



Toronto Alliance for  
Better Parks

Toronto Park People  
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Members of Budget Committee:

Toronto Park People is the city's catalyst for better parks. We would like to provide the following comments on the proposed 2013 Operating and Capital budgets.

Spending on our parks is essentially flat-lined. As the number of city parks increases and the demands on our parks rise, a flat lined budget really means a continuation of the slow decline in our parks – fewer gardens planted, trees not watered and dying, trails not repaired, less city run activities in parks.

We are very concerning about the growing backlog of needed repairs to maintain our parks and facilities. Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division is right up front saying that spending on parks is not keeping up with the addition of new parks and demands on existing parks: "Parks, Forestry and Recreation's 10-Year Recommended Capital Plan will place heavy demands on the Program's future operating budgets...The operating impacts of capital projects are expected to grow substantially in the coming years..."

A major issue is that the City continues to fall further behind on "state of good repair" (SOGR) – the city's work on basic maintenance to ensure good parks, trails, arenas, pools. The SOGR backlog is projected to be \$300 million for this year and growing to \$366 million by 2017.

For example, the City's Trails, Pathways and Bridges are valued at \$50 million. The City estimates that \$29 million needs to be spent just to bring those back to a state of good repair. That \$29 million backlog is projected to grow to \$49 million by 2016. Our trails, pathways and bridges are just slowing falling apart.

On user fees, the budget proposes an across the board inflationary increase. We believe that the permit and insurance fees that the City imposes on park friends and community groups as a cost for providing community public events and park improvement activities is wrong headed. The City should be encouraging the volunteer efforts of park groups to animate and improve their park, not imposing fees on these groups.

Park People has put together a set of budget neutral recommendations to improve Toronto's Parks. The report – Pathways to Parks – is available on our parkpeople.ca website.



Some of the key recommendations are that our parks would be better if they were staffed with a dedicated city worker in each park, had an active local “Friends Of” group and were supported by private donations.

The report is the result of research and consultations with park advocates across North America as well as the collective experience of park volunteers and experts in the growing Toronto parks movement.

Park People believes that our parks are not as good as they should be and we know that when residents get involved, parks get better. That’s why we are working with more than 65 park friends groups, city workers and other partners to plant more trees and gardens, fix broken infrastructure and get more people out celebrating their communities through parks.

We develop tools and resources that help park volunteers become better stewards for their local parks. We also bring park friends together to share what they know and to collaborate on projects and issues that improve parks for all. Together, we recommend policies and practices that recognize how parks contribute to the social and economic health of cities.

Thank you for your interest in better parks.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Dave Harvey". The signature is fluid and stylized, with a large initial "D" and "H".

Dave Harvey  
Director