



INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT

Parks Operations Audit

September 2023

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CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY

Parks, Forestry and Horticulture Operations is responsible for the maintenance of parks and open spaces, including trail systems, playgrounds and a wide variety of sports fields and courts throughout the city. The department also maintains horticultural displays and flower beds and ensures the sustainability of the city's urban tree canopy. An audit of Forestry and Horticulture Operations was performed and presented to the Finance, Administration and Audit Committee on June 6th, 2018, and was therefore, not included in the scope of this audit.

Improvements are required to ensure risks related to Park Operation's activities are efficiently and effectively mitigated. The following opportunities were identified:

- Develop a Strategic Resourcing Plan and enhance the Staff Training Program
- Enhance Monitoring and Oversight of Acceptable Service Levels, Service Requests and Inspections Process
- Appropriately Safeguard Assets, Equipment and Inventory

Strategic resource planning is critical to ensuring that an organization has the workforce complement it requires to meet both current and future business objectives. Although Parks Operations estimates the number of resources it will need to perform maintenance, repair and upkeep of its parks, several key considerations have not been factored into the current approach to resource planning. Optimizing the resources and composition of the department will help mitigate the risk of operational inefficiencies and facilitate meeting the growing needs of the department. In addition, enhancements to the department staff training program in the form of consistent delivery and monitoring of completed training would support the safe and efficient performance of staff work-related activities.

Service level standards provide direction as to the frequency of performing key work-related activities. These activities are necessary to ensure park areas are safe for the public, remain in good working order, and prolong the life of park assets and spaces. Parks Operations has established service level standards. However, a review of service level targets has not been performed since they were established. Service levels that are set too low may lead to degradation of park assets, increases in replacement costs, and potential injury to park users due to poor upkeep. Alternatively, service levels that are set too high may lead to unnecessary expenditure, suboptimal allocation of resources, and ineffective prioritization of staff and management activities. In addition, completed work activities are inconsistently tracked using various methods. This makes it challenging for management to compare with and confirm that established service level targets are being met. It is paramount that service level targets be reviewed and updated on a regular basis, to ensure the efficient, effective and safe maintenance of parks.

The City rolled out a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system in 2021, to manage relationships and interactions with citizens related to service requests. It is an on-line portal to report citizen service requests, and tracks the identification and closure of deficiencies and concerns identified in parks. Although management continues to build out the capabilities of the

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CRM, opportunities exist to streamline the service request documentation process, which will facilitate complete, accurate and timely closure of service requests. Steps should also be taken to enhance the real-time data analysis and monitoring capability to ensure minimum service request thresholds are being met.

Inspections are vital to ensuring parks are safe, free from debris and in operational working condition. Parks Operations performs various inspections, including, playground equipment, pathways, splashpads, play area courts, facility sidewalk snow removal, as well as inspections of employee work activities to confirm safe work environments and safe employee work practices. Although inspections are being performed, opportunities exist to enhance the process by digitizing inspection forms to gather complete and accurate inspection results in a timely manner. This will facilitate data-analytics for management monitoring and decision making. In addition, benchmarking with municipal peers and Standards supports the maturation of the process, and alignment with industry better practices.

Parks Operations uses various vehicles, motorized equipment and inventory to maintain parks. Enhancements to the safeguarding and oversight of assets were noted, including the formalization of an equipment, tool and inventory management system at the district level, a process for staff to sign-out and sign-in assets before and after use, and the appropriate storage of assets and usage of cameras to monitor assets. Although management has taken proactive steps to count equipment and tools, and piloted a digital sign-out/sign-in form for assets, failing to improve these activities increases the risk of misappropriation of assets, increasing replacement costs to the City.

This audit was conducted in conformance with the *International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing*.

Internal Audit will follow up on the status of outstanding management action plans related to this audit and will report the status at a future Audit Committee meeting.

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BACKGROUND

The City of Vaughan's Parks Operations department manages more than 200 parks, and more than 800 hectares of parks, boulevards and open space land. Amenities include 273 playgrounds, 18 splashpads, 59 tennis facility locations and 130 courts, 10 skate parks, extensive walking trails, 73 basketball courts, 58 baseball diamonds, and 150 soccer fields. Parks Operations is also responsible for winter maintenance on City walkways and pathways, and litter and debris pick-up in parks, on sidewalks and City boulevards, and City owned cemeteries within city borders.

OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE

The objective of the audit was to evaluate the adequacy and effectiveness of the internal controls, processes, and procedures in place related to Parks Operations, and that they are adequately designed and operating as intended to mitigate business risks.

The audit approach included a review of the strategic goals, objectives and oversight of the department, review of relevant policies and procedures, service levels, safeguarding of assets, use of technology, and interviews with staff and management.

The scope of the audit covered Parks Operations activities for the period of June 2021 to October 2022.

The audit scope did not include a review of cemetery services.

This audit was conducted in conformance with the *International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing*.

Auditor and Author: Luca DeFazio, CPA, CA

Director: Kevin Shapiro CIA, CFE, CRMA

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DETAILED REPORT

1. Develop a Strategic Resourcing Plan

Strategic resource planning is critical to ensuring that an organization has the workforce complement it requires to meet both current and future business objectives. Strategic staffing ensures that a business unit has the appropriate number of employees, with the skills it needs to achieve objectives efficiently and effectively. An effective resourcing plan also considers outsourced and seasonal staff to augment the core workforce to meet demands during peak operating times.

Currently, Parks Operations has a workforce complement of 36 full time employees, on average 90 seasonal staff in the Summer, on average 30 seasonal staff in the Winter, and outsources work for activities such as park grass cutting and fence repair. The work is overseen by three district Supervisors and a Manager of Parks and Horticulture Operations.

On an annual basis, Parks Operations estimates the number of resources it will need to meet service levels based on the total number of parks, multiplied by the frequency of performing work-related (maintenance, inspection, repair, cleaning) activities. However, some key considerations have not been factored into the current approach to resource planning. These include:

- A framework to assess and determine the optimal mix and ideal work allocations for insourced and outsourced resources has not been developed.
- Resourcing requirements to service emergency, citizen service requests and permitted events are not systematically factored into resource planning.
- As the City continues to grow and more parks are added, the incremental resources required to appropriately service park assets are not being factored in.
- An overtime strategy, including cost benefit analysis of staff overtime versus alternative resourcing options (seasonal, outsourced, different shift options) has not been systematically factored into overall resource planning.
- Completed staff work is documented on paper Daily Assignment Sheets, which does not facilitate data collection and analysis to effectively estimate future resourcing needs.
- As the overall staff complement has continued to grow and the number of staff assigned to the afternoon shift has expanded, an assessment of the optimal supervisor-to-staff ratio has not been performed, nor has a dedicated Afternoon Supervisor role been established. It is critical that management maintain an appropriate supervisor-to-staff ratio to ensure adequate oversight and supervision to monitor the safe and efficient performance of work.

Optimizing the resources and composition of the Parks Operations department will help mitigate the risk of operational inefficiencies. Once management has mapped out its planned

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resource complement for the coming months and years, they can determine the number of full time, seasonal and outsourced resources to best align the department to meet the growing demands of the City.

Recommendation

We recommend that management develop a strategic resource plan to facilitate estimation of future resourcing needs, including the optimal mix of full-time, seasonal, and outsourced resources.

Management Action Plan

Management agrees with this audit recommendation and work is already underway.

1. Staff to conduct a review to develop a strategic resourcing plan for the Parks Operations division (Q4 2025)

The Parks Operations Division provides a mix of both internally delivered and externally contracted services to over 280 parks and open spaces across the city. The division is made up of three districts (east, central, and west) that support city-wide parks operations and maintenance. With continued development and anticipated population growth, a review will ensure adequate resourcing needs for the division are identified to ensure that the Parks Operations Division continues to meet the needs of Vaughan's growing community.

The review would identify the optimal mix of insourced and outsourced resources, staffing models, alternative resourcing options, overtime pressures, adequacy of resources to support emergencies and significant weather events, and ongoing growth pressures experienced year-over-year. The review will also include a jurisdictional scan of practices in other municipalities to ensure that the department is organizationally structured to continue to meet current and future service demands.

In fall 2023, the department issued a Request for Proposal (RFP) to hire an external consultant to conduct a review. The review will begin early 2024 and will be completed by the fall of 2024. The review will examine organizational structures of parks operations teams in other municipalities, include determination of impacts and costs to the city, and explore timelines and implementation plans to ensure a strategic and planned approach to managing affordability and change while continuing to deliver critical services to the community.

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2. Review and Monitor Acceptable Service Levels

Service level standards provide direction as to the frequency of performing key work-related activities. These activities are necessary to ensure park areas are safe for the public, remain in good working order, and prolong the life of park assets and spaces. Setting appropriate service targets and updating them as required, facilitates decision-making in the allocation of resources to maintain parks. Service level targets are typically informed by industry standards.

Parks Operations has established service level standards. These are based on the nature of the activity. Frequencies include weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, quarterly and annual activities. For example, playground maintenance, repairs, fertilizing, grass aerating, cleaning and sanitizing, facility sidewalk snow removal, and inspections to name a few. An activity tracking sheet has been piloted to plan the performance of activities over the course of the year to meet the established service levels. The tracking sheet also includes a section to update when the activities have been completed, in order to assess whether the service level targets are being met.

The following observations related to service level targets and monitoring were noted:

- A review of service level targets has not been performed since they were established. Management is unclear as to when the service level targets were initially developed, nor the approach that was taken to establish them.
- A review has not recently been performed to confirm that all key park-related responsibilities have an associated service level target.
- Although an activity tracking sheet to capture the completion of maintenance related activities has been developed, it has not been consistently updated to facilitate management monitoring that service level targets are being met. Currently, management is unable to conclude that all park related responsibilities have met established service level targets.

Setting appropriate service level targets and monitoring them is vital for the efficient and effective allocation of resources to ensure upkeep of parks. Service levels that are set too low may lead to degradation of park assets, increases in replacement costs, and potential injury to park users due to poor upkeep. Alternatively, service levels that are set too high may lead to unnecessary expenditure, suboptimal allocation of resources, and ineffective prioritization of staff and management activities. It is paramount that service level targets be reviewed on a regular basis to assess the appropriateness of the targets, and to adjust them as necessary.

Recommendations

We recommend that management:

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- Review and update service level targets, and establish a frequency for regular review and update.
- Explore technological solutions to efficiently and effectively capture when activities are completed, and compare completed activities with service level targets to confirm that service level targets are being met.

Management Action Plan

Management agrees with the audit recommendations and work is already underway.

1. Staff to review and update service level targets and establish a frequency for regular review and update of service standards. (Q4 2024)

A spring and summer operations playbook highlighting services and service level information was developed before the start of the 2023 season. The playbook provided an overview of the department's services to the community and highlighted service levels and targets that the department strives to meet. For the 2024 spring and summer season, a more robust portfolio-wide playbook is being developed, which will highlight spring and summer services, targets and key programs and initiatives for the portfolio. In addition to this and working closely with the Corporate and Strategic Communications Department, updates to the city's website were also made in 2023 to ensure clarity to residents on service levels related to spring and summer operations. This website is often shared with residents seeking additional information on service levels and was also circulated via social media channels for general awareness.

Staff will create a process to regularly update and review services levels. While some comparisons to other municipalities have been reviewed through informal communication and correspondence in the past, a thorough review of service levels and service level frequency reviews will support validating current operations and considering any service level enhancements where financially feasible.

2. Staff to work with partners in the Corporate Services Portfolio to support implementation of the workorder management system (Q4 2025)

A workorder management system is currently being planned for the city that will significantly streamline operations and provide a solution for the oversight and management of daily tasks and responsibilities assigned as well as ensure greater effectiveness of the Customer Relationship Management system (CRM) cases that are logged for actioning. The lack of a comprehensive workorder management system significantly limits the ability to adequately dispatch, track and monitor service performance and thus creates a reliance on highly manual and paper-based processes. Until a workorder management system is in place it will be challenging to effectively track service levels in real-time and to a complete degree of accuracy. However, the department does continue to track service requests completed through the CRM system on a monthly basis and key performance measures are reported on. Additionally, as a further compensating control, the department will continue to plan and schedule staff to

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perform duties in line with spring and summer operations standards, and Supervisors will continue to monitor the completion of work by staff in accordance with planned work activities which includes manual sign-offs on completion of tasks as well as ad hoc community visits and checks within each district.

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3. Enhance Monitoring and Oversight of Service Requests

The City's Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system was rolled out in 2021, and is a solution for managing relationships and interactions with citizens. It is an on-line portal to report service requests. When an event triggers a response to rectify a deficiency/concern in a Park, a service request is created in the CRM by Service Vaughan during working hours and dispatch after hours.

The Parks, Forestry and Horticulture Services Administration team is responsible for maintaining the service request information in the CRM system. This includes notifying Parks, Forestry and Horticulture staff of new deficiencies, creating new, updating existing and closing service requests. Once Parks Operations staff are notified of an event, they are responsible for rectifying the issue and providing an update to the Service Administration team to update the record in the CRM.

Work order service requests had previously been managed in JDE. However, the tool was not sufficiently robust to effectively track and monitor service requests to meet the needs of Public Works. Previous audits of Roads Operations, Winter Maintenance and Forestry identified opportunities to improve the effectiveness of the work order management process. This led to the development and implementation of the CRM system to manage citizen service requests. In the absence of a city-wide work order management system, Parks Operations is piloting its own work order management dashboard (365-day Asset Management Plan Dashboard).

Although management has taken steps and continues to build out capabilities of the CRM and its piloting of the 365-day work order system, the following observations were noted:

- Information provided by the field and administrative staff in relation to service requests are not updated/entered into the CRM in a timely manner. This includes timely investigation and closing of service requests.
- The documentation of service requests is paper-based, and is not conducive to timely updating of service requests in the CRM. Although Forestry staff have access and use the functionality to update the status of service requests via mobile devices, this functionality is not being consistently used by Parks Operations staff.
- Although minimum thresholds for completing service requests have been established, the CRM lacks real-time data analysis and monitoring capability to ensure the minimum service request thresholds are being met.
- There are no documented procedures outlining the roles, responsibilities and accountability of staff involved in the Parks Operations service request process.
- Some deficiencies are being reported directly to the operations team, by-passing the CRM administrative process. This practice poses several risks, including:
 - Inefficient and ineffective deployment of resources.
 - Perception of favoritism.

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- Incomplete data capture.

Enhancements to the monitoring and reporting of service request data is required. Not having robust monitoring increases the risk of business objectives not being achieved, which may have a significant impact on performance management and service delivery. Service requests that are addressed without being entered into the CRM make it difficult for management to track, monitor and oversee appropriate closure. This makes it challenging on a going forward basis to estimate future resourcing needs to appropriately rectify service requests. In addition, the lack of formalized policies and procedures increases the risk that activities will not be performed in a timely and satisfactory manner.

As the City continues to develop a city-wide work order management solution, Parks Operations and Public Works as a whole must be engaged as key stakeholders to provide requirements and specifications to be built into the system, to ensure department needs are being incorporated to meet the operational needs of the departments.

Recommendations

We recommend that management:

- Enhance the data analytics, monitoring and reporting capabilities to facilitate decision making and to evaluate whether service levels are being met.
- Develop standard operating procedures, clearly identifying the roles, responsibilities and accountabilities of staff involved in the service request/ work order administration process.
- Provide access to Parks Operations staff to update service request tickets via mobile devices.
- Ensure that all service requests are captured in the CRM.

Management Action Plan

Management agrees with the audit recommendations and work is progressing well.

- 1. Staff will enhance data and analytics capabilities and work to support implementation of the corporate work order management system to ensure that service levels are being met. (Q4 2025)**

The Parks Operations Division responds to thousands of requests from citizens throughout the year, which is particularly heightened in the spring and summer season due to parks operations and maintenance practices. The long-term benefits of a CRM system include improved informational availability and knowledge which leads to a better understanding of community needs. In addition, implementation of the CRM dashboards with the opportunity to review service requests, provides for better data and decision-making capability. The CRM system has also been helpful in increasing the portfolio's

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ability to provide a better citizen experience by allowing for the tracking of citizen communications, documents, and historical information as well as the automation of tasks. Currently, the CRM data and analytics for each service area is posted and shared with the portfolio to promote an open data culture of evidence-based decision making. The CRM dashboards were shared with members of Council and the senior leadership team in early 2023.

The Parks Operations team will further enhance data and analytics capability of the CRM system to evaluate effectiveness of meeting service levels to the extent possible that such a system allows and will also support corporate implementation of the new workorder management system which will automate service delivery and strengthen the ability to evaluate whether service level targets have been met.

2. Staff will leverage existing training materials, reference guides and manuals to document standard operating procedures for Parks Operations staff around the service request administration process. (Q4 2024)

The Customer Relationship Management (CRM) technological solution was fully implemented in fall 2022. During its rollout and in coordination with the Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO), a series of training guides, reference materials and manuals were created to ensure that there was a systematic process in place in the use of the solution, clarity of roles and responsibilities, and consistency across all three operating departments. In addition to this, staff work closely with Service Vaughan to coordinate the logging of service requests and have placed greater emphasis on ensuring consistency in approach. As a next step to further augment this work, these materials and processes will be included as a formalized approach during the development of Standardized Operating Procedures (SOPs) indicated in section #8.

3. Staff will budget for the expansion of mobile devices to the Parks Operations division for the 2025 budget in coordination with implementation of the corporate work order management system. (Q4 2025)

The Urban Forestry Division was prioritized to pilot a digitalized dispatch system and obtained mobile devices accordingly. This was due to its operational activities being more ad-hoc and responsive, and conducive to utilizing a mobile device to service dispatched requests in a timely manner. Parks Operations activities are primarily planned operations and maintenance which does not lend itself to such a dispatching process to the same degree.

As the City moves towards further digitization of service requests through implementation of the workorder management system, mobile devices will be ordered for Parks Operations staff to support this future technological advancement to better assign, service and track the completion of our activities in an efficient and effective manner.

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4. Staff will continue to ensure that all service requests are captured in the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system (Q2 2024)

Staff have already begun ensuring that service requests are captured within the CRM system and are working closely with Service Vaughan to continue to log service requests into CRM. Inquiries received directly from Councillor offices are also being logged into CRM by administrative staff. Staff will continue to implement this process and ensure a consistent approach in training and onboarding of staff.

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4. Appropriately Safeguard Assets, Equipment and Inventory

Parks Operations uses various vehicles, motorized equipment and inventory to maintain parks in a safe and orderly manner. Each of the three districts are responsible for safeguarding the equipment, tools and inventory in their possession. Each of the districts have a yard/ building, and in the event that the district shares the building and/or yard with other City of Vaughan divisions, the assets, tools and inventory are separated using cabinets, lockers, cages, bins, and dividers. Equipment and tools are to be stored in locked cages when not in use. The Fleet division maintains records of Parks Operations vehicles and motorized equipment, including their serial numbers.

The following observations related to the safeguarding and monitoring of assets, equipment and inventory were noted during the audit:

- A formalized equipment and tool management system to catalogue the equipment and tools (such as chainsaws, shovels, spades, clippers, and other motorized hand-held tools) at each of the district yards has not been established.
- A system to record staff sign-out and check-in of tools and equipment has not been formally implemented across all districts.
- A formalized approach to maintaining the inventory of consumable items (such as personal protective equipment (PPE), sunscreen, protective glasses, gloves, etc.) does not exist. The individual districts purchase the inventory they require. However, there is no systematic tracking of the items on hand, nor how many have been consumed.
- Periodic count of tools, equipment and inventory are not performed.
- During district yard visits, it was observed that the cages, where tools and equipment are stored, were unlocked and open. Management has directed staff to keep the cages closed and locked when not in use. However, management has faced challenges in enforcing this safeguarding protocol.
- Management identified occasions when equipment and tools went missing from district yards. However, instances of cameras not being positioned in the direction of the cages or not appropriately functioning prevented video footage from being investigated further.

Not having a formalized system to track inventory, tools and equipment at the district level increases the risk of misappropriation of assets. This risk is amplified by weaknesses in the safeguarding of assets at the district yards. These lack of controls may increase costs as a result of having to replace assets more frequently than would otherwise be required.

Although observations have been noted, management has taken preliminary steps in an effort to proactively remediate some of the findings. For example, performing counts of equipment and tools at the individual districts has commenced, along with piloting a digital sign-out/sign-in form for equipment and tools.

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Recommendations

We recommend that management:

- Establish a formalized equipment and tool management system. This should be used to ensure:
 - Tools and equipment are updated in the management system at the district level, as they are onboarded and offboarded.
 - Periodic counts are performed to verify the quantity of assets is consistent with records.
 - A formalized process for staff to sign-out and sign back in equipment and tools across all districts.
- Develop and implement written departmental policies and procedures for equipment, tool and inventory management. This should include well defined roles, responsibilities and accountabilities related to the use, maintenance and oversight, including appropriate training for staff and management.
- Enhance the safeguarding of equipment, tools and inventory by limiting asset access to authorized individuals only.
- Ensure cameras are present and working in locations where high value equipment, tools and/or inventory are being stored, and regularly check that the cameras are functioning.

Management Action Plan

Management agrees with the audit recommendations and work is already underway.

1. Staff will create a baseline inventory of all Park Operations equipment and tool assets and develop a formal equipment and tool management system. (Q2 2024)

To support the development of a formal equipment and tool management system, consistency in processes, and a formalized approach to inventory management, each district will conduct a baseline inventory of all parks operations assets which will be refreshed quarterly to ensure that inventories within each district is kept up-to-date.

In January 2023, the Parks Operations Division piloted an equipment sign-in and sign-out process using Microsoft Forms in the east district. The digitalized process has created a systematic approach to equipment management and allows for the tracking and monitoring of tools, including implementation of a dashboard for oversight and monitoring. This will be phased into the other districts in 2024 for consistency in approach to tool sign-in and sign-out processes.

2. Staff will develop written policies and procedures for equipment, tool and inventory management including roles, responsibilities, and accountabilities. (Q2 2024)

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Staff will ensure that written policies and procedures are created to support the effective management of equipment, tools and inventory in order to create consistency across each district and greater rigor in the management of inventory. Policies and procedures to include information around access, sign-in and sign-out processes and the general safeguarding of equipment.

- 3. Staff will review and request an appropriate budget for placing cameras and employee access readers in locations where equipment, tools and inventory are being stored to enhance the safeguarding of equipment. (Q2 2025)**

Staff have worked with partners in the Facilities Management Department to install cameras and employee access readers in each district. Part of this process will include identifying risky areas in each district to determine where cameras are needed. The cameras will ensure that there is a mechanism to reference and review in the event that inventory is unaccounted for. The employee access readers will ensure that once the cage door is opened, it automatically locks, and that only authorized individuals have access. As an interim measure, doors are required to be locked by district supervisors and only select individuals have access to keys in order to better safeguard inventory.

The budget for installing cameras is \$2,000 each and installing locks with an employee card access reader is \$5,000 per door. Staff will determine overall costs and budget accordingly.

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5. Enhance the Inspections Process

Parks Operations performs various inspections, including, playground equipment, pathways, splashpads, play area courts, and facility sidewalk snow removal. The inspections process is vital to ensuring parks are safe, free from debris and in operational working condition.

In addition, inspections of employee handling of personal protective equipment, body position and working environment, vehicles, tools and equipment are performed. These are conducted by the Manager, Supervisors and Forepersons within Parks Operations, and are part of the Health and Safety Program. These inspections are conducted using a templated Crew Site Inspection Form, utilizing Microsoft Form technology. Based on review of the inspections process, improvements are required to ensure that the inspection process is well defined, up-to-date, and consistently performed.

The following observations related to the inspections process were noted:

- A risk-based methodology to determine the location(s) to inspect and frequency of inspections (if they are performed too frequently or not frequently enough) has not been established.
- A complete record of playground asset components at the individual park level does not exist. Although Infrastructure Planning & Corporate Asset Management maintains a list of park assets, its current tracking system does not capture the individual components that make up the playground hardware. This makes it challenging for Parks Operations management to monitor the completeness of park component inspections.
- Digital inspection forms that are fillable using staff mobile devices have been piloted. However, paper-based inspection forms continue to be used. Digital inspection forms facilitate the capturing and storage of data in a consistent and accessible manner, provide confirmation that inspections have been performed, and enables data analysis and decision-making.
- Inconsistent entry of data into the Crew Site Inspection forms was noted. For example, the data entry fields are free text form (not case or format sensitive), with the inspection time, type of work observed, location and names of individuals performing inspections, being documented inconsistently. Including drop down menus or radio buttons and data entry fields that are format sensitive, enable consistent entering of information and facilitates data analysis.
- A single staff member performs vendor grass cutting inspections. Also, limited numbers of staff have operational experience performing the various types of inspections. Insufficient staff trained to perform inspections increases the risk that inspections may not be performed, and appropriate steps to repair or maintain park assets may not be completed.

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- A target number of Crew Site Inspections to be performed at the individual park districts was set in 2022. Although monitoring of completed inspections is performed, only one of three districts completed the assigned number of crew site inspections during 2022.
- Inspection processes and practices have not been recently benchmarked with municipal peers or Standards¹.
- Standard Operating Procedures (SOP's) which defines roles, responsibilities and accountabilities have not been established for performing all types of inspections.²

Recommendations

We recommend that management:

- Develop a risk-based methodology and criteria to prioritize inspections.
- Work with Infrastructure Planning & Corporate Asset Management to identify solutions to keep track of playground and park asset components. This will help facilitate inspection of all park assets.
- Benchmark the current inspection process with municipal peers and industry standards.
- Continue to digitalize inspection forms to facilitate data analysis and retention of inspections performed. Ensure to incorporate drop down menus or radio buttons, and character sensitive data entry fields for consistent entering of inspection information.
- Enhance the monitoring process of Crew Site Inspections to ensure adherence with the targets set by management.
- Develop SOP's for all inspection processes which defines the roles, responsibilities and accountabilities for performing inspections. This should include guidance on the appropriate documentation of inspections.

Management Action Plan

Management agrees with the audit recommendations and work is progressing well.

- 1. Staff will develop a risk-based approach to prioritize inspections based on available data and measures. (Q4 2025)**

¹ For example, the Canadian Standards Association (CSA) is a not-for-profit, non-statutory, voluntary membership association engaged in standards development. It has developed a Standard CSA Z614 *Children's Playground Equipment and Surfacing*, that management may wish to consider, to enhance its processes related to public-use playground equipment.

² An inspection policy and procedure has been established for Parks Contractor Grass and Landscape Maintenance. Parks Operations intends to develop inspection procedures for other key activities.

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Staff will review necessary data and analytics and develop a methodology that determines the best approach for conducting inspections for Parks Operations. This can be based on citizen service request metrics with respect to areas of heightened community concern, age of park assets and community hot spots. A risk-based approach will ensure a value-add process is in place rather than a reliance on ad-hoc procedures.

2. **Staff are working closely with partners in Infrastructure Planning and Corporate Asset Management to ensure that there is a baseline of park assets and further integrate detailed asset components into Standardized Operating Procedures (SOPs). (Q4 2025)**

Staff are working with Infrastructure Planning and Corporate Asset Management (IPCAM) to inspect and review assets, conditions, and quantities. IPCAM will be reviewing park asset conditions and has identified this as a workplan priority. While this project is currently in the initiation stage, through regularized update meetings, the Parks Operations division will be engaged and updated on the status and progress of this initiative. Staff will also ensure that the development of SOPs, which is already underway with recommendation #8, includes documentation of detailed asset components.

3. **Staff will further benchmark its inspections target and process against other municipalities and industry standards (Q4 2024)**

The City has a robust inspections process in place and is meeting targets set out by the division. Staff conducted a preliminary review of practices in other municipalities which highlighted that the city has an inspection cycle that is above partner municipalities and industry standards. The table below indicates that the city has a 14-day cycle for inspections in comparison to other municipalities that complete inspections every 30 days. A 14-day inspections cycle allows the city to ensure that any deficiencies can be documented in a timely manner and any acts of vandalism are addressed. Staff will continue to review the inspections cycle to determine the best approach for the City balancing costs versus risks.

Table 1: Jurisdictional Analysis of Inspections Cycle

Municipality	Inspection Cycle
Vaughan	14 days
Mississauga	30 days
Markham	30 days
Barrie	30 days
Toronto	30 days
Brampton	30 days
Richmond Hill	30 days

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4. A digitalized form for parks inspections has been developed ensuring a more streamlined and efficient process which will be further enhanced. (Q1 2024)

The Parks Operations Division has created a digital park and playground inspection form which is now being used across each of the three districts. This new form was initially being piloted and with successful implementation, it has now been rolled out across the division. A digitalized format has created greater efficiencies, eliminating the need for paper and hundreds of park inspection form versions as well as allowing the team to keep track of ongoing inspections. With continued use, the division will be able to make use of this business intelligence to better understand inspections being undertaken and plan for future inspections. Staff will work to further update the digital form to add consistent fields and dropdown lists to support future enhancement of data/analytics capability, ensure consistency in usage of the form and eliminate any opportunity for variability of data entry.

5. Staff will continue to monitor and report on Crew Site Inspection Forms (Q2 2024)

The Parks Operations Division will continue to use a systematic process for overseeing crew site inspections. The division has demonstrated consistent performance in meeting the set targets for crew site inspections. Specifically, the division has successfully conducted and completed over 753 inspections to date, exceeding its year-to-date target of 653. Additionally, a real-time dashboard is also at hand (as shown in Figure 1 below), providing the capability to continuously monitor inspections and comprehensively review associated data. This live dashboard offers an immediate and dynamic overview of ongoing crew site inspections, allowing for quick and informed decision-making based on up-to-the-minute information. This innovative tool further complements the division's efforts to enhance oversight and ensure the adherence to established standards throughout the inspection process. Staff will continue to work to ensure greater consistency across each district.

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Figure 1: Crew Site Inspection Dashboard as of Q3 2023



6. Continue to complete Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for inspection processes and develop a best practice documentation process. (Q4 2024)

Since 2022, the Parks Operations division has been undergoing an initiative to develop and update Standardized Operating Procedures (SOPs) for all services including inspections. Work to develop over 50 SOPs is currently underway and progressing as planned. The portfolio and department identified the need for SOPs a few years back and with limited resources has been using a more manageable approach to completion. Further information can be found in recommendation #8.

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6. Enhance the Staff Training Program

The Occupational Health and Safety Act of Ontario legislates specific responsibilities to employers, supervisors and staff to ensure that workers are well trained and to provide proof of training. According to the City's Employee Health & Safety Training procedure, each department is responsible for developing and implementing their own initial and specific hands-on operational and technical training programs. This involves identifying risks or hazards associated with the work to be performed, making sure risks are minimized by SOPs, proper equipment and training, and monitoring to ensure health and safety measures are in place and working effectively.

All new, returning or transferred City of Vaughan employees are required to attend the City of Vaughan's Health and Safety Orientation training program. In addition, Parks Operations has a staff training plan based on the employees' job title, which sets out the specific training that the employee must perform based on the activities the staff member is responsible for.

In reviewing the Parks Operations staff training program, observations were noted that stem from the lack of a dedicated staff resource developing and providing training, and maintaining staff training records. These observations include:

- Halogen is used to keep track of full-time staff employee training records. However, there is no regular monitoring process to confirm that staff have been enrolled and have completed all required formal and informal on-the job training before starting to work on-site. Per management, individual training courses are manually assigned in Halogen for new hires at the time of onboarding. Per review of staff training records, numerous instances of expired training were noted. The risk is that if training courses are not assigned at the time of hire, no record of enrollment (or lack thereof) will exist, and an employee may never receive the required training. In addition, if training proficiency is allowed to lapse, the risk of improper health and safety practices or inefficient work processes may occur.
- Formal machinery and equipment staff training is provided in-house by Fleet Management Services. Although a Record of Training is provided to Parks Operations for staff who attended and completed a training session, Parks Operations does not receive a copy of related training materials for reference and on-the-job training purposes.
- An on-the-job training curriculum does not exist. When a new staff member is hired, although they are provided hands-on training by a supervisor, foreperson or other qualified staff, there are no formalized reference materials to ensure it is administered uniformly across all three districts and covers all key work activities. There is also no formal testing and sign-off process of an employees' readiness to start work. An employee's readiness is based on the judgment of the individual conducting the hands-on training. As a result, there is increased risk that the delivery of training may be inconsistent, and staff may be permitted to perform work duties before sufficient training has been completed. This may increase the risk of workplace injuries or errors, which may compromise the health & safety of City staff and the public.

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- Training records of seasonal staff are not maintained in Halogen. Rather, they are manually maintained by each of the three district supervisors who indicated that records are not consistently kept up-to-date reflecting completed and training that is pending. This increases the risk of staff not being appropriately trained to perform duties safely and effectively.
- Health and safety talks are provided by district supervisors on a regular basis to supplement formal training. A safety calendar identifies the health and safety topics, and documentation has been developed to aid the supervisors in consistent delivery of the topic material. However, though records of staff attendance are documented on a paper-based Attendance Record Form, there is no follow-up or rescheduling for staff who miss sessions. The paper-based forms are also not conducive to data analysis to easily identify who missed sessions. The risk is that staff who miss sessions are not receiving relevant health and safety related updates to safely and effectively perform work.

The lack of formalized on-the-job training, inconsistent maintenance of training records, expiry of training, and the ability for staff to perform work activities before training has been completed increases the risk of workplace injuries or errors, which may compromise the health and safety of staff and the public. This may hinder the City's ability to defend workplace accident claims and increases the risk of non-compliance to occupational health and safety legislation and internal procedures. This could result in fines or other sanctions.

Recommendations

We recommend that management:

- Perform regular monitoring of staff training records to ensure all staff training is up to date.
- Formalize on-the-job training reference materials to facilitate consistent staff training.
- Develop an assessment and sign-off process of key on-the-job activities, to ensure staff are consistently trained and ready for work.
- Develop a Train the Trainer curriculum for on-the-job training to ensure consistent training across districts.
- Formally and consistently document attendance for all staff (fulltime, part-time and seasonal) training and at Health and Safety Talks.

Management Action Plan

Management agrees with the audit recommendations.

- 1. Staff will identify an administrative lead to review training records on a regular basis to ensure compliance. (Q4 2024)**

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Training records are captured and reviewed by district supervisors and there are limitations within Halogen, the city's Human Resource and Learning Management system, for seasonal staff that work only a few months in the year, requiring the division to manually keep track of training history. An administrative lead within the portfolio will support the tracking of records and identifying non-compliance which will be reported to the district supervisor.

- 2. The portfolio has created a new onboarding process for returning seasonals and new employees which will be formalized and used to ensure a consistent approach to training year-over-year. (Q4 2024)**

Each year, the Parks Operations Division hires over 160 part-time seasonal labour staff to support winter, spring and summer operations. A new process for onboarding seasonal staff was created in 2023 and has been successful in ensuring a consistent approach to training and onboarding new staff. The orientation ran from 7:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. during the first day on the job and reviewed key areas such as health and safety legislation overview and specific city health and safety initiatives, staff expectations, clothing and timecards, access cards, parking passes and personal protective equipment distribution, fuel training and testing, vehicle accident reporting and demos on circle checks and backing up vehicle procedures. The new onboarding process will be formalized and implemented on an ongoing basis for spring/summer and winter operations.

- 3. Staff will develop an assessment and sign-off process of key on-the-job activities, to ensure staff are consistently trained and ready for work. (Q4 2024)**

Staff have developed a training matrix to review training history, records and certifications and will develop a sign-off process to ensure that on-the-job activities and requirements are being completed. This will be supported with regular reviews of training records to ensure compliance. Work shadowing and informal training sessions will be supplemented with a validation process that includes sign-offs by both the trainer and the trainee.

- 4. Staff will develop a train-the-trainer curriculum for on-the-job training to ensure consistency in training across each district. (Q4 2024)**

Staff will leverage the newly created onboarding process developed in 2023 to create a train-the-trainer curriculum that can be used year-over-year and will ensure consistency across each district.

- 5. Staff will develop bi-annual reports to ensure adequate reporting and oversight at district health and safety meetings. (Q2 2024)**

Health and Safety talks are conducted once per week, and over 150 times in a year, by each district Supervisor and Assistant Foreperson, which includes safety talks and Form 5 Inspection checks. A digital form has been developed that tracks staff in attendance and staff not in attendance, which reminds the supervisor of who was not present and ensures that meetings with those staff are conducted on the next available date. The

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division will run bi-annual reports on health and safety attendance and ensure staff who were not in attendance are brought up to speed.

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7. Develop a Noxious Weeds Strategy

In 2019, the City piloted a revised mowing program to leave strategic "Grow Zones" unmowed. These Grow Zones focus on converting specific areas in City parks covered by grass into naturalized meadows and pollinator gardens. The initiative is to help the City achieve targets set in Green Directions Vaughan, as well as to meet actions identified in the Mayors' Monarch Pledge. These Grow Zones are being allowed to naturalize, which will benefit a variety of pollinator and wildlife species, while also providing other environmental benefits such as the management of excess stormwater and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. Reduced grass mowing throughout the spring and summer also saves the City money on fuel and labour.

On an annual basis, the City receives regular resident complaints regarding noxious weeds. In the event that a resident informs the City of a noxious weeds outbreak, or City staff identify noxious weed infestations, Parks Operations will contract out the responsibility for treating the noxious weeds on an ad-hoc basis. The City inspects both public and private land for legislated noxious weeds, and the primary tool for controlling the spread of such weeds is to cut the grass in City parks, boulevards, sports fields and other green spaces on a regular basis to keep weeds at a minimum.

Although the City takes steps to treat noxious weeds and notifies residents how to contact the City to report outbreaks, the main reason for the reoccurring noxious weeds issue is that an overarching strategy to both assess and restore naturalized grow areas while proactively managing and mitigating the spread of noxious weeds has not been developed.

Establishing Grow Zones is beneficial to pollinator and wildlife species. However, the unintended consequences of leaving grass uncut to promote naturalized meadows and pollinator gardens is flareups of noxious weeds. The health and safety of residents in Parks and open spaces is paramount, while the needs of the environment are equally as important. A strategy should be developed which considers both the Grow Zone needs of pollinator and wildlife species, but is also proactive in managing the spread of noxious weeds to keep the public safe.

Recommendation

We recommend that management develop a noxious weeds management strategy to proactively mitigate the spread of noxious weeds in park Grow Zone areas.

Management Action Plan

Management agrees with this audit recommendation.

- 1. Staff will develop a noxious weeds management strategy and review practices in other jurisdictions. (Q4 2024)**

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8. Continue to Develop and Update Relevant, Current and Appropriate Standard Operating Procedures (SOP's)

Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) are established methods of carrying out routine or repetitive tasks performed by staff. They document the way activities are to be performed to facilitate consistent performance and conformance to policies and procedures. To be effective they should identify roles and responsibilities, provide expectations, and guidance to achieve operational objectives.

Parks Operations maintains several SOPs, policies and procedures, and work instruction documents for performing Parks related responsibilities. However, management has acknowledged the need to continue to develop SOP's and to revisit existing SOP documents to ensure they are appropriate, up to date and comprehensive to facilitate consistency, quality and safety.

The development and use of SOPs also provides individuals with information to appropriately perform tasks and facilitates consistent implementation to promote quality end results. Housing these documents in a centralized accessible location makes it easy for staff to access. Management acknowledges the risk of outdated, inconsistent and/or missing process documentation, and prior to the commencement of this audit, has proactively initiated the development, updating and centralized storing of key process documentation, using a risk-based approach to prioritize the updating and drafting of SOPs.

Internal Audit has noted that management has made progress, although additional efforts are required.

Recommendations

We recommend that management:

- Continue to draft and update key SOPs, policies and procedures, and work instruction documents to promote consistency, quality, and safety in business activities.
- Continue to populate the centralized document repository to maintain all key process related documentation.

Management Action Plan

Management agrees with the audit recommendations. Significant work is underway to develop standardized operating procedures and other policies and procedures, including work instruction documents.

1. Staff will continue to develop Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), policies and procedures and work instruction documents. (Q4 2024)

Since 2022, the Parks Operations division has been undergoing an initiative to develop Policies, Standardized Operating Procedures (SOPs), Work Instructions, and Forms.

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Work to develop over 50 SOPs is currently underway and progressing as planned. Both the portfolio and department identified the need for SOPs a few years back and with limited resources has been using a more manageable approach to completion since then.

This ongoing effort is essential to ensure that all operational activities are guided by the most current and comprehensive instructions. A *Public Works Document Hub Dashboard* has been created to monitor the status of all Public Works Policies, SOPs, Work Instructions, and Forms and will be utilized to track progress and ensure that all documents are developed and updated as required.

- 2. Staff will continue to work towards updating the centralized repository for Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and ensure yearly updates are made as required. (Q4 2024)**

A *Public Works Document Hub* has been created as a centralized repository for Policies, SOPs, Work Instructions, and Forms. Each document in the Hub is tagged with metadata providing essential information such as Document Name, Document #, Version #, Status (Approved/Revision in progress), Document Type, Parent Doc, Operation Topic, Department, Proofreader, Author(s), Approver(s), Distribution List, Date Approved, and Next Review Date. Additionally, the system features an automated notification workflow that alerts relevant staff (Proofreader, Author(s), Approver(s), Distribution List) when a new or updated document is available. This triggers necessary training or re-training and the disposal of any obsolete versions. This centralized repository ensures staff can easily access the most current versions of all documents. The aforementioned dashboard will be instrumental in monitoring the status of the centralized repository to ensure it is always up-to-date.

A procedure for the annual review of documents will be implemented to ensure they remain current and comprehensive. The next phase of the Public Works Document Hub involves incorporating an automated workflow that will notify relevant staff (Proofreaders, Authors, Approvers, and Distribution List) when a document is due for review or overdue for its review. This feature will be implemented once a schedule is agreed upon with the Operations group.