



Staff Report for Committee of the Whole Meeting

Date of Meeting: June 21, 2023

Report Number: SRPI.23.058

Department: Planning and Infrastructure

Division: Policy Planning

Subject: SRPI.23.058 - Request for Approval – Town Park Master Plan

Purpose:

The purpose of this staff report is to present the final Town Park Master Plan.

Recommendation(s):

- a) That staff report SRPI.23.058 regarding the Town Park Master Plan be received;
and
- b) That Council approve the Town Park Master Plan (Appendix A).

Contact Person:

Michelle Dobbie, Manager, Park and Natural Heritage Planning, phone number 905-771-2467

Maria Flores, Director, Policy Planning, phone number 905-771-5438

Report Approval:

Submitted by: Kelvin Kwan, Commissioner of Planning and Infrastructure

Approved by: Darlene Joslin, City Manager

All reports are electronically reviewed and/or approved by the Division Director, Treasurer (as required), City Solicitor (as required), Commissioner, and City Manager. Details of the reports approval are attached.

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Background:

Town Park is Richmond Hill's first park, opened in 1885. For much of its history, Town Park was the principal outdoor site for the community's sporting, civic and agricultural events. As Richmond Hill developed, the facilities in Town Park have evolved to meet the needs of the growing community. Town Park became part of a system of community parks that serve the City and it grew in size as adjacent land became available or was acquired for park use.

Changes to Town Park have occurred incrementally without a guiding vision. Most of the park's facilities have not been updated for many years. To address this, the City initiated preparation of the Town Park Master Plan (the "Master Plan"). The Master Plan will establish a revitalization vision and strategic direction to guide the future enhancement, management and programming of Town Park.

A four-stage process is being followed to complete the Town Park Master Plan project as follows:

Stage 1	Research Stage
Stage 2	Options & Preferred Master Plan Stage through public consultation
Stage 3	Preparation of Draft Town Park Master Plan for consultation
Stage 4	Approval of Final Town Park Master Plan & Implementation Stage

Details related to each stage were outlined in SRPI.23.008 (received by Council on March 8, 2023). The Town Park Master Plan project was re-initiated in 2023 as a key project intended to aid in implementing the 2022 Parks Plan.

Key Themes Expressed on the draft Town Park Master Plan:

As part of the public consultation process on the draft Town Park Master Plan (i.e. through the comments received from March 8th to early April, 2023), the following key themes were expressed:

Overall support for the Master Plan

The public expressed overall support for the Master Plan, noting that the Plan appears to be creating a multi-generational, multi-functional, four-season park. A number of residents noted their support for improving Town Park and felt that the Master Plan was generally well thought out; many liked how the Plan proposes to showcase the park's history through interpretive signs and an attractive gateway reflecting its history. Support for adding trees and a continuous walkway along Verne Dynes Way, permeable paving in the parking area, improving the Lorne Avenue streetscape to visually and functionally better connect the entry to Town Park to Yonge Street, and the phased approach to balance costs were all noted in the comments received. The proposed new pathways around the park, pollinator meadow, and ample seating spaces

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including the picnic pavilions were also received favourably. The public also voiced their appreciation for the public consultation before the re-development and improvements to the park.

Tennis courts

The public expressed a desire to maintain the existing three (3) tennis courts for tennis play, rather than converting them to purpose-built pickleball courts as was shown in the draft Master Plan. Staff reviewed these comments in the context of other parks in Richmond Hill that are either now hosting pop-up pickleball courts or planned to have purpose-built pickleball courts (i.e. Richmond Green which has a seasonal pop-up with 10 pickleball courts, Bayview Hill Park Revitalization where construction will begin shortly to provide 4 purpose-built pickleball courts by 2024, RHDDO Park which was identified as a potential site for a pickleball hub, and Mill Pond Park Revitalization project which shows 2 purpose-built pickleball courts in the emerging concept). Given the number of outdoor pickleball court opportunities provided or soon to be provided in the area around Town Park, the final Town Park Master Plan provides direction for the three existing tennis courts to remain, and to maintain two of the tennis courts being lined for both tennis and pickleball play, as they are now.

Church Street Frontage (playground and drop-off loop)

The public expressed a desire to maintain the Church Street frontage as a more active park space and to maintain the playground in this location (rather than converting this frontage to a drop-off loop and moving the playground into the wooded area to the north of the arena). Doing so would ensure the playground continues to have good sightlines, along with ensuring that the properties across the street from the arena do not become subject to headlight glare. The final Master Plan provides direction for the playground to remain along the Church Street frontage. Transportation staff have been consulted in relation to reconfiguring areas for a drop-off loop. The final Master Plan now shows a drop-off area on the north side of Verne Dynes way, aligning with the main arena entrance, and another drop-off area on the east side of the arena, aligning with the entrance to the Richmond Hill room. Re-configuring the parking area to the east of the arena to include a drop-off area will have the added benefit of providing a new location for the waste receptacles. Currently located just outside the entrance to the Richmond Hill room, the waste receptacles will be relocated further north, closer to the loading area on east side of the arena.

Wooded Area north of the Arena

Given that the playground will remain along the Church Street frontage (and is no longer proposed to be relocated to the wooded area north of the arena) the final Master Plan provides direction to add a trail through the wooded area, ensuring enhanced connectivity between the tennis courts along the north side of Town Park. Providing this more passive use within the wooded area will provide a more sensitive transition between the park and the adjacent residential rear yards. The wooded area will be enhanced with new trees as space permits.

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Softball Diamond

Demand for large softball facilities from the clubs operating in Richmond Hill continues to exceed the number of large softball facilities the City has available for permit. There is also a lack of new parkland in the assumption stage with the capacity to accommodate large new softball or baseball diamonds in the future. Given the history of Town Park in relation to softball play and tournaments, the final Master Plan has been revised to include a Class A softball diamond (rather than the Class B softball diamond shown in the draft Master Plan) in order to fill this need and build on the site's history. The Class A softball diamond footprint is larger than that of a Class B softball diamond and, as such, the walking paths and pollinator meadow shown in the north-east corner of the draft Master Plan have shifted slightly west. In addition, given the on-going need for this type of recreational facility, evidenced by the permit requests for larger softball fields that the City cannot currently fill, the phasing in the final Master Plan has been adjusted to include the revitalization of the softball diamond in Phase 1 of the project.

Beach Volleyball Court

The public expressed a desire for beach volleyball courts to be included in the Town Park Master Plan. The City's 2022 Parks Plan directs as follows with respect to beach volleyball courts:

- Public requests for other recreation facilities should be supported by demonstrated demand, available resources, partnership opportunities, and other factors (i.e. disc golf, outdoor lawn bowling, BMX/dirt bike jump track, beach volleyball facilities, table tennis, archery, arboretums, forest bathing trails).

Beach volleyball courts are one of the Outdoor Recreational Facilities that the City currently provides, or may have an interest in providing, that are considered to be specialized facilities for which service targets are difficult to establish. To staff's knowledge, a public request with the information noted in the above Policy has not been received for beach volleyball facilities to date. Furthermore, in order to balance the amount of passive and active recreational opportunities available within Town Park, the Master Plan does not propose to include beach volleyball courts.

Outdoor Skating Rink

The public expressed a desire for an artificial skating rink or a skate trail like the one that exists at Richmond Green. The draft Master Plan proposed a natural ice rink (created through what is called a rink water unit). As a result of the effects of climate change, the City was not able to provide outdoor skating opportunities on any of its natural rinks in the 2022/23 season and this trend is expected to continue. Given that the City already has a Zamboni available at Elgin Barrow Arena to support the maintenance required for an artificial skating rink at Town Park, the final Master Plan provides direction for a cost benefit analysis to be undertaken at detailed design to consider the appropriate size, shape, location and technology to use to create an artificial outdoor skating rink at Town Park. If feasible, this recreational facility would

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allow the park to be activated across all four-seasons as the climate continues to change.

Financial/Staffing/Other Implications:

The Town Park Master Plan attached as Appendix A to Staff Report SRPI.23.058 has been used to inform the City's Capital Forecast. There are no immediate staffing or financial implications associated with this report.

Relationship to Council's Strategic Priorities 2020-2022:

Balancing Growth and Green

The Town Park Master Plan is a key project intended to aid in implementing the 2022 Parks Plan, which is identified as a major project intended to recognize the critical balance between economic development and environmental stewardship. Stewardship of green spaces such as parks and trails and longer-term sustainability planning and climate action initiatives associated with parks and the facilities within them aid the City in balancing growth and green.

Fiscal Responsibility

The Town Park Master Plan provides for a phased build-out to ensure the planning, design/construction, and maintenance/operational aspects of the facilities and programs outlined in the Master Plan account for all costs from project inception through to construction/program formulation, and operation/maintenance.

Sense of Belonging

The Town Park Master Plan aids in establishing a sense of belonging by revitalizing an aging park space to serve the changing demographics of this growing neighbourhood adjacent to the Yonge Street growth corridor while providing elements that reflect on and enhance the unique cultural history of the park and area. For example, the following elements are proposed to add to the sense of place:

- A park gateway that references the original entry feature to Town Park;
- Interpretive signage that incorporates photos from the park's past;
- Historical design features for the softball field that celebrate its history as the home of the Verne Dynes jewellers team;
- Placing the Lion's Club monument at the north-east entrance to the park to commemorate the Club's former headquarters.

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Getting Around the City

The Town Park Master Plan directs for the creation of enhanced connections between Yonge Street, through Town Park, and across Pugsley Avenue to Unity Park. These enhanced connections include improved streetscaping in the form of new trees and seating between Yonge Street and Church Street along the north side of Lorne Avenue, the reconfiguration of Verne Dynes Way to better accommodate pedestrian/cyclist movement and provide additional trees and seating between Church Street and Pugsley Avenue, and a new crossing to Unity Park at Pugsley Avenue. These enhanced connections will allow residents and visitors who wish to access Town Park by foot or bicycle to enjoy a seamless travel experience when using park facilities.

Climate Change Considerations:

The way we plan, design and maintain parks and the facilities within them impacts the City's larger greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and how vulnerable the City is to the impacts of climate change. The 2022 Parks Plan provides direction that a climate change lens be applied to the development and redevelopment of parks, like Town Park. The Town Park Master Plan proposes the following elements to aid in creating a more resilient Richmond Hill by combating climate change and reducing its impacts:

- Enhanced connections between Yonge Street, through Town Park, and across Pugsley Avenue to Unity Park, allowing residents who wish to access Town Park by foot or bicycle to enjoy a seamless travel experience when using park facilities, promoting exercise and providing alternatives to getting around by car;
- Extensive tree canopy enhancements, particularly in the north-eastern corner of the park and west of the softball diamond, aiding in cooling and cleaning the air and retaining stormwater on-site;
- Pollinator meadow areas to reduce the need for park maintenance and enhance biodiversity within the park;
- Downcast/low-impact lighting, reducing light pollution;
- “Green” parking features including:
 - Pedestrian walkways,
 - Planting islands with salt-tolerant species,
 - Low-impact stormwater features such as bioswales and permeable paving to encourage the on-site treatment of stormwater management,
 - Light coloured or treated asphalt paving to reduce the urban heat island effect,
 - Parking space that are pre-serviced for future EV charging stations,
 - Environmentally-sensitive snow storage areas, and
 - Sheltered bike parking in clearly visible and illuminated locations close to building entrances and walkways.

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Conclusion and Next Steps:

It is recommended that this staff report be received and that Council approve the Town Park Master Plan (Appendix A). Following Council approval of the Town Park Master Plan, staff will aim to bring forward a 2024 Capital Budget request to initiate Phase 1 of the Town Park revitalization project.

Attachments:

The following attached documents may include scanned images of appendixes, maps and photographs. All attachments have been reviewed and made accessible. If you require an alternative format please call the contact person listed in this document.

- Appendix A – Town Park Master Plan

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Report Approval Details

Document Title:	SRPI.23.058 - Request for approval - Town Park Master Plan.docx
Attachments:	
Final Approval Date:	May 31, 2023

This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:

Maria Flores - May 31, 2023 - 9:20 AM

Kelvin Kwan - May 31, 2023 - 11:53 AM

Darlene Joslin - May 31, 2023 - 12:33 PM

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Report Approval Details

Document Title:	SRPI.23.058 - Request for approval - Town Park Master Plan.docx
Attachments:	- SRPI.23.058 - Appendix A -Final Master Plan - AODA.pdf
Final Approval Date:	Jun 12, 2023

This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:

Maria Flores - Jun 12, 2023 - 9:01 AM

Kelvin Kwan - Jun 12, 2023 - 9:18 AM

Darlene Joslin - Jun 12, 2023 - 2:38 PM