



SUBJECT: Proposed pilot project with Conservation Halton for Lowville Park

TO: Environment, Infrastructure & Community Services Cttee.

FROM: Office of the Mayor and Ward 3 Councillor

Report Number: MO-06-20

Wards Affected: Ward 3 specifically, all wards more generally

File Numbers: 155-03-12

Date to Committee: July 6, 2020

Date to Council: July 13, 2020

Recommendation:

Direct the Executive Director of Environment, Infrastructure and Community Services to work with the Chief Administrative Officer and staff of Conservation Halton to develop and implement a pilot project for Lowville Park encompassing the application of Conservation Halton's new online park access registration system effective end of July or sooner, and;

Direct the Executive Director of Environment, Infrastructure and Community Services to report back for the July 13 City Council meeting on the following items:

- City capital and operating costs - short term to implement 2020 pilot project
- Proposed Lowville Park policy recommendations related to park access and usage
- Proposed terms of a partnership arrangement with Conservation Halton to the satisfaction of the Executive Director of Legal Services, and;

Authorize the Mayor and Clerk to sign any related agreements or other related documents with Conservation Halton or their contractors/service providers to proceed with the pilot project upon the council vote July 13, subject to the satisfaction of the Executive Director of Legal Services; and Direct the Executive Director of Environment, Infrastructure and Community Services to report back on results of the Lowville Park pilot in October 2020, including any estimated long-term capital and operating costs for consideration by Council in the proposed 2021 Budget.

PURPOSE:

Vision to Focus Alignment:

- Support sustainable infrastructure and a resilient environment
 - Building more citizen engagement, community health and culture
 - Deliver customer centric services with a focus on efficiency and technology transformation
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Background and Discussion:

When the city announced the partial reopening of the parking lot at Lowville Park at 50% capacity, effective June 29, we heard directly from a number of residents in the immediate area regarding concerns in the park that pre-date the COVID19 virus and which escalated in 2019. These are summarized below and detailed in the attached Appendix A. There are also COVID19 related concerns around controlling crowds in the park to ensure the ability to physically distance.

After extensive discussion with the residents, as well as input from capital works, parks and recreation, transportation, parking, and roads, parks and forestry staff, it appears these concerns can be best managed with the ability to control access to the park. Controlled access also assists in the short term with controlling crowds to ensure physical distancing during COVID19.

To address the above concerns, the recommended option is to proceed with a pilot project that would see Conservation Halton add Lowville Park to their existing reservation booking system and install (at the city's cost) the required capital infrastructure (gate or gate house). Whereas CH does charge a minor fee for park usage, there would not be any fee to visitors reserving space at Lowville Park.

Some short-term options to manage the immediate reopening of the parking lot are also outlined below.

This report is being written prior to the reopening on June 29, however when the report comes to the EICS committee July 6 we will have data from how the reopening and holiday weekend went to inform the discussion of the potential pilot project.

Below is the short-term plan for controlling access to deal with COVID19 crowd control, as well as options for the long term.

Residents have detailed their existing concerns with the park in the attached Appendix A. In summary the concerns relate to the need to:

- control the number of people in the park to ensure space for physical distancing under COVID19

- control size of groups to ensure 10-person COVID19 limit. Post COVID19 better manage number of visitors and size of groups. In the past large groups might show up in buses; or if they booked a permit with the city, numbers sometimes vastly exceed the stated size of the group on the permit. Also, if visitors arrived and found the parking lot full, they would park illegally

- maintain cleanliness and supplies in washrooms, so visitors don't attempt to use area businesses

- prevent illegal parking on Guelph Line, area businesses and residents when the parking lot becomes full

- provide education around what amenities are available so residents are prepared for their visit before and when they arrive, particularly around no potable water, rules around fire/BBQ, during COVID19 no playground access, and more.

During a recent ZOOM call with Mayor Meed Ward and Ward 3 Councillor Nisan, area residents expressed support for the short term opening plan, but agreed that it was not a long-term sustainable plan, and expressed support for the proposed pilot project to engage Conservation Halton to assist in managing access to Lowville Park.

Short Term Opening Plan:

Monday June 29 through Tuesday June 30

Parking lot opens at 50% capacity.

Washrooms will be opened with attendants daily from 8am to 8pm. This is a requirement under COVID19 health guidelines but will also help with longstanding issues related to the cleanliness/supplies at the washroom, causing park users to occasionally attempt to use the washrooms of nearby businesses. Park Ambassadors will not be on site as of yet.

Wednesday July 1 (Canada Day) through to Sunday July 5: treated as a holiday weekend.

Parking Enforcement: Parking services will have a parking enforcement officer on site every weekend and Holiday. The officer will be stationed at Lowville Park from 8am-7pm, monitoring illegal parking. The officer will tag and/or tow vehicles when appropriate. The goal will be to make sure that people are not parking in the lot beyond the COVID capacity, or in business lots in the area and along Lowville Park Road. Illegal parking has been an issue in the past in this area. It is anticipated that parking enforcement costs will be offset by parking fines.

Park Ambassadors: City Park Ambassadors will greet park visitors at the entrance to the parking lot, instruct them where they can park and what areas of the park they may use. They may also answer questions and remind visitors that playground equipment is still closed and while washrooms are open, the water is not potable. This is essentially an education/customer service role. They can also remind visitors to remain 6ft from anyone outside your household or social bubble and that gatherings are restricted to 10 people or less. A tent will be provided at the entrance for shelter for the Ambassadors.

Park Ambassadors will be on site July 1 - 5 and then weekends and holidays up to Labour Day, from 8:30 - 4:30pm. Cost per day is approximately \$500. Total cost for the twenty-five days indicated would be \$12,500. These costs will be funded through the COVID-19 emergency response cost center.

Bylaw Enforcement: Posting a bylaw officer at the park on a proactive basis is not recommended as the team is currently focused on a backlog of enforcement across the entire city. It is anticipated that the parking control measures will aid in the reduction of crowding at Lowville park as the majority of patrons must arrive by vehicle and tour buses/large corporate events are currently prohibited.

Should proactive enforcement be preferred, appropriate hours would be 11:00 am – 5:00 p.m. Thursdays through Sundays and on holidays. Staff costs will be provided in the forthcoming staff report.

Off-duty police officers: The City is requesting HRPS officers to attend the park if available. Must book a minimum of two officers. One will be directed to manage traffic at Guelph Line and Lowville Park Road to make sure Guelph Line isn't blocked, especially at the curve. The other one will be directed to patrol the park, especially at the entrances from the parking lot to make sure that no groups of more than 10 are congregating, that people are physically distancing and adhering to COVID-19 provincial and municipal emergency orders and bylaws. Essentially traffic and crowd control with authority to close roads, attend to traffic hazards/accidents and issue citations. They would also assist, if necessary, any issues that may escalate from parking, bylaw or park ambassadors. Once the parking lot is full, officers would ensure that cars don't enter from Guelph Line, or park illegally on Guelph Line or elsewhere.

The city has requested two Paid duty officers for July 1-5, 11-12 and 18-19, from 11am - 4pm. Cost per day is approximately \$1150 so total for the nine days indicated will be approximately \$10,350.

Signage: Staff will work on new signs outlining expected behaviour in the park, and COVID19 regulations. These would remain throughout the pandemic.

Long Term Opening Plan:

Though these measures will help to control the initial phased opening and start to change behaviour, this plan is not financially sustainable for the long term, and experience has shown that when staff are not on-site some of the problematic behaviour returns.

Further, at some point the city will reopen the entire parking lot and that will escalate issues of crowd control and related parking/crowd management issues unless access is controlled.

Long Term Options:

Conservation Halton has co-developed and implemented an innovative online Park access reservation system in partnership with local Canadian technology start-ups, that controls crowds at their parks. Residents book a time slot, and the number of slots available per hour are determined based on park capacity. The system will show if all spots are taken for a particular time slot before residents arrive and see the park is full.

The CAO and staff of CH will provide a demonstration of the system at the July 6 EICS meeting, and more details are provided in the attached Appendix B.

Access is through a digital “ticket” and a scanner that lifts a gated arm. Ultimately the system will not need staffing. For the foreseeable future, there is an attendant at the gatehouse to assist residents with registering (if they didn’t do so in advance) if space remains available.

The only fee is the typical charge to enter a CH park, either a daily rate or as a yearly member. No additional charges are applied for reserving the space.

To date, more than 100,000 visitors have successfully used this system since it went live on May 22nd.

CH has offered to partner with the City to run a pilot project at Lowville using CH technology, so the city doesn’t have to independently create a new booking system. Similar to other city parks, there would be no admission fee for visitors to Lowville Park.

The city would cover any one-time capital costs and incremental CH costs, and the program would be reviewed at the end of the pilot.

CH has an extra temporary gate house they are not using (similar to a large shed) that can be trucked to the site and placed. Once the pilot ends and is reviewed, if the initiative proceeds the city can install gate arms and if needed a formal gatehouse as more permanent structures (which may require an NEC permit). CH would train city staff on their technology and set up a separate portal that staff can access. Training typically takes one day. To set up and deploy the technology, onboard staff, and install the temporary gatehouse would take approximately one week.

This technology has drawn national interest, with the City of Toronto actively considering using it for booking access to approximately 65 swimming pools (once opened) as well as other uses in the near future. Vancouver and several other organizations and municipalities have also reached out, and The Honourable Navdeep Bains, Federal Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry has reached out to learn more and potentially support the development of technology.

In addition to controlling access, the technology provides valuable data on park usage and visitors for planning purposes

Option 1: Recommended

CH adds Lowville Park to their Park reservation booking system and provides capital infrastructure (gatehouse). City reimburses Lowville for capital costs. No fee for Lowville park users other than currently existing fees (eg. Picnic site reservations).

City provides all other staffing and park maintenance.

Cost to City: to be provided by CH and confirmed at July 13 City Council.

Other options considered but not recommended.

2. City opens and operates Lowville, as status quo.

No change in operations. Parking lot and park is self-policing, like Beachway/Spencer Smith and others. Option for park ambassadors.

Pros: Simplest, least expensive. Additional costs if park ambassadors are stationed at the park. Parking enforcement provided (as in previous years) to ensure proper parking in the lot (i.e. not blocking cars in, or parking in fire lane).

Cons: A status quo approach does not address longstanding existing issues of crowds, parking, and other matters, especially outside of times when staff are available to attend. Park ambassadors not equipped to deal with bylaw enforcement or traffic queuing up on Guelph Line if parking lot is full

3: City develops a reserve parking platform to limit the volume of people in the park and install necessary gate and/or gatehouse.

Pros: City retains the infrastructure for the parking platform.

Cons: Additional costs and delays from having to develop a new platform; extended time to investigate and implement, reinvents the wheel when CH has a proven system. Parking would need to be monitored and enforced. Possibly would still need a gate system to control access to registered visitors, so no savings compared to the CH pilot option.

Financial Matters:

A staff report will be provided directly for consideration at the July 13 City Council meeting and will include the financial impact of short-term park re-opening plan, inclusive of the following items:

- Park ambassador staffing
- Parking enforcement staffing
- Gathering size and physical distancing bylaw enforcement staffing
- HRPS off duty officer support
- Signage

In addition, the report will include required one-time capital costs and funding source to implement the CH Park reservation system as a 2020 pilot project.

Climate Implications

Not directly applicable to the pilot project. Staff will report back in the fall on any implications based on a review of the pilot and recommendations pertaining to a long-term solution.

Engagement Matters:

As referenced above, engagement with local residents through emails and Zoom calls has taken place, as well as discussions with CH on the pilot itself. Further detail is provided in Appendix A.

Conclusion:

Committee's approval of the report recommendations will result in the City proceeding expeditiously with a 2020 pilot project in partnership with Conservation Halton (CA) to add Lowville Park to their innovative and new park reservation booking system and install (at the city's cost) the required capital infrastructure (gate and/or gatehouse).

Similar to other City parks there would not be any admission fee to visitors reserving space at Lowville park through the CH system.

This recommended pilot project is in response to longstanding concerns raised by residents and visitors to the park, as well as additional requirements around crowd control during COVID19. The goal is to address these concerns in a positive manner through enhanced customer service, through an advanced reservation system that provides predictability and certainty about available space and parking when visitors

arrive. It is a more positive customer experience than the enforcement alternative of providing tickets, tows and police officers to manage the crowds, and the frustration of arriving and finding the park full.

In addition, depending on the results of the pilot, it could be rolled out in other city parks, such as Beachway, where similar crowd control issues exist. As noted, the City of Toronto will be using this system for their beaches, and CA will be using it for their own beach.

Respectfully submitted,

Mayor Marianne Meed Ward and Councillor Rory Nisan

Appendices:

- A. Resident Feedback
- B. Conservation Halton FAQs on park reservation system

Report Approval:

All reports are reviewed and/or approved by Department Director, the Chief Financial Officer and the Executive Director of Legal Services & Corporation Council. Final approval is by the City Manager.