



CITY OF HAMILTON
PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT
Environmental Services Division

TO:	Chair and Members Public Works Committee
COMMITTEE DATE:	October 30, 2023
SUBJECT/REPORT NO:	Wild Waterworks and Confederation Beach Park - Future Direction (PW23067) (Ward 5)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	Ward 5
PREPARED BY:	Cynthia Graham (905) 546-2424 Ext. 2337
SUBMITTED BY:	Cynthia Graham Director, Environmental Services Public Works Department
SIGNATURE:	

RECOMMENDATION

- (a) That staff be directed to begin a comprehensive review of the Wild Waterworks area within the Confederation Beach Park master plan with consideration of how changes to Wild Waterworks may impact other parts of the larger park master plan, to support work including:
- (i) A report back to committee with the results of public consultation to establish guiding principles for the master plan design;
 - (ii) A report back to committee with the final draft master plan for approval; and
- (b) That the cost of the review be funded by reallocating \$200,000 from existing Project ID 4401956802 Beach Park Dev Program to a new Project ID.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On August 12, 2016, City Council approved item 9 of the Public Works Committee Report 16-013, Confederation Beach Park Master Plan – Feasibility Study (Report PW11005(d)), which outlined the master plan for Confederation Beach Park including an implementation strategy, priorities for redevelopment and funding requirements (the “Confederation Beach Park Master Plan”).

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Since that time, staff have worked to implement projects outlined in the Confederation Beach Park Master Plan, including Stoney Creek Pond Trail in 2016, the wayfinding strategy in 2017, sports park development with design in completed in 2018, construction of phase 1 in 2020 and construction of phases 2 and 3 in 2023, and design of an improved pedestrian entrance at Centennial Parkway in 2022.

In the yearly capital budget submission for Confederation Beach Park, and in the Development Charges background study, the remaining projects to implement the approved Confederation Beach Park Master Plan have been costed and projected for implementation.

In 2020, the task of completing a master plan study, including economic feasibility, for Wild Waterworks (the “Wild Waterworks Master Plan”) was completed, and on November 11, 2020, City Council approved item #1(b) of the Emergency and Community Services Committee Report 20-009, Status and Strategy for Wild Waterworks (Report HSC20048) (the “Information Report”). The Information Report outlined the four options for the future of Wild Waterworks considered in the Wild Waterworks Master Plan.

The Wild Waterworks Master Plan study recommended option 3 – Modest Enhancements at a cost of \$40.14M (2020 dollars) as the most financially viable option for continued operation of the water park. The Information Report did not include a staff recommendation but provided the commitment to report back with a staff recommendation for the future of the area, in the context of city recreation, tourism, parkland need and financial strategy. Report PW23067 fulfils the commitment to report back to committee and council.

When staff reviewed the Wild Waterworks Master Plan options against a changed perspective following COVID-19, including renewed public desire for free and available public open space, financial pressures following COVID-19 expenses, increased costs of capital projects, inflation and decreased city revenues, it was difficult to see how the operation of a pay-for-entry water park that operates only 9-10 weeks of the year but occupies significant waterfront lands is the highest and best use of the space.

Given the significant investment required to reimagine a water park at this location - \$40.14M, staff recommend through PW23067 that a fulsome master plan review be conducted to bring back to council any and all options that would meet highest and best use of the lands in the context of current council priorities, specifically those under Sustainable Economic and Ecological Development – reduce the burden on residential tax payers, climate change/decarbonization progress, and protection of green spaces and water that might be achievable for the greatest benefit to Hamilton, including financial implications and opportunities.

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The first step of the Confederation Beach Park Master Plan review would be to complete a public and stakeholder consultation to establish the guidelines and principles to apply to the master plan design, and it is anticipated that this would be complete by Q3 2024. These guidelines and principles will be confirmed through a report back to committee before completing the remainder of the master plan design review. The final proposed master plan will be prepared and brought back to committee for approval, including proposed phasing and financial requirements, by the end of 2025.

Anticipating that the master plan review will take some time, the Wild Waterworks facility will continue to open in the summer, operated by the Hamilton Conservation Authority. Yearly inspections by the Technical Safety Standards Authority (TSSA) and Hamilton Public Health are a legislated requirement and will continue to be completed to ensure that the slides, pools and other features are safe for public use. If there are features that do not pass inspection, and cannot be repaired, staff will review if the water park will open with that feature closed off, and this will be communicated to council and the public through a communication update as needed.

Alternatives for Consideration – See Page 5

FINANCIAL – STAFFING – LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Financial: The Confederation Beach Park Master Plan review is estimated to cost \$200,000 for a consulting assignment to complete the study. \$200,000 of funding be reallocated from an existing Project ID 4401956802 Beach Park Dev Program to a new Project ID within Landscape Architectural Services to support this work.

Wild Waterworks can continue to operate in its current condition, with yearly Technical Safety Standards Authority inspections to ensure it is safe for use. There are existing funds allocated yearly to complete repairs, however if a repair exceeds the funding, it is possible to open the water park with that feature closed.

When a future design is approved for the Wild Waterworks areas, the existing features on the park will need to be removed, and this is anticipated to cost approximately \$5M. Staff will include costs to remove existing features and create new features as part of the reporting back for the Confederation Beach Park Master Plan review recommended in Report PW23067.

Staffing: The Confederation Beach Park Master Plan review can be completed using existing staff resources.

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Legal: None. The existing agreement with the Hamilton Conservation Authority who operates and maintains Wild Waterworks and much of the lands of Confederation Beach Park will require review in 2026 and can incorporate any revision as a result of the reviewed Confederation Beach Park Master Plan.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Confederation Beach Park is a 93-hectare city owned park located on the Lake Ontario waterfront in Ward 5. The Hamilton Conservation Authority has operated the majority of the lands including Wild Waterworks since the 1980's.

Confederation Beach Park (then called Confederation Park) was opened in the early 1960's, an idea presented to then Mayor Jackson by Jennie Florence Parker (after whom the newly opened sports park within the larger Confederation Beach Park is named).

In 2011, the Hamilton Conservation Authority identified that many of the features in the park were aged and needed renewal. From the initial master plan presented by the Hamilton Conservation Authority, a revised City-led Confederation Beach Park Master Plan was presented to Public Works Committee on August 11, 2016 and was approved by Council on August 12, 2016. Subsequently, the Wild Waterworks Water Park master plan was completed in 2020 and identified that many of the features of the water park were near or past expected lifespan, although still certified as safe yearly to ensure operations can continue.

Since 2016, staff have been working to implement the recommended projects outlined in the Confederation Beach Park Master Plan. The first priority identified was to transition the campground at the far east side of the park to a sports park – work that is now complete with the official opening of the Jennie Florence Parker Sports Park on September 7, 2023.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND LEGISLATED REQUIREMENTS

N/A

RELEVANT CONSULTATION

The following internal city divisions have been consulted and are supportive of the recommendations:

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Recreation – staff from Recreation are the leads for the City’s park amenity strategy and led the Wild Waterworks Master Plan.

Tourism and Culture – staff from Tourism and Culture have confirmed that additional bookable park space for events would benefit the City’s tourism industry.

The following external groups were consulted on the recommendations of this report:

Hamilton Conservation Authority staff: Staff at the Hamilton Conservation Authority acknowledge that changes to the Wild Waterworks space may trigger amendments to the management agreement for the park, and possibly other components of the master plan in order to balance budgets and staffing. At this time, Hamilton Conservation Authority staff indicate that they are willing to work with the city to revise the agreement to continue to operate the park.

ANALYSIS AND RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION

The 2024 Budget Outlook presented to General Issues Committee on September 20, 2023, anticipates a tax increase of 14.2%. This is significantly higher than past years tax increases, and the pressures on Hamilton to increase services related to housing, litter, programming, and public open spaces is felt across the City. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the need to have free, available, accessible and quality open spaces year-round. Public spaces provide needed recreation space, mental and physical health benefits, especially in areas where residents have little or no private open space in backyards or balconies.

Wild Waterworks has been a beloved water park amenity that drew visitors from all over the greater Hamilton region for the life of the park. It was designed and constructed at a time when there few many other water parks to visit. It has continued to be a highlight of summer for Hamiltonians and has remained a relatively low-cost way to cool off and have fun in the summer.

The slides, pools and structures at Wild Waterworks are at their end of expected lifespan. Report HSC20048, presented to Emergency and Community Services Committee on November 5, 2020 outlines the costs associated with various levels of redevelopment to renew the water park. When the economics of visitation is factored in, the recommended redevelopment that will be economically viable will cost over 40 million dollars.

Given the significant financial pressures currently faced by the City, and the fact that a redeveloped Wild Waterworks would need to have an increased entry fee to make the park viable, staff have difficulty recommending this path as a responsible way forward for the City.

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In discussions with various staff across the city, there is an identified pressure on existing parkland to fill the desire of residents and organizations for the use of parks. As an example, a quick analysis was done on how many large event bookings are hosted at the top desired parks in the city – Bayfront, Dundas Driving Park, Gage Park, Joe Sam’s Park, Pier 4 park, T.B. McQuesten Park, and Waterdown Memorial Park – in total 137 events were booked in 2023, encompassing most weekends from April until October. This is a significant burden on the infrastructure in those parks and takes away from the regular neighbourhood use of those parks. In speaking with tourism staff, additional park space that would be bookable for larger events would be welcome within the city. This is the type of use that can be considered in a redevelopment envisioning for the Wild Waterworks space within Confederation Beach Park, as a city-wide resource.

With the term of council priorities set through Report CM23020, which was presented to General Issues Committee on September 20, 2023 focussing the priorities of the City on “Sustainable Economic and Ecological Development”, “Safe and Thriving Neighbourhoods”, and “Responsiveness and Transparency”, the recommendation of Report PW23067 can tie into all three of these priorities by undertaking a fulsome review of the lands encompassed by Wild Waterworks, and the larger Confederation Beach Park in light of current economic, ecological and financial conditions being faced by Hamilton.

ALTERNATIVES FOR CONSIDERATION

An alternative to the recommendation of Report PW23067 is to direct staff to implement one of the four alternatives for the redevelopment of Wild Waterworks outlined in Report HSC20048, being:

Option 1 – Do Nothing. As infrastructure, rides and attractions continue to age and are taken out of service, it is expected that the park will become increasingly expensive to operate and would eventually be closed.

Option 2 - Replace Like for Like. Replacement of existing rides, attractions and facilities with same/similar

Option 3 – Modest Enhancements. Replacement of some rides, attractions, dryland climber, sheltered recreation area for adverse rain conditions, improved ticketing systems and Radio frequency identification (RFID) wristbands.

Option 4 – New Design, New Program. New design, rides and attractions and facilities to meet future guest needs and attendance.

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Staff do not recommend any of these options as an alternative because it does not consider the use of the lands as anything other than pay-for-entry waterpark which is anticipated to be a barrier for many Hamiltonians to enjoy the park. Additionally, the site is only active for 9 weeks of the year, when open and accessible parks across Hamilton are available for use year-round.

Financial: As outlined in Report HSC20048, the options will cost:

Option 1 – Do Nothing: \$5M. This option will see the water park run until each feature is no longer safe, and then include the removal of structures to establish a safe site for public access.

Option 2 – Replace Like for Like: \$24.92M. This option includes a replacement of single use slides, wave pool and amenities to be similar to what is at the water park today.

Option 3 – Modest Enhancements: \$40.14M. This option imagines a waterpark with newer attractions as well as increased levels of service, additional park space for parking and improvements to entrance areas.

Option 4 – New Design, New Program: \$61.12M. This option is a complete redesign of the area that will include new rides and attractions and will require additional park space for parking and program areas.

Staffing: Wild Waterworks is operated by the Hamilton Conservation Authority and it would be anticipated that a redeveloped waterpark would continue to be operated by the staff in place. During redevelopment, a shutdown period would be required.

Legal: Legal Services staff would assist with any agreements or amendments to existing agreements that arise as a result of a Council decision to implement one of the alternative options.

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

N/A