

Parkland Strategy: Preliminary Report

Date: November 17, 2017

To: Executive Committee

From: General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation; Acting Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning Division

Wards: All

SUMMARY

The Parks Plan (2012-2017) was approved by City Council at its meeting in May 2013 and among other recommendations, directed an update to the strategy for the acquisition of parkland to continue to prioritize underserved areas and address City priorities.

This report provides an overview of the Parkland Strategy (Strategy) focusing on the preliminary analysis undertaken to improve the assessment and decision-making on the allocation of parkland across the City. The report also outlines the alignment of this Strategy with key City Planning initiatives including the Rail Deck Park Implementation Plan and the Review of the City's Alternative Parkland Dedication under Section 42 of the Planning Act. Included in this report is a Parkland Strategy Preliminary Report Primer (Attachment 1), providing a high level summary of a Phase 1 Report prepared by O2 Planning & Design Inc.

The Parkland Strategy is a 20-year plan for the enhancement of Toronto's park system through the creation of new parks and the expansion and improved access to existing parks. The Parkland Strategy will build on current practice providing new approaches and tools to support decision making on the acquisition and reinvestment in our City's park system.

This report proposes an updated methodology to measure and assess parkland provision, using the baseline of residential population against the hectares of parkland available across the City. Included in this analysis is Toronto's ravine system and large parks such as the Rouge.

The methodology has determined that the City-wide parkland provision average is 28 m² per person, including 36 m² per person in Etobicoke York; 29 m² per person in North York; 45 m² per person in Scarborough; and 21 m² per person in Toronto and East York (see Table 2). Comparison of city-wide parkland provision (see Table 3) with that of six other large North American cities shows that Toronto is comparable to Vancouver, is higher than San Francisco and lower than Los Angeles. Comparison of parkland

provision in each city's densest core shows Toronto is lower than New York, Chicago and Houston (all cities that have protected/invested in large parks in their downtown areas). The updated methodology has also assessed how future growth and employment population further decreases parkland provision city-wide.

This preliminary analysis of city-wide parkland supply and distribution will be used to build an understanding of the scope, scale and location of parkland need across Toronto. The next phase of work of the Parkland Strategy will consider acquisition, reinvestment and functionality of the parks system. It will also assess the options for potential updates to the Alternative Parkland Dedication Rate. This will be integrated into an implementation, policy and investment framework to be presented in the Parkland Strategy Final Report, due back in second quarter 2018.

The Parkland Strategy is necessary and foundational work that will support concurrent City initiatives and guide long-term planning for new parks, expansions and improved access to existing parks throughout the City. It will provide a comprehensive analysis of the availability and function of parkland and provide new approaches and tools to support decision-making and the prioritization of parkland investment across Toronto for the next 20 years. Finally, it will act as Toronto's parks plan, satisfying the new requirement in the Planning Act that municipal organizations study the need for parkland through preparation of a parks plan prior to adopting any changes to the Alternative Parkland Dedication Rate.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation and the Acting Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning recommend that:

1. The Executive Committee direct the General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation and the Acting Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning to report back on the Final Parkland Strategy in Q2 2018.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There is no financial impact arising from the recommendations in this report.

The Acting Chief Financial Officer has reviewed this report and concurs with the financial impact.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting of November 6, 7 and 8, 2001, City Council adopted the Parkland Acquisition Strategic Directions Report through Report No. 10, Clause 10 of the Economic Development and Parks Committee which established a general framework and approach to establish parkland acquisition directions, identified priority areas and

themes and provided a basis from which to guide more detailed parkland acquisition planning.

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/2001/agendas/council/cc011106/edp10rpt/cl010.pdf>

The Parks Plan (2012-2017) was adopted by City Council at its meeting on May 7, 8 and 9, 2013 and among other recommendations, directed an update to the strategy for the acquisition of parkland to continue to prioritize underserved areas and address City priorities:

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2013.PE20.1>

At its meeting of October 5, 6 and 7, 2016, City Council amended item EX17.1, "Rail Deck Park - Work Plan for Official Plan Amendments and an Implementation Strategy" and requested that an update to the 2001 Parkland Acquisition Strategy be considered at the same time as the Rail Deck Park Implementation Strategy.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2016.EX17.1>

At its meeting of April 19, 2017, Executive Committee referred item EX24.9, "Status of Cash-in-Lieu of Parkland", to the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation and the Deputy City Manager and Chief Financial Officer, with the request to report to the Executive Committee before the end of the third quarter of 2017 with recommendations to amend the cash-in-lieu allocation policy to direct cash-in-lieu of parkland to the acquisition of new parkland, new recreation facilities and new park developments.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2017.EX24.9>

Equity Impact

Parks, Forestry and Recreation values inclusion and diversity and aims to improve the quality of life of all Torontonians through the provision of facilities and services that are welcoming and accessible. Increased access to parks and the associated features and facilities improves individual, social and economic well-being. The Parkland Strategy is a 20-year plan for the enhancement of Toronto's park system through the creation of new parks and the expansion and improved access to existing parks. It is being guided by the themes of expand, share and connect. This phase of work developed a new measurement methodology which allowed for an updated picture of parkland provision (supply of parkland per person) variations across the city. With an understanding of variations in parkland supply and distribution, the next phase of work will explore approaches to the allocation and prioritization of investment to address identified gaps.

COMMENTS

Investment in Toronto's Park System is Essential

Toronto's parks system consists of approximately 7,705 hectares of parkland, covers 12.7% of the city's land base, and includes over 1,500 parks. Parks are necessary elements for a good quality of life. They are essential in making Toronto an attractive

place to live, work, and visit. Toronto's parks offer diverse sport and play opportunities, transportation routes, and places for residents to interact with nature and their community. Parks also provide important economic benefits: they attract tourists and businesses, add value to neighbourhoods, and help to build a healthy workforce. They provide ecological services such as shade, oxygen production, and rainwater storage, increasing the City's resilience to extreme weather events. Toronto's population is expected to reach 3.2 million by 2032, placing greater demands on our parks system. As the City grows, parkland supply, distribution and functionality must respond to ensure a livable Toronto for future generations.

Each year the City invests in its park system, acquiring new parkland and carrying out parks improvement projects. The Planning Act allows municipalities to require that land be conveyed for parkland as a condition of development or redevelopment. Since amalgamation in 1998, the City has acquired 246 hectares of parkland city-wide, which includes 27.7 hectares in Etobicoke York; 54.6 hectares in North York; 119.5 hectares in Scarborough; and 44.1 hectares in Toronto and East York.

The Planning Act also allows municipalities, where City Council deems lands to be unsuitable for parks, to accept cash-in-lieu of parkland equal to the value of the land that would otherwise be conveyed. Cash-in-lieu (CIL) is then collected and held in reserve funds for the purpose of parkland acquisition or parkland development.

The Parkland Allocation Policy distributes CIL funds between district-specific and city-wide funds, as well as between land acquisition and park development (Table 1). Allocating half of the CIL received to city-wide use enables investment, via acquisition and development of parks, in low-growth areas.

Table 1: Cash-In-Lieu Allocation Policy:

2% and First 5% (from parkland dedication or Alternative Rate):		
	City-wide	District
Land acquisition	25% acquire parkland throughout the City	25% acquire parkland within the District
Park development	25% develop and upgrade parks and recreation facilities throughout the City	25% develop and upgrade parks and recreation facilities within the District
Above 5% CIL (remainder from Alternative Rate calculation):		
Acquire parkland that is accessible to the area in which the development is located or to improve parks in the vicinity of the development.		

An important factor to consider is the challenge of acquiring parkland and the spending of cash-in-lieu funding. The current parkland dedication rate has not kept pace with development intensity in Toronto. Acquiring adequate parkland in an infill environment is challenging due to small property sizes and high land values. The purchasing power of cash-in-lieu payments diminish as the cost of land rises. In today's land market, increases in land values are outpacing the ability of the City to make effective use of the

money it receives through cash-in-lieu. The City's current practice is to purchase parkland parcels outright, using cash-in-lieu revenues for funding, rather than a financing tool. Waiting to collect the full value of land parcels places the City at a disadvantage with respect to strategic land purchases and also because the relative value of cash-in-lieu accounts decreases as land values increase. The availability of land in some areas of the city is limited at the same time as the cost of land in these areas continues to increase considerably. The capacity of the reserves to meet parkland demand is limited.

Growing Toronto's Parkland

Provincial and municipal legislative policy frameworks, including the Planning Act (Section 42) and Toronto's Official Plan, ensure that parkland acquisition is a foundational element in city building by requiring land dedication as a condition of residential and commercial development. Toronto's development has intensified and its population is expected to grow over 500,000 residents in the next 15 years. As the city grows, the parks system must expand and improve to meet demand.

The parkland planning framework authorizes the City of Toronto to use a range of tools to acquire land for parks, including parkland dedication from development, purchases, and internal transfers of city-owned land. Decisions regarding the location of parkland acquisition is currently guided by the 2001 Parkland Acquisition Strategic Directions Report (PASDR). PASDR uses the Local Parkland Assessment Cells (LPAC) map as its primary parkland provision reporting tool. This map is currently referenced as Map 8B in Toronto's Official Plan.

Parkland use and trends are changing. At the same time, the emergence of technology and new tools to measure the availability and quality of parkland, supports developing an improved methodology to respond to current and future pressures.

This Preliminary Report proposes an updated methodology which incorporates several key improvements:

- A more refined reporting unit that provides a detailed assessment of local parkland provision variation. The reporting unit is based on Statistics Canada's Census Dissemination Blocks. With over 12,000 units, these are the smallest geographic areas census and dwelling counts providing for a more accurate and detailed indication of provision and need. Reporting on the Census Dissemination Blocks through the census five-year cycle, ensures the data will be readily available and replicable;
- An updated parks classification system that uses park size as the primary metric, and sets a catchment area for each classification based on a reasonable travel distance to each park (industry standard is a 5-10 minute walk). The catchment area of parks increases with park size, as more park space can accommodate more features or functions and people would be willing to travel farther to access more or unique amenities; and
- A newly developed tool that measures parkland provision (supply per person) based on the total park area that serves the population within the catchment area.

Parkland provision is measured against current population, using Statistics Canada 2016 Census information, and against estimated population using City Planning's development pipeline, which generally reflects 15 years of development activity (based on market absorption, which varies across the City).

This updated methodology is a key improvement, because it accurately reflects how parks are accessed through Toronto's walkable network (sidewalks, paths and local roads), and how many people they serve within their catchment area. Implementing this new approach will address the three critical themes of expand, share and connect, to consider for Toronto's parkland provision analysis moving forward.

Preliminary Report Analysis and Findings

The updated methodology offers a more accurate analysis because the reporting units are smaller and show a fine-grained picture of park availability; access is determined by a walkable network of sidewalks, local roads and pathways which offers true use and travel patterns; and considers the total amount of parkland in and between dissemination blocks using population within the catchments. This is the first time a methodology considers cumulative pressure on parks by both residential and employment populations, as well as impact of future populations on current park supply.

Toronto has approximately 7,705 hectares of parkland, including 2,122 hectares in Etobicoke York; 1,680 hectares in North York; 2,710 hectares in Scarborough; and 1,193 hectares in Toronto and East York. Applying the methodology which captures the population relative to parkland area, the city-wide average is 28 m² per person. This city-wide provision rate is reflective of Toronto's natural geography and parkland distribution that is impacted by the unique ravine system and historical patterns of development. Provision levels across the city districts reflect this, as well as population within their boundaries: 36 m² per person in Etobicoke York; 29 m² per person in North York; 45 m² per person in Scarborough; and 21 m² per person in Toronto and East York.

Population growth places demand on Toronto's park system. When future estimated population is incorporated in the assessment, the amount of parkland per person decreases. Assuming no additional parkland is acquired, Toronto's city-wide parkland provision average will decrease to 23.5 m² per person with estimated population growth. At a district level, this equals an approximate decrease of 4-5 m² per person, as follows: 31 m² per person in Etobicoke York; 24 m² per person in North York; 41 m² per person in Scarborough; and 17 m² per person in Toronto and East York. In areas identified for growth by the Official Plan with active applications in the development pipeline, and where parkland provision is already low, such as the Downtown, there is a compounding impact. The result is a pronounced loss in parkland provision.

At the current city-wide parkland provision level of 28 m² per person, to address population growth to 2032, the city would need to acquire 1,400 ha of new parkland city-wide, and in the Rail Deck Park study area alone, 160 ha of new parkland will be needed. It is clear that this amount of parkland cannot feasibly be acquired. This underpins the importance of securing land in underserved areas, along with making strategic connections and park improvements, which will be key to growing Toronto's park system to meet future needs.

Non-residential population creates additional pressure on the parks system. Employment population decreases the current parkland provision level from 28 m² per person to 18 m² per person and would decrease even further from 23.5 m² per person to 15 m² per person factoring in the city's future estimated employment population growth to 2032. This cumulative pressure is additionally important to consider for parks operations and maintenance.

All of the figures noted above are summarized in Table 2 below.

Table 2: City-wide and District Parkland Area and Provision Levels

	Parkland (in hectares)	Parkland Provision in 2016 (m ²) (residential population relative to parkland area)	Parkland Provision in 2016 (m ²) (residential and employment population relative to parkland area)	Parkland Provision in 2032 (m ²) (residential population relative to parkland area)	Parkland Provision in 2032 (m ²) (residential and employment population relative to parkland area)
City-wide	7,705	28	18	23.5	15
Etobicoke York District	2,122	36	25	31	22
North York District	1,680	29	19	24	17
Scarborough District	2,710	45	34	41	31
Toronto and East York District	1,193	21	11	17	9

Comparison of Toronto's parkland provision with that of six other large North American cities considers provision city-wide, as well as within the dense cores of each city. This is critical for comparison purposes, since these cities all have varying population densities and geographies that differ in built form and open space. Table 3 shows this comparison, highlighting which cities have more parkland closest to their densest population areas (New York, Chicago and Houston) and which cities have more parkland outside their densest population areas (Toronto, Vancouver, Los Angeles).

Table 3: City Comparison - Parkland Provision

	City-wide Parkland Provision (m ² per person)	Dense Core* Parkland Provision (m ² per person)
Toronto	28	23
Vancouver	25	16
Los Angeles	52	1
New York	15	33
Chicago	20	40
Houston	30	44

*dense core was measured by selecting the densest census tract and spreading outwards until approximately 250,000 people were selected.

Preliminary analysis concludes parkland supply varies widely across the city. This is due to a number of factors, including the city's natural geography and built-form, pre-amalgamation history of development, and that the six former municipalities all approached parkland acquisition differently, with their own by-laws and policy frameworks. Areas of the city with some of the highest parkland provision include those adjacent to large parks, along the ravine system and the eastern waterfront. These include neighbourhoods near Rouge Park, areas in North York and Etobicoke near the river valleys and the Scarborough Bluffs. Areas of the city with some of the lowest parkland provision include those where there is high existing population density, high estimated population growth and fewer parks. These include the Downtown and Yonge-Eglinton.

The findings also highlight that the areas considered within Rail Deck Park and TOcore initiatives have an overall low supply of parkland for the current population as well as the negative impact that estimated growth will have on parkland provision rates if new parkland is not provided. The key challenges with parkland acquisition in these low provision areas remain consistent and will increase over time, namely: the cost and availability of land. This work also shows park provision by park type, offering preliminary analysis on the distribution of local versus larger parks.

There is currently a low provision of large parks in the Downtown core. This is an important finding, as acquiring large parcels of land for parks is challenging and creative approaches to parkland provision must be planned for and considered in the near term against escalating costs and declining land availability.

Preliminary research and analysis has resulted in an updated picture of Toronto's parkland provision. While preliminary findings have emerged, additional analysis will be carried out against the tool to ensure the methodology will provide an implementable and sustainable approach to parkland acquisition, reinvestment and development for the short, medium and long term. This work will be undertaken in the next phase of the Strategy.

Parkland Strategy Aligns With and Supports City-Wide Planning Strategies

The Parkland Strategy builds on Parks, Forestry and Recreation's service plans and multiple strategic and policy initiatives such as Our Common Grounds (2004); the Parks Plan (2012-2017), the Strategic Forest Management Plan (2012-2022), the Ravine Strategy (2017) and the Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan (2019-2038).

The Parkland Strategy will also align with broader city-wide planning strategies and initiatives currently underway. The Parkland Strategy also provides analysis, with a focus on provision rates, accessibility and functionality that is specific to the TOcore, Rail Deck Park (RDP) and Yonge-Eglinton study areas. This analysis highlights the negative impact that estimated growth will have on parkland provision rates in these areas if new parkland is not provided.

The Review of the City's Alternative Parkland Dedication under Section 42 of the Planning Act sets out the analysis to support an update to the cash-in-lieu component of the alternative rate in order to be responsive to the realities of the land market and intensity of development that Toronto is experiencing today. The Parkland Strategy's Phase 2 will integrate the findings and recommendations of this report in the development of the implementation, policy and reinvestment framework.

The work being undertaken through the Parkland Strategy, as well as the Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan (2019-2038), Ravine Strategy (2017) and the Review of the City's Alternative Parkland Dedication under Section 42 of the Planning Act, contributes background information for the Five Year Review of the Official Plan's Parks and Open Space policies.

Scope and Timelines

Parks, Forestry and Recreation has engaged O2 Planning & Design Inc. as the lead consultant on the development of Toronto's Parkland Strategy. The team is strengthened by Gladki Planning Associates, N. Barry Lyon Consulting and Hemson Consulting Ltd., who bring experience in public policy development, economic testing and financial research.

The development of the Parkland Strategy is occurring over two phases. A preliminary phase of work provides the improved parkland measurement and assessment methodology, resulting in a current picture of Toronto's supply and distribution of parkland. The final phase will deliver an implementation, reinvestment and policy framework. The analysis presented through this work will help to inform priority investment decisions, and will be aligned with related City studies, strategies and initiatives. This cumulative work will be presented in a Parkland Strategy Final Report in the second quarter, 2018.

At its meeting of April 19, 2017, the Executive Committee referred to staff the request to report back before the end of the third quarter of 2017 with recommendations to amend the cash-in-lieu allocation policy to direct cash-in-lieu of parkland to the acquisition of new parkland, new recreation facilities and new park developments. As a review and analysis of cash-in-lieu informs part of the scope of the next phase of work, the request through the motion will be addressed and reported back in the Final Report in Q2 2018.

Extensive Public Engagement Provides Critical Input

Public engagement has provided critical input in the direction and development of the Parkland Strategy, and will continue to provide key input moving forward. This phase of engagement heard from a broad range of stakeholders, residents, community, advisory and equity-seeking groups. Two stakeholder workshops were held in the spring of 2017 to explore challenges and solutions to parkland provision and to identify equitable access criteria in evaluating parkland supply. Throughout the late summer and fall, residents and the general public were invited to share their input and feedback through an online survey, 21 pop-up events and five open houses across the City. In September 2017, a presentation was given to the Aboriginal Affairs Committee and a workshop was conducted with the Toronto Planning Review Panel.

In total, almost 4,000 people participated in providing feedback and informing the development of the Parkland Strategy Preliminary Report. This includes almost 60 workshop participants, almost 2,400 online survey responses, 1,200 pop-up attendees and over 100 attendees at the open houses. A comprehensive “What We Heard Report”, which provides further analysis on feedback, will be available in late November on the project website: www.toronto.ca/parklandstrategy.

This feedback and input will be complemented by Councillor consultations and expanded public and stakeholder outreach in 2018.

Next Steps

The Parkland Strategy Final Report, to be reported in second quarter, 2018, will guide long-term planning for new parks, expansions and improved access to existing parks throughout the city. It will provide a comprehensive analysis of the availability and function of parkland and provide new approaches and tools to support decision making and the prioritization of parkland investment across Toronto. It will assess the options for potential updates to the Alternative Parkland Dedication Rate. Finally, it will act as Toronto's parks plan, satisfying the new requirement in the Planning Act that municipal organizations study the need for parkland through preparation of a parks plan prior to adopting any changes to the Alternative Parkland Dedication Rate.

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ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Parkland Strategy Preliminary Report Primer