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# Crews said they were spending about four hours a shift maintaining city parks. GPS tracking told a different story

A new report from Toronto's auditor general about the upkeep of city green spaces recommended the city step up oversight of its parks division.

Updated 11 hrs ago | Oct. 7, 2024  



City crews tasked with maintaining Toronto's public parks spent fewer hours at job sites each week than they reported in official logs according to a new report.

R.J. Johnston/Toronto Star file photo

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**By Ben Spurr City Hall Bureau Chief**

City crews tasked with maintaining Toronto's public parks spent fewer hours at job sites each week than they reported in official logs, and drove to plazas and other nonwork-related locations while on the clock. Meanwhile, the municipality doesn't have a reliable way of determining whether the work the crews are supposed to be doing is performed to standard.

Those were among the findings of [a new report from Toronto's auditor general](#) about the upkeep of city green spaces, which recommended the city step up oversight of its parks division.

The poor state of fountains, washrooms and other park facilities [has been a frequent source of resident complaints](#) in recent years, and Mayor Olivia Chow made improving public spaces a key part of her 2023 election platform.

On Monday, her press secretary Arianne Robinson said in an email that Chow found the report "deeply concerning," and will work with councillors and staff to implement its recommendations. She said Chow believes "people deserve park amenities that are well-maintained."

The report from Auditor General Tara Anderson focused on the branch of the city's parks and recreation division responsible for the maintenance of washrooms, lawns, trails, sports fields, parking lots and other facilities at Toronto's 1,500 public green spaces.

The branch has a gross operating budget of \$190 million and a staff that fluctuates between about 700 in winter months, and more than 1,300 in spring and summer.

The audit used records from 2023. Based on a comparison of 85 daily work logs to global position system (GPS) data for city-owned vehicles, it concluded that there were "discrepancies" between maintenance activities crews reported and their actual locations.

In one example, the auditor found that while a crew reported stopping at eight park locations in their daily log, GPS data showed their vehicle didn't visit five of them. Instead, it was parked at a plaza for more than two and a half hours, and returned to the yard about three hours before the end of their shift.

In a second example, over the course of a 40-hour work week, one crew spent more than 10 hours parked at plazas and other non-City locations, an average of more than two hours a day. The same crew reported being at park locations for 24 hours that week, but the GPS showed the real number was less than 12 hours.

On average, crews reported spending just over four hours of a standard eight-hour shift performing park maintenance on location, but GPS information indicated the average was just two hours and 36 minutes.

The report is reminiscent of [a 2019 city audit](#) that used GPS data to determine private crews hired to perform tree maintenance spent time at malls and coffee shops when they were supposed to be on the job, at an estimated cost of \$2.6 million in lost productivity.

While Anderson's new report flagged the behaviour of city workers, it also determined the parks' management "has not established key performance indicators" to measure maintenance standards.

She noted that the city's paper-based record system made it hard to collect reliable data. But based on a review of logs from June and August of 2023, service standards for tasks like litter pickup, grass mowing and daily washroom and splash pad maintenance "were not consistently achieved."

Additionally, the level of on-site supervision varied significantly depending on the supervisor and the park's location, and there were no clear policies on how to conduct reviews of scheduled work.

The auditor made nine recommendations to improve oversight and maintenance. They included expanding the use of GPS technology to monitor productivity, ensuring the accuracy of daily logs, modernizing record keeping, and developing clear service standard performance indicators.

In an email, city spokesperson Russell Baker said the report findings "reinforce the city's analysis that there are areas for improvement."

He said the city was already working to address many of the recommendations, and plans to install GPS devices on all park vehicles by the end of 2025. At the time of the audit, about one-third of the park branch's 604 vehicles didn't have the devices.

Baker said staff are also undertaking a review of service level standards that will "include benchmarking against other relevant jurisdictions."

The union representing park maintenance workers didn't return a request for comment Monday afternoon.

Coun. Stephen Holyday (Ward 2, Etobicoke Centre), who chairs the audit committee, said that in his experience park staff are “really great people” who are committed to their work, and it would be “disheartening” for many of them to see examples of when their colleagues “didn’t live up to expectations.”

He predicted residents will be watching to see whether the city follows through on the auditor’s recommendations.

“People are passionate about parks in all the communities in the city ... And when things aren’t right, people notice it,” he said.



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