

Report to Community & Protective Services Committee

To: Chair and Members
Community & Protective Services Committee
From: Kelly J. Scherr
Deputy City Manager, Environment & Infrastructure
Subject: Review of Water Servicing in City Parks
Date: November 14, 2023

Recommendation

That, on the recommendation of the Deputy City Manager, Environment & Infrastructure, the following actions BE TAKEN with respect to the review of water servicing in City parks:

- a) the following report regarding the provision of drinking water in City of London parks BE RECEIVED for information;
- b) the practice of including outdoor drinking water infrastructure with the construction of new field houses and community centres BE MAINTAINED;
- c) Civic Administration BE DIRECTED to develop a prioritized plan to add drinking water to appropriate locations as part of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan Update work commencing in 2024 in order to inform investments and budgets beyond 2027.

It being noted that Parks and Forestry staff will continue to review opportunities for low cost/low maintenance drinking water installations in the regular consideration of parks infrastructure renewal projects in the interim.

Executive Summary

This report provides an overview of current water servicing within parks in London and the feasibility of extending water services to additional parks, including dog parks. Feasibility and cost varies by location and park type, resulting in a range of suitability considerations amongst parks. Park types with consistently high numbers of users such as Regional and City-Wide Parks, District Parks, Sports Parks and Dogs Off-leash Parks are more likely to meet water servicing infrastructure criteria and maintain water quality by ensuring a minimum level of use exists. At a high level, 36 parks have been identified as potentially suitable locations for new drinking fountains subject to future funding.

Linkage to the Corporate Strategic Plan

This project builds on Council's strategic priorities:

- Wellbeing and Safety – Londoners have safe access to public spaces, services, and supports that increase wellbeing and quality of life
- Climate Action and Sustainable Growth - London's infrastructure and systems are built, maintained, and operated to meet the long-term needs of the community

Background

1.1 Previous Reports Related to this Matter

None

1.2 Council Resolution

At its meeting on August 2, 2022, Council resolved the following:

That the following actions be taken with respect to the installation of a water supply for dogs at the Pottersburg Dog Park:

- a) the Civic Administration BE DIRECTED to report back, in advance of the 2024-2027 multi year budget process, with respect to extending water services to parks, including dog parks in the City of London; and,
- b) the communications from Councillor M. van Holst, M. and L. Cammaert, R. Haslip and T. Lynn Gray, as appended to the Agenda and the Added Agenda, as well as the verbal delegation from R. Haslip, with respect to this matter, BE RECEIVED. (2022-R04)

The below information describes the review of water servicing in parks undertaken by staff and options for future consideration. Staff have examined the feasibility by park types by order of priority:

- City Wide & Regional Parks
- District Parks
- Sports Parks
- Off-leash Dog Parks
- Neighbourhood Parks

1.3 Benefits and Constraints for Providing Drinking Water in Public Parks

There are benefits to providing drinking water in parks, such as:

- Health and safety benefits – promoting hydration without sugar, calories, additives, preservatives or caffeine. This is particularly beneficial in hot weather and during physical activity.
- Equity benefit – City water is a convenient and free source of hydration for all residents and pets.
- Environmental benefits - reduction of single-use containers (plastic water bottles) that find their way into recycling and waste systems. This approach supports the City's current ban on the sale of bottled water at City-owned facilities.

There are also constraints associated with the provision of drinking water in City of London parks:

- Installation – initial cost for installing water services and the associated restoration of the park, as well as disturbance to the park and park use.
- Maintenance – ongoing cost and time to ensure servicing infrastructure is functioning and water quality is safe for public consumption.
- Funding – capital and operational funds would be required (service improvement and/or growth).

1.4 Current Status of Drinking Water Access in City of London Parks

The City of London does not currently have policies or standards that require drinking water access in public parks. The practice has been to incorporate drinking water infrastructure at selected locations. Since the mid-2000s, drinking fountains and bottle filling stations within City parks were prioritized at locations with buildings, such as field houses and community centers, in order to make sure that the water system would be maintained at optimum functionality and to meet water quality standards. New water services are typically included as part of construction projects that involve new buildings in parks. Recent examples include the East Lion's Community Center and plans that are underway for the future Foxfield District Park expansion.

There are currently 24 parks with drinking water fountains:

- 3 Regional and City-Wide Parks (60% of Regional and City-Wide Parks)
- 11 District Parks (26% of District Parks)
- 3 Sports Parks (21% of Sports Parks)
- 0 Dogs Off-leash Parks
- 7 Neighbourhood Parks (4% of Neighbourhood Parks)

Fleet and Facilities is the lead division for the installation and maintenance of drinking water fountains where water servicing currently exists. In partnership with Water Engineering, they have been retrofitting or installing new drinking fountains at various City sites in recent years. Park sites include the Springbank Park west washroom building, Springbank Gardens Community Centre, Springbank Pump House, Thames Field house, Ivey Park, Storybook Beaver Tails, Northridge Pool, Victoria Park, and Piccadilly Park. Two additional drinking water fountains are scheduled for installation this year at Storybook Village Cafe and North London Athletic Fields. There will also be a water connection for the Thirstmobile installed at Hyde Park Village Green. Generally, these projects have arisen out of the need to replace old fountains or to retrofit existing fountains to sturdier fixtures that are less likely to experience vandalism.

Analysis

2.1 Feasibility

The feasibility of installing water servicing in existing parks varies by park location and park type, resulting in a range of suitability amongst parks. Considerations include:

- number and frequency of park users;
- presence of an existing water connection within the park (e.g. for fieldhouse, spray pad or irrigation);
- length of water pipe and proximity to an existing water service in adjacent road network;
- location constraints, such as in the river valley;
- disturbance to park use during construction;
- impact to park infrastructure, trees, and amenities; and,
- restoration after installation.

The number and frequency of park users is an important consideration because water mains and watermain networks are required to be designed so that infrastructure is not without sufficient use for more than three (3) days to ensure water turnover and maintenance of appropriate chlorine residuals. Parks with a frequently high number of users are more likely to meet this criteria and therefore help ensure safe water quality. Parks with a limited number of users would not be as suitable and would pose challenges to maintain the water servicing system without additional investment to ensure proper water turnover.

Backflow prevention ensures that the supply of drinking water, in the drinking fountain and at the City water main, is protected against the entry of any contaminants, pollutants, infectious agents, or other materials or substances. The installation of an appropriate backflow prevention device at the water connection will therefore be required, along with a meter to monitor water consumption.

To support park users in the busiest months of the year and to avoid the need for heating water chambers, three-season water access would be best suited for most parks.

2.2 Park Types and Suitability

Based on the various factors involved with both initial installation as well as ongoing maintenance, the suitability of each park type can be summarized as follows:

- City Wide & Regional Parks – highly suitable, if not already serviced
- District Parks – highly suitable, if not already serviced
- Sports Parks - highly suitable, if not already serviced
- Off-leash Dog Parks – likely suitable upon a detailed assessment of each site
- Neighbourhood Parks – lowest suitability based on the nature of park function and usage and the high number of sites across the City (160+)

Staff have identified 36 parks that could be suitable for the installation of new drinking water fountains:

- 2 Regional and City-Wide Parks
- 20 District Parks
- 9 Sports Parks
- 5 Off-leash Dog Parks

Work to install the necessary water infrastructure would need to be phased in over time and priority of parks should be assessed in more detail based on the number of users, easy access to water servicing, and distribution of drinking fountains in parks throughout the City.

2.3 Cost

The cost to supply and install an individual water fountain is minimal when servicing is in place. However, the cost of a new water servicing connection, where needed, varies per site and can be significant. For park locations that are suitable for new servicing, it is estimated that the cost of hiring contractors to supply and install a water connection, water line and drinking fountain would be between \$60,000 to \$100,000 per site. Depending on individual park locations and constraints, as well as a competitive bid process for external consulting and contracting services, these average costs could significantly increase on a case-by-case basis.

The cost of maintaining a drinking fountain includes spring opening and fall shut-off, as well as any required repairs and maintenance while in use. Annual maintenance costs are estimated at \$1,000 to \$3,000 per year for each individual site.

Discussion

3.1 Water Servicing in the Parks and Recreation Master Plan

The City does not have a policy or standard document dedicated to water servicing in parks. Policies could be developed and incorporated into the Parks and Recreation Master Plan as part of an update planned to start in 2024. This process would allow staff to create a drinking water prioritization and management system across all parks and service areas that would:

- build on current processes for the installation of drinking fountains in parks;
- plan for retrofitting existing or adding new drinking water facilities at District and Sports Parks with fieldhouses or other suitable buildings;
- identify drinking water fountains to be included in the scope of new parks based on suitable park types and locations;
- identify and assess existing parks with sufficient use to support drinking water infrastructure; and,
- track all new and existing equipment, document conditions and plan for lifecycle renewal needs.

This approach would involve collaboration across City departments including Facilities, Water Engineering, Water Operations, Parks Long Range Planning & Design, Parks Design & Construction, Parks Operations, and Aquatics which can be incorporated into the Parks and Recreation Master Plan update planned to start next year.

3.2 Financial Impact and Considerations

The cost of installing a new drinking water service is estimated to be an average of \$80,000 per park site, plus an average maintenance cost of \$2,000 per year. Overall, the cost to supply drinking water to all suitable City-Wide, Regional, District, and Sports Parks that are not already serviced is estimated to be approximately \$2.5M.

The cost to supply drinking water to all Dog Parks is estimated at \$500,000, however further assessment of all Dog Park sites is required in order to confirm detailed feasibility and estimated costs for installation and restoration.

The increased overall annual cost to maintain new water drinking services if installed as above is estimated to be approximately \$75,000 per year.

There is currently no source of funding identified to support installation or maintenance of new water servicing into existing parks as a service improvement. Costs and the timing of investments can be refined with the upcoming Parks and Recreation Master Plan Update to inform future budget business cases.

Conclusion

The feasibility of installing water servicing in parks varies by each park type and location, resulting in varying suitability amongst parks. Park types such as Regional and City-Wide Parks, District Parks, Sports Parks and Dogs Off-leash Parks, with a high number of users, are more likely to meet water servicing infrastructure criteria and therefore help ensure water quality. Most Neighbourhood Parks would not have enough use to meet the selection criteria for suitability, however they could be individually evaluated.

At a high level, Staff have identified 36 existing parks that may be suitable for the installation of infrastructure to provide new access to drinking water. An estimated budget and source of funding of \$3M, of which \$500,000 towards off-leash dog parks, would be required to supply drinking water to all suitable City-Wide, Regional, District, Sports Parks, and Dogs Off-leash Parks, along with \$74,000 per year for maintenance cost. Incorporating water servicing into a future update to the Parks and Recreation Master Plan will guide efforts across service areas to support existing infrastructure and plan for future needs.

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