and governance. Additional detail related to one criteria or standard is stipulated and required annually. An area of concern is the requirement for minimum number of operating hours (1080 hours or 180 days per year) in order to receive the full grant for a year-round facility, which creates the requirement to open during less viable times

Item 8.12

of the year. It is our expectation that the CMOG terms will be revisited in the post-COVID-19 environment, but this has not been confirmed.

In 2019, the Ministry focused on museum governance and required that BCPV submit a strategic plan. The grant application stated that the strategic plan must comment on museum operations, demonstrate alignment with TRCA's strategic direction, and provide measurable goals for the duration of the plan. After community and peer consultation followed by SLT approval, staff submitted the strategic plan to the Ministry in early 2020.

In 2020, the Ministry waived the detailed application process recognizing that the Province's museums were in urgent need of funding. As of the writing of this report 2020, funding at a similar level as 2019 funding of \$220,000 has been confirmed, however 2021 funding is uncertain.

In addition to seeking annual CMOG funding, staff have met with staff from the City of Toronto Economic Development and Culture division and are holding discussions with intent of finding ways to work together to cross promote each other's museums and cultural programs and to seek mutually beneficial funding options and other potential synergies.

BCPV Strategic Plan, 2020-2023

Fulfilling strategies outlined in the Five-Year Update to Building The Living City 2013-2022 Strategic Plan for TRCA, the strategic plan for BCPV outlines steps required to make BCPV the preeminent heritage destination in the Toronto region – one where people living in and visiting the region go to experience the region's natural and cultural heritage.

The overarching goal and proposed strategic priorities in the plan flow directly from the Five-Year Update to the TRCA Strategic Plan. The BCPV Strategic Plan outlines how BCPV will tell the story of the Toronto region through interactive experiences and from multiple perspectives while strengthening community engagement and growing the number of partner-led experiences available on the site. The plan builds on BCPV's previous strategic plan (2012-2017) and reflects several years of community consultation, research in sector best practices, work with Museum Planning Partners, prototyping of ideas, and analysis of visitor feedback.

Impact of COVID-19 on BCPV's Operations

As school board labour disruptions did in the early part of 2020, COVID-19 has dramatically impacted BCPV's operations, staffing levels, visitation, and public offerings. BCPV closed to the public on March 16, 2020 and reopened in a limited capacity on August 8, 2020.

During this interval, no general visitation, school visits, recreational programming, or special events, took place. Revenue associated with these programs, along with parking fees associated with York University and Tennis Canada has been reduced.

On April 8, 2020, the majority of 27 permanent and all 47 seasonal BCPV staff members were placed on Declared Emergency Leave (DEL), with the expectation that BCPV would be closed throughout the pandemic. Limited staff involved in essential services, including care of livestock and property maintenance work, remained working during the duration of the pandemic while some seasonal staff were successfully redeployed for a portion of this period to conduct seasonal restoration work. Since April, two staff members have returned on a short-term contract to complete funded capital work and an additional 18 seasonal staff members have returned for limited hours to implement BCPV's COVID-19 reopening model, outlined below.

Item 8.12

While visitors are returning to the site, the pandemic continues to impact BCPV as no school visits are expected for the 2020-2021 school year. Furthermore, general visitation, recreational programming, and special events are expected to be restricted and the pandemic will continue to diminish parking revenue from York University and Tennis Canada related programs and events for the foreseeable future.

In 2019, BCPV earned \$2,858,832 in revenue while operating expenses were \$4,571,581, resulting in a funding shortfall of \$1,712,749, which is representative of BCPV's annual operations. Staff anticipates a reduction in both expenses and revenue in 2020 and are projecting that the site will bring in \$625,000 in revenue while expending \$2,250,000 in operating, resulting in a funding shortfall of \$1,625,000.

Despite the period of closure brought on by COVID-19, BCPV has maintained a robust online presence and social media following, attracted two large-scale film contracts, and has welcomed more than 100 visitors to the site most days since the modified reopening on August 8, 2020 for a total of 3,730 visitors in the first five weeks. Visitor reaction to the site's reopening has been extremely positive with many visitors purposefully thanking staff for making the site available to them. Maintaining market exposure by being open is vitally important for future operations and bookings.

COVID-19 BCPV Modified Reopening Model

In "A Framework for Reopening our Province Stage 2," the Province of Ontario outlined conditions under which heritage institutions, including outdoor museums, could reopen for public visitation during the pandemic.

In adherence to the Framework's stipulations, TRCA introduced scheduled, pre-paid ticketed entrance and a one-way route through BCPV to manage visitor flow. To promote the safety of staff and visitors, costumed Education Interpreters are now stationed outside and adjacent to heritage buildings where they are demonstrating heritage trades and leading hands-free activities.

Upon modified reopening on August 8, 2020 visitation levels in August were approximately 100 visitors per day, representing a 70% decrease in daily visitation rates from the comparable period in 2019, which correlated to the 57% reduction in the number of hours that BCPV was open to the public, allowing BCPV to focus visitation onto fewer days and make prudent use of TRCA's resources.

As of the end of September, BCPV is open to the public on most weekends from 11:00 am – 3:00 pm, and available for pre-booked programs on Wednesday – Friday, as general public visitation levels traditionally decline upon the reopening of schools and field trips are not expected for the duration of the 2020-2021 school year.

For the duration of 2020, BCPV staff will continue working with their colleagues in the Education and Training Division to develop, blend, and cross-promote online content and programs. The two teams are working together to create virtual "field trips" and live synchronous learning modules for students, pilot offering BCPV's family programming at Tommy Thompson Park (and vice versa), and offering physically distanced family programs at BCPV for homeschoolers and those looking for a safe weekend outing, including themed visits for Halloween and Christmas.

Plans for early 2021 are not firm at this time and will adjust to fit program demand as has been done since modified reopening began August 8, 2020. Maintaining market exposure is as

Item 8.12

important to the public we serve as it is for BCPV. Demand for programming offerings such as those delivered since August remains steady and participants have been very thankful for the experience. Business partners are also dependent on BCPV being active.

Measures to Limit Financial Impacts – Partner Led Experiences

Weddings/Corporate Events, Escape Rooms, Axe Throwing, Goat Yoga, Haunted Walks

To help improve performance and promote BCPV as a destination TRCA is partnering with the private and academic sectors to further our objectives, with the goal of helping to reduce the operating shortfall.

In 2018 byPeterandPauls.com (PnP) entered into an agreement with TRCA to provide catering and event services at BCPV and Kortright Centre for Conservation (KCC) for a period of five years with the option to extend for an additional two terms. 2019 represented the first full year of this agreement.

PnP reports that COVID-19 has significantly impacted their operations. Restrictions on event size, food service options, and physical distancing requirements have contributed to a slow resumption of business.

Expansion of Filming Opportunities

Two film contracts have been entered into for BCPV since it reopened. TRCA staff are working with the City and stakeholders to promote BCPV and our other sites to the film industry.

Indigenous History Project

TRCA's unique three-way partnership with York University (including Anishinaabe scholar and historian Dr. Alan Corbiere) and Jumblies Theatre (project led by Haudenosaunee artist, Ange Loft) is entering its third year. This multi-year collaboration will result in a permanent exhibit at BCPV, original historical scholarship, and a weaving of Indigenous perspectives, content, and voices through BCPV's existing interpretation of the Toronto Region in the 19th century.

In June 2020, York University historians Alan Corbiere and Jennifer Bonnell received \$38,000 from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) for this project. This will fund original archival and community-based oral history research into Indigenous peoples living in the 19th century Toronto region. This builds on earlier project research funded by York University and will provide the foundation for the exhibit located at BCPV and co-created with Indigenous communities. TRCA has initiated preliminary engineering work on the heritage building earmarked for the exhibit and BCPV staff will be putting forward a campaign proposal to the Toronto and Region Conservation Foundation (TRCF) and TRCA's grants team with the hopes of securing approximately \$100,000 in sponsorship and grant funding for exhibit co-creation with participating First Nations.

Item 8.12

Measures to Limit Financial Impacts – TRCA Led Programming and Operational Changes

With the need for rapid development of new operating models within COVID-19 operating restrictions, efforts are underway by the Senior Leadership Team to realign the program and site operations of BCPV.

The focus of this effort is intended to improve and enhance visitor experiences by combining programming from BCPV with Education and Training division offerings. This will increase and improve programming opportunities and connections (e.g. with school boards). Staff are also seeking potential operational service improvements and efficiencies in both divisions with a view towards improved business continuity, service coverage, and career development opportunities for staff.

Education staff at BCPV have commenced closer collaboration with the Education and Training division as COVID-19 related restrictions demanded alternative ways of providing visitor experiences and learning opportunities

Planning for the BCPVNL

The BCPVNP is 16 hectares consisting of mixed table land forest, a wooded ravine along the Black Creek, as well as mown grass and small meadow areas. The site has two entrance points on Jane Street and is accessible from BCPV by way of a service road that goes under the bridge at the intersection of Steeles Avenue West and Jane Street along with an access from Jane Street south of the rail bridge. There are five heritage buildings on the site that are falling into a poor state of repair due to lack of required maintenance funds (Attachment 3). The site itself is well suited to events that could handle large crowds or gatherings. Several large-scale events have occurred on the site in recent years and were planned to occur in 2020 but were cancelled due to COVID-19 challenges. A master plan update for the property was conducted in 2015 and contemplated a concept of what the site could become with many site improvements (Attachment 4). However, funding has not been available for developing these plans into projects. The site is currently underutilized and could be made accessible to the community through improved access and parking.

VMC is the City of Vaughan's new downtown located north of the BCPVNL at Highway 7 (Attachment 1). The City of Vaughan's vision for this new downtown is a vibrant, modern urban centre for tens of thousands of residents and many businesses with multi-use office towers, residences, subway access, open green space, urban squares, pedestrian shopping areas, and restaurants, as well as walking and cycling paths.

This development growth, coupled by an already dense landscape, puts pressure on existing park space and creates need for more. The BCPVNL is presently largely isolated. Given the projected growth through development in the surrounding area, this property will soon be enveloped by many more residents and visitors who will require safe and accessible greenspace, which will become pivotal to the future success of BCPV.

TRCA staff have begun discussions and site visits with the City of Vaughan's Planning and Parks Planning staff to create a shared vision for this site. Discussions have been around ideas for transforming the property into an active use park, with the existing heritage buildings on the site which could be uniquely blended into the landscape for imaginative use, as has been accomplished in locations such as Wychwood Barns Park, Distillery Historic District, and Evergreen Brick Works in Toronto.

Item 8.12

Park development and use of the property would be invaluable to residents, accessible by nearby transit, and would create an additional draw for visitation to BCPV through the existing service trail. Successful development and operation of a more active use park could be accomplished through a MOU with City of Vaughan for this property.

Trails and Connections

Work is also underway with both the City of Toronto, York Region, and Vaughan to realize the opportunity for an active transportation corridor and trail connecting Vaughan into Toronto through this important area.

Downsview Dells Park located south of Shoreham Drive has a bike and pedestrian trail that is well used and maintained. The trail has a new and improved trailhead on the east side of Black Creek, both south and north of Shoreham Drive. The north access point ends on the service road for BCPV (Attachment 2).

TRCA staff, together with City of Vaughan staff and City of Toronto Planning and Transportation staff, have looked at this segment in association with the BCPVNL, which is ideally situated to connect two major trail systems of Toronto and Vaughan.

The objective of various meetings and discussions to date has been to develop a link between the Downsview Dells Park and Vaughan, ideally through the Black Creek Community Farm located on the west side of BCPV property. This connection would eventually link Vaughan Metropolitan Centre to Toronto's ravine trail system through Downsview Dells Park and to the Vaughan Super Trail, which is a trail initiative that envisions connecting a variety of off-road pathways and on-road pedestrian and cycling paths, thereby linking communities and people with local nature, cultural heritage, communities and special destinations. The Vaughan Super Trail is planned to be a 140-kilometre loop through Vaughan.

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

This report supports the following strategy set forth in the TRCA 2013-2022 Strategic Plan:
Strategy 6 – Tell the story of the Toronto region

DETAILS OF WORK TO BE DONE

TRCA staff will persist in improving educational and programmed cultural opportunities at BCPV to carry on telling the story of the Toronto region while strengthening engagement within the community and establishing third-party partnerships. Staff continue to adjust creatively and positively through turmoil being presented by COVID-19 and find ways to deliver value added programs to our visitors, both online and in-person.

Collaboration will continue between the Education and Training and Parks and Culture divisions in efforts to streamline program delivery and operational performance at BCPV.

BCPV Staff will work with the TRCF towards a campaign to support the planned Indigenous History Project exhibit in collaboration with York University.

Staff will continue discussions with the City of Vaughan, Region of York, and City of Toronto to advance future trail connectivity and active transportation including the BCPV and VMC Trail Connection, parking facility upgrades, and potential adaptive re-use and refurbishment of vacant heritage buildings between the two cities through the Black Creek North and South Property to ensure better access and use of these unique assets.

Item 8.12

TRCA will respond to any relevant funding intakes that the Provincial and Federal governments announce through the Funding and Grants team in consultation with our municipal partners including Toronto, York, and Vaughan.

BCPV will remain as one of the four priority campaigns (Meadoway, Bolton Camp, Tommy Thompson Park, BCPV) for the Toronto and Region Conservation Foundation in 2021.

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Attachment 1: Map of Black Creek Pioneer Village and Black Creek North (2020)

Attachment 2: Black Creek Trail Connections (2017)

Attachment 3: Photos of five buildings on BCPVNL

Attachment 4: BCPVNL Concept Plan (2015)