

Section I – Items for Board of Directors Action

TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Directors
Friday, June 25, 2021 Meeting

FROM: Anil Wijesooriya, Director, Restoration and Infrastructure

RE: **TOMMY THOMPSON PARK UPDATE**

KEY ISSUE

To provide an update on Tommy Thompson Park Joint Management with City of Toronto.

RECOMMENDATION

WHEREAS at Council Meeting #34 on June 8, 2021 the City of Toronto Council approved a report which recommends the establishment of a Tommy Thompson Park Joint Management Committee in 2021 that includes representation from City of Toronto, TRCA, CreateTO, PortsToronto and the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, for the purpose of integrated management of the three existing property components that comprise the Leslie Street Spit, and will be collectively known as the future Tommy Thompson Park;

AND WHEREAS City Council directed the preparation of a three-year work program by the Tommy Thompson Park Joint Management Committee;

LET IT BE RESOLVED THAT TRCA staff be directed to participate in the Tommy Thompson Park Joint Management Committee as described in the City of Toronto Council report;

THAT staff be directed to work with City of Toronto to prepare the 2022 budget request;

THAT staff report back on actions and initiatives of the Joint Management Committee in 2024 at the completion of the three-year work program;

THAT staff report back on integration of MNR owned lands into Tommy Thompson Park prior to the lands being transferred to TRCA ownership;

AND FURTHER THAT staff report back on the proposed public and stakeholder consultation model related to the Joint Management Committee in Q4 2021.

BACKGROUND

Tommy Thompson Park is one of TRCA's most popular and ecologically significant properties with over 250,000 visitors per year. This pet-free urban wilderness is located on the Leslie Street Spit, a 500-hectare lakefill site under construction by PortsToronto since 1959. Through natural succession and strategic habitat creation and enhancement projects implemented by TRCA, along with advocacy by community groups such as Friends of the Spit, the Leslie Street Spit has evolved into a wilderness that supports rich flora and fauna communities. It is designated as a globally significant Important Bird Area by Birdlife International and its Canadian partners Nature Canada and Birds Canada, and it is designated as an Environmentally Significant Area in the City of Toronto Official Plan.

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Ownership of 247 hectares was transferred to TRCA in 1984 and is officially known as Tommy Thompson Park. The remaining land, currently owned by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF) under lease to PortsToronto, is expected to be transferred to TRCA for integration into Tommy Thompson Park upon lakefilling completion and shoreline stabilization. The Baselands, located at the entrance to Tommy Thompson Park, will remain owned by CreateTO and the City of Toronto.

The Leslie Street Spit is constructed largely of brick and concrete rubble and does not include any formal shoreline protection as compared to other City of Toronto waterfront parks. The TTP shoreline is an informal shoreline influenced by natural processes, necessitating ongoing monitoring and maintenance related to erosion impacts to ensure structural integrity and hazard mitigation (e.g. exposed rebar concrete rubble on trails from wave uprush). Based on these conditions and limited resources to address the issues, the shoreline is not safe for public use. TRCA and the City of Toronto will continue to work with MNRF, PortsToronto and other stakeholders to understand the options and costs associated with installing a formal engineered shoreline, where required. Shoreline stabilization costs, operational considerations, and other associated matters will be addressed in a future report once more information is available.

In August 1973, the Provincial Cabinet gave TRCA "the responsibility of being the Province's agent with regard to the proposed Aquatic Park (now Tommy Thompson Park) and the preparation of a master plan". In 1977, TRCA's mandate was expanded to include not only the preparation of a master plan, but also development and interim management. The Tommy Thompson Park Master Plan and Environmental Assessment was approved in 1995, and the first phase of Master Plan implementation was completed in 2012. However, Tommy Thompson Park remains under Interim Management as the 1995 Master Plan cannot be fully implemented until the remaining MNRF land under lease to PortsToronto is transferred. In the interim, the approved Master Plan guides park management and development and has been the foundation of TRCA's Tommy Thompson Park Interim Management program.

Under the 1972 Management Agreement between the City of Toronto and TRCA, the City of Toronto is responsible for the management of TRCA-owned lands within the City of Toronto (with the exception of Black Creek Pioneer Village) once TRCA has prepared and implemented Master Plan work. With the completion of Phase One Master Plan implementation at Tommy Thompson Park in 2012, TRCA and City of Toronto developed the Tommy Thompson Park Joint Management Plan as a framework for co-management to meet the unique needs of an urban wilderness park. The Tommy Thompson Park Joint Management Plan reinforces the vision for the park as set out in the Master Plan, identifies priorities, defines the roles and expectations between TRCA and the City, and defines the principles and practices for park management. The Tommy Thompson Park Joint Management Plan was previously received as an item for information of the Board. At Authority Meeting held on May 27, 2011, Resolution #A113/11 was approved as follows:

IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) and City of Toronto Joint Management Plan for Tommy Thompson Park (TTP) be received.

TRCA and City of Toronto Parks, Forestry and Recreation have jointly managed Tommy Thompson Park since late 2012. TRCA leads the natural heritage management, communications, and environmental programming of the park. While the City of Toronto provides maintenance of the buildings, parking lot, and addresses public inquiries that are made through 311 with assistance from TRCA.

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Since 2015, the City of Toronto has invested in capital improvements at, and around Tommy Thompson Park. Key improvements include design and construction of the Martin Goodman Trail along Unwin Avenue and the Link Trail connection to the Tommy Thompson Park Multi-use Trail along Outer Harbour Marina Road; development and implementation of a wayfinding strategy; and design and construction of the entrance pavilion washroom facility.

TRCA has also continued to improve the ecological significance of the park through habitat restoration projects. Building upon previous successes and the works completed as part of Phase One Master Plan implementation, an additional 32.4 hectares has been created and enhanced by leveraging capital funds to secure \$2.4 million grant and private funding for these projects since 2012.

TRCA has been actively delivering education programs at Tommy Thompson Park since 2003 and has been implementing the Community Learning and Achievement model since 2015. Between 2016 and 2020, a total of 25,385 participants have been engaged through programming representing over 42,000 learner hours. The education business model focuses on building financial resilience through a diverse revenue generation strategy.

TRCA has observed a noticeable increase in visitor numbers at Tommy Thompson Park over the last five years. In 2020, trail counters were installed at the park to provide updated estimates of visitor use. The total number of visitors recorded between February 28, 2020 and February 26, 2021 was approximately 286,500.

Stakeholder engagement and public consultation have been important components for park development. In addition to numerous public meetings during the Master Plan and Environmental Assessment process, TRCA established stakeholder advisory groups. The first official group was the Natural Area Advisory Committee (1987-1992) that provided comment on the Master Plan process. This committee continued to meet ad hoc in the 1990s and was re-formalized as the Tommy Thompson Park Advisory Committee (2002-2011) which was instrumental during Phase One Master Plan implementation. The Tommy Thompson Park User Group (2011-2020) provided guidance and insight on restoration and capital improvement projects.

Since 1987 TRCA has also hosted many public meetings, workshops, information sessions and working groups to seek public and user group input and feedback. As a result of the pandemic, virtual engagement platforms have been effectively utilized to disseminate important information to the public. Most recently, TRCA and PortsToronto, with involvement of Councillor Paula Fletcher, hosted a public information webinar in February 2021 to advise park users of upcoming operational activities.

The attached City of Toronto report was adopted at the June 8, 2021 Toronto City Council meeting. This report provides context to Tommy Thompson Park and outlines recommendations for property integration; a robust Joint Management model moving forward, including the development of a Joint Management Committee with representatives from all landowners and managers of the Leslie Street Spit; development of a long-term governance and management model; and development of a budget request for implementation of the recommendations and management of the park.

RATIONALE

There has recently been a significant increase in the number of visitors at Tommy Thompson

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Park, notably since the start of the pandemic (approximately 286,500 visits in 2020). Coupled with the surrounding land use changes and planned Port Lands development, it is expected that visitor numbers will remain high and continue to increase in the future. The increase in visitors and associated rise of incompatible activities and bylaw infractions is resulting in negative impacts on the park's ecology, as well as increased user conflicts (e.g. trail use conflicts). Furthermore, visitors do not understand the complicated ownership and management structure of the Leslie Street Spit and perceive the entire landform as Tommy Thompson Park. The split ownership also has impacts on the ability to enforce municipal bylaws, as they are only applicable within Tommy Thompson Park proper.

Additionally, Tommy Thompson Park is experiencing pressure from wildlife use of the site including nesting pressure from Double-crested Cormorants, tree removals by American beavers, and human interference of wildlife including waterfowl feeding, unethical owl photography, intrusion into sensitive breeding habitats and competing recreational uses.

These pressures have stretched TRCA resources and staff are concerned about these threats impacting the ecological integrity of the site, which when considered with the added threat of climate change and the anticipated continued increasing human use, present significant management challenges.

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 2 – Manage our regional water resources for current and future generations

Strategy 3 – Rethink greenspace to maximize its value

Strategy 5 – Foster sustainable citizenship

Strategy 8 – Gather and share the best sustainability knowledge

FINANCIAL DETAILS

Funding for TRCA's role in the Joint Management of Tommy Thompson Park totals \$354,000 per annum and is broken down as follows. The amount of \$270,000 is available in the Tommy Thompson Park Interim Management account 210-19 and covers activities including project management and administration, implementation of the TTP Cormorant Management Strategy, wildlife management and monitoring, and invasive species management. Funds totaling \$50,000 in the Tommy Thompson Park-Cell Capping account 210-04 for wetland monitoring and management, and \$34,000 in the Waterfront/Moraine Migratory Bird Corridor Program account 113-48 for songbird migration monitoring at Tommy Thompson Park. Senior management activities related to Tommy Thompson Park are funded through operating budgets.

Recognizing the current pressures at Tommy Thompson Park, TRCA has taken the following measures to help mitigate issues at the location. TRCA increased weekend staffing for public engagement and park interpretation to help address incompatible uses that are impacting the ecological integrity of the park. TRCA Enforcement and Compliance staff and City of Toronto Municipal Licensing and Standards enforcement staff have been deployed to assist on weekends during peak hours. Despite the additional measures taken, TRCA staff continue to express concern regarding the increased demands on park space and associated costs.

Looking forward to address growing public recreational use, improve customer service standards, and achieve effective long-term management, TRCA staff currently anticipate an annual cost to operate and manage TRCA's responsibilities of the Joint Management Plan, including participation in the Joint Management Committee at approximately \$845,000,

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exclusive of shoreline maintenance, shoreline restoration and project management costs, or any special projects (e.g. public/stakeholder consultation related to the creation of a visitor experience plan). To maintain a minimum service standard, staff estimate an additional \$270,000 of operational support needs to be secured for 2022.

Shoreline protection and maintenance is not currently funded. Opportunities for erosion protection include yearly maintenance of the informal shoreline in perpetuity, implementation of a fully engineered shoreline, or a hybrid approach allowing for maintenance in perpetuity coupled with construction of long-term stabilization measures. Preliminary TRCA estimated costs approximate \$1.5M annually for maintenance and \$50M - \$100M for formal shoreline protection. Costs vary significantly depending on the degree of long-term stabilization required.

DETAILS OF WORK TO BE DONE

TRCA will participate in the Joint Management Committee and will work collaboratively to develop a plan for integration of all the Leslie Street Spit properties into Tommy Thompson Park. The committee will report back to the City of Toronto Infrastructure and Environment Committee prior to the incorporation of non-TRCA or City owned lands into Tommy Thompson Park. A key issue for the transfer of MNR lands to TRCA is confirmation/demonstration that the constructed shorelines are stable and meet the standards of TRCA/City of Toronto. A report providing an update on the status of the shoreline is forthcoming to the Board of Directors. Consolidation of the lands will mitigate the challenge of enforcement jurisdiction and allow for completion of Master Plan implementation, pending funding.

The Joint Management Committee will also prepare a three-year work program to:

- Develop a coordinated and comprehensive approach to the operations, maintenance and visitor experience across the entire site;
- Create a balanced visitor experience plan that considers public access and ecological integrity;
- Undertake community and stakeholder consultation, including Indigenous engagement, to inform the visitor experience plan; and
- Develop coordinated policy and enforcement approaches related to filming, dogs, trail conflicts and similar issues.

TRCA is currently developing a robust public and stakeholder consultation model to ensure that all park users, including ones who have just discovered Tommy Thompson Park, are engaged and connected. The consultation model will seek meaningful input and include clear, transparent communication via a number of platforms (e.g. in-person and virtual) to ensure that consultation is inclusive and represents broad park users.

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Attachments: 3

Attachment 1: Leslie Street Spit Ownership Map

Attachment 2: City of Toronto Council Report

Attachment 3: City of Toronto Report for Action