



SUBJECT: Park Experience Program Summer 2021

TO: Mayor and Members of Council

FROM: Recreation, Community and Culture Department

Report Number: RCC-06-21

Wards Affected: all

File Numbers: 915-01

Date to Committee: March 23, 2021

Date to Council: March 23, 2021

Recommendation:

Authorize the Director of Recreation, Community and Culture to implement a pilot park customer experience program in 2021, utilizing service options items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 as outlined in report CM-06-21, to an upset limit of \$350,000 to be funded through the Recreation, Community and Culture COVID operating cost centre; and

That amendments to By-law 35-1976, being a By-law to Regulate Public Parks in the City of Burlington, otherwise known as the "Parks By-law", to update regulations related to bicycle use in parks, be presented to Council for approval in a follow-up report.

PURPOSE:

Vision to Focus Alignment:

- Building more citizen engagement, community health and culture
- Deliver customer centric services with a focus on efficiency and technology transformation

Background and Discussion:

Through community surveys, the residents of Burlington have repeatedly noted how much they value the parks system in the City. Having access to open spaces to socialize and recreate has become essential for many residents' mental and physical health during the pandemic. As a result, the City has witnessed unprecedented park use.

Park use is not just seasonable but year-round because residents are aware that being outside is a safer way for people to see family and friends, and a place to get some physical activity. As the transmission of the virus evolves the province has been reacting by updating and amending their emergency orders. This has confused residents on what they can and cannot do, and with who they are allowed to socialize with. This has resulted in a lot of resident inquiries and complaints about other people's adherence to the provincial orders. Based on last summer's experiences and in anticipation of some gathering size restrictions for the next year, staff anticipate seeing some resident frustration and fatigue that will impact people's behavior. Staff is proactively bringing forward a report to look at ways to mitigate some of the park issues and are seeking Council's investment into a park experience program that will have positive, proactive staff encouraging residents to remain diligent.

Park Amenities and Service Levels

Seeing residents outside and active, has been great to witness, however has come with some challenges that the City has not been able to keep up with including the need for more park washrooms, picnic tables, and garbage cans and increased servicing to maintain those additions in the parks. Over the course of the pandemic Council has approved additional expenditures to support increased service levels.

Council may recall that at the start of the pandemic many of the summer students and temporary staff in the Roads, Parks and Forestry, (RPF) department were not hired as a cost saving measure. Although some were brought back midseason to assist with washroom maintenance, this still did not allow for our regular level of litter cleanup, washrooms being open or being open for traditional operating hours amidst higher park use. This summer RPF is aiming to be closer to its pre-COVID service levels in the parks from garbage pickups to grass cutting and general park maintenance. There is currently no need to increase the number of cans because the return of seasonal staff will improve the frequency of litter cleanup and garbage collection from last year. Staff will monitor the litter and garbage situation and will add cans if necessary. Similar to last year, RPF will be providing portable washroom units for park users. It was indicated that these units were challenging to find so signage will be posted to provide improved wayfinding direction as necessary.

Resident Education

There has also been a lot of confusion on what residents can and cannot do according to the evolving provincial orders resulting in a lot of calls to Police and

By-law for enforcement. To mitigate some of these issues staff looked at Disney for some inspiration.

At Disney the staff most likely to be approached in their parks are the groundskeepers. The groundskeepers are the most knowledgeable and trained staff people at Disney. They know all things about the park, the attractions and all other things Disney. Following that same model, staff is proposing to put Park Experience staff into the parks system during the pandemic.

Having the Park Experience staff in the parks, gives the City a great opportunity to not only monitor behaviour and use, but to provide education on provincial orders and local attractions as well as bringing City services to where residents are. There is also an opportunity to engage with residents that do not typically respond to traditional municipal engagement tools, people such as newcomers, youth, homeless people and people living in poverty. We will be able to engage on some key upcoming projects such as the Parks, Recreation and Culture Master Plan Update and the Active Transportation Plan.

Safer Park Experience

As Council is aware, COVID has exacerbated some existing park pressure uses such as the shared use of the promenade at Spencer Smith between walkers and cyclist. This has led to some unsafe situations. As a result, staff are updating the parks by-law in relation to cycling and will be completing targeted enforcement throughout the summer. Amendments to By-law 35-1976, being a By-law to Regulate Public Parks in the City of Burlington, otherwise known as the "Parks By-law", will be presented to Council for approval in a follow-up report. In addition, advisory signage is under review in order to complement by-law changes as well as to mitigate future pedestrian-cyclist conflicts.

Strategy/process

Staff presented the COVID staff intervention model in late spring 2020 and has been a framework that staff repeatedly refer to as provincial orders change and community expectations change.

Given the experience of last summer, staff noticed that most residents and visitors are being compliant with provincial orders, but sometimes people need a reminder to know what is acceptable in each zone in the provincial framework, it is very confusing for everyone. With gentle reminders and education the majority of people become compliant with the provincial order. In addition, many residents took advantage of staff meeting them in the parks, asking questions they had about City services. They were interested in learning and were more comfortable having the conversation in person in order to ask questions during COVID and getting clarification. Just giving residents

access to people, allowed them to open up and ask their questions. To have highly trained customer experience staff position in high volume parks providing that education and engagement role will support a safe park experience for everyone. If required for the small fraction of the public, staff in the parks will call for support from By-Law Officers and Police for provincial enforcement. Having By-Law officers stationed in high volume parks does not make a lot of sense when there are a limited number of resources in this area to service the entire City. In addition, having a friendly presence in the park demonstrates to residents that the City is taking steps to provide a safe park experience for all versus the perception of enforcement and that residents cannot be trusted.

Table A:

<p>Criteria for consideration level of enhancement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Volume of utilization ✓ Level of compliance through self-regulation ✓ Risk of not complying <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to public • to city ✓ Liability ✓ Public perception ✓ Cost ✓ Feasibility (can we get staff?) 	<p>Awareness (Self-Regulate)</p>	<p>Generic signage Asset specific signage (e.g. tennis rules) Media Release Social Media Council members amplifying the messages Specifically: Corporate Campaigns tied to Regulations</p>
	<p>Monitoring (Educating)</p>	<p>Resident Educator</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Educate/observe ○ Call enforcement if needed • Roving site visits • On-site at high risk – peak times • On-site at high risk - daily
	<p>Enforcement (Education/ Enforcement)</p>	<p>Hot Line By-law officers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Educate/warn ○ Ticket • Respond to Hotline calls • Roving site visits • On-site at high risk – peak times • On-site at high risk – daily <p>Restrict Access</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caution tape • Lock gates • Fence

Appendix A provides a detailed overview of the staffing plan and model. With the bulk of the resourcing going to Spencer Smith Park, staff also suggest having park experience staff at:

- Beachway Park in July and August
- A roving patrol to service the rest of the park system with frequent stops at LaSalle, Burloak, Norton and Lowville.

Staff also feel that the people recruited to this position require exemplary customer service skills as there could be some intense interactions with park visitors from time to time and these staff will need to know how to deescalate situations. At the same time these staff must have a friendly demeanor to develop and strengthen relationships with park goers. Park experience staff must be very comfortable and confident in approaching people to engage in conversation and solicit their feedback as part of the engagement team on several City projects.

The park experience staff will also be able to relay service information to the appropriate operating department in a timely manner, for example, the need for more garbage cans in a certain areas or to increase frequency of pick up or staff could position in certain “hot spot” locations to reinforce positive behaviours and compliance.

Options Considered

Staff considered several options as outlined in Table A from:

- Not having staff in the parks has been considered, but we know that because of the changes and confusion in the provincial orders this can lead to unnecessary calls to the COVID hotline or to Service Burlington if the situation can be managed in a timely manner by on-site staff.
- Employing By-Law officers all over the City, which residents have told us they do not like. There is a sentiment that residents should be trusted to do the right thing. Having By-Law officers in the parks does not present the image that we would want to our community nor is it effective use of this limited resource.
- Staff have included a chart of options on location, hours and number of staff in Appendix A. Having the six options listed allows Council to have the flexibility to pick and choose levels of service and the proximity of resources in the parks system.

Financial Matters:

Appendix A outlines the detailed service plan to create a 2021 park experience. There are six options that Council can pick from or combine if they would like to provide residents with an enhanced park experience in 2021.

Total Financial Impact

\$350,000 is required to implement all six options outlined in Appendix A.

Source of Funding

At this time, staff are recommending that all expenses be applied to the related department's COVID cost centre. These cost centres have no budget allocation and would be positioned to document advocating for senior levels of government grants or funding, and any funds secured would be applied to offset these expenses.

Other Resource Impacts

Several departments and staff will be impacted by this enhanced park experience program including, Human Resources, Corporate Communications and Public Engagement, Customer Experience, Information Technology, By-Law Enforcement, Recreation, Community and Culture and Roads, Parks and Forestry.

Climate Implications

Staff in the parks could experience some extreme weather events and providing some sort of temporary shelter or secure location will be required. In addition, staff may need to support park visitors with emergency first aid from time to time related to weather events.

Some staff teams could be using gas powered vehicles to roam the city going from park to park. Staff will try to rent electric vehicles, but this may not be feasible. In some cases, staff may be providing a personal vehicle and claiming their mileage as their personal vehicles may be gas powered.

Engagement Matters:

Limited community engagement has been done on this matter. The recommendations in this report are based on staff experiences from last summer and this past winter. A community communication plan will be required if this report is approved to outline to the community the role of the park experience staff, what they can expect from the experience, in addition to wayfinding and behaviour cues through signage and posters.

Conclusion:

City parks have been well used during the pandemic. It has been great to see so many residents getting outside to benefit their social, mental and physical health. Given the past years' experience and the increased use of city parks, staff are recommending that Council invest in additional resourcing to:

- Educate residents on COVID protocols and By-Laws
- Engage with residents on several city projects
- Provide feedback to operating departments on service requirements
- Flexibility to increase maintenance service levels, provide more washrooms and waste bins, if needed

Overall creating a safer and enhanced park experience for residents.

Respectfully submitted,

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Appendices:

- A. Park Experience Staff Options and Budget

Report Approval:

All reports are reviewed and/or approved by Department Director, the Chief Financial Officer and the Executive Director of Legal Services & Corporation Counsel.