



Community Recreation 2012 budget briefing

December 5, 2011

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This document contains Community Recreation for All's assessment of the 2012 Parks, Forestry and Recreation budget proposal based on available information from Parks, Forestry and Recreation and City documents. This document is for discussion purposes only and reflects the best of our knowledge. Significant research is needed to assess the cumulative impacts of the proposed budget on children, youth and communities. Significant research is also needed to assess the financial impacts of proposed cuts for other City departments.

A list of questions for staff is provided at the end of this document.

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Executive Summary

The 2012 Parks, Forestry and Recreation (PFR) budget proposal for 2012 takes aim in particular at children and youth, impacting free registered children and youth programming; youth outreach workers and youth employment. The 2012 PFR budget proposal is also unsupported—at least publicly—by relevant data and key information.

As one example of missing data, PFR proposes to eliminate free registered programming for children, youth and seniors (1) at 22 Priority Centres (Antibes CC is slated to become a Priority Centre in 2012). They do not, however, include information about how many registered programs are offered at these 22 Centres, or how many children, youth and seniors are using these programs. In addition, they do not include an impact assessment in terms of how children and youth who currently use Priority Centres will be affected by this change.

While the budget proposal includes an additional—and much-needed—\$1.2 million for the subsidy program the Welcome Policy, \$1.1 million of this is tied to revenue PFR expects to generate from children and youth at Priority Centres. It is not clear how PFR arrived at the \$1.1 figure, or what will happen to this pledge if they fail to generate this revenue. (When fees were added to adult programs in Priority Centres in 2011, attendance dropped by 61 percent.) In addition, \$1.2 million is likely not enough, given demand, to end the frequent freezes of the Welcome Policy. As a result, the assertion that the Welcome Policy will be available to qualifying children and youth who have been shut out of registered programs at Priority Centres is likely inaccurate. (2)

Additional severe cuts include permanent closures for 12 community centres run out of TDSB properties, 7 indoor pools, 2 outdoor pools, 5 wading pools and the elimination of 17 full-time youth outreach worker positions. There are also user fee increases of 10 - 13 per cent (3) for programs including drawing, music, dance, skating, martial arts, cardio and yoga. According to budget documents, these cuts will affect 176 jobs (this includes to Parks Department). Many of these will be jobs for youth themselves—PFR is known in Toronto as an employer that introduces youth to the job market, and helps them generate income for education.

Most disturbingly, the budget document contains hints of both severe user fee increases and moves towards privatization in future budgets.

(1) While seniors programs are not highlighted in the budget document, they have been historically free at Priority Centres. If the Priority Centre model is eliminated, it is assumed free registered program-

ming for seniors will also disappear.

- (2) When PFR recommended that free adult programs be cut from Priority Centres in 2011, its management assured Council and the public that the Welcome Policy would be available to qualifying adults at Priority Centres. Instead, the Welcome Policy was frozen for most of 2011.
- (3) Each year, PFR user fees see an inflationary increase of 3 per cent. It's assumed that this will be added to the proposed 10 percent fee increases.

Motion to City Council

Community Recreation for All is looking to City Council for a strategic champion for access to recreation. We ask that this champion propose the following motion on access to recreation to City Council:

- The addition of \$1.2 million of new funds for the Welcome Policy as proposed in the 2012 budget. These funds should be considered a new allocation to the PFR 2012 budget and should come from the \$139 million surplus.
- Continuing free registered programs for children, youth and seniors at 22 Priority Centres at current or enhanced service levels.
- The re-introduction of free registered programs for adults at 22 Priority Centres at 2010 service levels or better.
- No community centre or pools closures.
- The establishment of a transparent and accountable process for arriving at an access plan for community recreation that meets City Council's policy of providing access to high quality recreation programs to all City of Toronto residents, regardless of their ability to pay.

Proposed cuts and future directions

The 2012 PFR budget proposes to:

- Eliminate free registered children and youth programs at the city's 21 (soon to be 22, as Antibes CC is slated to become a Priority Centre in 2012) Priority Centres, where adult programs have already been cut.
- Increase user fees for introductory instructional programs by 10 percent (likely on top of the standard 3 percent inflationary increase). This includes programs like dance, drawing, music, yoga, martial arts, cardio and skating.

- Eliminate 17 of 29 youth outreach workers.
- Close 12 community centres run out of TDSB properties.
- Eliminate programming at 7 selected TDSB pools.
- Close 5 wading pools and 2 outdoor pools.
- Increase youth ice permits by 5 - 15 percent.
- Introduce off peak closures at selected arenas.
- Introduce new sportsfield permit fees for children and youth groups (including for use of on-site buildings).

For a list of proposed closures of community centres, pools and arenas please see: http://www.toronto.ca/budget2012/pdf/pfr_service_locns.pdf

There are also proposed cuts that are impossible for the community to comment on without access to additional information. For example, a \$0.510 million proposed cut achieved by 'restructuring Community Recreation Support Function.'

PFR is also suggesting severe changes in the future. Several times, the budget document mentions the following:

Based on the User Fee Policy approved by Council on September 24, 2012 [sic], PF&R will be assessing the full cost of providing registered and instructional programs which will incorporate direct and indirect operating costs, as well as capital costs, in order to determine appropriate user fees for these programs.

This suggests plans for significant future user fee increases to all registered programs, which would have a direct impact on access and access programs like the Welcome Policy. In 2011, PFR's approximate cost recovery per program was 30 percent. A move to full cost recovery means that user fees will more than triple. In addition, the document makes several references to 'alternate service delivery' methods and repeats KPMG's recommendations under the heading 'future opportunities', including this one:

In view of growing private involvement in recreation services, reconsider the City's role, purpose, goals and objectives in Community Recreation.



Welcome Policy and Priority Centres, budget impacts

In 2011, PFR advised City Council that they expected attendance at adult programs in Priority Centres to drop by 20 percent when user fees were introduced. Instead, attendance dropped by 61 percent. Around the same time, PFR management assured City Council and the public that the Welcome Policy would be available to all qualifying adults at Priority Centres. It wasn't. The Welcome Policy was frozen for most of 2011.

Now, PFR is assuring City Council and the public once again that the Welcome Policy will be available to all qualifying children and youth at Priority Centres. They are also saying they will generate \$1.1 million from these same children and youth and put this into the Welcome Policy. This time, the community is asking City Council to hold PFR to account.

The proposed budget includes an additional \$1.460 million to the Welcome Policy in 2012 (\$1.1 million from the elimination of free programs for children and youth at Priority Centres, \$0.1 million in new funding, an inflationary increase of \$0.260 million) for a total budget of \$10.149 million, up from \$8.689 million in 2011.

This is a needed increase and, if it wasn't accompanied by severe cuts to access for children and youth at Priority Centres, it would be strongly welcomed by Community Recreation for All. At the same time, given demand, it will likely not be enough to stop periodic freezes of the Welcome Policy.

There are also a number of questions raised by this proposal:

- PFR is saying that they will generate \$1.1 million from children and youth at Priority Centres, and put this \$1.1 million into the Welcome Policy. There is no indication of how they arrived at the figure of \$1.1 million.
- Although demand on the Welcome Policy will be impacted by increased pressure from children and youth who used to attend free registered programs at Priority Centres, PFR does not estimate what this impact will be.
- The Welcome Policy will also be impacted by user fee increases. When someone chooses a program that costs \$1.00, \$1.00 comes out of the Welcome Policy pot. If this program goes up to \$1.13, \$1.13 comes out of the Welcome Policy pot. In other words, the 13 percent user fee increases on a number of registered programs will further impact the availability of the Welcome Policy. PFR does not estimate what this impact will be.
- A number of classes and camps are running at approximately three-quarters full



across the recreation system. Since staff and space costs are already covered, allowing Welcome Policy participants to register for these programs would be revenue neutral. If this were put into place, what impact would this have on the number of registrations possible given the proposed budget?

- PFR refuses to keep a record of the number of people who have been approved for the Welcome Policy but are unable to register for programs. As a result, it's impossible for City Council to know how much money is needed to resource the Welcome Policy, or how many children and youth who are shut out of Priority Centres will have access to the Welcome Policy.
- PFR says the Class computer system is unable to create waiting lists for Welcome Policy users who can't register for programs. At the same time, the Class system is able to keep waiting lists for other programs. In addition, alternative methods (like excel sheets updated by staff at the points of refusal) could be put into place immediately.
- While PFR is suggesting an approximately 17 percent budget increase to the Welcome Policy, they are only proposing to increase Welcome Policy registrations by approximately 10 percent (82,000 in 2011 to 90,000 in 2012).

Priority Centres vs. Welcome Policy

With this budget, PFR has put community members who care about access to recreation in an impossible position. We know how important it is to see additional resources for the Welcome Policy. We also know how important it is to keep free registered children and youth programs at Priority Centres. Yet we are being told we have to choose.

Even if we accepted this choice—Priority Centres vs. Welcome Policy—we do not have the information we need to make it. We don't know how many children and youth attend Priority Centres. We don't know if PFR will generate \$1.1 million from these same children and youth in 2011. We don't know how many people have been approved for the Welcome Policy but are unable to register for programs. We don't know how often the Welcome Policy will freeze in 2012 and we don't know how much user fees will go up in 2013.

But we do not accept this choice. A range of entry points into recreation and community centres is exactly what we need. So is an increase to the Welcome Policy. What's the right mix? How big should that increase be? Nobody knows. PFR is not a reliable source of information, and community members don't have the resources to do this research on our own. What we do know from living and working in communities: access is bad and getting worse.

As a result, this is not the time to cut off points of entry. Instead, in the short term, we ask that City Council move forward with the increase of \$1.2 million to the Welcome Policy while preserving free registered programs for children and youth at Priority Centres. In the long term, we ask City Council to demand the information it needs and work with communities to create a real access plan—one that meets its own policy of providing year round access to quality recreation programs for all Toronto residents, regardless of their ability to pay.

Why Priority Centres matter

Prior to amalgamation in 1998, community centres and recreation programs in the old City of Toronto were free. As there were no barriers to entry, many children and youth spent much of their free time in community centres, where they had the opportunity to interact with responsible adults and engage in skills-building, sports and leisure activities.

Children who grew up in the nineties remember the moment when fees were introduced at their community centres. Members of Community Recreation for All (CRfA) have heard these stories over the past year at meetings about access to recreation. These children—now young adults—talk about the impact fees had on their ability to access community centres and on their communities. Some relate reduction in access to community centres directly to increased violence. Others talk about a lack of adult supervision in their lives following the introduction of user fees.

While CRfA is just beginning to collect stories about the history of free recreation in Toronto, we have a significant amount of data about the challenges of the Welcome Policy in the present. From the complex, ever-changing and often humiliating application process to the periodic freezes, we know, as a model for access, the subsidy program presents a number of challenges.

For children and youth, the challenges are even more significant. If PFR moves to an all-subsidy-based access model, children and youth attending Priority Centres will have to approach their families and ask them to prove to a City worker that they are low-income enough to qualify for the program. They will then have to wait for approval and hope that a freeze is not in place when they go to register. The reasons to stay outside the community centre—away from sports, from skills-building activities, from responsible adults—pile up.



If children and youth are currently attending summer camps, swimming, sports, dance and art lessons at city recreation centres, the last thing responsible adults should want to do is turn them away with the expectation that only a few will return. Instead, if we have an access model that's working, let's keep it. Let's build on what's working and fix what isn't. But let's not, under any circumstances, turn children and youth out of recreation centres.

If PFR knows what Priority Centres mean to children, youth and communities, they have not included this information in their budget proposal. They haven't even told us how many children and youth will be impacted by these cuts. PFR might not want to share this information—they likely haven't gathered it themselves—but City Council needs it. Let's take our time, and find out. Before we damage the daily lives and futures of children and youth. Before we lose an access model that we might never get back.

Questions for staff

Priority Centres

1. How many children and youth currently attend registered programs at Priority Centres?
2. Please provide a breakdown of these programs (ie. summer camps, swimming, sports, etc.) along with attendance by centre.
3. Adult attendance went down by 61 percent when free adult programs were eliminated from Priority Centres in fall 2011. Please estimate the drop in attendance once fees are introduced for children and youth programs at Priority Centres.
4. Please list the drop-in programs for children currently available at each of the 21 Priority Centres. Please list the attendance for these programs.
5. Please list the drop-in programs for youth currently available at each of the 21 Priority Centres. Please list the attendance for these programs.
6. What kind of demand do you anticipate on the Welcome Policy if fees are introduced to registered children, youth and seniors programs at Priority Centres?
7. How many seniors currently attend free registered programs at Priority Centres?
8. Please provide a breakdown of these programs (ie. art, fitness, swimming, etc.) along with attendance by centre.
9. Please estimate the drop in attendance once fees are introduced on seniors programs at Priority Centres.



Welcome Policy

1. How much money is needed to resource the Welcome Policy to the point where it will not be periodically frozen?
2. How many people city-wide does PFR anticipate turning away due to Welcome Policy freezes in 2012?
3. How many children and youth who currently attend Priority Centres are expected to apply for the Welcome Policy, and how many are expected to be turned away due to freezes?
4. If PFR does not have answers to the above questions, how can it move at this time to cut children and youth out of free programs at Priority Centres?
5. If the revenue target of \$1.1 million from children and youth at Priority Centres is not met, will \$1.1 still go into the Welcome Policy?
6. How did PFR arrive at the figure of \$1.1 million? What is the business case for this?
7. Why do you suggest that an approximately 17 percent increase in the Welcome Policy budget will only result in an approximately 10 percent increase in registrations?
8. A number of classes and camps are running at approximately three-quarters full across the recreation system. Since staff and space costs are already covered, allowing Welcome Policy participants to register for these programs would be revenue neutral. If this were put into place, what impact would this have on the number of registrations possible given the proposed budget?
9. When you say you hope to target 90,000 registrations, what does this mean? Does this mean people who have successfully qualified for the Welcome Policy? Or people who have successfully registered for programs? Does this mean 90,000 registrations divided by four seasons? How many people does this represent, and how many courses, on average, do you expect each of these people get in a year?
10. In the 2012 operating budget, it is noted that, 'By introducing adult fees at Priority Centres, the allocation of recreation subsidy shifted away from a geography-based to a needs-based model, as the same adult programs are available at no charge through the Welcome Policy subsidy program.' (page 25) This is not true. The Welcome Policy was frozen and unavailable during most of 2011. How does staff justify this statement?

Impacts on children and youth

Inviting a child or youth to walk into a community centre and attend a class is much different than asking a child or youth to fill out a complicated needs assessment, prove that their family is low-income, wait for approval and then hope that the Welcome Policy will not be frozen when they finally go to register for a class.

1. What kind of impact assessment did PFR perform to evaluate the impact the elimination

of free—and bureaucracy free—programming in Priority Centres would have on children and youth?

2. Who are the children and youth who attend these centres, and what kind of research has PFR done to find out how they experience, value and use the programs? What is the break down by gender? How many of these children and youth are newcomers? How many come from racialized groups? What are their ages?

3. What kind of research has PFR done in terms of the access models that work best for children and youth?

4. What kind of impact assessment did PFR do on the elimination of 17 of 29 full-time youth outreach workers? Or the loss of youth employment? How will these cuts relate to cuts in Priority Centres? Will some youth be losing their access to programming, their part-time jobs and/or their youth outreach workers? What are the expected impacts of these cumulative changes on the daily lives of youth and communities?

5. How many employment positions that generally go to youth are impacted by this budget proposal?

Community Recreation for All asks

Community Recreation for All (CRfA) asks City Council to demand an open, transparent budget process supported by relevant data from PFR. We ask Council to work with PFR to come up with a plan for access across the City of Toronto. Until relevant data has been generated and a considered access plan put in place, CRfA asks for:

- \$1.2 million of additional new funds for the Welcome Policy as suggested in the 2012 budget document, to be allocated from the budget surplus of \$139 million;
- Continuing free registered programming for children, youth and seniors at the 22 Priority Centres at present or enhanced service levels;
- The re-introduction of free adult programs at Priority Centres;
- No community centre or pool closures;
- A policy limiting recreation user fee increases—beyond annual inflationary increases—barring significant new expenses directly impacting program delivery;
- A policy specifically addressing community centres and public ownership and use of community centre space;

- A full assessment of the state of access to City-run community centres and recreation programs including relevant community input;
- A full cost-benefit analysis of access to recreation taking into account costs to other City departments including child care, public health, social assistance and policing when access to recreation is cut;
- A city-wide City Council plan to meet its own stated policy of making high quality recreation programs available year round to Toronto residents regardless of their ability to pay.

Sources

2011 BUDGET BRIEFING NOTE, PF&R Adult Program Fees at Priority Centres (Revised Feb. 22, 2011) http://www.toronto.ca/budget2011/pdf/op11_bn_PFR_adult_program_fees2.pdf

2012 Parks, Forestry and Recreation Operating Budget Analyst Notes http://www.toronto.ca/budget2012/pdf/op12_an_pfr.pdf

Released Confidential Information, Parks Forestry and Recreation Service Change locations

http://www.toronto.ca/budget2012/pdf/pfr_service_locns.pdf

City Manager response to administrative inquiry from Councillor Janet Davis, November 28th 2011: <http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2011/ia/bgrd/backgroundfile-42621.pdf>

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About Community Recreation for All

Community Recreation for All is a broad, city-wide group of community organizations, research groups and residents in Toronto that includes the Centre for Urban Schooling, University of Toronto; Chinese Canadian National Council, Toronto Chapter; Grassroots Youth Collaborative; LAMP Community Health Centre; Toronto Women's City Alliance and Unison Health and Community Services.

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