

Consolidated Clause in Economic Development and Parks Committee Report 5, which was considered by City Council on July 20, 21 and 22, 2004.

2**Toronto Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan
Our Common Grounds (All Wards)**

City Council on July 20, 21 and 22, 2004, amended this Clause by:

- (1) *adding to Recommendation (28)(c) contained in Attachment 1, entitled “Our Common Grounds: Toronto Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan”, the words, “and access to ice time in Toronto rinks”, so that Recommendation (28)(c) shall now read as follows:*

“(c) more female programming, to level the gender playing field in sport and recreation, including dance, female-only sports and workshops, and access to ice time in Toronto rinks;”; and

- (2) *adding the following:*

“That:

- (a) *the Commissioner of Economic Development, Culture and Tourism be requested to consult with Ward Councillors and report to the Economic Development and Parks Committee on:*

(i) *existing garbage collection in parks; and*

(ii) *options for ensuring the provision of a higher quality service; and*

- (b) *the Commissioner of Economic Development, Culture and Tourism, in consultation with the Acting Medical Officer of Health, be requested to report to the Economic Development and Parks Committee, in September 2004, on the feasibility of creating a reasonably-priced, fixed-cost, ‘healthy recovery’ monthly program pass for survivors of serious illnesses, such as cancer, heart disease, stroke and HIV.”*

This Clause, as amended, was adopted by City Council.

The Economic Development and Parks Committee recommends that City Council adopt the following staff recommendations in the Recommendations Section of the report (June 28, 2004) from the Commissioner of Economic Development, Culture and Tourism:

“It is recommended that:

(A) Our Common Grounds: Toronto Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan be adopted (Attachment 1);

(Recommendations contained in Attachment 1)

- (1) an Urban Forestry Management Plan be implemented over the next 10 years to create the framework to increase Toronto’s current tree canopy coverage of 17 percent to 30 to 40 percent;**
- (2) annual tree planting be increased by 16,000 trees per year;**
- (3) the average lifespan of our sidewalk trees be increased from five to 20 years by improving tree planting conditions; City to coordinate with other municipal departments to ensure soil and water conditions are adequate and secured;**
- (4) a permanent interdepartmental Tree Committee be established to coordinate the extension of the greenscape and management of the urban forest; such Committee to include representatives from Urban Development Services, Parks and Recreation and Works and Emergency Services;**
- (5) an ecological restoration and preservation program be implemented for natural and environmentally sensitive lands that supports the Natural Heritage Strategy and the Parkland Naturalization Program; the program to include: erosion protection through the planting of native trees, shrubs, flowers and grasses; elimination of unsafe pathways by converting them to sustainable natural trails for hiking and mountain biking; and control of destructive invasive species;**
- (6) an Eco-Fan Club be established to engage and educate the public; to include: interpretive signs; tours; outreach to schools and community groups; promotion of volunteerism in the protection of natural areas; support for special events like clean-up days and Trees Across Toronto; partnership with Toronto’s natural environment groups; and be related to the protection of unique aspects of Toronto’s ecosystem;**
- (7) the nature with technology be improved through the roll-out of mobile computers so staff can keep track of the urban forest;**
- (8) the forestry service order backlog be reduced to three to six months to properly sustain the existing trees in streets and parks;**
- (9) the protection of public parks as everyone’s front yard be promoted;**

- (10) a Parks Renaissance Program be implemented, to be phased in over five years; such Program to include:**

 - (a) Turf Improvement: cutting grass eight more times per year; seeding, top dressing and fertilization; aeration; irrigation system installation; and integrated pest management in every park;**
 - (b) Our Uncommon Gardens: renovating existing garden beds; enhancing City Hall's and other significant municipal buildings' displays; reinventing our feature gardens; and adding new beds over five years;**
 - (c) Heal the Eyesores: clean up graffiti; fix the broken windows, benches, field houses, picnic tables, benches, playgrounds and pathways;**
 - (d) Pick It Up: continue installation of new environmentally friendly garbage cans for waste collection and recycling, with resources to empty them, and educate the community about their proper use; and**
 - (e) Keep It Running: replace worn forestry vehicles, grass cutting and other equipment as required to maintain service, and worn park furnishings and amenities;**
- (11) the City lead in implementing 'green action' through organizing the work of parks volunteers to ensure community engagement;**
- (12) a new Dog-and-People In Parks strategy be developed;**
- (13) a World Parks Program be developed to celebrate Toronto's cultural diversity through the redesign of our parks; plan to remake eight parks per year with multicultural themes, phased in over five years;**
- (14) a Parks Master Plan be prepared for spring 2005 to guide the renaissance of City parks and trails across the City; the City has great landscape designers and they should let them shine;**
- (15) a Trailblazers Program be instituted involving improvement and expansion of the City's trail system; the provision of interpretive and directional signage, guidance for users with a disability; and appropriate lighting, for the pleasure and safety of trail and park users;**
- (16) a Park Ranger Program be created with rangers in every Ward to promote and protect Toronto's green assets; a defining aspect of the City for tourists and residents;**
- (17) a Life Gardens Program be implemented to promote gardening as a healthy activity which brings forth bounty and beautifies the City; components to include: year round children's gardens, and support for community gardens and related programming in City parks and conservatories across Toronto;**

- (18) a ParksArt Program be created with Toronto Culture involving artful horticulture in parks as part of the Public Art Program;**
- (19) a professional gardener certificate program be initiated through community gardens and greenhouses, aimed at disadvantaged youth;**
- (20) a Natural Areas, Forestry and Parks Apprenticeship Program and a Youth Interpretive Program be pioneered; hire 60 students per year to educate youth on careers in these areas and to raise awareness of the vital importance of nature;**
- (21) the Facility Renewal Program (a component of the Facilities Master Plan and Pool Provision Strategy) be implemented which should increase the capital maintenance budget by at least \$40 million a year, or one percent of insured value, for 10 years; this will address the maintenance backlog;**
- (22) preventative maintenance be implemented to ensure the City centres are clean, welcoming and comfortable again; lack of preventative maintenance is increasing the City's capital cost and the buildings are showing their age;**
- (23) the goals of the Environmental Plan be advanced by implementing conservation and waste diversion in City buildings;**
- (24) a Sport Strategy Framework be prepared, in partnership with the Toronto Sport Council, for spring 2005 which identifies the critical role that sport can play in City building; the plan to:**
 - (a) identify regional facilities and field requirement priorities to increase sport opportunities for all participants from grass roots to elite athletes;**
 - (b) set a foundation for working with other sport and recreation agencies to ensure that participants have maximum opportunities to learn, participate, train, compete, at all stages of the playground-to-podium continuum;**
 - (c) identify means to increase leadership capacity in sport by providing youth with opportunities to learn sports event management and coaching;**
 - (d) establish levels of achievement for sports instruction programs offered by Parks and Recreation;**
- (25) City standards be set for sport delivery, permits, and recreational facilities' equipment and supplies offered by Parks and Recreation;**

- (26) priority be placed on sports field development; increase the number of sports fields by 10 percent, including artificial turf surfaces;**
- (27) the City work with the Toronto Waterfront Revitalization Corporation and Parc Downsview Park to ensure that active recreation opportunities are included in their development plans;**
- (28) the Youth Recreation Strategy—Investing In Our Youth be implemented following the philosophy of youth-for-youth; such Strategy to include:**
 - (a) increased sport opportunities across the City to increase physical activity, teamwork, and skill building;**
 - (b) enhanced urban programming for youth;**
 - (c) more female programming, to level the gender playing field in sport and recreation, including dance, female-only sports and workshops; and**
 - (d) youth empowerment and mentorship opportunities, encouraging youth to assume leadership roles in community centres and community volunteer projects;**
- (29) the Parks and Recreation Division lower its hiring age from 16 to 14 for some positions, provided youth have completed the Leadership Training program;**
- (30) the Youth Outreach Program be expanded to reach out to new immigrants; youth should be hired to explain the programs to newcomers and invite them to use them;**
- (31) the City ensure that adequate facilities are available in communities with large populations but few recreational opportunities by renting extra space specifically for youth programs;**
- (32) day-time drop-in and recreation opportunities be provided for homeless and out-of-school youth to build their self-esteem and connection with the community;**
- (33) the City ensure that each centre has a least one unstructured but supervised after-school drop-in program for youth;**
- (34) physical activity opportunities and leader-in-training programs be provided in each district, in partnership with other agencies, for youth with a disability or special needs;**
- (35) youth councils be established for all community centres so that youth have their say;**

- (36) the City seek support and finalize the Seniors Recreation Strategy with the Seniors' Round Table;**
- (37) the number of physically active Torontonians be increased 10 percent by 2010 and 20 percent by 2020;**
- (38) the Children's Recreation Strategy be fully implemented;**
- (39) the number of children registered in programs be increased by 20 percent by 2020;**
- (40) new Canadians be provided, especially those from warm climates, opportunities to learn and play Canadian winter sports;**
- (41) all children in Toronto be ensured that they have the opportunity to learn to swim;**
- (42) the Commissioner of Economic Development, Culture and Tourism be requested to report by spring 2005 on options for free programs for children and youth;**
- (43) a capital plan be developed by spring 2005 to retrofit facilities for use by people with disabilities that is based on the requirements of the *Ontarians With Disabilities Act*;**
- (44) staff at all levels reflect the diversity of all the communities the City serves, and invest in staff training to achieve a welcoming environment for all;**
- (45) capacity to improve community recreational development and citizen engagement be increased;**
- (46) the programs, services and benefits of recreation across the City be promoted; building public awareness requires a broad effort;**
- (47) Parks and Recreation be the coach for the whole City; the City needs to demonstrate the value of lifelong activity through the use of City parks, trails, and community centres;**
- (48) a Stakeholder Engagement Plan be created to guide, recognize and celebrate volunteers, advisory councils, partners and advocates;**
- (49) the Mayor's Community Safety Neighbourhood Plan be supported through the increased use of multi-service-multi-agency program delivery methods in high risk neighbourhoods;**
- (50) Parks and Recreation Division budgets be calculated with due regard to costs avoided, both now and in the future, in other departments and by other levels of government;**

- (51) **Parks and Recreation Division’s annual budget relate directly to the size of the assets maintained, and the numbers of Torontonians served; a measure of success be that both numbers grow in lockstep with the City’s population growth; and**
- (52) **the City of Toronto encourage other levels of government to invest in activities related to parks and recreation;**
- (B) **request the Commissioner of Economic Development, Culture and Tourism to present an implementation plan for the 52 recommendations, with financial implications, to the Economic Development and Parks Committee, prior to consideration of the 2005 Budget;**
- (C) **recognize the valuable contribution by residents and staff to ReActivate TO! The Parks and Recreation Organizational Review, and direct staff to proceed with the Stakeholder Engagement Plan that outlines how Parks and Recreation will integrate staff, community and stakeholder involvement on an ongoing basis, including CUPE Local 79, Toronto Civic Employees’ Union, Local 416 and COTAPSAI;**
- (D) **consider the strategic directions and consultation input in the implementation of the next steps of the organizational review; service plans, organizational design, stakeholder engagement plan, training and skills plan, and a three-year business plan, to be completed by year end;**
- (E) **forward the input from the public as a result of the consultation process to the Listening to Toronto process for consideration in the 2005 budget process; and**
- (F) **authorize and direct the appropriate City officials to take the necessary action to give effect thereto;**
- subject to:**
- (a) **amending Recommendation (A)20 to read as follows:**
- “A(20)(a) enter into discussion with Toronto Civic Employees’ Union, Local 416 to develop forestry and park apprenticeships program agreements to raise awareness of career opportunities within Parks and Recreation; and**
- (b) undertake a program to educate students on careers in environmental related fields such as forestry, parks and naturalization;”;**
- (b) **the addition of a new Recommendation (A)53:**
- “(53) the City of Toronto work with the Toronto District School Board and the Toronto Catholic District School Board to achieve the objectives of ‘Our Common Ground’ especially those objectives for children and youth.”; and**

(c) amending Recommendation (B) by adding:

“the requested implementation plan take into consideration the recommendations brought forward by deputants at the July 5, 2004, Economic Development and Parks Committee meeting;”.

Purpose:

To obtain approval of the Toronto Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan - Our Common Grounds and confirmation of next steps for the organizational review, ReActivate TO!

Financial Implications and Impact Statement:

There are no immediate financial implications resulting from the adoption of this report. The Parks and Recreation Strategy sets objectives for increased investment in Parks and Recreation on the part of the City and suggests a variety of ways in which this investment can be funded. The Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan is meant to provide direction for the City leading to 2020 in three major areas: Environmental Stewardship, Child and Youth Development, Lifelong Active Living – sport and recreation. This plan also positively impacts the progress of other corporate objectives: Clean and Beautiful City, the Mayor’s Community Safety Plan, Environmental Plan, the Social Development Strategy, Call to Action on Physical Inactivity, Strong Neighbourhoods Task Force and further complements the City’s Official Plan.

The Commissioner of Economic Development, Culture and Tourism will report back within six months with a strategy that outlines the first phase of implementation of recommendations and associated budget impacts for the 2005 budget process.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that:

- (1) Our Common Grounds; Toronto Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan be approved (Attachment 1);
- (2) City Council direct the Commissioner of Economic Development, Culture and Tourism to present an implementation plan for the 52 recommendations, with financial implications, to the Economic Development and Parks Committee, prior to consideration of the 2005 Budget;
- (3) City Council recognize the valuable contribution by residents and staff to ReActivate TO! The Parks and Recreation Organizational Review, and direct staff to proceed with the Stakeholder Engagement Plan that outlines how Parks and Recreation will integrate staff, community and stakeholder involvement on an ongoing basis, including CUPE Local 79, Toronto Civic Employees’ Union, Local 416, and COTAPSAI;

- (4) strategic directions and consultation input be considered in the implementation of the next steps of the organizational review-service plans, organizational design, stakeholder engagement plan, training and skills plan, and three-year business plan, to be completed by year end;
- (5) input from the public as a result of the consultation process be forwarded to the Listening to Toronto process for consideration in the 2005 budget process; and
- (6) the appropriate City officials be authorized and directed to take necessary action to give effect thereto.

Background:

The strategic planning process began in 2001 and has most recently become an integral part of the Parks and Recreation Organizational Review with the initiation of ReActivate TO! At its meeting May 30, 31 and June 1, 2001, City Council adopted Clause 11 of Report 5 of The Economic Development and Parks Committee, a Terms of Reference for the Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan. Subsequently, City Council, at its March 2, 3 and 4, 2004 meeting, adopted the staff report "Framework for Aligning Strategic Goals and Service Levels with Organizational Review in the Parks and Recreation Division". This subsequent report outlined an approach that included the strategic planning process as the starting point for service plans, service priorities and organizational design. Phase three of the framework outlined a report back to the July 5, 2004 meeting of the Economic Development and Parks Committee on the summary of key findings from staff, stakeholder and public consultations and on the strategy.

Council approved the establishment of a Parks and Recreation Council Steering Committee comprised of Councillors Ashton, Lindsay Luby, Rae, Augimeri, and Hall. A Stakeholder Reference Group comprised of representative members from organizations associated with parks, forestry, recreation, sport, business, and community was also established.

Comments:

Consultation Process:

Toronto Parks and Recreation undertook considerable consultation with staff, stakeholders and members of the public in the development of its Strategic Plan. Two series of consultations were held: the first in 2002/03 and a more comprehensive process in spring 2004.

In March 2004, Toronto Parks and Recreation initiated ReActivate TO! an extensive consultation process to engage staff, stakeholders and public to contribute to an organizational review. In addition to the Council Steering Committee and the Stakeholders Reference Group, an internal project co-ordination staff team was established with representation from all levels of Parks and Recreation staff – frontline to General Manager, Directors of the two Economic Development, Culture and Tourism support divisions - Policy and Development and Administration and Support, CAO's Office, and representatives of CUPE Local 79, Toronto Civic Employees' Union, Local 416, and COTAPSAI. (Attachment 2).

The consultation process focused on outlining service priorities, service expectations and opportunities for service improvements. The process also provided input to the development of the final strategic plan *Our Common Grounds – Toronto Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan*.

Staff Consultation

Twenty-seven staff consultation sessions were held for Parks and Recreation Division part-time and full time staff from all units and functions of the Division. Three consultation sessions were held for Economic Development, Culture and Tourism staff and staff from other City Departments/Divisions. Parks and Recreation Staff were also sent surveys attached to their pay stubs. Many staff also submitted general comments, suggestions and ideas through e-mail and inter-office mail.

Public Consultation

Eight public consultation sessions took place in May and early June. Youth and Children made significant contributions at all of the sessions. Four additional sessions were also included for four important stakeholders - sport organizations, environmental groups and community centre advisory councils. Surveys were also distributed to the public via mail and also accessed and submitted online. Additional comments, suggestions and ideas were mailed in and e-mailed.

Consultation Method	Consultation Summary	Participants
Public Sessions 12 sessions City-wide facilitated small group discussions	8 public sessions – 2 per district 1 sporting organizations 1 advisory councils – community centres 1 youth only session 1 environmental organizations	632 (168 youth and 81 children)
Staff Sessions 30 sessions frontline staff facilitated small groups discussions	27 Parks and Recreation staff 1 EDCT divisions 1 CNS department 1 all City Departments and Divisions	689
Enviroics Poll	Randomly selected persons (see Consultation Report)	500
Re-Activate TO website	e-mails and comment sheet submissions	94
Surveys pay stub, on-line and publicly distributed surveys	Staff Surveys Submitted Public Surveys Submitted	436 625

Summary of Feedback from Public and Staff

Public input directly shaped the strategic plan and will also be applied to the development of service plans. A sense of urgency was prevalent during the discussions with the public especially around the condition of parks and the need to invest in our youth. The following reflects the most common comments and ideas from the Public Sessions:

- (i) citizens view Parks and Recreation as a key contributor to the quality of life of Toronto's communities and neighbourhoods;

- (ii) need to focus on parks and parks maintenance with priority to bring them into better shape – parks highly valued and want them treated like our ‘front lawn’;
- (iii) increased use of City parks and diversity of users – creating need for better park designs and user strategies – i.e., dogs, trails, roller sports, etc.;
- (iv) youth programming and employment opportunities for young people;
- (v) need for increased community responsiveness by programs, services and staff;
- (vi) unmet demand for sport fields, community centres, and arenas;
- (vii) quality of facilities and general state of good repair – impact on community enjoyment and utility;
- (viii) need to increase marketing, promotion and general awareness of services, locations and programs – need comprehensive outreach strategy; and
- (ix) seniors programs and increase in population that will be retired in the next 10 years present opportunities for volunteerism and mentorship with youth.

Staff comments and concerns were similar to the Public and also included:

- (i) need to increase training, and skills investment;
- (ii) lack of identity – uniforms and signage;
- (iii) desire for better consistency in practice and service levels across City;
- (iv) concerns with perceptions of inequalities by geography;
- (v) need to improve communications with frontline staff; and
- (vi) morale - need to feel valued.

Attachment 3 contains a summary of both staff and public consultation sessions.

Service Review

In conjunction with the public and staff consultation process, a Service Review process was started. This process included four service teams in Parks, Urban Forestry, Recreation, and Facilities and Technical Services. An interim report outlining the current service levels and issues impacting service is attached. (Attachment 4)

This interim report provides essential background on service delivery issues facing the Division. There are no recommendations associated with the attached report. Recommendations will be developed later in 2004 once more detailed analysis of the input is completed.

Our Common Grounds

Toronto Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan Our Common Grounds recognizes the importance of quality of life as an indicator of a great City. The urban forest that surrounds us, the parks and public spaces that please and comfort us, the activities and skills that give participants a sense of

competency and joy of physicality - all contribute to building communities in Toronto and make it the best it can be. As the City has grown and evolved, the services and programs of Toronto Parks and Recreation must respond. We must adapt our capacity, our facilities, our programs, and our responsiveness to the changing dynamics of Toronto.

Over the three years of the strategic planning process and the organizational review process, a great many Toronto residents from all parts of the City took the time to contribute their thoughts and ideas about the services, programs and facilities provided by Parks and Recreation.

The extensive consultation process confirmed a number of key points:

- (1) that residents regard Toronto Parks and Recreation as critical to the quality of life in the City of Toronto;
- (2) that the three streams of the strategic plan; 1 - environmental stewardship; 2 - children and youth development; and 3 - lifelong active living among all Toronto residents, are appropriate; and
- (3) that there is a sense of urgency and priority from the public with respect to Parks and Recreation service priorities around parks maintenance and youth engagement.

Three Streams – Strategic Directions

The three main goals that will form the basis of the priorities and service plans from now to 2020 are Environmental Stewardship, Child and Youth Development and Lifelong Active Living.

Environmental stewardship is a priority for Parks and Recreation because with responsibility for 7,400 hectares of land, it is the single-largest manager of green space in Toronto; the Division is also custodian of most of the City's natural areas and many of its trees. Toronto Parks and Recreation will protect, preserve, and enhance the health of Toronto's environment through diligent care and maintenance of the City's green spaces, forests and built Parks and Recreation environments.

Child and Youth Development is a priority for Toronto Parks and Recreation since close to 70 percent of our registered participants are children and youth – (61 percent 0 to 12 years old and 9 percent youth). More importantly, our children and especially youth are physically inactive, face increased levels of poverty and need a focus during the critical after-school period. Parks and Recreation will demonstrate leadership in providing opportunities that support healthy child and youth development through recreational programs and employment opportunities.

Lifelong Active Living is a priority for Parks and Recreation because the City has a complex and challenging demographic profile to address if social development is to be achieved: a high proportion of socially vulnerable groups, growing diversity, high mobility, an ageing population, income polarization and concentrations of risk and social vulnerability. Further, Parks and Recreation will provide leadership in getting Torontonians regularly active. Nearly 60 percent of Torontonians aged 12 and older are physically inactive – we are the most out of shape City in

Ontario. Parks and Recreation has the facilities, programs, parks, trails and confidence to engage Torontonians to become physically active. The longer-term payoff will significantly reduce health care costs.

Setting Targets – Toward 2020

The following key targets are being recommended to guide the achievement of the three goals and can be achieved following implementation of many of the recommendations:

<p>Environmental Stewardship Extend our tree canopy from its current 17 percent to 30 - 40 percent of the City. Ensure more than 80 percent of our park visitors are very satisfied. Engage in active stewardship of 100 percent of naturalized areas.</p>
<p>Child and Youth Development Achieve a 20 percent increase in the number of children participating in registered programs. Achieve a 40 percent increase in the numbers of youth participating in programs.</p>
<p>Lifelong Active Living Achieve a 20 percent increase in physical activity by the City's population -- by 2020. Achieve a 40 percent increase in seniors participating in programs by 2010. Achieve a 1,000 percent increase in persons with a disability enrolled in programs over five years.</p>

Our Common Grounds addresses the comments from the public and staff and incorporates the achievement of the three strategic goals through its 52 recommendations. The strategy sets the direction for subsequent activity on organizational design and the analysis of the information gathered through the Services Review process and also sets the stage for healthy collaboration with our unions, stakeholders, other City departments, senior levels of government and the citizens of Toronto.

Bold Moves on Our Common Grounds

Our Common Grounds shows how we can make some bold moves and meet the public's expectations for a safe, clean and beautiful City:

- implement a Parks Renaissance Program – Five-year Plan for revitalizing the maintenance, safety, and beauty of the City's front lawns – the greenest part of our city;
- create a Park Ranger Program - rangers in every ward who will promote and protect Toronto's green assets - a defining aspect of the City for tourists and residents;
- create a ParksArt Program with Toronto Culture Division;
- implement the Facility Renewal Program - increase the capital maintenance budget by at least \$40 million a year;
- prepare a Sport Strategy Framework in partnership with the Toronto Sports Council for spring 2005 - identifies the critical role that sport can play in City building;

- implement the Youth Recreation Strategy - Investing In Our Youth - following the philosophy of youth-for-youth;
- Parks and Recreation should lower its hiring age from 16 to 14, where possible – allow younger youth to develop leadership skills; and
- options for free programs - Council should direct Parks and Recreation to investigate and report by spring 2005.

The recommendations found in Attachment 1 build on the other key City policy documents, including the Council Strategic Plan, Official Plan, the Clean and Beautiful City, Mayor's Panel on Community Safety, the Environmental Plan, the Culture Plan, the Social Development Strategy and the Call to Action on Physical Inactivity.

Conclusions:

The Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan Our Common Grounds will lead to a revitalization of the City's parks, urban forestry and recreation programs and services. This revitalization will contribute greatly to Toronto's quality of life for everyone who lives here, works here and visits here.

Enhancing the beauty of our common grounds requires more than just resources but also an increased focus on partnerships and community engagement. The financial squeeze brought on by the downloading of responsibilities from the Provincial government, together with the City's dependence on the property tax has resulted in long-term impacts. There has been a negative impact to our quality of place due to the cost cutting decisions of the past 10 years and on our capacity to maintain the quality of life Torontonians desire. Much like the Culture Plan the costs to finance and invest in the City's quality of life will require support from senior levels of government, new financial tools, innovative partnerships and new ways of doing business.

Our Common Grounds sets the direction for the City's Parks and Recreation priorities from now to 2020. The Commissioner of Economic Development, Culture and Tourism will report back to Council in the fall 2004 with an implementation plan that outlines priorities for the next three to five years and the related costs.

The draft strategic plan has been presented to the Economic Development, Culture and Tourism Senior Management Team, the Executive Management Team of the City of Toronto as well as the Interdepartmental Policy Co-ordinating Team.

To reach its goals, the City of Toronto needs to ensure that Parks and Recreation is a strong front-line function that delivers high quality services that enhance the life of Toronto residents. This Strategic Plan sets out what we need to do to create a City-wide urban forest, envelop our neighbourhoods in a connected greenscape, renew our parks and encourage all Torontonians to live actively from childhood to their sunset years.

Parks and Recreation will initiate, welcome, coach and cheer for the Toronto of the future.

Contact Name :

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(Copies of Attachment 1, entitled “Our Common Ground: Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan, 2004”, Attachment 2, entitled “Membership List of the Council Steering Committee, Stakeholder Reference Group and the Parks and Recreation Project Co-ordinating Team, Attachment 3, entitled “What we heard: Comments from Staff and Toronto Residents”– Consultation Report and Attachment 4, entitled “The Service Review Interim Report, June 2004” referred to in the foregoing report were forwarded to all Members of Council with the July 5, 2004 agenda of the Economic Development and Parks Committee, and copies thereof are also on file in the office of the City Clerk.)

The Economic Development and Parks Committee also had before it during consideration of the foregoing matter a communication (June 30, 2004) from Councillor Brian Ashton, Chair, Economic Development and Parks Committee forwarding a communication (June 29, 2004) from the Honourable R. Roy McMurtry, Chief Justice of Ontario in support of the Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan, “Our Common Grounds”.

The following persons appeared before the Economic Development and Parks Committee in connection with the foregoing matter:

- Bruce Kidd, University of Toronto;
- Akosua Manso, African/Canadian Seniors Centre;
Velia Speranza, Italian Seniors Group, North Kipling Community Health Centre; and
Saadia Akram-Pall, Ethno Cultural Seniors Group;
- Jack Radecki, Executive Director, Ontario Urban Forest Council;
- Lewis Yeager, General Manager, Rouge Park; and filed a copy of his submission;
- Karen Pitre, Chair, Toronto Sports Council;
- Bill Alexander; and filed a copy of his submission;
- Laura Berman, Manager, Community Gardening Program;
- Joanne Kidd, Toronto Bay Initiative; and filed a copy of her submission;
- David Kidd, CUPE Local 79 and filed a communication (July 5, 2004) from Ann Dembinski, President, CUPE Local 79;
- Joy Kastanis;
- Dr. Tilly Chandulal (Dr. Tilly);
- Susan Antler, Executive Director, The Composting Council of Canada;
- Mel Plewes, Don Watershed Regeneration Council; and filed a copy of his submission
- Bill Guthrie, Toronto Civic Employees' Union, Local 416; and filed a copy of his submission;
- Paula Davies, Friends of the Don East; and filed a copy of her submission;
- Nathan Gilbert, Laidlaw Foundation; and filed a copy of his submission;

- Geoffrey J.R. Dyer, President, Toronto Botanical Garden;
- Denise Drago;
- John Wilson, President, Task Force to Bring Back the Don; and e-mailed his submission;
- Jean McClaren, Homewood Residents Association (Allan Gardens); and
- Philip van Wassenauer, Ontario Urban Forest Council.

**Our Common Grounds
Parks and Recreation
Strategic Plan 2004
City of Toronto**

Economic Development and Parks Committee

Mayor David Miller (ex officio)
Councillor Brian Ashton (chair)
Councillor Gloria Lindsay Luby (vice-chair)
Councillor Maria Augimeri
Councillor Mike Feldman
Councillor Suzan Hall
Councillor Peter Li Preti
Councillor Case Ootes
Councillor Kyle Rae

Joe Halstead
Commissioner
Economic Development,
Culture & Tourism

Brenda Librecz
General Manager
Toronto Parks and Recreation

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Our Mandate

In 1998, seven municipal governments were amalgamated to become the new City of Toronto—turning a modest city into the fifth largest in North America with a front row seat at the world stage. One regional and six local governments, each with its own history and style, were submerged inside the new corporation. To harmonize efforts, Council mandated a planning process to carry the city forward to 2010.

First, Council created the Strategic Plan.¹ Then, in 2003 the City Planning Division drafted an official plan to shape the next 30 years of growth.² The Official Plan is predicated on the belief that by 2030 Toronto will have a population of three million, (537,000 more residents and 544,000 more jobs than we have now), which can be accommodated gracefully if channeled appropriately. The Official Plan marks those areas where growth should intensify, where it should be moderately encouraged, those neighbourhoods that should remain essentially as they are now, and those places that need to be enhanced and protected.

Both strategy and plan envision Toronto as one of a few great world cities, battling for a leading place in the new globalized economy. Many economists believe that major urban centres—such as London, New York, Chicago, Tokyo, Seoul—are the world's real engines of growth. These cities are Toronto's new competitors. They are leaving behind the heavy industry that brought them to world prominence, marketing instead their citizens' skills and ideas, becoming what economist Richard Florida has called Creative Cities³. Toronto, with its concentrations of international achievers in biomedicine, finance, law, film and television, professional sport, publishing, theatre and music, and its fine institutions of higher learning, is right on the cusp of becoming such a city, one of those places where the future wealth of the world will be made.

To make the leap, we must hold on to our own best and brightest, while enticing the world's to join us. Creative people follow opportunities wherever they are, but choose most often to live and work in places which celebrate human diversity, in cities where the quality of life is best.⁴ Quality of life means parks, open space, vibrant cultural communities, strong architecture and fine schools. As Council has recognized, that puts Toronto in a great competitive position: cultural diversity and quality of life are Toronto's best features.

Perched on the edge of a great lake between historic rivers, Toronto's varied neighbourhoods were laid out under a leafy green canopy. It's no accident that Toronto is now home to people from almost every continent who speak more than 100 languages.⁵ We have become one of the most diverse places on earth while also retaining our unique physical character and identity. This is bedrock we can build on.

Toronto City Council's Strategic Plan and The Official Plan aim Toronto at a future shaped by the quality of our ideas. The Economic Development Strategy, the Culture Plan, the Social Development Strategy and the Environmental Plan set out particulars of how our civic aspirations may be achieved. All seek to break down barriers, to lift up the poor and eliminate distress, to reduce pollution, to make our streets both beautiful and intriguing, to energize our lives with the crackle of artistic excellence, to make Toronto a place where we can all enjoy health and civility.

Parks and Recreation will be a front line department in the development of Toronto's quality of life over the coming 15 years. We are responsible for our common grounds—the urban forest that enfolds us, the parks and public spaces that enliven us, the activities and skills that give our children their first thrills and triumphs. We have prepared several drafts of our ideas and presented them to stakeholders and individuals in the community over the past year.^{6, 7} The result is this Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan which sets out how, in our community centres, parks and natural places, we can make Toronto its best self.

Beginnings

First Parks, Then Programs

A river starts in a trickle of water welling up out of a rock face, or in the slow drip of melting ice in a mountain pass. Streams wind together, carrying leaf and branch and small living things, carving deep grooves across the landscape. A great city too starts small, gathering in all kinds of people from all sorts of places: a city shapes its setting, and is formed by it. The quality of life in the city, like the quality of the water in the river, is determined by the streams that feed it, and by the care its citizens take as stewards of the public sphere.

Modern Toronto started as the town of York in 1793. It was laid out close to a great body of water, edged by marshes thrashing with birds and fish, shaded by a magnificent Great Lakes forest, rumbled by ravines, streams, and winding rivers which had carried aboriginal traders for millennia. Within 50 years of its founding, the first settlers' descendents, and newcomers who'd escaped slavery and civil war to the south, tried to make it more beautiful by creating the first park—set out beside the Don River. Within 100 years, waves of immigrants from Europe were pouring off the trains, hoping to build a new life in a place of prosperity. They were welcomed, gingerly, into a formerly British colony. The newcomers were poor: they had different customs and beliefs. City Council hit upon a scheme to use recreation to assimilate them peacefully into the city. It created the first free organized recreation program—for boys only—in 1897.⁸

And so it was that Toronto embarked on 150 years of using parks and recreation to build social cohesion and soothe frazzled spirits. The Parks Division (now called the Parks and Recreation Division) took charge of the river of children flowing into Toronto, and then into communities like Weston, West Hill, Mimico, Leaside, and Willowdale and the changing landscape they called home.

With amalgamation in 1998, our responsibility burgeoned to encompass 7,365 hectares of common grounds including: 3,565 hectares of natural areas and open spaces; 1,470 large and small groomed parks; the canopy of green shading neighbourhoods, streets and parks; three conservatories; planted boulevards and horticultural displays throughout the city. We care for an urban forest of more than three million trees. We run programs out of 141 community centres and 131 swimming pools for everyone from babies to seniors, managing events, teaching sports, arts and crafts, grooming 839 sports fields, 756 tennis courts, 51 arenas, 126 ice pads, and even using spaces in churches, storefronts, public buildings, where community buildings aren't available. We run the ferries to and from the Toronto Islands. We keep golf courses and ski hills. We run day camps, and nature trails. We teach leadership skills to youth and hire them too, giving about 4,000⁹ young Torontonians a job every year, often their first and best. Our citizens dropped into our facilities 3.3 million times in 2003, and our programs garnered 448,000 registrations.

Most Torontonians spend happy times in our parks. Our surveys tell us that over 50 per cent of us go to the park at least once a week, and 340,000 visit every day.¹⁰ Parks and Recreation employs 1,576 permanent staff and 2,115 full-time equivalent employees who work on a part-time basis. In all, about 6,500 people work for Parks and Recreation on any given day.

As the keepers of our common grounds, Parks and Recreation staff is the welcoming face of the city.

The Creative City Begins with Health:

A Tale of Two Crises

Until the 1990s, with the exception of the Great Depression, Toronto always found the money to keep up our common grounds, our beautiful parks and natural areas. But after a hard recession at the beginning of the last decade, all levels of government entered a long period of budget cutting, forcing the City to let go thousands of talented people who'd made Toronto known as New York Run By The Swiss, or, The City That Works. Amalgamation was supposed to save money but as the City's responsibilities grew with downloading and side loading, finances shrank even more. The homeless overflowed from the shelters to the streets. They took up their posts on our splendid boulevards and parks, built tent cities, camped under bridges and in the ravines. For the first time, residents of the former City of Toronto had to pay for all recreational programs. Just at the time when we should have been paying most attention to building the future, we were struggling to manage our inheritance. Our parks succumbed to weeds, costly shrubs and trees died, exotic species invaded our natural areas. There was litter everywhere and everybody noticed.

But that wasn't the worst of it. In 2003 Toronto's Medical Officer of Health made it clear that parks and recreation are vital to city life. In her report titled "Call To Action" she declared that the health of Torontonians is endangered—by inactive lifestyles. Her report gathered together the work of many others who'd pointed out that two thirds of Toronto's residents don't do enough exercise to maintain health and stave off chronic illness, and that a plague of smog is making children and old people sick with respiratory diseases. Toronto residents' rates of physical activity are significantly lower than those in the rest of the country, and among the lowest of all the health units in the province. Toronto, the Medical Officer of Health found, also has the highest barriers to participation.¹¹

Over the last 50 years studies have shown conclusively that physically and socially active people are generally healthy, while the inactive are prone to stroke, hypertension, coronary heart disease, type 2 diabetes, colon cancer, breast cancer and osteoporosis.¹² We've known since the 1960s that exercise prevents and heals social ills as well as physical ones. Researchers have shown that children and youth who are introduced in their earliest years to sports and vigorous group play grow up to be adults who mingle happily with others—healthy adults and healthy seniors who have joy in their years.¹³

Inactivity is not just a Toronto problem: more than one third of Canada's children are overweight because they don't get enough vigorous exercise: more than one half of these kids are obese and at risk of life threatening, and life shortening diseases. But in the Medical Officer of Health's opinion, several factors make things worse in Toronto. "There is tremendous concern about the diminishing ability of Toronto's public institutions and service systems to reduce or eliminate barriers to physical activity. The shifting of responsibilities for public education and municipal service delivery, coupled with budget cuts and the amalgamation of large service systems...has resulted in reduced resources and opportunities for physical activity." In Toronto, the percentage of the inactive population increases with age until, by 65, more than 67 per cent of women and 55 per cent of men don't do enough exercise to maintain optimum health.¹⁴ This is more than a quality of life issue—inactivity is a matter of life and death.

Inactivity is tightly associated with poverty.¹⁵ In 1999, 32 per cent of Toronto's children lived in families earning less than the Low Income Cutoff.¹⁶ By 2001, things had improved, though 25 per cent of city residents still earned low incomes.¹⁷ Many of these families are led by single wage earners without post secondary educations. But recent immigrants are often poor too, even though the majority are extremely well educated. They arrive with few resources, isolated by barriers of language and custom, and it can take years before these families get on their economic feet. Little wonder, then, that immigrants have 50 per cent higher rates of inactivity than others in the city.¹⁸ People with a disability too are sometimes poor. About three per cent of Toronto's children, 10 per cent of adults and 40 per cent of seniors have a disability. Even though they should be active, and want to be, 27 per cent of Toronto's recreation facilities are over 40 years old, dating from a time when the needs of people with a disability were not met by government agencies.¹⁹

The poor flow from one side of the city to the other in search of jobs and affordable homes, but Toronto's Parks and Recreation centres don't move with them. The poor, and people with a disability, have less access to the facilities that all Torontonians are entitled to use, and that means they have fewer opportunities to take care of themselves.

The facts of these twin crises—low rates of physical activity and straitened financial circumstance—shaped our strategic plan. Studies of human development and behaviour show that our children need to be active to reach their full potential.²⁰ Our seniors need to keep moving to stay healthy: since we can expect more than 17 per cent of our population to be over 65 in five years, our economy depends on seniors staying healthy into their twilight years.²¹ Studies have shown conclusively that youth who are physically active benefit socially and academically, yet many of our youth disappear from our parks and recreation programs when they turn 12. Numerous task forces and summits have shown us what we must do²²—youth themselves have told us what to do. We must reengage with youth, listen to them, make programs that entice them, train them to lead, and hire them—so they will become healthy, productive adults.

Wise Priorities

It is instructive to note how many new civic programs have Parks and Recreation components. We do our share in 25 new initiatives.

- The Smog Alert Plan
- The West Nile Virus Response Plan
- The Pesticide Reduction Policy and By-law
- The Community Safety Plan
- The Seniors' Task Force
- The Children's Action Plan
- The Food and Hunger Action Committee
- The Task Force on Community Access and Equity
- The Environmental Plan
- The Economic Development Strategy
- The Parkland Acquisition Strategic Directions Report

- The Bike Plan
- The Social Development Strategy
- The Waste Diversion Task Force
- The Mayor's Strategy to Promote Safety for Toronto Youth
- The Alternative Service Delivery
- The Official Plan
- The Toronto Waterfront Revitalization Plan
- The Wet Weather Flow Management Master Plan
- The Ravine Protection By-law
- The Culture Plan
- The Water Efficiency Plan
- The Call to Action on Physical Activity
- The Clean and Beautiful City Initiative—Implementation Operational Plan
- The Five-Year Tourism Action Plan

Toronto's waterfront revitalization project calls for parks and open space initiatives that will require \$659 million over the next 30 years. Just keeping track of these commitments is a full-time job. The city is beset by challenges. So we have to set priorities.

The Strategy

To enhance quality of life in the city:

- Parks and Recreation must steward the environment around us.
- Parks and Recreation must promote and enhance the social and physical development of our children and particularly our youth.
- Parks and Recreation must lead the way to lifelong physical activity among all of Toronto's communities.

Vision, Mission, Values, Roles

Our Vision

Parks and Recreation's vision is that Toronto will become known as the City within a Park. Quality of life starts with health, but for most of us it is also about savouring beauty in all its forms—especially natural ones. What is more spectacular than a majestic maple tree in full leaf, or a chapel architecture of living green connecting road to neighbourhood and neighbourhood to park? Parks and Recreation's vision is that Toronto will incorporate new neighbourhoods along our broad thoroughfares, extending our urban forest until a continuous greenscape envelopes communities across the lakefront, and north to the Oak Ridges Moraine. Toronto's children and youth will be engaged in vigorous physical activity every day. Our seniors and people with a disability will be too. The majority of Torontonians will live active lives from their earliest days to their sunset years, connecting through Toronto's varied recreational facilities, its parks and pathways.

This fits well with City Council's direction. In 2002, Council declared its vision for Toronto: caring, friendly, clean, green, sustainable, creative, aimed to succeed in a global economy through investment in quality of life.²³

Our Mission

Parks and Recreation will bring all of Toronto's diverse communities together on our common grounds. We will provide a wide variety of leisure and recreational opportunities that welcome everyone. In our centres, parks and playing fields, we will help communities help themselves, and encourage all Torontonians to become the best they can be. We will measure our success by quality, satisfaction and community development outcomes. Our parks, playing fields and recreation centres, our trails, forests, meadows, marshes, and ravines, will be beautiful, clean, safe, and accessible, meeting all our communities' needs.

Our Values

Parks and Recreation values: inclusion; respect; diversity; health; innovation; openness; excellence.

Our programs and services will be welcoming and accessible. We will accommodate special needs, promote equity for all regardless of age, culture, ethnicity, language, gender or sexual orientation. We will create the kind of social climate in which everyone can flourish. We will use all available means to inform residents about programs and services and respond to needs and concerns in an open, forthright and timely manner. We will support and honour achievement.

Our Roles

Parks and Recreation staff will be:

Mentors: we will offer positive examples to all of the vital importance of active living.

Helpers: our programs will reach out to communities and assist in the formation of partnerships to solve problems.

Enablers: we will seek out those who might not know about what we have to offer and overcome all barriers to provide residents with positive recreational experiences.

Coaches: we will help individuals, teams, and communities reach their potential and provide the best research available about fitness, well-being and care of the environment.

Partners: we will encourage the active involvement of volunteers in parks and recreation. We will work with community groups, businesses, officials, unions, school boards, public agencies, non governmental organizations and individuals.

Entrepreneurs: we will secure necessary resources from all available sources including other levels of government, foundations, the private sector.

Stewards: we will manage the assets we have inherited so that they may be passed on in prime condition to our descendents.

Trailblazers: we will expand leadership training programs for staff and residents, acknowledge our innovators, and take our place again at the leading edge of municipal parks and recreation services in the world.

Growing the Green Canopy

A Forest Story: Circling Back to Nature

In 1793, Toronto's settlers found themselves in an overwhelming green world. Mrs. Simcoe's diaries speak eloquently of the sound of the wind sighing through 180 foot high white pines. The only clearings in the vast forest were oak savannahs, dotted by grasses, shrubs and wildflowers they'd never seen before. The settlers hacked and sawed their way through until, in less than 100 years, the forest was beaten back to the woodlots, hedgerows, marshes and ravines skirting the mouths of rivers and creeks. They tried to make the revealed landscape more familiar by planting trees and shrubs and flowers from home, species which soon escaped into the wild where many did very well, having no natural enemies.

Toronto's first parks were unnatural green spaces, but parts of the forest were managed too. For more than a thousand years, aboriginal peoples had used controlled burns to make small, fertile clearings for their shifting farms, leaving a different mix of tree and shrub behind as they moved on. Riverdale was Toronto's first park (1856) and the biggest, eventually covering 44 hectares. By 1900, it also included Toronto's zoo and main playing fields. Island Park, set out on a land given to the City by the Dominion government in 1867, was built on reclaimed marsh and shallow lagoons which were filled in with garbage and street sweepings and covered by fine sweeps of lawn. John G. Howard deeded 67 hectares of land to create High Park in 1873: the City didn't really want it because it was outside Toronto's boundary and inaccessible to most, but the City kept adding land until High Park swelled to 162 hectares. Howard wanted to keep it as forest, which suited the City because it had no money to do anything more. But it wasn't until 1909 that others began to say that Toronto's natural landscape was worth protecting. It was the Toronto Guild of Civic Art, a private group, which pushed this radical idea on a reluctant Council.²⁴

The Guild drew up a plan. Their idea was to make Toronto "not just a beautiful city, beautiful in a conventional way, after the model of some other city, but to bring out its own beauty. It is character in a town that makes the dwellers in it love it. Toronto should bring to the minds of those who live in it something which is lovely and pleasant in its own way; so that, when we have been away and are returning homewards, we may feel that, though it is good to see other cities we are glad to get back to Toronto."²⁵

Instead of adopting this plan, which would have started us down the path to being known as the City within a Park 100 years ago, City Council focused on acquiring land for small neighborhood parks and playgrounds. Parkland acquisition mainly went hand in glove with development—such as alongside the roads built to service private lands along the Humber, or through the ravines of Rosedale. The city was interested in a certain kind of natural beauty, but much more interested in infrastructure. And what good was a marsh in a city, other than to breed mosquitoes? So Ashbridges Bay, 520 hectares of marsh and sand and shallows, was turned into a port and industrial lands, destroying the largest wetland in eastern Canada, creating in its place the brown fields we will reclaim in the Waterfront Revitalization Project.²⁶

It wasn't until World War II that Torontonians decided it was important to save the green belt that still stretched from Niagara to the Oak Ridges Moraine. Toronto's 1943 Master Plan called for a conservation region in a kind of U that joined the Don and the Humber rivers and protected their streams. But it was the creation of Metropolitan Toronto in 1953 that permitted conservation park planning on a large scale. Metro established a 2,700 hectare park system built around Toronto's river valleys.²⁷ These regional parks were conceived as large, green oases, as extensive, natural green space, rather than intensively groomed parks. First Metro Parks Commissioner Tommy Thompson's idea was to preserve the natural, not reshape it. Torontonians had finally come to see nature as a place of refuge from the high stresses of an urban environment.²⁸

These regional parks were meant to provide a taste of wilderness and teach people about nature and conservation. Lands were acquired around the lower and middle Humber and Don, in Highland Creek's valleys, on the Toronto Islands, in Vaughan Township, and then around the upper reaches of the Humber and Rouge Rivers. In 1954, after Hurricane Hazel killed 81 and caused \$25 million in property damage in the Toronto region,²⁹ Metro chairman Frederick Gardiner decided low-lying areas should not be redeveloped but used instead as regional parks. In 1965, Metro and the Federation of Ontario Naturalists created Canada's first urban wildflower reserve at James Garden. But even as these "natural" parks were being created, the lakefront was still being filled in to expand the port and the city.³⁰

In the 1970s, citizen activists began to demand the greening of Toronto, including protection of the ravines from development, leaving dead trees in place to make habitat for other life, the use of native shrubs to prevent erosion, the return of streams and marshes to their natural state instead of being straightened with concrete corsets. Over the next 20 years, as areas of local, provincial and national environmental significance were identified, reasons for restoring the natural green cover expanded as it was demonstrated that the native forest, meadows and wetlands give better protection from air pollution, water pollution, and Global Warming than any technology human kind ever devised.³¹

After amalgamation in 1998, the circle was complete. Controlled burns were back, used to rejuvenate native oak savannahs, and to assist in control of invasive exotic plants. Once again, wild blue lupines, native grasses and thousands of young oaks could be found in the clearings of the restored forest in High Park. Thousands of volunteers planted native species throughout Toronto. The federal and provincial governments set aside the Rouge Park as the largest urban wilderness park in North America, spanning 4,000 hectares from Lake Ontario to the Oak Ridges Moraine. With amalgamation, Toronto's park system expanded to include all of Metro's parklands, which had grown to 4,680 hectares of trees, shrubs and flowers.³²

Toronto now has the potential to create a unique urban forest that is both host to and hosted by a great city. But that could slip away.

Our Green Treasures

The trees set into Toronto's streets alone are worth almost \$2 billion. The city's entire green commons represents an investment of billions more in land, and millions of hours of design, labour and care over more than 150 years. We have fashioned beautiful settings that are their own reward. Our ravines and our shaded streets increase property values and are inviting to tourists. Our ancient spreading deciduous trees support all sorts of animal life, but perhaps most important, they lift human spirits bowed down by huge buildings of concrete, metal and glass, and roaring freeways. There are many studies to show that human beings need to be in touch with nature in order to be healthy, that just looking at a tree is therapeutic—one study demonstrated that patients in hospital who could see trees outside their windows recovered faster than those who only saw brick.³³ A tree can also help bring a community together.

Compared to the value of our green assets, the net budget of \$80 million a year we spend on parks, horticulture and forestry, is very small.

Working with Nature

Torontonians place a very high value on our groomed and natural green spaces, our streetscape and parks, and our forests, meadows, marshes and ravines. Thirteen per cent of Toronto's area is parkland. About 42 per cent, or 3,565 hectares, is ungroomed, and is supposed to be self-sustaining. But our natural green spaces are under stress. The ravines have been invaded by a host of invasive species which destroy the native woodland ground cover. This has resulted in dramatic erosion and slope failures.

We've tried to keep up with volunteer help. Sixty natural environment groups work with us. We are helped by 5,000 volunteers who have planted 40,000 native trees, shrubs, grasses and flowers each year for the last five years. We have volunteer groups watching over 15 locations of great environmental significance. We think that involving volunteers in our parks and natural spaces builds community pride, a sense of ownership of the community's assets, and teaches everyone more about the environment. Our volunteers should be honoured and encouraged. But directing their work calls for a high degree of organization on our part.

Working with nature is a full time job.

The Working Tree

Urban trees work for their living—they provide oxygen, reduce heating and cooling costs, soak up storm water run-off, reducing the cost of water treatment, and native trees reduce erosion and improve water quality. They also filter out particulates in the air that cause respiratory distress, including particles of soot so tiny (under 2.5 microns in diameter) they can't be seen. Yet they're so deadly they cause 1,000 premature deaths and 5,500 hospitalizations a year in Toronto.³⁴ The Ontario Medical Association calculates air pollution induced illness costs the province \$1 billion a year.³⁵

And then there's the economic value trees create. As the San Francisco based Trust for Public Land has noted, trees and green space increase property values in cities and generate a sense of community. A recent Trust report described the work of one scholar who reviewed the American literature on the contributions of parks and open space to property values. The scholar found that 20 out of 25 papers reported an increase. Increased property values also mean additional property taxes "sufficient to pay the annual debt charges on the bonds used to finance the park's acquisition and development." Another study the Trust cites documents the revitalization of a degraded area of New York, infamously known as Needle Park. After it was reclaimed and refurbished, commercial rents around Bryant Park, as it is properly known, increased from 115 to 225 per cent in 10 years. In other words, in the long run, trees, green space and parks will pay for themselves many times over.³⁶

The US Forest Service has calculated what trees are worth in terms of pollution abatement. Over a 50 year lifespan, the average tree makes: \$31,250 worth of oxygen; \$62,000 worth of air pollution control; recycles \$37,500 worth of water; controls \$31,250 worth of soil erosion.³⁷

- More trees mean more beauty and a better quality of life.
- More trees mean fewer children and seniors will suffer from respiratory distress.
- More trees mean fewer smog alerts and loss of productivity from forced industrial shut downs.
- More trees can help soothe neighbourhoods locked in strife.³⁸
- More trees mean less power consumption on hot days and nights, more of which are coming with Global Warming.
- More trees are an important part of the infrastructure of our common grounds.

The Urban Forest

There are more than seven million trees in Toronto, more than two for every resident. About three million are owned by the City. Some 2.5 million city trees are in our parks and natural areas. There are 500,000 set out along our streets. But large areas of the city have trees that will reach maturity at the same age. Many already have, and are beginning to die.

The City's Official Plan calls for an increase in tree cover throughout the city over the next 30 years. Currently, about 17 per cent of our land area is covered. Urban foresters in Canada and the US recommend that urban areas need 30 to 40 per cent tree cover in order for the forest to be sustainable. A tree needs about 50 years to reach maturity, but trees planted within our city sidewalks live on average only about five years. We need to support them with the right conditions to increase their lifespan. Their roots have no room to spread; they are assaulted every winter by road salt; the soil around them is heavily compacted. Currently we average about 80 trees along a kilometre of road. We need to increase that to 120 trees per kilometre over 30 years. We believe this objective can be reached.

We currently plant 7,500 trees a year along our streets, and in our parks, along with about 15,000 to 20,000 young trees planted through our Tree Advocacy Program. Council has appointed a Tree Advocate (Councillor Joe Pantalone) and added a much needed \$750,000 a year to the capital budget to fund the work. No other city has a program like it. We have also developed a watering communication plan to inform residents, volunteers, and Business Improvement Areas about what to do to protect and water these trees, to make sure they survive in times of drought.

Our tree maintenance service prunes city trees, removes dead wood, inspects for and controls forest disease and insect infestations. We were tested in 2003 and not found wanting by a major outbreak of a dangerous exotic species—the Asian Long-Horned Beetle. With free trade and the onset of Global Warming, we expect the arrival of many pests from other climes, against which our native plants will have few defences. The Emerald Ash Borer already infests trees in Windsor. If it hits Toronto, we will lose six to seven per cent of the trees in the canopy.

Currently, we answer 91,000 calls a year for forestry services. Our response time ranges from three months to 18 months. We want that delay in service sharply reduced.

As part of our Strategic Plan we propose the creation of a continuous expanse of tree cover, a greenscape to connect all the oases of green from one side of the city to the other, returning large areas of Toronto to what it once was—a magnificent, complex, forest ecosystem—to enhance the quality of life in the city.

Slipping Down the Deforested Slope

In 1990, the old City of Toronto encompassed 97 square kilometres of land and spent \$12.71 per capita per year on forestry. The average staff person was responsible for maintaining the trees on 0.8 square kilometres. Since amalgamation, Parks and Recreation cares for trees across an area of 634 square kilometres. The average staff person is now responsible for the trees in 3.52 square kilometres, more than four times greater than before. In 2004, the City's expenditure on

Toronto's urban forestry was \$6.20 per capita per year. Staff must manage four times the land with half the resources of 1990. This is a recipe for failure. Instead of moving forward, we have fallen back.

In the same period, our US competitors, particularly Chicago, invested heavily in green assets. Chicago believes a beautiful, pristine green commons is a spur to economic development, raises property values, and entices tourists. Anyone who has visited Chicago recently can see that its green commitment has changed the whole flavour of the town. Even smaller cities in the US spend more on urban forestry than we do.

- Detroit spends \$13.00 US per capita.
- Milwaukee spends \$15.13 US per capita.
- Minneapolis spends \$18.21 US per capita.

Recommendations:

1. Implement an Urban Forestry Management Plan over the next 10 years to create the framework to increase Toronto's current tree canopy coverage of 17 per cent to 30 to 40 per cent.
2. Increase our annual tree planting by 16,000 trees per year.
3. Increase the average lifespan of our sidewalk trees from five to 20 years by improving tree planting conditions. We need to coordinate with other municipal departments to ensure soil and water conditions are adequate and secured.
4. Establish a permanent interdepartmental Tree Committee to coordinate the extension of our greenscape and management of the urban forest. It should include representatives of Urban Development Services, Parks and Recreation and Works and Emergency Services.
5. Implement an ecological restoration and preservation program for our natural and environmentally sensitive lands that supports the Natural Heritage Strategy and the Parkland Naturalization Program. This program should include: erosion protection through the planting of native trees, shrubs, flowers and grasses; elimination of unsafe pathways by converting them to sustainable natural trails for hiking and mountain biking; control of destructive invasive species.
6. Establish an Eco-Fan Club to engage and educate the public. This should include: interpretive signs; tours; outreach to schools and community groups; promotion of volunteerism in the protection of natural areas; support for special events like clean-up days and Trees Across Toronto; partnership with Toronto's natural environment groups; and should be related to the protection of unique aspects of Toronto's ecosystem.
7. Improve nature with technology through the roll-out of mobile computers so staff can keep track of the urban forest.
8. Reduce the forestry service order backlog to three to six months to properly sustain the existing trees in streets and parks.

Landscape Is Culture

Parks are groomed green spaces where all our cultural threads are woven together, where families picnic; where children navigate slides and sandboxes and make their first friends; where adults run, dogs chase, and new communities meet old. Half of Toronto's residents go to a park at least once a week.³⁹

The way we shape the greenery of the city, the way we use living things to frame and interpenetrate our buildings and roads, the way we conceive of parks has evolved like a language, like any other aspect of a human society. "Landscape," as the innovative landscape architect Peter Latz recently explained in the *New York Times Magazine*, "is not the opposite of the town. Landscape is culture." Toronto's parks are as important to building the quality of life as our major institutions for music, theatre or visual art. It is the evocative presentation of Toronto's diverse cultures through parks and plantings that will draw the world's attention, not our capacity to make a pretty green space that mimics a London square. We want to invent our own *Tuileries*.

Our Strategic Plan aims at reinventing our parks. As Toronto's first park planners knew, our geography, history and ecosystems are unique. But our parks should also reflect our cultural diversity. Our Plan calls for creating them anew, while promoting the maintenance of our parks as a shared responsibility. We will advocate that all residents are keepers of our common grounds, and use the restoration and creation of parks as another way to engage youth.

Our parks are a strategic advantage. We are not only one of the most diverse cities in the world, we are also one of the greenest. We have 3.19 hectares of parkland per 1,000 people. This is much better than our US competition: Chicago only has 1.23 hectares of parkland per 1,000 people, including its public shoreline. We are infinitely better off than most major Asian cities where parks are often tiny perfect spaces but few and far between. Many of our parks also contain community gardening plots where apartment and condominium dwellers can get in touch with the soil and grow food for their families.

But it's not just the space that matters: quality of life depends on what you do with it. Parks and Recreation staff is responsible for the beauty of Toronto's main boulevards, and the development of truly innovative parks such as the Music Garden on the waterfront and the great rock park erupting in the heart of Yorkville. These parks are destinations for tourists and our own residents. Over the last decade, there has been an explosion of interest in all kinds of gardening among older residents of the city. As the demographer David Foot reminds us, as a greater proportion of our population reaches their golden years, this trend will only intensify.⁴⁰ The reinvention of our parks will capitalize on this interest.

Which all sounds wonderful until we measure what we do now against what we once did.

While we may have more green parks than the average US competition, we are 13th on a list of Canadian cities.⁴¹ The number of flowers we plant each year is down 50 per cent from our peak in the early 1990s. Budget reductions between 1992 and 2002 didn't just shrink our employment roll, they also devastated our horticultural infrastructure, so carefully built over 150 years. Perennials and shrubs need the hands of human helpers to stay healthy. As we lost 45 to 50 per cent of our summer service capacity, we also lost flowering shrubs, grasses, roses, rhododendron

bushes: this is a spectacular waste of money and effort. The mandated end to the use of pesticides has increased the problem. Pesticide-free parks need many more hands to stay ahead of weeds. As a survey of the US National Association of Realtors shows, while many will pay more to live close to a park “...the parks must be well maintained and secure. A park that is dangerous and ill kept is likely to hurt the value of nearby homes.”⁴²

We want to increase the amount of park space available on foot to our residents. In some places in the city, people have a long way to go to reach one. We want our children to be able to walk no more than a few hundred yards to get to a safe playground, without having to cross a busy street. We need to set aside parkland and playing fields for new communities, develop parks in areas that are not well-served, and recreate the parks we have.

We want to take Toronto’s parks to a whole new level: but first we have to return to proper maintenance.

Fuzzy Borders: Protecting Everybody’s Front Yard

Our Strategic Plan envisions integrating our parks and trails with existing neighbourhoods—linking them together as an integral part of a city-wide greenscape. This will require us to step up our program to reduce private encroachment on public space.

At present, we have only one full-time employee to deal with 2,500 known encroachments.

When parks go unattended by staff, others take them over. People sleeping overnight on park benches, or leaving their garbage behind, limit public access and enjoyment of areas that belong to us all. An unkempt park suggests that no one really cares for this space and invites others to behave heedlessly too. As New York City can attest, it’s small eyesores left to fester that become major social infections, turning the parks from places loved to places feared. Garbage has been piling up in our parks: more than 40 per cent of what we find strewn in our parklands is household waste.

We have to take charge of the green commons again—before it’s too late.

Life Under Glass

Even before amalgamation, Toronto City Council identified horticulture as a way to boost tourism by making Toronto a beautiful destination. Our strategic plan calls for us to be beautiful and distinctive. The 950,000 plants set out in our parks in 2003 were produced in two greenhouse complexes. We provide year round seasonal displays of exotic plants at Allan Gardens and Centennial Park conservatories where five major floral shows are staged each year. We also mark holidays and the changing seasons as well as contributing displays and exhibitions to major festivals. Our Riverlea Greenhouse offers 145 indoor plots to residents and is extremely popular—there is always a waiting list. In other words, we have the capacity to change the way our parks and boulevards look through creative horticulture.

Plant Health Care

Plant science improves methods of maintaining parks, playing fields and horticultural displays while reducing environmental hazards. Applied plant health care science should provide environmentally friendly parklands while reducing the impact of pests. The use of the best plant science is essential given the passage of the Pesticide By-Law. However, we have only one full-time employee working on program development and staff training. We need to invest more in plant health care training so we can teach our field staff new methods and use plant health care science across the whole city.

Recommendations:

Parks and Recreation should:

9. Promote the protection of public parks as everyone's front yard.

10. Implement a Parks Renaissance Program to be phased in over five years. Components should include:

- **Turf Improvement:** cutting grass eight more times per year; seeding, top dressing and fertilization; aeration; irrigation system installation; integrated pest management in every park.
- **Our Uncommon Gardens :** renovating existing garden beds; enhancing City Hall's and other significant municipal buildings' displays; reinventing our feature gardens; adding new beds over five years.
- **Heal the Eyesores:** clean up graffiti; fix the broken windows, benches, field houses, picnic tables, benches, playgrounds and pathways.
- **Pick It Up:** continue installation of new environmentally friendly garbage cans for waste collection and recycling, with resources to empty them, and educate the community about their proper use.
- **Keep It Running:** replace worn forestry vehicles, grass cutting and other equipment as required to maintain service.

11. Lead green action through organizing the work of parks volunteers to ensure community engagement.

12. Develop a new Dogs-and-People In Parks strategy.

13. Develop a World Parks Program to celebrate Toronto's cultural diversity through the redesign of our parks. We plan to remake eight parks per year with multicultural themes, phased in over five years.

14. Prepare a Parks Master Plan for spring 2005 to guide the renaissance of our parks and trails across the city. We have great landscape designers: we should let them shine.

15. Institute a Trailblazers Program, involving improvement and expansion of our trail system, and the provision of interpretive and directional signage, guidance for users with a disability, and appropriate lighting, for the pleasure and safety of trail and park users.

16. Create a Park Ranger Program, with rangers in every ward who will promote and protect Toronto's green assets—a defining aspect of the city for tourists and residents.

17. Start a Life Gardens Program to promote gardening as a healthy activity which brings forth bounty and beautifies the city. Components should include: year round children's gardens, and support for community gardens and related programming in our parks and conservatories across Toronto.

18. Create a ParksArt Program with Toronto Culture involving artful horticulture in parks as part of the Public Art Program.

19. Initiate a professional gardener certificate program through our community gardens and greenhouses, aimed at disadvantaged youth.

20. Pioneer a Natural Areas, Forestry and Parks Apprenticeship Program and a Youth Interpretive Program. Hire 60 students per year to educate youth on careers in these areas and to raise awareness of the vital importance of nature.

Sport and Recreation

Turning History on its Head

In July, 1897, Toronto City Council voted to spend no more than \$6 dollars every day to hire tugs to “convey the boys of the city across the channel, free of charge, in order that they may be enabled to bathe in safe waters.”⁴³ Council also hired men to watch over other popular swimming places, including the Don River. Soon ferries were sailing from three wharves and there was free supervised swimming at the foot of Roncesvalles and Woodbine Avenues too. Between 1896 and 1905 the population of Toronto doubled, and it doubled again by 1914. Between 1902 and 1921 the population of children under 15 had tripled to 139,757. Most newcomers settled in the dense squalor of the downtown. Poor children had no place to go. The police threatened them with jail and worse for playing softball on the streets, so Council offered free, safe swimming.⁴⁴

The development of Toronto’s recreation facilities did not go forward for the sake of children alone, but to safeguard the larger community. The idea was, the children will learn in supervised play what is expected of them. Taking charge of children’s play was seen to be in the public interest and a matter of civic responsibility.

By 1908 the City’s board of education had set up five supervised playgrounds—the first in Canada created by any public agency. In 1913 the Parks Department created a Playgrounds and Recreation Branch and the McCormick Centre had a winter program. At the turn of the 20th century there were only two public skating rinks: by 1912, the Parks Department ran 43. By 1920, the City operated more playgrounds on school yards than the Board did. By then too, the popular beaches were marked and staffed with lifeguards and the Parks Department ran Toronto’s first summer swim program at Carlton Public School in 1922. This was the beginning of a long and fruitful relationship between Parks and Recreation and the Toronto District School Board.

In 1931, the two agencies, Parks and the School Board, together ran 84 summer playgrounds, and the number of recreation centres set up in schools, rented halls or dedicated buildings had climbed to 60. These centres drew 2,064,050 visits from children. By 1934, the City ran 72 skating rinks, 64 hockey rinks, 17 children’s slides and eight toboggan runs. Rinks on school property were maintained by both the City and the Board. The Toronto Public Library offered the first year-round indoor recreation programs for children, which helped turn out generation after generation of avid readers and library supporters. The renowned artist, Arthur Lismer, gave art lessons at The Art Gallery of Ontario on Saturdays. Reading, painting, arts and crafts joined swimming and organized team sports as means to shape the young bodies and minds.⁴⁵

In the Great Depression budgets shrank along with the tax base. The playground budget declined 27 per cent and the Library didn’t build again until 1949. Squabbling between City Council, the library board and the school trustees became a routine fact of civic life.

But Torontonians had come to see their playgrounds and playing fields, libraries, swimming pools and art centres as basic ingredients for a decent quality of life. Everyone understood that recreation and sport shape human potential and forge a commonality of purpose from which

everyone benefits. After WWII, this accumulation of social capital accelerated. Parks and Recreation's programs remained intertwined with the public schools.⁴⁶

By 1998, the whole meaning of integration had long since changed completely. No one wanted new Torontonians to strip off their cultures and customs like old clothes: integration meant continually remaking Toronto as a place of cultural diversity. Parks and Recreation staff had learned to make existing facilities fit the needs of the always changing ethnic communities moving in and out of old neighbourhoods.

But amalgamation, followed by downloading and side loading created a new kind of integration problem. For the first time, the provincial government's new education funding formula left no room to permit inexpensive community use of school facilities. Parks and Recreation had to pay for the use of school space and equipment, and had to ask in turn for payment for programs. City Council decided recreation centres near areas with a large population earning less than the Low Income Cut Off should be designated as Priority Centres where all recreation programs are free. It also created the Welcome Policy so that families in need, but far from Priority Centres, could apply for free entry to programs. Many Torontonians, especially older ones, found being asked to prove their need demeaning.

Poverty had also become a moving target. Whereas once poor neighborhoods were once located near downtown, poor families had moved east, west and north, from low rise neighborhoods to high rises in the suburbs, often without even rudimentary sports or recreation facilities nearby.⁴⁷
⁴⁸ In some suburban areas, regional recreational facilities were the norm, rather than the neighbourhood facilities downtown. They were convenient for families with cars, but not for people using public transportation, especially for children.

Some areas of the city resented being labeled as poor. Thus, though there are intense pockets of poverty in the former Scarborough, for example, there is only one Priority Centre. In addition, Parks and Recreation had to limit its swim programs in schools after the Toronto District School Board requested \$10.6 million⁴⁹ in fees for their use.

We didn't even have enough money to staff front desks in all of our community centres. Newcomers have difficulty knowing who to ask about services and programs in those centres which have no front desk.

All these changes created barriers to participation. In sum, while amalgamation was difficult for every department of the City, for Parks and Recreation, whose basic mission had been inclusion of the whole river of humanity flowing into the city, it caused major upheaval.

***Hard Pressed Assets:
A State of Ill Repair***

The first thing we did in preparation for this Strategic Plan was to start a value audit of our amalgamated facilities. It turns out they're worth a fortune, almost as much as the whole City's annual budget—over \$6 billion.⁵⁰ Many programs, venues and services provide the City a stream of revenue. In fact, many earned more than they cost, and contributed \$70 million to Parks and Recreation's bottom line, more than 30 per cent of our total annual budget.⁵¹

But all these assets also create a problem. We have to maintain them. The industry norm for maintaining physical assets is an expenditure of about two per cent of insured value each year to keep a state of good repair. In 2003, Parks and Recreation's state of good repair expenditures were \$17 million, leaving a \$103 million gap between our reality and the gold standard. We have completed our audit for state of good repair of the following: community centres, indoor and outdoor pools, arenas, field houses, washrooms, clubhouses, yard buildings, tennis courts and sports pads and parking lots. Our backlog to bring these facilities up to standard is \$201,193,295. We need to spend \$20 million a year for the next 10 years just to catch up.

We still have to survey sea walls and ferry docks, water fountains and monuments in parks, underground services and utilities, irrigation systems and the horticulture and amenities in our parks. A survey of the actual state of all these facilities is not yet complete. We estimate it will cost at least another \$200 million to bring these assets to a state of good repair. But we must also consider how much it will cost to bring old facilities in line with smart building and energy conservation requirements and to introduce proper waste diversion.

Failure to maintain \$6 billion worth of hard assets is as wasteful as letting our green assets, worth about the same amount, decline to ruin.

Recommendations:

21. Implement the Facility Renewal Program (a component of the Facilities Master Plan and Pool Provision Strategy) which should increase the capital maintenance budget by at least \$40 million a year, or one per cent of insured value, for 10 years.

22. Implement preventative maintenance to ensure our centres are clean, welcoming and comfortable again. Our buildings are showing their age.

23. Advance the goals of the Environmental Plan by implementing conservation and waste diversion in our buildings.

Inhospitable to Athletes

Insufficient maintenance of old structures is only half the problem: we have not kept pace with demand for new ones, either. Athletes range in their achievements from toddlers taking their first steps, to promising amateurs, to Olympians. Our common grounds should offer opportunities for everyone, no matter what their level of achievement. Parks and Recreation has played a large role in the playground-to-podium continuum of sport. In the past, we always managed to provide sport opportunities for everyone, no matter what their dream. But in the last few years, we've lost a lot of ground right across the whole spectrum of sport.

Toronto is the largest city in the country, and the wealthiest. Our economy produces 20 per cent of Ontario's GDP.⁵² More than 89 per cent of Toronto's children under 12 say they prefer swimming to any other form of activity. Youth aged 13 to 24 (the same youth we're trying to lure back to physical activity) place swimming at number three on their preferred list. Yet Toronto has only one public, competitive 50 metre pool. We have only one indoor diving tower. Skateboard parks have been the coolest thing in male youth recreation for a decade—yet we have only four. BMX, a special kind of bike track, is the latest thing. We have only one BMX park. And what about women? We have worked hard to break down gender barriers: many more girls now play ice hockey, but we haven't built a new arena in 20 years. There is no prime ice time available in the city. We can't pull youth into our programs if we don't offer them facilities they want to use. And we are inhospitable to top athletes, the kind of people we want to train, and hold on to.

In the last 15 years Toronto has tried repeatedly to propel itself onto the world sports stage. We bid for the Olympics twice, and lost. We've tried and usually failed to attract world championship sports competitions (although we did manage to host one indoor track and field and one men's basketball championship). We haven't hosted many national or provincial championships either. We don't have the infrastructure to support them. That means Toronto's top athletes have to leave home to rise to the top of their sport and the city misses big tourism opportunities which could generate millions in economic activity. Similarly, major sporting events are held around the world for athletes with a disability: but we have limited facilities for training these athletes and for displaying their skills. When the best Canadian athletes perform well for their country, it motivates children and youth to get involved in sport. But if we can't keep our top athletes at home, if we can't bring their peers here from around the world, we fail to nourish their dreams.

By comparison, our competitors have not been shy about spending on the future. Montreal has six diving towers. Melbourne, Australia, which will host the 2006 Commonwealth Games, has already built everything they need, including five stadiums, two of which have retractable roofs, one of which holds 103,000 people. Their Aquatics Centre has two 50 metre pools and they plan to add another.

Melbourne offers us a lesson: if we build, the world will come. If we don't, our best athletes will leave home. Investment in new infrastructure for sports and recreation is as important as maintaining the infrastructure we've already got.

Finally, we need to focus on building the soccer fields and cricket pitches for burgeoning new communities. Cricket is a fast growing sport in Toronto, soccer is the most popular sport in the world, but you wouldn't know that from counting our soccer fields and cricket pitches. Women who play rugby, hockey and Ultimate Frisbee have few places to go. By 2030 there will be 500,000 more customers clamoring for services and we have to get ready.

Recommendations:

24. Prepare a Sport Strategy Framework in partnership with the Toronto Sport Council for Spring 2005 which identifies the critical role that sport can play in city building. The plan will:

- Identify regional facilities and field requirement priorities to increase sport opportunities for all participants from grass roots to elite athletes.
- Set a foundation for working with other sport and recreation agencies to ensure that participants have maximum opportunities to learn, participate, train, compete, at all stages of the playground-to-podium continuum.
- Identify the means to increase leadership capacity in sport by providing youth with opportunities to learn sports event management and coaching.
- Establish levels of achievement for sports instruction programs offered by Parks and Recreation.

25. Set city standards for sport delivery, permits, and recreational facilities' equipment and supplies offered by Parks and Recreation.

26. Place priority on sports field development. Increase the number of sports fields by 10 per cent, including artificial turf surfaces.

27. Work with Toronto Waterfront Revitalization Corporation and Parc Downsview Park to ensure that active recreation opportunities are included in their development plans.

Youth Need to Belong

By the year 2010, demographers predict there will be 2.76 million people in Toronto. The number of children under 12 will grow by a modest six per cent, but the number of youth will grow by 21 per cent in five years. Right now there are 308,400 youth in the city: in five years, there will be 370,000. These are the children of the aging baby boomers, sometimes known as the baby boom echo, and we are failing to reach them. Youth account for only nine per cent of our registrants. About 64 per cent of registrants are children under 12, but we can't expect those children enrolled now to stick with us as they get older. Our studies show a marked drop-off in all forms of recreational activity by youth over the age of 13, which sets the stage for falling levels of physical activity throughout the rest of adult life. The drop-off with young girls starts at age 12.⁵³

We have lately seen the violence that results when youth in despair are left without programs or hope for the future, when their energies go un-channelled. Violent crime goes up: young men and women die or waste themselves in jail. We can't just let these things happen—if for no other reason than we won't be able to afford the billions it will cost to take care of this inactive echo. They will be prone to chronic diseases early on in life. When they become elderly, if they become elderly, they will be hobbled by fractures brought on by osteoporosis, by heart disease, hypertension, and stroke. It's not in the common interest to let the future take care of itself. We have to turn the river of the city's youth in a new direction. But first we have to understand where it's flowing.

The various task forces conducted over the last few years inquiring into the causes of youth violence in this city, point in the same directions: we need to offer youth inclusion into something larger than themselves. We need to eliminate barriers that feel like exclusion. We need to offer welcoming alternatives to gangs, which youths sometimes join to protect themselves from unsafe streets.

We have conducted many focus groups and community sessions with youth across the city and have heard the same complaints: we don't offer the right programs, we don't listen, we don't let youth manage programs for themselves.

We believe that by making youth our priority in all aspects of Parks and Recreation's responsibilities, by calling on them to steward our parks and ravines, to help plant trees and native species, to lead environmental education programs, by offering them opportunities to work for the City and to acquire the kinds of skills they want, the river will turn in the right direction. We need to offer innovative, creative, and alternative types of programming which reflect youths' interests. We should do this with locally engaged staff who are in touch with local youth and can design programs that respond to particular demands. We should offer after-school programs specifically for youth so that hard-working parents know where their children are and what they're doing.

Our goal: to enroll at least one half of our youth population, about 185,000 kids, in programs, services, volunteer opportunities or jobs over the next five years.

We are the biggest youth employer in the city, yet out of 5,000 part-time jobs we only employ a little over one per cent of the total city's youth. Most of our part time jobs pay \$10 to \$12 per hour. But many require our youth to have achieved a certain level of certified skill: often they must spend more than they can afford on certification programs in order to be hired. We can't fill all the high paying lifeguard jobs we have because certification is so expensive. We have to find money to help youth defray the costs of acquiring the skills we need, so we can deliver our programs safely. Whatever it costs to support their acquisition of skills will be cheaper than failing to involve them in parks and recreation and the communities around them.

It costs \$100,000 to keep one youth in jail for a year.⁵⁴ If we divert 70 youth from a one-year jail term, the community saves \$7 million. With the same amount of money, we could offer jobs, leadership training, skills, a lifelong commitment to health, and fill the other gaps in youth programming which currently plague our system.

Recommendations:

28. Implement the Youth Recreation Strategy—Investing In Our Youth, following the philosophy of by-youth-for-youth. Components should include:

- Increased sport opportunities across the city to increase physical activity, teamwork and skill building.
- Enhanced urban programming for youth.
- More female programming, to level the gender playing field in sport and recreation, including dance, female-only sports, and workshops.
- Youth empowerment and mentorship opportunities, encouraging youth to assume leadership roles in our community centres and community volunteer projects.

29. Parks and Recreation should lower its hiring age from 16 to 14 for some positions, provided youth have completed the Leadership Training Program.

30. Expand the Youth Outreach Program to reach out to new immigrants. Youth should be hired to explain our programs to newcomers and invite them to use them.

31. Ensure adequate facilities are available in communities with large populations, but few recreational opportunities, by renting extra space specifically for youth programs.

32. Provide day-time drop-in and recreation opportunities for homeless and out-of-school youth to build their self-esteem and connection with the community.

33. Ensure each centre has a least one unstructured but supervised after-school drop-in program for youth.

34. Provide physical activity opportunities and leader-in-training programs in each district, in partnership with other agencies, for youth with a disability or special needs.

35. Establish youth councils for all community centres so that youth have their say.

Lifelong Activity:

Recreation Can Shape the Future

Parks and Recreation centres have always been gathering places—for everyone from babies to seniors. They have used our facilities and programs to improve their fitness, meet their friends, and escape from the harried pace of life in the city. As Toronto grows and the population changes, our challenge will be to accommodate shifting and sometimes competing expectations.

The greater the income and education, the higher the rates of participation in recreation and sport. However, even well-educated immigrants are 50 per cent less active than the average Canadian. Immigrants are landing here at the rate of 60,000 to 80,000 per year. In 2001, the Census found that 49.4 per cent of Toronto's population was born outside of Canada, 21 per cent had arrived within the last 10 years, with Asia replacing Europe as the source of most new arrivals. The 2001 Census records that 30 per cent of families with children under age 15 in Toronto still lived on less than the Low Income Cut Off.⁵⁵ About 19 per cent of all families and 38 per cent of people living on their own had incomes below the Low Income Cut Off.⁵⁶ Half of low income children live in sole-support families.⁵⁷

To reactivate Toronto, to help newcomers develop the habit of lifelong activity, we need to get people educated about the importance of sport and recreation, keeping in mind that poverty is a barrier to physical activity and well-being.

There are so many things we know about the benefits of physical activity and recreation. We know it cuts the risk of death and illness from major disease throughout life and therefore extends life.⁵⁸ The rich, who take good care of themselves, live longer than the poor. We know that in addition to preventing disease, vigorous physical activity and recreation is also therapeutic—it helps people get over surgery, depression, anger, loss and anxiety.⁵⁹

The more we learn about the development of children, the more we realize that human brains and human temperaments are shaped by physical activity and social interaction. It's not just stronger bones and muscles children are building when they're clambering on climbing bars and tearing across the soccer fields. They're also learning how to lead, how to be accommodating, how to be part of something larger than themselves. They are building self-esteem, and learning to view themselves as people who can do things.⁶⁰

We know that children who study art, drama and music do 20 per cent better in math, science and languages than those who don't. We know children who spend a third of their day doing physical activity in school perform better academically than those who don't. We know children and youth who are involved in organized sport are much less likely to be involved in deviant activities, much more likely to stay involved with their communities as adults—to contribute, to volunteer, and to have a positive impact on the society around them.⁶¹ Teenaged girls who do competitive sports have 80 per cent fewer unwanted pregnancies, and are 90 per cent less likely to use drugs than their inactive peers.⁶² So it follows that community support for children and youth is one good way to shape the future.

And finally, Toronto's population is aging. By 2010, 17 percent of us will be over 65. Studies have shown that even moderate levels of activity help seniors maintain their health and sense of well-being. We can't expect seniors to fit themselves in around the needs of children and youth. Out of respect alone, we should be providing more seniors-only programs at facilities across the city.

Recommendations:

36. Finalize, and seek support for the Seniors Recreation Strategy, with the Seniors' Round Table.

37. Increase the number of physically active Torontonians—10 per cent by 2010 and 20 per cent by 2020.

38. Implement the Children's Recreation Strategy fully.

39. Increase the number of children registered in programs by 20 per cent by 2020.

40. Provide new Canadians, especially those from warm climates, opportunities to learn and play Canadian winter sports.

41. Ensure all children in Toronto have the opportunity to learn to swim.

Barriers

Recreation Lifts the Poverty Bar

No one knew that recreation can treat poverty's worst side effects until McMaster University's Dr. Gina Browne and her colleagues finished an outcomes study in 2001.⁶³ Browne and her group followed 765 households with 1,300 children headed by single parents (mainly women) on social assistance. In a randomized trial, most were helped by direct interventions: they were offered advice from public health nurses, job retraining and subsidized, high quality recreational day care for their children. A control group had access to these services, but had to find them on their own. Browne found that 15 per cent more of the parents who received active help got off social assistance by the end of the first year of the study than those who didn't. Browne also zeroed in on the effects of good recreation on those children who were experiencing emotional and learning disorders. Children with such problems who received top quality subsidized recreational child care, (as opposed to those whose parents had to seek it out and pay for it themselves) enrolled in more programs and were able to keep up academically and physically and socially with classmates who were healthy. The increasing emotional and physical health of these children also rebounded on their parents who had fewer mental health complaints than their counterparts. Parents used medication, counseling, and the food banks less often.⁶⁴

So, Is Time Really Money?

Most Torontonians are not on social assistance: in fact, as the economy expanded at the turn of the 21st century the total number of people in Toronto with low incomes fell by 15 per cent. The average household income climbed by \$10,000 between 1995 and 2000.⁶⁵ Yet only 33 per cent of Torontonians are moderately active, almost 11 per cent below the national average.⁶⁶ Fifty-six per cent are not active enough to maintain optimum health: that's uncomfortably close to two thirds of our whole population. Most people we surveyed knew that activity is good for them, and inactivity is bad.⁶⁷ So why such low rates of participation in Toronto?

An Environics poll told us that the main factor that prevents Torontonians from being more active is time (51 per cent).⁶⁸ Torontonians told us that promotion and education would have much less impact on changing their behavior than having a few more hours in the day. We were told by 34 per cent of those we surveyed that there was nothing Parks and Recreation could do to make it easier for them to be more active.⁶⁹

No, Money Buys Time

And yet, our graphs charting patterns of use tell a different story. We think there is something we can do. Canadians over 15 have 5.8 hours of free time every day, averaged over a seven-day week. Men, on average, have a half hour more free time than women. They spend more of their free time on leisure activity.⁷⁰ Over 27 per cent of respondents to the Mayor's Listening to Toronto sessions told us that user fees, affordability and accessibility make a big difference to their use of City facilities. Those who need to participate in programs under our Welcome Policy, (which allows those who can't afford the fees to get in free), find the application and means test process is cumbersome. Some also find it demeaning. Our own community centre visits chart shows that fees have had a significant negative impact on activity. Before the introduction of fees, 46 per cent of users came to our facilities once a week. In 2003 that was down to 37 per cent, while the percentage of those who came less than once a month rose from 21 per cent to 25 per cent. Adults over 60, who often live on fixed incomes, are our smallest group of fee-paying registrants. Park visits, on the other hand, which are free, went in the opposite direction: 48 per cent of respondents told us in 2001 that they went to a city park at least once a week. By 2003, that number went up to 56 per cent, while the number of those who said they never use a park had gone down from nine per cent to five per cent.⁷¹

Fees mean fewer can participate. Fees mean fewer will participate. Fees are a barrier to getting Toronto moving again.

Flexible and Nimble at Warp Speed

Sport and recreation can be like paths in a forest—they can guide a newcomer's way into the heart of a new community. But to follow a path, one has to know it's there, and that it can be used by everyone. And sometimes signs aren't enough: our staff learned through years of experience that refugees and immigrants from warm climates often arrive with preconceived ideas about Canada and sport. Sport helps to define a culture. To outsiders, Canadians excel at sports involving ice and snow. Our staff learned to turn this idea on its head: if doing winter sports is Canadian, learning winter sports can turn everybody into a Canadian.

We introduced children from warm climates to hockey: we provided the skates, the equipment, the welcoming hand. They learned that this country, like the sport, is open to everyone.

Newcomers also arrive with their own sports and recreation cultures, and with very different beliefs about appropriate behaviour in the public sphere. It's not just that soccer is the premier team sport throughout Latin America and much of Europe, whereas traditional Canadian team sports are lacrosse, basketball, football and hockey.

Some communities also bring with them deep concerns about personal modesty, and strive to maintain customary boundaries between men and women, boys and girls. These ideas, on the surface, directly conflict with Parks and Recreation's unshakeable commitment to gender equity. But our staff have found ways to bridge such chasms. We met with representatives of one religious community which felt public swimming pools could only be used by women of their faith if they are emptied of all other users. We offered female-only swim hours, and all female lifeguards. We also covered the windows on our gyms so women who use them in female-only hours can move freely without being seen by males. And it worked. Now we're working on expanding all our programs for women so that the value we place on equity is better reflected by the programs we offer.

Newcomers arrive, settle, get on their financial feet and then move on. Populations in our neighbourhoods change constantly. There is a large Russian community in North York, a Somali community in Etobicoke, each with its likes and dislikes. We need to be quick on our feet, know our communities, and offer them what they like.

We also need to be responsive to the needs of the disadvantaged, particularly the homeless.

Flexibility and nimbleness should be the defining characteristics of our whole system. We don't have the same facilities in the east, west, north and south districts of the city. Each area has a different history, with different ideas about sport and recreation. We can't wipe out our differences: we have to make them work for us.

Equity Means Access for All

The City of Toronto is committed to equity and access for all. But that wasn't always the case.

We should never forget that until 1947, some groups were not welcome in some of Toronto's recreational facilities. Harry Gairey, an African Canadian, had to petition City Council after his son, and his son's Jewish friend, were refused admission to a skating arena because of skin colour and religion. As a result, City Council passed a motion to end discrimination. Gairey was eventually honoured for his courage and determination to demand equal access and respect for everyone. The City believes groups which have suffered discrimination need a special welcome at our facilities. Parks and Recreation values and respects the inclusion of all aboriginal Canadians; other visible minorities; women; bisexuals, gay, lesbian and transgendered people; and people with a disability.

We have legal obligations that we will be hard pressed to meet with regard to equity of access for people with a disability. The Province of Ontario proclaimed the Ontarians With Disabilities Act in 2002, requiring all public agencies to create plans and become accessible. We have no hard numbers on how many among us have a disability, since that is an area of voluntary reporting to Statistics Canada, but we believe the percentage in Toronto is high. About 40 per cent of Canadians over 65 have a disability. At least three per cent of our children have a disability or a special need. Many of our older facilities have not been properly retrofitted to serve those with a disability. Only one half of one per cent of our registrants are people with a disability, which is clearly unacceptable.

It's not just that our old buildings are inappropriately designed, but that those with a disability often need the help of caregivers. We don't have the staff to meet present demand. In addition, some of our policies are contradictory. It is better for environmental stewardship if our swimming pools are maintained at a lower temperature. But it is painful and counterproductive for a person disabled by arthritis to get into a cold swimming pool.

We have a long way to go to properly serve people with a disability.

Initiate, Welcome, Coach, Cheer

Our Strategic Plan calls for lifelong activity because it's what we must all do to stay healthy until the end. It calls for a focus on the development of children and youth because we know they are our future and they are not sufficiently active to maintain their health. It calls for environmental stewardship because without a clean and green environment, and special attention to growing the Urban Forest, the City within a Park will only be a dream.

To bring our Strategic Plan to life, Parks and Recreation must initiate programs, welcome and coach communities and individuals, and recognize their achievements. These are roles we are qualified for. Who knows better than parks and recreation staff what a change for the better physical activity can make in the quality of peoples' lives? Our staff loves their work because they know it makes a difference.

Recommendations:

Parks and Recreation staff should:

42. Ask Council to direct Parks and Recreation to report by spring 2005 on options for free programs for children and youth.
43. Develop a capital plan by spring 2005 to retrofit facilities for use by people with disabilities that is based on the requirements of the Ontarians With Disabilities Act.
44. Ensure staff at all levels reflects the diversity of all the communities we serve, and invest in staff training to achieve a welcoming environment for all.
45. Increase capacity to improve community recreational development and citizen engagement.

46. Promote the programs, services and benefits of recreation across the city. Building public awareness requires a broad effort.

47. Be the coach for the whole city. We need to demonstrate the value of lifelong activity through the use of our parks, trails, and community centres.

48. Create a Stakeholder Engagement Plan to guide, recognize and celebrate volunteers, advisory councils and advocates.

49. Support the Mayor's Community Safety Neighbourhood Plan through the increased use of multi-service-multi-agency program delivery methods in high-risk neighbourhoods.

***Benchmarks or Targets
Efficient or Effective?***

The development of children and support of the elderly is something every civilized society must do, regardless of cost. Parks and Recreation is not a business, but we can certainly operate in a businesslike way and be accountable for what we do.

Council has already voted to increase Parks and Recreation's net budget by six per cent for 2004.⁷²

But when we lay out the way our costs have grown versus the slower growth in our revenues over the period 1999 to 2003, we are concerned about sustainability over the long term. We are also concerned about measuring our progress by traditional business plan benchmarks.

In 2004 our net budget is:

- \$34.00 per person on parks and open spaces
- \$30.67 per person on sport and recreation
- **\$64.67** net per person on Parks and Recreation

In 2004 our gross budget is:

- \$42.76 per person on parks and open spaces
- \$53.22 per person on sport and recreation
- **\$95.98** gross per person on Parks and Recreation

By comparison, 2004 other departmental gross budgets are:

- Transportation: \$96.54 per person
- TTC: \$369.34 per person
- Police Services: \$265.28 per person

We can evaluate our progress by using the business efficiency benchmark model—which is all about getting more for less. We can try to find more efficiencies in the way we do things and earn more revenues. We can get rid of our expensive parks and boulevards and pave them over with concrete. We can give up on the idea of enfolding the city in an urban forest. We can forget about developing youth and maintaining the health of the young and the old. Alternatively, we can admit that Parks and Recreation services create social goods as vital to life as basic physical security or transportation and fund the work appropriately.

We think a better model to evaluate our contribution is effectiveness. We should set targets and look at what their achievement will save the larger society in terms of the social, justice and health costs our work defrays. One study has shown that just a 10 per cent reduction in the proportion of the population who are inactive would result in \$150 million in health care savings each year⁷³ including fewer expenditures on nervous system problems, on medications, use of counseling and reliance on food banks.⁷⁴

We know our targets.

Environmental Stewardship:

- Extension of our tree canopy to over 30 to 40 per cent of the city.
- More than 80 per cent of our park visitors very satisfied.
- Extension of natural area stewardship from five per cent currently to 100 per cent protected and restored.

Child and Youth Development:

- A 20 per cent increase in the number of children participating in registered programs.
- A 40 per cent increase in the number of youth participating in programs.

Lifelong Active Living:

- A 20 per cent increase in the city's population enrolled in programs to 190,000 more by 2020.
- A 40 per cent increase in seniors participating in programs by 2010.
- A 1,000 percent increase in people with a disability enrolled in programs over five years.
- A 20 per cent increase in the number of Torontonians who are physically active by 2020.

To be effective, our budgets must realistically reflect the size of the task in front of us. We have calculated what we will need to spend on forestry, parks, horticulture, and sport and recreation to carry out our Strategic Plan. In the context of the whole \$6 billion annual City budget, Parks and Recreation expenditures required to effect the Plan would still be less than 2.5 per cent of the total, a small sum to achieve a great impact on quality of life. The savings in other areas over the next 15 years would be incalculable.

Recommendations:

50. Parks and Recreation budgets should be calculated with due regard to costs avoided, both now and in the future, by other departments and by other levels of government.

51. Parks and Recreation's annual budget should relate directly to the size of the assets maintained, and the numbers of Torontonians served. A measure of our success should be that both numbers grow in lockstep with the city's population growth.

52. The City of Toronto should encourage other levels of government to invest in parks and recreation.

Financing Our Common Grounds

In the past, Toronto Parks and Recreation's budget has been funded entirely by municipal taxpayers. The Province of Ontario has provided some capital infrastructure support for new arenas, or pools. But Parks and Recreation also needs operating funds to run equitable programs, plant trees, groom parks, manage the urban forest, design gardens, and maintain the structures we have.

We have made the case here that we should turn to other levels of government to support our operating programs as well as our infrastructure needs. Our effectiveness will reduce costs to other levels of government and other divisions of municipal government. Higher recreation participation rates will yield reduced costs to the provincial health care system. Similarly, an extension of our green canopy will reduce federal and provincial costs for environmental stewardship. Our youth programs should reduce required budgets for provincial departments of justice and prisons. Our programs aimed at integration of newcomers should receive support from Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

We need to conduct more thorough analyses to demonstrate how our services intersect with other levels of government's responsibilities. Then the City can explain to all taxpayers how we can protect against future costs with small investments in parks and recreation now.

We need to partner with the private sector to lever the funds we have. Benches, public art and amenities in our parks and trails are opportunities for large corporations to give back to the community.

We need to remind generous donors that they might think of establishing a Legacy Fund to help maintain a park donated by others.

In fact, we need to get better at asking for help. We should seek out community foundations to support specific youth and environmental programs that might fit their interests. Our Toronto Parks and Trees Foundation is one such example of collaboration: its work needs to earn a wider community profile.

And we can always borrow a smart idea from our competitors. St. Louis, Missouri, for example, asks its residents to volunteer extra help for its urban forest through their Round Up system. Taxpayers may indicate on their water or tax bills whether or not their city can round up their payments to the nearest dollar, proceeds to go to the provision of more trees. While Toronto cannot apply this system to its water bills, it could be offered on tax bills. A Round Up system could be used to direct funds to various areas of need within Parks and Recreation's portfolio.

Conclusions

This Strategic Plan sets out what we need to do to create a city-wide urban forest, envelope our neighbourhoods in a connected greenscape, renew our parks and encourage all Torontonians to live actively from childhood to their sunset years.

It brings together three streams: environmental stewardship, development of children and youth, and the promotion of lifelong activity for everyone. Our 52 recommendations constitute an action plan to turn Toronto into the City within a Park. Our targets are: to increase registration in all our programs by 190,000 people by 2020; to increase the numbers of physically active youth by 40 per cent and of all Torontonians by 20 per cent by the same year; to make certain our reinvented parks satisfy 80 per cent of our visitors; and our tree canopy covers 30 to 40 per cent of our entire land area.

Following this plan, Toronto Parks and Recreation will be a strong front line department, delivering on the promise of a high quality of life to all Toronto residents.

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Appendix I

Parks and Recreation Project Coordinating Team

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Appendix II

Our Stakeholder Participants

Bill Alexander, Disabilities Issues Committee
Lea Ambros, CELOS
Laura Berma, Foodshare Toronto
Lea Bredschneider, Swim Ontario
Steve Boone, Greater Toronto YMCA
John Caliendo, ABC Residents Association
Catherine Charlton, ProAction Cops & Kids
George Dark, Toronto Parks and Trees Foundation
Peter D'Cruz, Toronto Field Hockey Club
Brian Denney, Toronto Region Conservation Authority
Tony DiGiovanni, Landscape Ontario
Andy Doudoumis, North York Soccer
Geoffrey Dyer, Toronto Botanical Garden
Bonnie Easterbrook, John Innes Advisory Council
Tanya Fleet, Rainbow Hoops Basketball
Greg Flynn, Native Child and Family Centre
Sandy Foster, Centennial College Recreation Leadership Program
Nathan Gilbert, Laidlaw Foundation
Patrick Glasgow, John Innes Community Centre
Joanna Kidd, Toronto Bay Initiative
Jameela Krishnan, St. Jamestown Youth/Regent Park Youth Worker

Katrina Miller, Toronto Environmental Alliance
Roslyn Moore, Friends of Glendon Forest
Carole Murphy, Thistletown Community Advisory Board
Scott Oakman, Greater Toronto Hockey League
Greg Piasetzki, Leaside Girls Hockey League
Karen Pitre, Toronto Sport Council
Rhona Lewis, FHO and Field Hockey Canada
Ron Rock, East Scarborough Boys & Girls Club
Janet Rosenberg, Janet Rosenberg + Associates, Landscape Architects
Boris Rosolak, Seaton House, Community & Neighbourhood Services Dept.
(Pastor) Veta Saunders, Church of God of Prophecy
Steven Smith, Urban Forestry Associates
Robin Sorys, High Park Community Advisory Council
George Whyte, Toronto Cricket Association
Sau Lin Wong, Miliken Advisory Board
Sue Vail, York University—Sport Management Program
Lewis Yeager, Rouge Park Alliance