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**TO:** GENERAL COMMITTEE

**SUBJECT:** WATERFRONT ACCESS AND BEACHES – SUMMARY OF COVID IMPACTS AND LOOKING FORWARD TO ADDRESSING GROWTH-RELATED IMPACTS

**WARD:** ALL AND SPECIFICALLY 1, 2, 8 AND 10

**PREPARED BY AND KEY CONTACT:** A. MILLER, RPP, GENERAL MANAGER OF INFRASTRUCTURE AND GROWTH MANAGEMENT EXT. 4485

**SUBMITTED BY:** A. MILLER, RPP, GENERAL MANAGER OF INFRASTRUCTURE AND GROWTH MANAGEMENT

**GENERAL MANAGER APPROVAL:** A. MILLER, RPP, GENERAL MANAGER OF INFRASTRUCTURE AND GROWTH MANAGEMENT

**CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER APPROVAL:** M. PROWSE, CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

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#### **RECOMMENDED MOTION**

1. That staff in the Operations and Development Services Departments investigate the process of and the implications of closing the beach at Wilkins Park due to ongoing environmental damage in this area that is zoned Environmental Protection and report back to General Committee by March 2021.
2. That staff in the Operations Department, in conjunction with staff in the Legislative and Court Services Department, investigate the implications of and the required by-law changes for making permanent restrictions on the use of personal BBQs, tents and other associated equipment on City beaches, and report back to General Committee by March 2021.
3. That staff in the Development Services Department investigate the feasibility of and the cost to update the Waterfront Strategic Plan (2015) to address emerging trends and the impact of growth on the safe and appropriate access to City beaches, public spaces and parks along the public waterfront and report back to General Committee.

#### **PURPOSE & BACKGROUND**

##### Report Overview

4. The purpose of this Staff Report is to update Council on the operational and planning/design issues associated with providing public recreational access to the City's waterfront and beaches.
5. Resident concerns escalated significantly in the early summer of 2020 due, in part, to the COVID-19 driven use of outdoor spaces. A number of short-term solutions were put in place to address some of these concerns. Other solutions require more detailed review and/or Council direction.

#### **ANALYSIS**

6. Current concerns related to access to City beaches and public waterfront spaces, including parks and trails, is related to the significant use of beaches and waterfront public spaces during COVID. The pandemic restricted options for the public use of many traditional recreation activities (recreation centres, movie theatres, amusement parks, shopping centres, sports events, travel) and as such people needed something to do.

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7. COVID protocols also required physical distancing and sanitizing of hands and surfaces. These protocols were not always easy to enforce in an open public setting and the anxiety related to potential spread of the COVID virus in the community, as a result of beach overcrowding was palpable.
  8. Complaints received during the early summer of 2020 have been themed as follows and the full :
    - a) Parking, including overcrowded residential streets and lots, designated resident-only, enforcement, fees and fines
    - b) Overcrowding
    - c) Permitted activities, including BBQs, tents, washrooms, noise, campfires, dogs
    - d) Environmental impacts including loss of vegetation and potential contamination from human excrement
    - e) Designation as beach, including water testing, beach grooming, designated swimming area
  9. Additional signage and public awareness campaigns (including Park Ambassadors), restrictions on parking in beach/waterfront areas, realigned enforcement activity, restrictions on permitted equipment (BBQs and tents) and the presence of Barrie Police combined to improve the situation in some areas at different times. However, the situation is not fully resolved.
  10. The waterfront is a jewel for residents and an attraction for visitors. The number of people on the City's public waterfront and beaches during the summer of 2020 is likely indicative of the use to be expected as the City grows to more than 250,000 people in the next 20 years.

#### **Land Use and Capacity**

11. The City's population has grown significantly in the last 20 years and is projected to grow even more in the next 20 years:
  - a) 104,000 in 2000
  - b) 145,000 in 2015 (date of Waterfront Strategy)
  - c) 150,000 in 2020
  - d) Projected to be 253,000 in 2041
12. The Waterfront Strategy (2015) identifies 5 Beaches and 12-15 Parks/Facilities along the Waterfront. Only the beaches offer official direct access to the Lake although informal access is known at other locations.
13. Preliminary assessment of the capacity of designated beaches suggests overcrowding during peak times this year. One weekend in July saw upwards of 800 persons on the beach at Centennial; physical distancing protocols suggest a capacity of approximately 500 persons. The situation at smaller beaches like Wilkins is also concerning. Observations of 75-100 people at the beach and small surrounding area; physical distancing protocols suggest a capacity of approximately under 50 persons.

14. Currently there does not exist, in planning policy, a rating for determining parkland or beaches based on capacity. Park areas are based on the *Planning Act* requirements and not projected usership within said parks. As a waterfront community, waterfront parks and beaches are in high demand, especially on weekends. Without the ability to manage capacity, the City is experiencing overcrowding in some areas. As the City continues to grow, so too will the pressures on these parks and beaches.
15. City planning documents do not specifically define "beach" however, the Open Space Zone does permit active uses generally in keeping with beach activity.
16. Environmental Protection Zone does not permit active uses although it does permit picnic areas and nature trails.
17. The beach at Wilkins Park is zoned Environmental Protection (EP). The creek in this area is a noted cold water fishery and there are noted concerns that wading and fishing in the creek is impacting the habitat.
18. There has been noted deterioration of vegetation in the beach and immediate forested area at Wilkins due to excessive human use. Some natural area regeneration work has been done however, the effort is wasted when the crowds overrun the work.
19. Given the EP Zone there is concern for on-going use as a designated beach.

#### **Washroom Facilities**

20. Complaints about beach patrons using nearby wooded areas as washrooms has been consistent this year. This activity is a public nuisance and it is also a potential public health hazard.
21. The larger beaches have public washrooms that are maintained by the City although hours of operations this summer have been reduced due to COVID protocols.
22. Smaller beaches do not have washrooms however this information seems to not be widely understood. A beach service level standard or similar description may help educate beach patrons before arrival. Signage has been placed at problematic capital cost, maintenance and cleaning considerations. In addition, particularly for smaller beaches, the addition of washrooms will likely increase activity.

#### **Parking**

23. Staff brought forward Staff Report TPS003-20 on June 22<sup>nd</sup> to recommend increasing waterfront parking rates and set fines as originally planned within the Parking Strategy Update ahead of the 2020 summer season. This was done to bring the City into comparable rates among surrounding municipalities, help bolster the parking reserve, and control demand on the waterfront which also brought the added benefit of increased safety for residents. These changes went into effect July 8<sup>th</sup> as the temporary emergency order was updated. Until July 8<sup>th</sup> waterfront parking lots were only available to residents.
24. In addition, Council held a special meeting on July 13<sup>th</sup> to implement temporary spillover controls of waterfront parks in residential neighbourhoods and designate the Spirit Catcher, Lakeshore, and North Marina as waterfront lots with the same rates and provisions under the existing emergency order that is in effect until October 15<sup>th</sup>.

25. The following information is intended to provide Council with an update on parking revenues and utilization of spillover neighbourhoods to help assess the impacts of recent changes. Staff are also conducting surveys for residents on the affected spillover streets to capture feedback on preferences for permanent parking restrictions moving forward. It is anticipated the information being presented now and the additional survey data will be used to provide additional context for recommendations coming forward within the Parking Strategy Update in September.

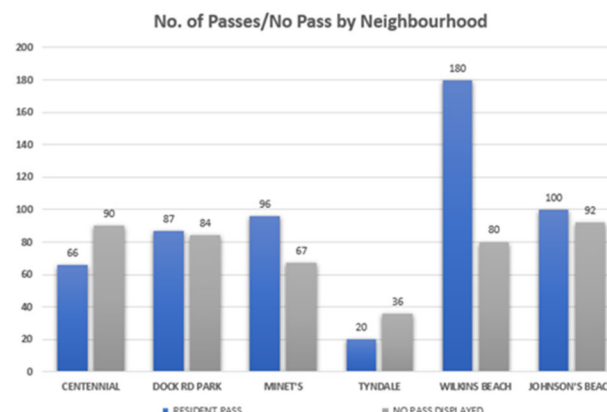
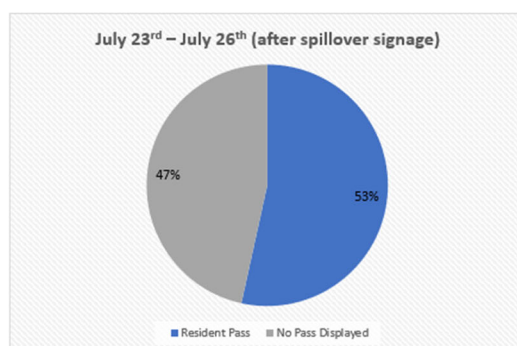
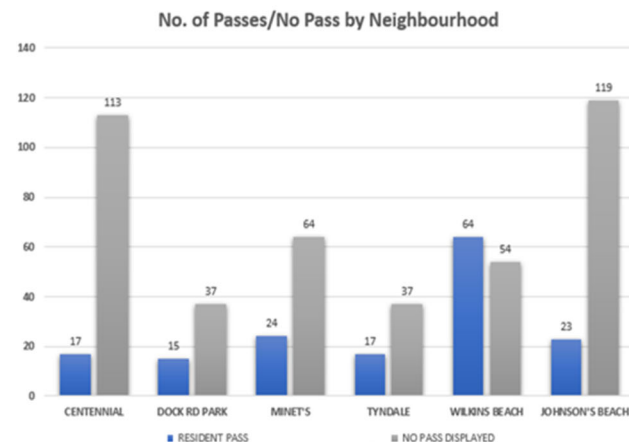
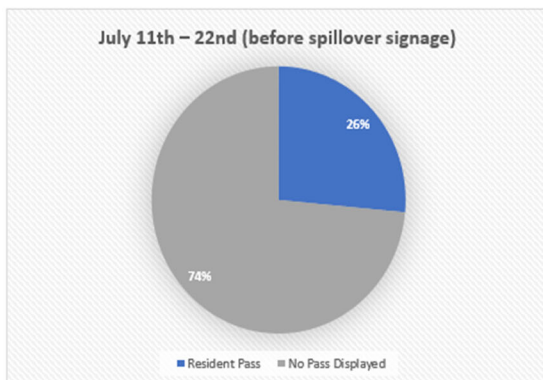
#### *Waterfront Parking Revenue*

26. The following waterfront parking revenue has been observed over the past 4 weeks since we returned to paid parking for non-residents.

	July 6 <sup>th</sup> – 12 <sup>th</sup>	July 13 <sup>th</sup> – 19 <sup>th</sup>	July 20 <sup>th</sup> – 26 <sup>th</sup>	July 27 <sup>th</sup> – Aug 2 <sup>nd</sup>
<b>Parking Revenue</b>	<b>\$29,262</b>	<b>\$49,597</b>	<b>\$66,624</b>	<b>\$53,165</b>

#### *Waterfront Parks / Beaches Spillover*

27. The following utilization data has been observed over the course of twelve different days between July 11<sup>th</sup> – August 2<sup>nd</sup> (8 weekend days, 4 weekday days).



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## **Enforcement**

28. Parking and the impact on the neighbourhoods adjacent to waterfront parks and beaches has been one of the most significant community concerns this summer.
29. Council has been provided weekly summaries of the complaints and infractions addressed by Enforcement Services in the month of July. A review of this information confirms that parking violations at waterfront parks and beaches accounted for approximately 85% of all parking tickets issued.
30. Despite the number of tickets issued, community complaints about not enough parking enforcement were received.
31. Many complaints were received with respect to violations of permitted uses on beaches (BBQs, tents, dogs) and once additional staff were redeployed to the waterfront and the emergency order temporarily restricted the use of personal BBQs, tents on City beaches, violations for these matters increased; 12 in the first half of the month prior to changes vs 41 in the second half of the month.
32. The challenge this summer amid COVID, is the ability to staff the waterfront enforcement needs and staff enforcement needs for the balance of the City.
33. As noted in the Enforcement Services 101 presentation made in October 2019, there has been no change in enforcement staff since the early 2000's notwithstanding the addition of almost 45,000 people and implementation of significant waterfront improvements which have increased activity, permitted and non-permitted, in these areas.
34. COVID has provided a glimpse of what increased demand means with respect to demand for enforcement in order to keep the City's public waterfront safe and attractive.
35. Additional context for recommendations with respect to enforcement services will be coming forward in the future.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACT MATTERS**

36. The following environmental and climate change impact matters have been considered in the development of the recommendation:
  - a) Appropriateness of using EP zoned land as a public beach
  - b) Storm event and flooding impacts on natural areas, parks, and beaches

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## **ALTERNATIVES**

37. The following alternatives are available for consideration by General Committee:

### **Alternative #1**

General Committee could maintain the existing approach to waterfront and beach access.

This alternative is not recommended as there are noted operation and community relations issues that need attention. These issues are exacerbated by COVID but will likely continue to be experienced as the City's population increases and the waterfront continues to be a strong draw for residents and visitors.

### **Alternative #2**

General Committee could alter the proposed recommendation by only addressing the permanent restrictions on the use of personal BBQs, tents and other associated equipment on City beaches and leaving the other strategic actions to a future date.

Although this alternative is available, it would result in on going issues and the likelihood of needing to take action more immediately rather than having the benefit of planning and implementing in advance.

## **FINANCIAL**

38. There are no financial implications for the Corporation resulting from the proposed recommendation.
39. Should works be required as a result of the noted investigations, the financial implications will be noted in the report back to General Committee.

## **LINKAGE TO 2018–2022 STRATEGIC PLAN**

40. The recommendation(s) included in this Staff Report support the following goals identified in the 2018-2022 Strategic Plan:
- ☒ Growing Our Economy
  - ☒ Fostering a Safe and Healthy City
  - ☒ Building Strong Neighbourhoods
  - ☒ Offering Innovative and Citizen Driven Services
  - ☒ Improving the Ability to Get Around Barrie