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# CIVIC AFFAIRS

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## FALSE ECONOMY IN CIVIC SERVICES

Fellow Citizens:

### A Twenty-Five Year Plan

Two weeks ago, the Toronto papers carried an account of a plan for the expansion of parks and recreational facilities to serve the people of Toronto. It is a long-term programme prepared by the Parks and Recreation Department and now before the City Planning Board. Under the plan, park acreage would be increased 25 percent over the next twenty-five years at an estimated cost of \$31 million. Another \$10 million would be spent on playground developments, outdoor theatres, swimming pools and community centres--all aimed at more intensive use of our park lands. It is a big programme, and one that merits thoughtful consideration.

There is no doubt of Toronto's need of good parks. Beyond promoting safe and healthful recreation, they boost the value of urban properties and go a long way toward preventing the deterioration of residential and business areas. Compared with other cities, Toronto can well take pride in its park facilities, but this is no denial of the Planning Board's belief that, in size or location, our parks are not adequate for the years ahead. While the Planning Board asked the Parks Department to prepare an expansion plan, it remains to be seen whether the \$41 million project now mapped out will be adopted. It has yet to be studied by the Planning Board and a recommendation passed on to the City Council. At this stage both Planning officials and members of Council can be assisted by the views of as many citizens as possible. Those who wish to look over the plan can telephone or write the Parks Commissioner for a copy. It is both good business and good citizenship to take a practical interest in what may become part of the blueprint for Toronto's future growth.

The suggestion that a twenty-five year expansion plan may be needed should bring home one lesson to all of us: the time to provide adequate park space is not after an area is built up but when it is being subdivided. In many parts of the suburbs, tracts of open land can still be reserved for parks, but in the city proper this opportunity has largely disappeared. As matters do stand, however, our representatives at the City Hall are to be commended for the thought that is being given to future park developments. Unfortunately, though, they cannot be credited with as careful attention to the sound management of the parks we already have.



Park Management

In our present parks, Toronto citizens have assets worth many millions of dollars. Perhaps it is not generally realized just how much of this wealth has been acquired at no expense to the local taxpayers. Toronto's earliest park, for example, was deeded first to the Village of Yorkville nearly a century ago by the late Jesse Ketchum and, in 1883, when Yorkville became part of Toronto, it was turned over to the city. Ketchum Park is but one of many which originated in a grant of land from some public-spirited citizen, Take Dentonia Park in the east end; it was opened by a gift of sixty acres from the Massey estate. Then, in Rosedale, Craiglee Gardens was made possible through the generosity of the Osler family. In the west end, the name of the late John G. Howard will always be associated with High Park. The story of Grange Park is interesting, too. The Grange was the fine home of another leading citizen of the early days, Goldwyn Smith. He left his property for the Toronto Art Gallery and provided that the grounds should be maintained as a city park. All in all, the generosity and vision of private citizens has played no small part in securing for Toronto its present park lands. To these gifts has been added much land deeded by the Federal government. The largest such area is Toronto Island, where the city now operates recreational facilities spread over 371 acres. From these two sources--Federal grants and private philanthropy--has come nearly half our present park acreage.

We have mentioned the beneficial effect parks have on the value of urban properties. Yet the action is not all one-sided. The growth of the city and the continuous spread of population towards the outskirts has meant that the value of the donated lands has greatly appreciated. With the growth of the business community, the park lands in the central area have doubled their value many times. To get good use from our heavy investment in parks, as well as to keep faith with the public-spirited citizens who donated so much of these lands, it is essential that they be kept in a proper state of repair. Owners of equipment and property generally, will agree that a reasonable amount of continuous maintenance is necessary to prevent a rapid rate of depreciation. Yet the table which follows suggests that we have been reluctant to budget sufficient funds for reasonable park maintenance.

EXPENDITURE ON UPKEEP OF THE CITY PARKS*						(6)
Year	(1) Land Area of City Parks acres	(2) Salaries & Wages \$ '000	(3) Materials & Supplies \$ '000	(4) Total \$ '000	(5) Total per Acre \$	Total per Acre ** Adjusted for Changes in Value of Dollar \$
1926	1665	---	---	777	467	467
1929	1971	---	---	1085	550	494
1932	2078	757	296	1053	506	536
1935	2084	669	173	842	404	445
1938	2202	649	142	791	359	369
1941	2202	545	110	655	297	270
1944	2030	611	125	737	363	283
1947	2067	837	543	1380	668	419
1948	2171	980	507	1487	685	382

\* Includes shared expenditures by Canadian National Exhibition on maintenance of Exhibition Park; excludes money spent on Supervised Playgrounds and expenditures of Forestry Division, the bulk of which is used outside the parks.

\*\* Labour and material indices have been used in working out an approximate adjustment. For the base year 1926 and for 1929, the proportion of spending on labour and materials has been estimated as breakdown not available.



In the table, column #5 shows the actual expenditures per acre on park maintenance and operation for representative years from 1926 to 1948. However, it is obvious that the city's dollar would pay for more labour and materials in the thirties than in the twenties and now buys less than in either of the previous decades. An adjustment has been made to estimate, in the final column, the comparable value of expenditures for each selected year. Let us look at the story these figures tell.

Even assuming city wages did not vary as widely as the general wage structure, it is quite plain that the amount spent on parks from the middle thirties to the end of the war was insufficient to assure proper park maintenance. There is, however, a very reasonable explanation for this lack. When the depression set in, some of the unemployed were put to work on the parks. But as bad times continued, economies were introduced which more than offset these earlier additions to the labour force. Throughout the war years, shortages of materials and manpower forced an even greater curtailment and even where labour or supplies could be found the city was reluctant to interfere with an all-out war effort. The result has been a back-log of repair and maintenance work demanding urgent attention.

What have post-war budgets done to overcome this back-log? Looking at the actual sums spent, it would seem that very real progress has been made. In 1948, the money spent on park maintenance was more than twice the amount spent in 1944. (\$737,000 in 1944 against \$1,487,000 in 1948--column #4) But this overlooks two important factors--the increase in park acreage and the very real and sharp depreciation of the dollar. With little change in the labour force employed by the Parks Department between 1947 and 1948, one look at the increase in the wage bill (column #2) is enough to show what havoc the recent inflation has played with the city budget. The 1949 wage bill will be up again, not only in Parks but throughout the whole civic administration. Against such odds, how can a council give a sensible pledge that there will be no increase in the city's tax rate? In fact, such promises are not being honoured in full; but panic attempts to do so result in budget slashing which is often badly directed.

Your Bureau has always stood for sane economies in civic management. But it asks the Council to remember that it is not always a wise economy to save the dollar now. Failure to keep up the City's parks interferes with their recreational value, and while well-kept parks will not eliminate careless use by the public, or even outright vandalism, they will tend to reduce such losses. If well-serviced parks help to maintain property values, run-down parks have the opposite effect, and the trend once started is not easily reversed. Today it is not necessary to look at budget figures to realize that this physical asset of the city is not being properly maintained. But the budget figures do suggest where the blame should be fixed. The Parks Department is not staffed by magicians and they can do only so much with the money budgeted for men and supplies.

#### Short-sighted Policy

This brief story of Toronto's parks illustrates a weakness in municipal financing that needs to be guarded against constantly. Very frequently, budgets are held down by sacrificing sound operation of existing services and adequate maintenance of present physical assets such as streets, parks and public buildings. Indeed, this shortcoming is neither



peculiar to Toronto nor to budget difficulties of the post-war period. We seldom see a city or town hall that is kept up as well as the office or plant of the average factory. Those who doubt that this applies to Toronto have only to walk through the corridors of our own City Hall. In many parts of the building, they will find dark walls and antiquated lighting fixtures which carry them back at least twenty-five years. It is not an atmosphere likely to command respect for our civic officials or to boost the morale of municipal employees.

In a very few days, the City Council will be setting the 1949 tax rate. Without doubt, re-assessment should not be used to conceal a higher tax levy; and yet it is quite probable that some increase can be openly explained and fully justified. There is little sense in holding blindly to last year's levy if at the same time costly new services are authorized, for the budget can then be balanced only by cutting expenditures on established operations. What is more, the City Council cannot expect its costs to remain unaffected by the recent price inflation. The employees' unions have forced partial recognition of this fact in higher salaries and wages. The Council should realize that they must spend more also on purchases of materials and supplies for maintenance and replacement.

In good times, and even in bad, the City's working force is seldom reduced in numbers. But frequently it is crippled by lack of equipment to work with and, sometimes, by recruiting low cost labour that is not fitted to do its job. Another false economy, and a common folly, is to patch and repair repeatedly in order that the inevitable bill for replacement may fall on a future Council. In the long run the total cost can only be boosted by such tactics.

The views put forward in this letter are not intended merely to make a higher tax bill more palatable. Indeed, our whole purpose would be defeated if these arguments were turned in support of every type of increase. Certainly there should be a sound reason behind each additional dollar that is spent, while for every substantial addition to the budget a valid explanation ought to be forthcoming. It is just as important, however, to demonstrate the good sense of each economy move if we are to be sure that the taxpayers are really being saved money. The Bureau is not for one moment suggesting that the limit has been reached in economies in departmental operations. No doubt ways can be found to boost the return from each dollar spent on city parks, as elsewhere. But merely to cut appropriations brings no automatic guarantee that savings will result.

The member of Council who is doing his job properly will not be content merely that the total budget is not excessive. He will want to know that full attention to existing services is given precedence over schemes for expansion. And, today, in a period of high prices, the taxpayer should look to his Alderman more for a sound division of expenditures between current upkeep and new projects and a reasonable explanation of increases than for promises of spectacular economies.

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