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October 25, 2021

IE25.10 -- Centennial Park Master Plan

Infrastructure and Environment Committee (IEC)
100 Queen Street West
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

Dear Members of IEC,

I am writing on behalf of Midweek Cycling Club, a non-profit affiliated with the Ontario Cycling Association (OCA), the Provincial Sport Organization (PSO) for the sport of cycling in the province. Midweek has been organizing bike races in Toronto and the GTHA for over twenty years, working with municipal partners to create safe, fun events promoting physical and mental health.

Centennial Park has been an important venue for the discipline of cyclo-cross, a crowd-friendly hybrid of mountain biking and road biking that rewards bike handling over raw speed, since the late 1990s. In particular the Centennial Park hill, belovedly known in the racing community as “Mt Garbage” (as much for the feelings of nausea riding up it induces as for its origins), is a key feature in these events. **Two weekends ago Midweek helped host the first sanctioned bike race in Toronto since the pandemic at Centennial Park, challenging over 250 competitors on a 3 km circuit up, down, and around the hill.** In a normal year, Midweek would also run 8-10 weeks of cyclo-cross programming at Centennial Park including learn-to-race lessons led by experienced coaches for youth and adults. We look forward to returning in 2022 and beyond.

The proposed improvements to park facilities in the Master Plan for cycling as transportation are welcome, but **we urge you to continue to engage with stakeholders to ensure Centennial Park remains a venue that welcomes cycling as sport and recreation.** Without explicit reference to our sport in the Master Plan, we are concerned about the prospect of losing one of the few parks in Toronto that still allows these kinds of cycling events. With a global “bike boom”, we should be growing, not contracting, the sport, and working to make it more accessible to younger and more diverse communities.

Park use in Toronto for cycling events and bike races has been declining over the past decade. A [Globe and Mail article from 2011](#) outlines the decline, and if anything it has only gotten worse. Even before the pandemic permits were increasingly difficult to secure with no clear rhyme or reason to organizers. Organizers often have to rely on the angel support of individual councillors, like Councillor Holyday for Centennial Park & Councillor Layton for Christie Pits for cyclo-cross, and Councillor Bradford for Dentonia Park youth grasstrack, rather than a guiding vision from the Parks Department or Council as a whole. As a consequence more events continue to be pushed outside the city.

Organizers like Midweek look forward to working with staff and Council to keep existing venues like Centennial Park, and find opportunities to bring more cycling events to our city.

Best regards,

Michael Longfield, President, Midweek Cycling Club

cc: Stephen Holyday, Councillor Ward 2 Etobicoke Centre
Janie Romoff, General Manager, Parks, Forestry & Recreation
Michael Suraci, Interim CEO, Ontario Cycling Association
Matthew Jeffries, Executive Director, Cycling Canada