

Nancy Martins
10th Floor, West Toronto, City Hall
100 Queen Street West
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

September 4, 2017

Re: PG22.1 TOcore: Proposed Downtown Plan

To the members of the Planning and Growth Management Committee:

We are writing to offer our support and comments for the draft policies within TOcore, in particular those policies that refer to parks and public spaces. We are pleased to have been a part of this plan through our work managing the Public Spaces Public Life study with the City of Toronto and Gehl to inform the Parks and Public Realm Plan portion of TOcore.

Additionally, many of the proposed parks and public space policies within the plan reflect the guiding principles and ideas within our [Making Connections](#) report, released in 2015, that explored strategies for creating networks of parks and public spaces within urban neighbourhoods.

This includes experimenting with pilot projects to test new public space ideas, creating stronger programming and management partnerships with community groups and non-profits, and planning parks from a neighbourhood or district level as opposed to simply looking at the design of individual parks in isolation.

TOcore includes some exciting new proposals, such as a core green space circle to facilitate continuous movement along a string of parks and public spaces around the downtown as well as better connections to and along Toronto's waterfront. The policies and language promoting the importance of community and non-profit partners, alternative governance models for parks, and programming is very much welcomed.

We support the policy of sunlight protected parks and the inclusion of parks within the downtown core that are to have no new net shadows. Understanding the cumulative impact of shadows from multiple developments on a park and how that may impact its landscaping and use by people is critical in a dense, growing urban environment.

We also support a policy of promoting the assembly of land dedications from different developments to produce a larger park—as opposed to creating a number of tiny on-site parkettes. While parkettes are an important part of the park system, the downtown requires larger parks that offer room for more amenities.

The plan proposes a land first policy for park dedication in the downtown as opposed to accepting cash-in-lieu. This makes sense given the high cost of land in the downtown and the difficulty in finding suitable pieces to purchase by the City. However, we hope that any promotion of a land first



policy is accompanied by a study on how this may affect funds available for park acquisition and improvement elsewhere in the city as the current cash-in-lieu policy distributes 50% of this money citywide.

We would suggest two areas where the plan's policies could be strengthened further:

1. Inclusion of a policy that promotes building green infrastructure, such as bioswales, retention ponds, and rain gardens, within downtown parks and public space projects to contribute to climate-resiliency and stormwater management. Currently the plan alludes to green infrastructure in its contextual sections, but not within policies—whether within the parks section or the water section of the plan.

As we showcased in our new Park Solutions Brief on green infrastructure and parks—[Resilient Parks, Resilient City](#)—embedding green infrastructure within the park development process is critical. We have seen this summer that the issue of managing increased extreme weather is pressing and our parks offer an important opportunity that cannot be ignored to better manage stormwater while creating new and improved public spaces.

2. Inclusion of a policy recognizing the importance of the public right-of-way as potential new park and open space, specifically promoting more projects such as Berczy Park where an adjacent street was included within the park redesign to create a larger, more flexible open space. More of this kind of creating cross-divisional thinking is going to be needed in the downtown.

Finally, while we recognize that TOcore is a plan specifically for the downtown, we urge that the in-progress Parkland Strategy, which will set out a citywide strategy for parkland acquisition and connection, should examine these policies and ideas. Park districts and neighbourhood-level park planning would benefit neighbourhoods outside the core as well, as the city looks to connect existing public spaces—including parks, ravines, schoolyards, and other open spaces—better together.

We want to commend City Staff for their hard work on this much-needed, multi-year planning process and look forward to the full release of the Parks and Public Realm Plan

Sincerely,



Dave Harvey
Executive Director, Park People