

Section III – Items for the Information of the Board

TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Directors
Friday, March 25, 2022

FROM: Anil Wijesooriya, Director, Restoration and Infrastructure

RE: **MORNINGSIDE LEGACY PROJECT UPDATE**

KEY ISSUE

Update on the partnership with TD Friends of the Environment Fund for the design and implementation of an Indigenous gathering space at Morningside Park in the City of Toronto, being guided by Indigenous consultation.

RECOMMENDATION

WHEREAS TRCA is committed to developing collaborative projects and positive relationships with Indigenous communities;

WHEREAS TD Friends of the Environment Foundation approved a grant in the amount of \$470,000 to TRCA to create an outdoor gathering space for celebration and education;

THEREFORE IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT the update on the Morningside Legacy Project be received.

BACKGROUND

In 2017 TRCA was successful in securing a \$470,000 grant from TD Friends of the Environment Fund (TDFEF) to create an outdoor gathering space with an objective to:

- Restore Indigenous presence with the creation of a Legacy Space that can be used for programming, learning and sharing.
- Provide Indigenous peoples with a gathering place that is reflective of Indigenous cultures and a place where non-Indigenous people can learn and explore Indigenous cultures, histories and worldviews.

Upon learning of the successful application, staff worked with the City of Toronto and TDFEF to select a site for the project. Three sites were initially investigated in Morningside Park, Colonel Danforth Park and University of Toronto Scarborough campus. Morningside Park, adjacent to Highland Creek, was determined to be the optimal site for the project.

TRCA and the TDFEF met members of the Indigenous Place Making Council (IPMC) and discussed an opportunity to transform the concept behind the proposed outdoor education space in Morningside Park into an Indigenous gathering place for education and celebration. IPMC was a non-profit organization that restored Indigenous presence to the fabric of cities, towns and communities and had been aligned to lead Indigenous stakeholder engagement sessions to inform the overall design of the project as well as potential future programming. The organization ceased operations in 2018 due to funding constraints.

In November 2019 a formal procurement process for the Indigenous Consultation (Phase 1) of the project was undertaken. The City of Toronto Indigenous Affairs Office was engaged and assisted in the development of the RFP documents as well as the proposal evaluation and consultant selection process. Selection and execution of the agreement was completed in

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December 2019. TRCA has been working with 4 Directions Conservation Consulting Services to advance work since this time.

RATIONALE

The intent of this project is to align with the existing City of Toronto Morningside Park Master Plan. This Plan was published by the City of Toronto in July 2013 and is meant to provide a concise framework to guide decision making for the ongoing improvements and management of the park for users as well as the protection and enhancement of the park's natural environment. Strategy 4.2 of the Master Plan identified the need to establish a park nature centre to educate the community about the park's natural environment. The Master Plan states that the centre would provide a destination for environmental education and stewardship programs and should be designed as an outdoor facility with some weather protection.

The Indigenous place-making model draws on the social determinants of health and derives its ethos from a strength-based empowerment model. It values and draws upon the Indigenous history and culture of a particular place and seeks to build leaders equipped to tackle issues impacting their community. As such, the place-making approach promotes people-centered, participatory design that engages the community in life-enhancing practices.

By drawing from traditional Indigenous methods of place-making and restoring Indigenous presence to public spaces, the Morningside Legacy Project will share information and create a landscape and environment that is culturally appropriate for Indigenous peoples. At the same time, it will provide non-Indigenous people with access and exposure to Indigenous culture as part of their everyday experience – a critical step in advancing reconciliation. Place-making is focused on the creation of safe, inspiring places that welcome people of all backgrounds.

4 Directions of Conservation Consulting Services have led the engagement and consultation process with Indigenous communities for the Project. Interested communities are treaty holders in Williams Treaty First Nations and include Scugog, Hiawatha and Curve Lake First Nations. Representatives from these communities have participated in introductory meetings and a three-day design workshop. Feedback gathered through the workshop as well as several on-site investigations was used to identify key project parameters and guide the preliminary conceptual designs of the Morningside Legacy Project, which were first presented to TRCA on October 27, 2021.

The vision for the final design of the Morningside Legacy Project is taking on the form of an educational trail. The trail has five main components interpreting First Nation history, cultural significance and connection to ecologically sound and sustainable approaches to land management. Each station is connected by a trail approximately 2km in length which leads through Morningside Park. The trail will be educational and entertaining for all levels and abilities and the design will foster respect for First Nations culture and land acknowledgement. The design will demonstrate longevity of First Nation cultures and show importance of natural processes and their significance in First Nations way of life. The design approach also offers the opportunity for story telling through technology such as QR codes and offers a richly textured cultural interpretation of native history encompassing thousands of years. The project lends itself to implementation in various phases as funding becomes available.

On December 14, 2021 TRCA engaged the City of Toronto to provide technical input on the preliminary designs, including considerations for safety and long-term maintenance. An additional detailed review of the preliminary designs was undertaken by TRCA staff in January of 2022, with all comments compiled and forwarded in February of 2022 to 4 Directions

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Conservation Consulting Services for consideration.

At a high level, the following are key themes of feedback provided from both agencies:

- Request for further information on the proposed phasing of work and the priorities for implementation, based on the available funding.
- Further technical analysis of the proposed location of any stations located near Highland Creek is required.
- The City of Toronto's Multi-use Trail Design Guidelines should be considered.
- Request for additional information on potential long-term maintenance and management models required for each station.

Overall, the concepts were well received and the City of Toronto and TRCA are committed to continue to work with all parties to advance the Project.

On March 3, 2022 TRCA was invited to participate in a review of the concepts with the Williams Treaty First Nations participants. Feedback continues to be very positive and knowledge was shared which will help refine the concepts, site considerations and project phasing.

The preliminary conceptual design is included in Attachment 1.

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 6 – Tell the story of the Toronto region

Strategy 7 – Build partnerships and new business models

DETAILS OF WORK TO BE DONE

- Continue to undertake collaborative review of technical feedback provided by TRCA and City of Toronto Advisory Group with 4 Directions Conservation Consulting Services and their design firm;
- Refinement of the conceptual designs, led by Indigenous communities;
- Confirmation of project priorities by Indigenous communities to allow for a recommendation on phased implementation;
- Detailed design, tender and implementation of Phase 1, in concert with Indigenous community input;
- Explore grant opportunities to advance future phases of work; and
- Continue to update project information at: <https://trca.ca/conservation/watershed-management/morningside-legacy-project/>

TRCA has received positive feedback on the consultation approach for this project from the Indigenous communities involved. In 2022 staff will consider other opportunities to apply this model and explore appropriate funding sources.

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Date: March 3, 2022

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Attachment 1: Morningside Legacy Project – Preliminary Concepts