



Parks and Environment Committee
100 Queen Street West
Toronto M5H 2N2

September 8, 2015

Dear Chair and Parks and Environment Committee members,

Re: Enhancing Toronto's biodiversity and protecting our local species at risk

Every spring during migration, tiny chimney swifts (*Chaetura pelagic*) dart about the sky above Toronto neighbourhoods, catching insects on the wing. At dusk, the swifts begin to congregate around large, abandoned industrial chimneys that used to dominate the Toronto skyline. In just moments, in a spectacular show, hundreds of swifts suddenly funnel down into their communal roosts. Some chimneys are home to thousands of individuals.

When it comes time to start nesting, the swifts break up into pairs and find other, smaller chimneys throughout the city. Once they have successfully raised young, the families again begin to congregate, once again using the large communal roosts in preparation to fly south for fall migration. We don't often think of cities as habitat for wildlife, but this species relies exclusively on chimneys for its survival.

Unfortunately, the number of suitable roosting and nesting sites and availability of food has declined so much over the decades that the population of chimney swifts has declined by 30% over last 3 generations (13 years). In Ontario the chimney swift is listed as "threatened" under the *Endangered Species Act (2007)*.

The chimney swift is just one example of the frightening loss of biodiversity that we are experiencing in Toronto, Ontario, Canada and globally. Around the world, between 200 and 2000 species are lost every year, often due to habitat loss caused by humans.

The international community has taken a clear position. In 1992, global leaders made a commitment to stop the loss of biodiversity through the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity. The United Nations took a clear position declaring 2011-2020 the Decade of Biodiversity.

The province of Ontario, through the Ontario Biodiversity Council, has developed a Biodiversity Strategy with targets for engaging people, reducing threats, enhancing resilience, and improving knowledge.

Toronto does a lot to protect wildlife and biodiversity. We invest in its tree canopy, a huge step for protecting biodiversity of plants, animals, and insects. We work with the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) to protect our rivers and ravines. We protect riparian, dunes, and other

Councillor **Mike Layton**



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natural features that are important for habitats. Our Bird-Friendly Development Guidelines work to ensure our new buildings are not hurting migrating birds.

This year, the endangered piping plover (*Charadrius melodus*) returned to nest Hanlan's Point on the Toronto Islands for the first time in over 80 years. As a result, the TRCA worked with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF) to protect the nesting site so that the birds would be safe from predators and human disturbance. This is a great news story and we should celebrate our hard work to protect our natural habitat and the work of staff and volunteers to ensure all is done to protect these species.

Despite all we are doing, there is so much more the City can do to enhance biodiversity and protect species at risk. We routinely approve the demolition and construction of buildings that serve as critical habitat for species at risk. We plant and permit the removal of trees while migratory songbirds are nesting. We pave and we naturalize our parks. The City of Toronto is on the front line of biodiversity protection and need to live up to that responsibility.

We need to ensure that our policies and actions work to enhance and protect biodiversity and live up to our regional and international obligations. It is for this reason that I would recommend Toronto develops an updated biodiversity strategy that leads national and internationally in the fight to protect biodiversity. I recommend that:

The Parks and Environment Committee request that the Executive Director of the Energy and Environment Office, in consultation with the General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation, the Chief Planner, and the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, develop a strategy to enhance and protect biodiversity and threatened or endangered species in Toronto, including any changes required to site plan approval, demolition and building permits, the Official Plan, the Zoning by-law or any other city approval, review or bylaw that might be required, to the April 2016 meeting of the Parks and Environment Committee. Included in that report any international, national, provincial, or regional strategies for protecting biodiversity that might inform a Toronto biodiversity strategy.

Yours in sustainability,

Mike Layton
City Councillor
Ward 19, Trinity-Spadina