

Playgrounds need critical safety repairs; [Final Edition]

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North York's playground equipment is in critical need of \$185,000 worth of safety repairs, says the parks and recreation commissioner.

And that tab is for this year's repairs alone, Joe Halstead told a committee last week.

"There will be a lot more over the next four years."

The department did a site-by-site review of 198 playgrounds and discovered city-wide problems in need of fixing, Halstead said.

Parks and recreation committee members were asked by Halstead "to treat this as an urgent safety requirement."

The department's in-depth review of the playgrounds had them checking every piece of apparatus to see how they measured against Canadian safety standards, the commissioner's report said.

Everything was looked at, from swings and slides to climbing structures to base materials.

Ten sites had already been identified in the 1995 capital budget as needing work done at a cost of \$344,000.

During its review the department found two more playgrounds at Glen Long and Yorkwoods parks that need equipment replaced, the report says.

Other costs include installation of playground signs to provide information on which apparatus is appropriate for what age group.

Councillor Joanne Flint expressed shock at the unexpected expenditure, but Halstead assured her the money could be taken out of a \$1.4 million land development fund expressly set aside for such purposes. The fund contains money collected from charges levied on developers.

"I think we have no choice but to approve this," argued Councillor John Filion, who chairs the committee.

Flint had reservations: "I think it's too easy. We ran over budget and now we have to take it out of the (development charges). It's called crisis budgeting," she said.

Filion called it a safety problem that needs to be addressed and that discussions about whether or not repair is the best use of money would have to wait.

Halstead insisted the \$185,000 was not a budget oversight, explaining later that half of all parks development charges are set aside expressly for maintenance, upgrading and developing.

The committee approved the expenditure, sending the issue along to management committee.