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November 6, 2012

Councillor Giorgio Mammoliti, Chair  
Community Development and Recreation Committee  
100 Queen Street West, Suite B27  
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

Dear Councillor Mammoliti:

**Re: Recreation Service Plan 2013-2017**

The purpose of this letter is to express support for the proposed Recreation Service Plan 2013-2017 (the Plan). It is my understanding that the Plan is intended to increase Toronto residents' participation in recreation, decrease financial barriers to recreation, and improve local and geographic access to recreational amenities. The goals of the Plan are well-aligned to improve the health of Toronto residents and decrease health inequities. Access to and participation in recreational opportunities benefits the health of individuals and neighbourhoods and the city as a whole. The Plan incorporates many aspects of the Healthy City approach outlined in the TPH report, *Healthy Toronto by Design*.<sup>1</sup>

The Plan identifies children, youth, and seniors as priority populations and focuses on reducing barriers for newcomers, low income residents and people with disabilities. The Plan provides opportunities for increased physical activity and social interaction which has well-documented physical and emotional health benefits across the lifespan.<sup>2,3,4</sup>

The focus on increasing physical activity at an early age is critical as habits developed early in life tend to continue into adulthood. In 2010, 38.2% of Toronto youth, age 12 -19 years, reported that they were inactive during leisure time.<sup>5</sup> An even higher proportion of Toronto adults, 20 years of age and older, (58.5%) were physically inactive or moderately physically inactive during leisure time.<sup>6</sup>

The Plan also identifies the need for a youth leadership development program which will be developed in collaboration with other city divisions and community organizations. The program will provide opportunities for social interaction, civic engagement, and the development of employment skills and therefore, will also promote the health and well-being of youth. Toronto Public Health welcomes the opportunity to be involved in the development of this exciting new program.

Another key element of The Plan is promoting equitable access to recreational opportunities through the Welcome Policy and expanding the number of Priority Centres within the city. These initiatives will enable more low income individuals to access recreational opportunities. This is important because lower income individuals have lower participation in physical activity and other recreational activities<sup>6</sup> and are more likely to report having 'fair' or 'poor' mental health.<sup>7</sup> These initiatives will provide opportunities for social interaction and contribute to a sense of connectedness and belonging, resulting in improved health outcomes.

The Recreation Service Plan demonstrates the key role that Parks, Forestry, and Recreation plays in promoting health and that it is important to take every opportunity to intentionally integrate health into city policies. The Healthy City approach challenges local governments to put health on the agenda of all decision-makers and consider health related impacts in all of their policies, programs, and services.

I commend Parks, Forestry and Recreation for their leadership in promoting health and reducing health inequities. TPH has a long history of working in collaboration with PFR and welcomes the opportunity to strengthen this partnership.

Sincerely,



Dr. David McKeown  
Medical Officer Of Health

copy: Councillor John Filion, Chair, Board of Health  
Jim Hart, General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division

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<sup>1</sup> Toronto Public Health (2011). *Healthy Toronto by design*. Available at [www.toronto.ca/health/hphe/pdf/healthytoronto\\_oct04\\_11.pdf](http://www.toronto.ca/health/hphe/pdf/healthytoronto_oct04_11.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Toronto Public Health. (2007). *The Health of Toronto's Young Children: Volume 3 – The Growing Child*. Available at [http://www.toronto.ca/health/hsi/pdf/young\\_children\\_v3.pdf](http://www.toronto.ca/health/hsi/pdf/young_children_v3.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Warburton D.E.R., Nicol C.W., and Bredin S.S.D. (2006). Health benefits of physical activity: the evidence. *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, 174(6), 801-809.

<sup>4</sup> Physical Activity Guidelines Advisory Committee. (2008). *Physical Activity Guidelines Advisory Committee Report, 2008*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

<sup>5</sup> Toronto Community Foundation (2012). *Toronto's Vital Signs 2012 Report*. Available at <http://www.tcf.ca/torontos-vital-signs>

<sup>6</sup> Toronto Public Health. (2011). Surveillance Indicator Series: *Physical Activity*. Available at [www.toronto.ca/health/map/indicators/pdf/physicalactivity.pdf](http://www.toronto.ca/health/map/indicators/pdf/physicalactivity.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Toronto Public Health. (2012). Surveillance Indicator Series: *Self-Reported Mental Health*. Available at [www.toronto.ca/health/map/indicators/pdf/physicalactivity.pdf](http://www.toronto.ca/health/map/indicators/pdf/physicalactivity.pdf)