

REPORT

Council

Meeting Date: September 16, 2024

FROM: Parks and Open Space Department

DATE: September 3, 2024

SUBJECT: Fishing from Town Parkland - Update

LOCATION: Town Harbours

WARD: Town-wide

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RECOMMENDATION:

1. That the report from the Parks and Open Space department dated September 3, 2024, be received.
2. That the conversion of the evening fishing pilot program to a permanent program (from August 1 to October 15 from 9:00 p.m. – 12:00 a.m.) be approved.
3. That the amendments to the Parks By-law 2013-013, to reflect the permission for night fishing to be a permanent program, be included in the next council agenda for approval.

KEY FACTS:

The following are key points for consideration with respect to this report:

- Fishing from Town parkland became an issue during the pandemic as many residents did not travel and began using our parks and open spaces in high numbers. Fishing was one recreational activity that gained popularity, but opportunities were limited due to recreational boating in both harbours.
- Staff have taken a measured approach to allowing fishing from Town parkland, by focussing activity to the piers in Bronte and Oakville harbours. Through a report to Council in 2022 the fishing season was extended in both harbours to take advantage of early season and fall fishing, and fishing was permitted from the channel side of the west pier in Bronte.

- Since there were no issues arising from the changes implemented in 2022, staff recommended, through a 2023 report to Council, that improved spring and summer fishing as well as year-round fishing from both sides of the west pier in Bronte become permanent.
- Following the expansion of spring and fall fishing opportunities, staff turned their focus to potentially allowing evening fishing. Since some of the best times for fishing are in the evening, the allowance of evening fishing is beneficial from a sport fishing perspective. It also benefits residents who work during the day by providing evening access to the activity.
- In 2023 Council approved a pilot program that would allow evening fishing within designated areas of the east pier in Bronte as well as east/west piers in Oakville from 9:00 p.m. – 12:00 a.m. August 1 to October 15 (year-round fishing from the Bronte west pier was previously approved). See appendix A and B.
- The pilot program that operated in 2023 did not generate any concerns and staff are recommending that the pilot evening fishing period be made permanent.

BACKGROUND:

The pandemic brought forth requests from the community for greater access to fishing. Sport fishing continues to rise in popularity as evidenced by the number of vessels being launched at town boat launch ramps and the volume of charter fishing boats on the lake and docked in Bronte harbour. However not everyone has or can afford a boat, or access to a charter vessel. Therefore, shore angling continues to remain popular.

As noted in previous reports to Council, the shore angling opportunities historically occurred around the recreational boating season. The most suitable locations to fish from Town parkland are from the piers in Oakville and Bronte harbours. Many of our waterfront parks are not ideal fishing locations due to their proximity to residential areas (which limits parking availability), their linear and narrow access to the water or the height differential of the shoreline to the water.

During the pandemic staff made a recommendation to Council that greater shore angling opportunities from the Oakville/Bronte piers could be piloted to determine if there would be any issues or conflicts with pedestrians using the piers or recreational boaters using the channels (in essence sharing the water space).

The initial extensions to spring and fall fishing were well received, and the evening fishing pilot program (August 1 to October 15 from 9:00 p.m. – 12:00 a.m.) was implemented with success. Staff added signage in parking lots in Bronte and

Oakville (specifically at parking stalls close to the piers) that specified the allowance for night fishing. Due to the 10:00 p.m. park curfew, parking within the signed area, would identify for Mobile Compliance Officers that the vehicle owner was night fishing and should not be issued a penalty notice.

During the night fishing pilot period, it is important to note that concerns with people engaging in night fishing, being disruptive, or acting inappropriately in the parks beyond the 10:00 p.m. curfew, have not emerged as an issue.

COMMENT/OPTIONS:

The changes implemented over the past couple of years, to allow greater fishing from Town parkland, have been done in a measured and thoughtful manner with public safety being the dominant factor in the decision-making process. Throughout the pilot program staff believe that increasing the permissions for spring and fall fishing have not had any safety implications with pedestrians using the Town piers, or recreational boaters using the channels at Oakville harbour or Bronte inner harbour. Evening fishing and the extended spring/fall fishing have been very beneficial to those who enjoy sport fishing, or who simply angle as a hobby. Staff have taken the opportunity to observe night fishing and spoke with many people participating in evening/night fishing. All expressed enjoyment and appreciation for being able to partake in evening/night fishing for a portion of the fishing season.

Taking a measured and calculated approach to expanding fishing from Town parkland has been successful. Staff have received no complaints regarding the behaviour of people fishing or noise complaints. As a result, staff are recommending that Council approve the conversion of the evening fishing pilot program to permanent status.

Staff have discussed the conversion of the night fishing pilot program to become permanent with Municipal Enforcement Services staff and they have indicated no concerns.

For the permanent implementation of night fishing, staff would improve on the quality of the posted signs in addition to painting an unobtrusive blue line on the piers to demarcate the night fishing zones. If approved by Council, the Parks By-law 2013-013 would also be updated to reflect these changes.

CONSIDERATIONS:

(A) PUBLIC

During the pilot period staff have observed many people participating in night fishing in accordance with the demarked areas on the piers in Oakville and

Bronte harbour. All participants who spoke with staff enjoyed and appreciated the opportunity for evening/night fishing.

(B) FINANCIAL

The evening fishing program conversion to permanent can be accomplished with minimal cost and implemented as part of the approved 2024 Parks and Open Space operating budget.

(C) IMPACT ON OTHER DEPARTMENTS & USERS

This report has been prepared in consultation with the Municipal Enforcement Services department.

(D) CORPORATE STRATEGIC GOALS

This report addresses the corporate strategic goal(s) of community belonging, and accountable government.

(E) CLIMATE CHANGE/ACTION

N/A

APPENDICES:

Appendix A – Oakville Pier evening designated fishing areas.

Appendix B – Bronte Pier evening designated fishing areas.

Prepared by:
Chris Mark, Director Parks and Open Space

Recommended by:
Paul Damaso, Commissioner Community Services