

Clause embodied in Report No. 10 of the Economic Development and Parks Committee, as adopted by the Council of the City of Toronto at its meeting held on November 6, 7 and 8, 2001.

10**Parkland Acquisition Strategic
Directions Report (All Wards)**

(City Council on November 6, 7 and 8, 2001, amended this Clause by inserting in Recommendation No. (2) embodied in the report dated September 27, 2001, from the Commissioner of Economic Development, Culture and Tourism, as embodied in the Clause, after the words "Community Councils", the words "and the Planning and Transportation Committee", so that such recommendation shall now read as follows:

"(2) the Parkland Acquisition Strategic Directions Report be forwarded to Community Councils and the Planning and Transportation Committee for their consideration and report back to the January 21, 2002 meeting of Economic Development and Parks Committee;".)

The Economic Development and Parks Committee recommends the adoption of the report (September 27, 2001) from the Commissioner of Economic Development, Culture and Tourism.

The Economic Development and Parks Committee reports, for the information of Council, having requested the Commissioner of Urban Development Services to report to the Economic Development and Parks Committee, on what strategies would be included in the City's new Official Plan to attempt to achieve an acceptable parkland standard in the areas of the City which are both deficient in parkland and experiencing significant population growth.

The Economic Development and Parks Committee submits the following report (September 27, 2001) from the Commissioner of Economic Development, Culture and Tourism:

Purpose:

To present the Parkland Acquisition Strategic Directions Report as a general framework and approach to establish parkland acquisition directions, identify priority areas and themes and provide a basis to guide more detailed parkland acquisition planning.

Financial Implications and Impact Statement:

There are no financial implications resulting from the adoption of this report.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that:

- (1) the Parkland Acquisition Strategic Directions Report (Attachment No. 1) be adopted;
- (2) the Parkland Acquisition Strategic Directions Report be forwarded to Community Councils for their consideration and report back to the January 21, 2001 meeting of Economic Development and Parks Committee; and
- (3) the appropriate City officials be authorized and directed to take the necessary action to give effect thereto.

Background:

At its meeting of June 7, 8, and 9, 2000, Council dealt with a report on “Official Plan Policy Approach to Parkland Adequacy” which indicated that staff would bring forward a parkland acquisition strategy report.

Comments:

Toronto has a well-established and well-regarded parks system that plays a vital role in the quality of life enjoyed by the City’s residents, workers and visitors. The parks system provides important open spaces and recreational opportunities at both the neighbourhood level and the broader city level. This report outlines key directions and priorities that will help the City focus its parkland acquisition efforts to meet both ongoing and long term requirements.

The Parkland Acquisition Strategic Directions Report (Attachment No. 1) is an initial step in developing parkland acquisition priorities for Toronto. It provides an outlook for parkland acquisition from a City-wide perspective, develops broad parks acquisition objectives and identifies a number of priority actions to pursue. As such it provides a general framework and a point of departure for more detailed planning that is required to identify specific parkland requirements.

It should be emphasized that the Parkland Acquisition Strategic Directions Report (PAS Directions Report) is not intended to be a parks plan for the City. It is, however, timely at this stage in the planning for Toronto’s future to identify general directions and priorities for parkland acquisition, as part of the ongoing process of planning for the successful growth and redevelopment of the City.

It is also important to keep in mind that there are several planning exercises for the City, either recently completed or underway, that will have implications for parks and parkland acquisition in the City. These range from high-level corporate and statutory plans that define the City’s general directions (e.g., the City’s Strategic Plan, the Environment Plan, the new Official Plan) to more focused strategies and plans which help define service objectives and priorities that will affect parkland acquisition (such as the Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan, the Culture Plan, the Toronto Bike Plan).

Furthermore, while land acquisition is an important consideration for the future of Toronto's parks system, it is only one aspect of building and maintaining a quality parks system. Ensuring quality parks, especially in a large city like Toronto, is achieved through many means such as landscaping, facility development, proper maintenance and community stewardship.

Before turning to the PAS Directions Report itself, it is important to consider several fundamental aspects of the City's parks system and the City's population growth and development aspirations, as these both play an important role in defining parkland acquisition directions for the future.

What we are building on -- Toronto's parks system

Parks, along with related greenspaces, have long been important in defining Toronto's overall form and in contributing to the quality of neighbourhoods throughout the City. Toronto's parks system is, in a word, diverse, including small downtown parkettes, neighbourhood parks with playgrounds and informal play areas, sportsfield complexes, valleylands, garden parks and historical sites.

Toronto's parks range in size and character and the opportunities and benefits they provide. For purposes of analysis, parkland can be viewed in two main functional categories: (1) local parklands that primarily function to meet neighbourhood and community level needs for parks and (2) City-wide parklands oriented to district and regional purposes. These high-level distinctions are abstract, however, they help keep in mind the need to plan for balance in the overall parks system to meet both local and City-wide needs.

While Toronto's overall level of parkland provision (3.0 hectares per 1,000 people) may be considered good for a city of Toronto's size, a closer look reveals varying levels of provision across the City. Toronto's parks system has grown with the City over the past two centuries, resulting in a pattern of parkland provision that reflects the City's diverse urban form. In general, per capita parkland provision levels are lowest in the older, highly built-up areas of the City and in the higher density residential areas. Higher provision levels typically occur in the City's post-war suburban areas, where more abundant parklands were typically included as part of residential subdivisions.

Areas with low levels of parkland provision are a potential concern, particularly in those areas of the City experiencing significant population growth as a result of changing land use. There is also the on-going need to acquire land in support of City-wide purposes, such as the extension of the City's well-established system of major trails or to support natural and cultural heritage objectives.

Where we are headed – Toronto's future directions

The new Official Plan process is an important part of building a collective vision for the future of Toronto. The emerging Official Plan focuses on enhancing the City by supporting and investing in a high quality urban environment and taking advantage of Toronto's development capacity to grow. Toronto is at the threshold of establishing directions that will affect the City for many years to come.

A key question being asked in the Official Plan process is “how will we grow?”. The Toronto Plan Directions Report includes a population forecast for an additional 540,000 people over the next 30 years and approximately the same number of jobs over the same time period. The Toronto Plan Directions Report also suggests going beyond those growth forecasts to a more ambitious growth target for the City – as many as a million more residents in the next 30 years.

A more intensely developed Toronto is considered a general civic goal that will benefit the City and Region. Growth and intensification will, of course, place greater demands on municipal services such as parks, and these will have to be addressed through a diversity of programs. The prospect of significant population growth and development is, therefore, a fundamental consideration in developing strategic directions for parkland acquisition.

The emerging Official Plan approach to encouraging and managing growth (e.g., Areas of Major Change, Gradual Change Areas and Stable Areas) recognizes that different areas of the City provide different opportunities for growth. With respect to parks, each of these areas provide different opportunities to acquire parkland (e.g., areas undergoing major physical change may have more available land to develop as parkland than incremental change areas).

As a largely built-up area, growth within Toronto over the next 30 years will be very different than the growth that occurred in the past 50 years, when large areas of the City were converted to urban and suburban uses. The opportunities for parkland acquisition to keep up with growth are different at this point in Toronto’s development. Achieving or maintaining acceptable levels of parkland provision will, therefore, be a key consideration in planning for the future of the parks and open space system.

Overview and Key Points of the PAS Directions Report

The Parkland Acquisition Strategic Directions Report sets out a course of action to help ensure a diverse, and high quality parks and open space system for Toronto that balances local and City-wide needs and functions. The strategy is an initial step that outlines parkland acquisition objectives and opportunities and identifies priority areas and themes for further assessment.

The PAS Directions Report builds upon contextual information on Toronto’s parks and open space system, sets out parkland acquisition objectives and opportunities, and identifies priority areas for further assessment.

Priority areas and gaps related to the ‘local’, ‘district’ and ‘City’ parkland systems are identified. Where relevant, the findings have been discussed with respect to the three lenses for understanding the city (i.e., Areas of Major Change, Areas of Gradual Change, Stable Areas) as set out in the Toronto Plan Directions Report. Initial findings indicate:

Ten ‘local’ parkland priority areas. These areas are generally located in ‘Major Change’ areas and areas that have several ‘Areas of Gradual Change’.

Two ‘district’ parkland priority areas. These areas are generally large and overlap several identified ‘local’ priority areas. They occupy all three ‘lense’ types.

Major themes to pursue in achieving a better City-wide system, including gaps within the valley and waterfront systems and opportunities within hydro and rail corridors.

In terms of overall approach, the PAS Directions Report recommends that acquisition planning proceed on the basis of assessing communities within the City at a more detailed level, starting with those areas of the City identified as priority areas. Over time, all areas of the City should also be assessed in similar detail. At this point, however, proceeding with the identified priority areas and themes allows planning resources to be focused on those areas of the City that are under greatest apparent need or undergoing physical change.

A central premise of the PAS Directions Report is that creative solutions will be required to meet the increasing demand for parks and park amenities in a growing Toronto. These solutions should be based on more in-depth understanding of individual communities and their parks and open spaces. In essence, different neighbourhoods and communities will have different needs, opportunities and priorities for parkland, as influenced by many factors. To help assess parkland acquisition requirements and priorities more consistently across a diverse City, the strategy proposes the use of key variables (parkland provision, open space characteristics, urban form characteristics).

As well as outlining the need to do more detailed planning for acquisition at the community level, the PAS Directions Report acknowledges that a number of planning initiatives (such as the Official Plan) are still underway and that these will influence parkland acquisition. There is also the need to complete work on long term planning for recreation facilities that will help identify land requirements for additional facilities (e.g., district-level facilities).

The PAS Directions Report recognizes the importance of City-wide parks to Toronto, particularly opportunities to achieve trail connections and other green links. Toronto's valley lands and waterfront are well-established components of this system, however, other building blocks such as linear parks, utility corridors, streetscapes and abandoned railway corridors will take on additional significance as the City grows. Achieving these connected systems requires a long term view and commitment, however, the variety of benefits they provide justify the effort. Improving connections within the overall parks and open space system and with other elements of the City improves access to existing parks and amenities, which helps achieve greater use and efficiency of those resources.

The PAS Directions Report also recognizes that the City and other agencies have a number of policies, programs and powers that are relevant to the protection and acquisition of open spaces in the City. The protection of natural heritage resources on private lands, for example, may be achieved through policy measures, avoiding the need to acquire and maintain such lands as part of the parks system.

Parkland Acquisition in a Changing City

As outlined in the previous section, the PAS Directions Report identifies a number of diverse factors that influence how Toronto's parks system needs to grow. Among those to consider are several which merit some additional emphasis in presenting the PAS Directions Report. These pertain mainly to the implications of projected growth and anticipated physical change within the City's planning horizon.

The PAS Directions Report anticipates additional requirements on the parkland system over the next few decades to meet existing needs and anticipated growth. The amount of projected growth will, unless accompanied by parkland acquisition, tend to reduce existing per capita parkland provision levels. This is a particular concern in areas of the City that currently experience low levels of parkland provision. While the projected population growth may occur gradually or be considered a long term scenario, it is important, nevertheless, to ensure parkland requirements are part of community building. This includes ensuring that adequate levels and types of parkland are planned and built into new and transforming communities, keeping in mind that community needs for parkland can vary dramatically over time.

In a built up city, there are challenges to maintaining existing provision levels in the face of growth, let alone improve them. This is particularly relevant with respect to Toronto's proposed development goals and the desire to focus and encourage that growth within the City while maintaining an emphasis on quality of life.

A more equitable distribution of parkland in the City is an important goal, however, that is not to suggest that parkland provision can, or should be, evened out across the City. There is the need to recognize the practical limits to parkland provision in a mature, built-up city. Land values and other factors, such as the desire for compact urban form, suggest that maintaining the City's current levels of parkland provision across the City would be prohibitive.

Parklands are not the only resource to consider in meeting community needs, as there are other open space resources that can augment parkland provision in the City. The PAS Directions Report acknowledges that Toronto has a diversity of other public and private open spaces that supplement and offset parkland requirements (e.g., trails, sports fields and allotment gardens in hydro corridor lands).

There will, of course, be limitations to the use of other open spaces for parks purposes. For example, parks are typically secondary uses on these lands and, therefore, there may be constraints on securing public use for reasons of access, safety, tenure or cost. Nonetheless, other open spaces can, depending on their size and character, augment the role of parkland and help mitigate limited parkland provision. Other open spaces, therefore, have an increasing importance in an intensifying City where multiple use of land is considered desirable. While these other open space resources are not substitutes for parklands, the PAS Directions Report acknowledges the need to take them into consideration.

Overall, a key challenge in setting out acquisition directions for an intensifying Toronto is to ensure that parkland requirements and priorities are identified in response to the City's diverse urban form and the presence of other open spaces available to the community.

Next steps

The PAS Directions Report is an initial step in developing a comprehensive parkland acquisition strategy that fits with emerging City and Corporate directions. The PAS Directions Report is intended to advance the development of a framework to support acquisition decisions.

Although there are a number of in-progress initiatives that will continue to shape and influence parkland acquisition planning, the recommended course of action is intended to allow the City to move forward while accommodating emerging municipal initiatives as they arise.

A key emphasis of this report is that parkland acquisition will continue to be pursued through the development review process, which allows a number of objectives to be achieved on a continuing basis while other steps are implemented in the immediate and short term.

The recommended next steps (set out in more detail in the PAS Directions Report) outline a course of action to guide future parkland acquisition initiatives within a dynamic municipal context.

The immediate priorities to pursue are:

- (1) developing parkland acquisition principles that will provide a decision-making framework for maintaining and building the parks and open space system; and
- (2) conducting detailed assessments of identified priority areas to establish parkland acquisition requirements (i.e., parkland service levels).

The short term priorities are:

- (1) developing a direct acquisition program based on the parkland acquisition objectives and principles as well as the results of the detailed assessments of the parkland priority areas;
- (2) developing design guidelines and standards for parkland quality; and
- (3) developing policies and practices to pursue municipal initiatives as well as partnerships with relevant private and public bodies.

Other on-going priority activities related to parkland acquisition are:

- (1) participation in the development review and other planning processes to ensure that parkland acquisition and enhancement opportunities are achieved on an on-going basis;
- (2) updating and implementing the acquisition planning framework to reflect emerging initiatives; and
- (3) continue to develop a GIS system to monitor relevant parkland assets and opportunities.

Conclusion:

Parks are a vital resource in achieving the quality of life desired in Toronto, at both the neighbourhood and City-wide levels. The Parkland Acquisition Strategic Directions Report will help the City focus its parkland acquisition directions and priorities in view of on-going needs and the City's emerging growth and redevelopment objectives.

Contact Name:

Mr. Frank Kershaw, Director Policy and Development, Telephone: 416 392-8199,
Fax: 416-395-0278, e-mail: fkershaw@city.toronto.on.ca.

Mr. Frank Kershaw, Director, Policy and Development Division, Economic Development, Culture and Tourism, gave a presentation on the Parkland Acquisition Strategic Directions Report.

(A copy of Attachment No. 1, entitled "Parkland Acquisition Strategic Directions Report - September 2001", referred to in the foregoing report was forwarded to all Members of Council with the October 22, 2001 agenda of the Economic Development and Parks Committee and a copy thereof is on file in the office of the City Clerk.)