

REPORT TO: Mayor James M. Diodati
and Members of Municipal Council

SUBMITTED BY: Municipal Works

SUBJECT: **MW-2021-33**
Chippawa Boat Ramp Operational Review

RECOMMENDATION

1. That City Council receive for information Report MW-2021-33 and the attached public survey results pertaining to an operational review of the Chippawa Boat Ramp; and further,
2. That City Council direct staff to proceed with implementation of signage and enhanced parking enforcement at the Chippawa Boat Ramp; and further,
3. That City Council restrict the Chippawa Boat Ramp facilities from swimming; and further,
4. That City Council include a project to develop a Chippawa Waterfront Recreation Plan for consideration as part of the 2022 Capital Budget process.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Staff have been observing a steady increase in the popularity of the Chippawa Boat Ramp and the surrounding park located at 4379 Lyons Creek Rd. This past year, in 2020, the location was again extremely popular; as was the trend for most other outdoor recreation and gathering opportunities in the Region given the ongoing pandemic-related public health restrictions.

The increasing popularity of the park and facilities, coupled with the decisions of other jurisdictions in Niagara to implement paid-parking in 2021 at their boat launches, prompted Staff to seek public engagement in order to proactively consider possible measures necessary to ensure orderly operations of the park for the upcoming summer season.

Upon conclusion of the public engagement, Staff are now enlighten about the various operational, safety and parking concerns and consequently recommend to implement several signage, education and enforcement measures in order to help address the concerns.

The recommendations of this report are intended to assist with immediate operational concerns; however it is recognized that they may reach a limit of effectiveness if the demand for waterfront and on-water recreation continues to grow. Therefore, the continued popularity, coupled with projected population growth in Chippawa and elsewhere in the City suggests that it is an opportune time to consider developing a Chippawa Waterfront Recreation Plan that considers public input for potential opportunities to develop new and/or expanded waterfront recreation facilities along the Welland River.

BACKGROUND

The Chippawa Boat Ramp located at 4379 Lyons Creek Rd in is situated on parkland licensed to the City of Niagara Falls from Ontario Power Generation that includes 3 boat launch ramps, approximately 100 metres of dock, a playground, 34 trailer parking spaces, 23 vehicle parking spaces, 2 accessible parking spaces, as well as picnic tables and benches.

The boat launch and recreational facilities at the park were open to the public amidst the pandemic last year, albeit with varying degrees of public health restrictions in-place. During the course of the summer Staff observed and received several reports of various operational concerns, primarily on weekends and holidays, including the following: crowded parking, swimming in undesignated areas, inflatable tubes crowding the boat launch and dock, fishing in undesignated areas, littering, and waste receptacles overflowing.

A similar resurgence at outdoor recreational amenities was also experienced elsewhere in Niagara Region during the summer months – especially at beaches and other locations with waterfront access. Staff suspect that this increased activity is partially attributed to the pandemic - but to an unknown extent.

During 2020 the Niagara Parks Commission (NPC) also embarked on a review of their six (6) boat launches in light of their state of disrepair. The conclusions of their study was that in order to sustain investments in the boat launch infrastructure, Niagara Parks will introduced a boat launch / parking fee at these sites, beginning with the 2021 season. As confirmed with Staff, Niagara Parks boat launching facilities will now require payment of a daily parking fee of \$10 per vehicle per day, or the purchase of an annual pass for \$120.

Given the aforementioned popularity of the park and the pending changes to Niagara Parks boat launches, Staff are concerned that operational issues previously experienced may worsen in the upcoming year.

ANALYSIS/RATIONALE

This spring Staff initiated an engagement through Lets Talk Niagara Falls including a 12-question survey to solicit feedback. The engagement was promoted heavily on social

media and was live for 22 days until closing on April 23, 2021. 501 complete responses and 299 partial responses were received. The results of the survey and summary of comments are included in Attachments 2, 3 and 4.

Clearly, as the level of engagement indicates, the Chippawa Boat Ramp has been a very popular asset in the City, and is particularly endearing to the boating community and especially Chippawa residents. Staff are thus mindful of the implications of any changes at the facility; however, to be prudent recommend a proactive approach. This report and recommendations are being brought forth in order to ensure safe and smooth operations at the Chippawa Boat Ramp for what is anticipated to be a busy summer season again in 2021.

Having reviewed carefully the survey results, Staff offer the following comments and recommendations in regards to a few options.

Parking Operations Options

Option 1 - Standalone User Fee (\$10 per vehicle per day)

Install “pay-and-display machines” and charge an hourly fee, up to a maximum of \$10 per day. Free parking on weekdays. Paid parking on weekends and holidays. Enforced hourly.

- + Will reduce peak demand
- + Consistent with most major boat launch facilities in the Region (user-fee or paid season pass)
- + Revenue generating in order to offset future infrastructure improvements
- Perceived as another “tax”
- On-street parking on neighbouring roads will drastically increase
- Diminishes community fundraising efforts
- Reduces visitor and tourism opportunities

Parking Option 1 is **not** recommend.

Option 2 - Discounted Local Pass and User Fee (\$10 per day or discounted season pass for City Residents only)

Same as option 1; however, City of Niagara Falls residents will be able to purchase/obtain a discounted seasons pass.

- + May reduce peak demand
- + Affordable for locals
- + Revenue generating in order to offset future infrastructure improvements
- Peak demand may not be sufficiently reduced
- On-street parking on neighbouring roads will drastically increase
- Heavy administrative requirements for residents pass issuance and renewal

- Diminished visitor and tourism opportunities

Parking Option 2 is **not** recommended at this time; but is preferred in conjunction with Option 3 *should* visitor demand and operational concerns continue to increase.

Option 3 – Increased Signage and Enhanced Parking Enforcement

Installation of “boat trailer parking only” signage (see attachment #1) and utilize parking enforcement officers to educate and enforce bylaw requirements in the parking lot. Also employ on-site ambassadors to assist with swimming/fishing/floating concerns, and to generally keep order and civility.

- + Results in more efficient use of parking and safer circulation of vehicles
- + Greater oversight of day-to-day operations
- + Targeted enforcement of offenders
- + Maintains affordability
- + Maintains appeal to visitors and tourists
- May not sufficiently address peak demands

Parking Option 3 **is recommended** for immediate implementation.

There are some recent nearby examples of similar circumstances overcrowding of beaches in municipalities such as Fort Erie and St. Catharines that have resulted in the implementation of user fees for the facilities and/or local-only passes. Staff suggest that at this time it is too early to determine the effectiveness and relatability of these decisions to the Chippawa Boat Ramp, plus these decisions may have unintended negative consequences such as an increase in visitor “free” parking on neighbouring streets. Consequently it is suggested at this time to maintain the Chippawa Boat Ramp as a free amenity available primarily to City residents and visitors choosing Niagara Falls as their destination.

It is therefore recommended to proceed with Option 3 - Increased Signage and Enhanced Parking Enforcement at this time, and for Staff to closely monitor the ongoing operational challenges that arise during the Summer of 2021. Should the operational challenges become unmanageable, Staff believe the next logical step will be to consider the implementation of user fees and a discounted local seasons pass in addition to the increased signage and enforcement. In this event, Council will be kept apprised and no decisions will be made without prior Council approval.

Swimming and Inflatable Floating Concerns

The survey comments indicated a very strong concern for the safety of swimmers and floaters in inflatables who frequently congregate around the tie-up docks and boat ramp. The concern relates to typical docking operations, errant drivers or even unusual currents that may cause a boat who is either approaching or departing the boat launch to drift into the path of a swimmer/floater, or vice-versa.

For many years swimming and floating has been a pastime of Chippawa residents, thus Staff do recognize the desire to continue to provide swimming and floating opportunities. However, out of an abundance of caution, Staff do not recommend permitting swimming and floating in the immediate vicinity of the tie-up docks or boat ramp, especially during peak times on weekends or holidays. The City does offer several municipal facilities with access for swimming and floating in the Welland River including the Front Street Public Dock and George Bukator Park.

Future Considerations

The actions listed in the sections above are recommended to assist with immediate operational concerns that exist today. Clearly there appears to be a growing demand for waterfront and on-water recreation in Niagara Falls. This trend, coupled with projected population growth in Chippawa and elsewhere in the City suggests that it is an opportune time to consider developing a Chippawa Waterfront Recreation Plan that considers public input for potential opportunities to develop new and/or expanded waterfront recreation facilities along the Welland River. Staff recommend inclusion of a project of this nature in the 2022 Capital Budget Review process.

FINANCIAL/STAFFING/LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Implementation of additional signage is expected to cost approximately \$1000 and can be accommodated in the applicable traffic signage operating budget account.

Deployment of on-site ambassadors will require further discussion amongst departments, and could be accommodated via redeployment of some part-time employees.

Additional parking enforcement measures are not expected to incur additional costs as the officer's travel past the facility in order to perform their regular duties elsewhere in the City. Revenue generation is expected to be minimal as well, since the goal of enforcement is compliance which is better achieved through education and assistance first, and ticketing second.

CITY'S STRATEGIC COMMITMENT

The content and recommendation included in this report aligns with Council's adoption of the 2019-2022 Strategic Priorities to provide a Healthy, Safe & Livable Community.

LIST OF ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – Sample Boat Trailer Parking Signage
Attachment 2 – Survey Results
Attachment 3 – Survey Comments Summary

Attachment 4 – Email and Letter Correspondence Received

Recommended by: _____
Erik Nickel, Director of Municipal Works

Respectfully submitted: _____
Ken Todd, Chief Administrative Officer