

Section I – Items for the Board of Directors Action

TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Directors
Friday, April 30, 2021 Meeting

FROM: Richard Ubbens, Director, Conservation Parks and Lands

RE: SUPPORT FOR INVESTMENT IN PETTICOAT CREEK CONSERVATION PARK (PCCP)
Coordinated Funding Support from All Levels of Government

KEY ISSUE

This report is to advise Toronto and Region Conservation Authority's (TRCA) Board of Directors of TRCA staff efforts to fund recent investments in PCCP through Board approved use of unrestricted reserves and to seek support and funding for these investments and other required infrastructure upgrades at PCCP from municipal and senior government partners. Funding is required for PCCP to maintain current levels of service taking into account growing use by residents and visitors including Great Lakes Waterfront Trail and Rouge National Urban Park visitors. Funding support being sought from partners includes direct funding from benefiting municipal partners and support for coordinated joint Provincial/Federal applications prioritizing infrastructure and active transportation investments for PCCP.

RECOMMENDATION

WHEREAS Petticoat Creek Conservation Park (PCCP) is an essential attraction for residents and visitors from Durham and across the GTA region;

WHEREAS PCCP accommodates many users of the Lake Ontario Waterfront Trail and users of the Rouge National Urban Park through park amenities, trail connections, and washroom facilities;

AND WHEREAS TRCA recently completed the necessary replacement of PCCP's electrical infrastructure funded through TRCA's unrestricted reserves as approved by the Board of Directors;

AND WHEREAS the Executive Committee of the Board of Directors has endorsed the use of unrestricted reserves to implement essential upgrades to the park's aging maintenance workshop facility;

AND WHEREAS TRCA staff have assessed and identified additional critical state of good repair needs in support of PCCP's maintenance operations, amenities, and to maintain an overall high level of service for park visitors;

THEREFORE, LET IT BE RESOLVED THAT staff report back on the continued discussions with Region of Durham, City of Pickering, Parks Canada and stakeholders towards securing funding to address required infrastructure upgrades as part of 2022 budget updates.

BACKGROUND

For decades, PCCP has been an essential attraction for East Toronto, Durham and residents across the GTA region. Although certain facilities were not operational during 2020, such as the much-loved aquatic facility, visitors used the park in record numbers. TRCA recorded a 170% annual increase in passive trail use across its Conservation Lands in 2020 and staff have

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observed a similar increase at PCCP. In fact, trail counters at PCCP recorded 4,100 visitors over the 2021 Easter weekend, when the park's gates and washrooms were still seasonally closed. During this unprecedented pandemic, public use and access to parks and open spaces is of utmost importance, which has certainly magnified the importance of maintaining park infrastructure.

Due to its proximity to the Rouge National Urban Park, PCCP has become an essential year-round part of an extended park and trail system, providing relief for users as well as access to this regional scale amenity of the Great Lakes Waterfront Trail. Along the Great Lakes Waterfront Trail, PCCP is a well-established spot for picnics, shelter from the elements and a vital location for washroom facilities.

To facilitate this increased use, it is essential that the park infrastructure is safe and always provides a high level of service for visitors to the park. Last year, TRCA invested over \$600,000 to replace the park's electrical system to ensure continued use of park amenities such as the aquatic facility, washrooms, electronic gates and lighting. At Authority Meeting #5/20, held on June 26, 2020, Resolution #A84/20 for the electrical system replacement was approved, in part, as follows:

“AND FURTHER THAT TRCA staff fund the urgent procurement using unrestricted reserves and approach both the City of Pickering and the Region of Durham to reimburse TRCA and determine funding mechanisms for further infrastructure projects at PCCA.”

TRCA's minimal reserves are not usually used to cover ongoing infrastructure needs of our facilities, however, without financial support of our municipal partners, the Board made the decision that the alternative of closing the park was not an option and approved the urgent procurement to replace the electrical system. Following Board direction, staff conducted discussions with City of Pickering and Region of Durham officials. However, staff were unsuccessful in securing support or partnering with municipalities on potential funding applications due to the parameters of the funding programs and other municipal priorities.

Ahead of TRCA performing a Building Condition Assessment for PCCP as part of the Asset Management Program, TRCA staff undertook a comprehensive review of the current condition of infrastructure across PCCP. This review highlighted several pressing issues that are shown in Attachment 1 and will require funding in the immediate future, including the following:

- The driveway entrance (Whites Road connection) into the park requires major reconstruction and expansion. The existing condition of the roadway has resulted in complaints and incidents for both vehicles, pedestrians and cyclists and is a liability to TRCA. This project will incorporate a formal pedestrian sidewalk which is not part of the existing driveway and will strive to meet AODA requirements. Additional assessments will be required to address storm water management issues to fully realize the costs to reconstruct the driveway.
- The aquatic facility has undergone a comprehensive review and condition assessment to help diagnose and address the ongoing mechanical and structural issues. Reporting and detailed information of this assessment is imminent. The pool is the main attraction at PCCP and the potential for a mechanical inefficiency would force periodic closures of the facility during operating season. Currently, there is no estimated budget, but an engineering forensic study is being commissioned which will provide this information.

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- Three picnic shelters which provide much needed respite from inclement weather are in poor structural condition and require replacement.
- Two washrooms in the park require full renovation, upgrades and expansion to service the volume of users and eliminate the operational expense of portable toilets brought to site yearly.
- Automated gates are necessary at the front gate to allow paid off-season access to the park during nice weather days in the late Fall, Winter, and early Spring season and to reduce stacking of cars on Whites Road on busy summer days.
- Parking lots require reconstruction due to potholes and restricted capacity. The current conditions result in safety concerns within the parking lots and driveways as the existing lots are undersized to facilitate park use.

To address failing infrastructure, the April 9, 2021 Executive Committee Resolution #B20/21 recommended approval for the release of \$523,000 in additional reserves to implement essential upgrades to the park's maintenance workshop facility. This building is critical infrastructure and requires repair and retrofit to provide a safe facility for operations staff who maintain the park. The current workshop has deteriorated since it was constructed in 1975 resulting in roof leaks, mold and asbestos identified in the walls and ceiling, and does not have a proper functioning heating system or energy efficient doors and windows.

RATIONALE

To date, TRCA has been unsuccessful in securing municipal, Provincial or Federal funding to advance these initiatives, including most recently through the Investment in Canada Infrastructure Program (ICIP) funding as Conservation Authorities were deemed to be ineligible applicants.

To best serve our stakeholders, we continue to partner with our municipalities across our jurisdiction. For example, Peel Region, Brampton, Caledon and TRCA have entered agreements to facilitate the investment of millions of dollars in funds to maintain and enhance Conservation Park assets, resulting in sustained operations and continued public enjoyment in the region.

TRCA has discussed the need for funding with senior municipal officials and issued letters of correspondence seeking the opportunity to discuss potential support from Parks Canada, the Region of Durham and the City of Pickering that could be directed to PCCP for necessary maintenance and upgrades which will allow the park to continue to be a valuable community resource.

The PCCP with exception of the aquatic facility due to COVID-19, will be open to the public for the 2021 season. However, the infrastructure listed above that is nearing end of life provides amenities to provide a high quality experience at the park but is unfortunately either failing, requiring upgrades, or replacement. Opportunities to enhance the park experience have been considered, such as the potential to winterize washrooms to be available year-round, to upgrade the gate systems to allow for paid use of the park in the off season, and to share maintenance facilities to garner further support, achieve a greater public presence, and garner potential investment in the park.

Through several planning initiatives such as the west extension of the Waterfront Trail from Rotary Frenchman's Bay Park West, and upgrades to trails and infrastructure at Rouge Beach within RNUP, access and desire to utilize PCCP by residents is expected to continue to increase, providing opportunity for the park to see increased revenue and use should amenities be available and in proper working order.

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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 3 – Rethink greenspace to maximize its value

Strategy 7 – Build partnerships and new business models

FINANCIAL DETAILS

TRCA staff recommended, and the Board endorsed, the use of unrestricted reserves to address immediate requirements for PCCP. Staff will continue to explore any funding support from the Region of Durham and the City of Pickering, and possibly Parks Canada, to support these investments and future required infrastructure upgrade projects at PCCP. Staff will report back on progress of these discussions as part of budget updates as per the recommendation in this report.

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Attachment 1: Aging Assets at Petticoat Creek Conservation Park