



CELOS

centre for local research into public space

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**To: Policy and Finance Committee
Economic Development and Parks Committee**

Re: recommendations for immediate, short-term reductions in the Parks and Recreation Division 2001 budget, plus longer-term recommendations for addressing deep problems in this department.

February 22, 2001

CELOS, the Centre for Local Research into Public Space, was established in June 2000 with funding from the G.H.Wood Foundation and the Toronto Community Foundation. It operates out of Dufferin Grove Park and the surrounding community. As a monitor of the administration of our public space it inherited an archive of citizen observations of wasteful practices connected with the former City of Toronto's Parks and Recreation Division (now South District).

Some **examples of waste** just from the immediate area where we live:

Capital expenses:

1. Dufferin Grove Park's 7-year-old rink needed \$60,000 of emergency structural repairs in November 1999 because the necessary load-bearing soil tests were not done before construction.
2. In 1999 Campbell Rink, a little-used artificial ice rink not handy to public transportation routes, with three other A.I. rinks within 10 minutes' driving distance, came up for regularly scheduled rebuilding. Without asking any of the neighbours or the recreation staff, the city rebuilt that rink, for over \$700,000. It still gets very little use.
3. Trinity-Bellwoods Community Centre, built in 1960, needed structural repairs estimated at about \$1 million. Instead it was renovated for \$5 million. Now the McCormick Community Centre, 10 minutes' drive away, is closed for a \$3 million redesign. Meantime, the new Trinity Centre has cardboard taped over a broken mirror in the dance studio and ragged meshes on the basketball hoops – no money to fix things. And this winter once again the ice-clearing equipment available for the outdoor rinks was so decrepit that rink maintenance was often substandard.

Operations:

The Parks and Recreation Division in the former City of Toronto has suffered for some decades from wasteful staff allocation, inadequate supervision, negligent follow-up, rigid and outdated job descriptions, poor morale and widespread staff cynicism. To a considerable degree, management and the union have worked in tandem to create this situation.

There is an alarming trend to private use of public space, with some facilities approaching 50% of prime time rented out to private permits, even though the facilities are operated by public money. Moreover, the pressure to use public space for classes which will generate user fees has increased to the point where some community centres have stopped being neighbourhood gathering-places. They have become predominantly drop-off spots for people willing to pay for classes.

The Parks and Recreation management, as well as their unions, appear to be in denial about their role in creating this situation and unable to find the way out. Despite a budget currently at \$182 million (year 2000) it appears that the continued enjoyment of public space by the citizens is endangered.

For this reason CELOS asks the policy and finance committee, and the economic development and parks committee, to make the following recommendations to city council:

RECOMMENDATION 1:

That the Parks and Recreation Division be instructed to remove the following capital expenditures for 2001:

Suspend controversial CSA playground demolitions pending public input

\$2 million CSA playground demolition and rebuild

Reduce/ suspend inputs of outside consultants

\$.5 million (Capital Planning & Asset Management System)

\$.25 million Master Planning - various parks

Suspend major rebuilds/ renovations (not including state-of-good-repair):

\$1.075 million Queensway rink and fieldhouse replacement

\$3 million McCormick rebuild

\$.28 million Maryvale-Wexford CC - replacement of existing CC with new CC

\$.75 million Humber Sheppard CC, convert old school to CC

\$.76 million Flemingdon RC reconfigure floor plan

Suspend new Community Centre construction

\$2 million Wabash/Sorauren building demolition and cleanup (\$12.6 million CC not scheduled until after 2006 anyway)

\$5 million St.Jamestown CC

\$5.1 million Main Square new CC and pool

\$2.5 Heron Park new CC

Total temporary savings for 2001: \$23.2 million, a portion re-directed to cover existing services, with the remainder to diminish the city's current budget deficit.

Rationale: when there isn't enough money to run her household, the sensible householder does not add a room to her house, or go and buy an additional house. She stops buying anything unnecessary and takes a look at what changes she has to make to live well on what she's got.

RECOMMENDATION 2: That the Parks and Recreation Division ask for a written report from each area supervisor (front-line staff), to describe how their area could be operated more economically with an irreducible minimum of user fees and paid permits. This report would also append ideas, signed or anonymous, from any staff (including casual staff), and from any citizens wishing to contribute their understanding. The finished supervisors' reports would be due on September 1 2001, but a web site for each local area would begin long before, on April 1 2001, so that specific ideas can be posted there (by staff or citizens) and can start local discussion as they emerge.

Rationale: rank-and-file staff in Parks and Recreation, and people in a neighbourhood, may find specific remedies to local problems of which they have very detailed knowledge.

RECOMMENDATION 3: That the entire, unabridged text of the finished local supervisors' reports be posted on a main Parks web site and also posted on the bulletin boards of all the community centres on September 2, 2001. That the union responses be posted within a week at the latest, and that there be a public meeting in each area on September 15, for public discussion, with the aim of getting neighbourhood responses to the finished reports and union responses. That the specific directives emerging from each of these local discussion meetings be posted on the web site for further e-mail comments, signed or anonymous, from both staff and citizens.

RECOMMENDATION 4: that none of this work of running meetings, discussions, or writing reports be contracted to consultants: instead, make maximum use of the energy of the citizens and the staff involved in the stewardship of our public space.

Rationale: solutions worked out from start to finish by the people who will be living with their consequences are more likely to be well received

RECOMMENDATION 5: that the directives developed in this way form a fresh basis for 2002 budget discussions, to begin Oct.1 2001.

RECOMMENDATION 6: that the timely delivery of these directives/ suggestions for the 2002 budget discussions be monitored by CELOS, without recompense by the City.