

Memorandum to Council

Community Services Department

Parks Planning Division



To: Mayor and Members of Council

CC: Sean Malby, Sr. Manager Parks Planning & Development

**Acknowledged by M. Gaskell,
Chief Administrative Officer**

From: John Romano, Commissioner of Community Services

Date: June 16, 2023

File #: N/A

Subject: Update – CMS 06-23 Bill 23 – Parks Planning Framework

This memo is intended to provide Council information related to Staff Report CMS 06-23 in response to questions raised at the Committee of the Whole Meeting on June 5, 2023.

The recommended change in the planning framework which reduces the size of District Parks and utilizes additional Cash in Lieu of Parkland generated to develop sports field complexes, which was presented to Council offers many benefits:

- 1) A change in the framework is required to ensure that the Town provides the sports field amenities as identified in the Council approved Sports Facility Strategy.
- 2) The recommended approach is common in municipalities around the province, including neighbouring municipalities in the Region of Durham and is considered an industry best practice in providing sports fields.
- 3) When consulted, many of Whitby's outdoor sports associations requested sport field complexes, to assist with their programming and enhancing their ability to host large scale tournaments.
- 4) The framework does not reduce the number of parks in the Town and will reduce the conflicts which occur between local park users and sports field users.
- 5) The framework will better allow for additional amenities to support the use of sports fields, such as washroom and concession facilities.

- 6) It increases operational efficiencies when maintaining sports fields.

Through the implementation of the West Whitby Secondary Plan and initial phases of the Brooklin Secondary Plan, the Town has not been successful in achieving the sports field facilities targets set by the Sports Facility Strategy (SFS). The SFS was approved by Council through CMS-35-15 and directed staff to incorporate its recommendations in future capital budgets and development applications. The reductions in the required parkland dedication required through development as set out in Bill 23 make it more difficult, if not impossible, to achieve the targets. In west Whitby, the Town will receive six (6) or seven (7) of the ten (10) sports fields planned for the area to meet the SFS targets. The Town's experience shows that regardless of developers' support, it is highly unlikely, if at all possible, to achieve the sports fields targets established through the SFS.

Large scale sports complexes are found in Oshawa, Ajax, Clarington, Uxbridge, and many other municipalities across the province. They are effective in supporting local sport organizations and considered a best practice for providing these types of facilities.

Through consultation for the Parks and Recreation Master Plan (PRMP), many outdoor sports organizations have requested larger sports field complexes, to assist with programming. Larger facilities increase sports efficiency for programming and can reduce the number of volunteers/volunteer hours required to offer programming. These types of facilities also assist sport organizations in hosting successful tournaments and events, attracting sport tourism to the municipality. This has been true for Whitby as well, as the Iroquois Park Sport Centre (our primary large indoor sports complex) attracts large tournament play such as the Ontario Lacrosse Festival, Gloria Rints Memorial Silver Stick Tournament and The Tournament of Heroes. A large sports field complex in Whitby would provide similar opportunities to outdoor sport organizations.

This strategy will not reduce the number of parks in developing areas of Whitby or the overall hectares of Parkland in Whitby. Each park identified in the Brooklin secondary plan will be built (see Attachment 1).

This memorandum revises CMS 06-23 Bill 23 – Parks Planning Framework, such that the District Park Classification is maintained. However as recommended in the report sports fields would not be provided in Local and District Parks allowing for the potential reduction in the size of 3 District Parks from 4 hectares, to approximately 1.5 - 2 hectares, consistent with the upper range of a Local Park. One 4-hectare District Park, previously accepted through draft plan approval will remain unchanged (see Attachment 1). The park adjustments should result in incremental cash-in-lieu of parkland dedication to be collected by the Town. Incremental cash-in-lieu of parkland generated would be used to develop sports field complexes. The primary change in the amenities of these newly sized District Parks will be the removal of sports fields and parking. These new parks will be designed for the surrounding community and include the amenities most desired for the neighborhood that are typically found in a District Park, such as splash pads, larger playgrounds, and additional courts. These new parks will provide generous open lawn areas for informal pick-up field sports and passive enjoyment.

The proposed change removes the conflict between local and non-local users that often occurs in other District Parks, which attempt to support local neighbours and sport field users (the majority of which travel by car). Some challenges currently occurring are duration of play, noise, nuisance behaviour, and parking congestion. An example configuration for these new parks can be seen on Attachment 2. This shows the design for a new 1.5-hectare West Whitby Local Park located at 150 Marcel Brunelle Drive and currently under construction. Originally, this park was planned to include a baseball field, however it could not be accommodated due to spatial constraints. The resultant park includes a playground area, tennis courts, a large open lawn area and walkway. Two examples of existing Whitby Local Parks, without sports fields, are Norista Park and Pinecone Park. Norista park located at 40 Norista Street includes a multi-skills court, playground, splashpad and walkways (see Attachment 3). Pinecone Park located at 250 Cachet Boulevard includes a half basketball court, playground, hard surface plaza and walkways (see Attachment 4).

Sport field complexes are better able to support additional amenities such as washroom facilities, concession areas and maintenance supply facilities. The number of users that are typical at sports field complexes provides the rational to make concessions viable, make washroom facilities critical and allow for storage of maintenance materials and equipment to maximize efficient service delivery.

The impacts of the changes to parkland dedication enacted through Bill 23 makes it difficult for the Town to maintain the current parks planning framework. The changes would require the Town to acquire additional land using either Cash-in-lieu of parkland dedication funds and/or property tax-based funding to achieve the approximate sizing as set-out in the Official Plan. The additional land would need to come through negotiations with developers to purchase or otherwise secure the land.

It is important that Council provide direction to staff related to the parks planning framework. This will allow staff to comment appropriately on development applications and intentionally guide the development of Whitby's Park system while ensuring Council's goals are achieved. Should Council choose to wait for the completion of the PRMP the existing parks planning framework would continue to inform comments on development applications. Accordingly, the gap would continue to widen between SFS targets, and the provision of sports fields and additional cash-in-lieu of parkland dedication could not be captured.

In summary, the recommended change in strategy will help ensure the Town can achieve the sports field targets in the SFS, provide all of parks identified in the Brooklin Secondary Plan, deliver sports field complexes as requested by many minor sports organizations (an industry best practice), remove conflict between neighbourhood park users and sport field users, improve service delivery and improve maintenance efficiency.

I trust you find the information contained in this memo helpful, please feel to contact me should you have any questions or wish to discuss the matter further.