



## Downtown Parks and Public Realm Plan

**Date:** April 17, 2018

**To:** Planning and Growth Management Committee

**From:** Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning, General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation and General Manager, Transportation Services

**Wards:** 20, 27 and 28

### SUMMARY

---

This report recommends adoption of the Downtown Parks and Public Realm Plan (PPR Plan) to serve as the vision for and to guide future review and implementation of the Downtown Plan.

Toronto's streets, parks and publicly accessible open spaces are among the city's greatest assets and are essential to the quality of life that Torontonians enjoy. Downtown's proximity to Lake Ontario and its shoreline, the Toronto Islands, the Don River and Rosedale Valley offers a unique experience to residents, workers and visitors within the urban core. These natural features are the setting for Downtown Toronto. They create a link to Indigenous histories and are valued by contemporary Indigenous peoples.

Downtown's parks, squares and streets are some of the most iconic, beloved and heavily used destinations in the city. These public spaces set the stage for daily social interaction and act as the canvas on which public life occurs. The social bonds created in these spaces are fundamental to the city's identity and quality of life.

The variety of parks and open spaces Downtown provides unique experiences and offers a range of necessary functions. Easy and equitable access to quality public space for recreation, passive use, active transportation and nature promotes mental and physical health and contributes to social cohesion. Downtown is becoming a more dense urban environment, and improved and expanded public spaces must address the needs of an increasing intensity of residents, workers, students and visitors.

Working in tandem with the Downtown Mobility Strategy, the Downtown Parks and Public Realm Plan (PPR Plan) sets out a vision for parks, open spaces and streets, proposing a framework to re-imagine, transform and grow public space. It will guide the development of an expanded, improved, connected and accessible network of high-quality open spaces for people and promote healthier, diverse natural systems to support a growing Downtown. It will create stronger connections to the natural landscapes that surround Downtown, unlocking the potential to expand and improve

access to the parks and open space network. It will reinforce existing, and provide new visual and physical connections and improve active transportation within and beyond the Downtown. The PPR Plan supports the implementation of the Downtown Plan by informing the Complete Community Assessment and other requirements as part of the Planning Rationale for development applications.

One of the main financial tools that will be used to implement the Downtown PPR Plan will be the option for an alternative provision for or amount of parkland to be dedicated as part of any development, as permitted through Section 42 of the Planning Act. Prior to passing the by-law, an official plan is required to be in effect that contains specific policies dealing with the provision of lands for park or other public recreational purposes and the use of the alternative requirement. The City intends to enact a new by-law to set an alternative parkland dedication rate for the Downtown. The accompanying TOcore: Downtown Plan Official Plan Amendment report includes a recommendation that City Planning in coordination with Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff, bring forward the by-law in early 2019. The Planning Act also requires that a parks plan be made publicly available prior to the adoption of a new official plan policy addressing an alternate rate. The Downtown PPR Plan addresses the need for parkland and sets out a park plan for the area to support future growth and change, as referenced in the Planning Act.

The four objectives of the Downtown PPR Plan are: acquire and expand; improve; share; and connect. The objectives guide the Five Transformative Ideas identified in the PPR Plan: The Core Circle; 12 Great Streets; Shoreline Stitch; Park Districts; and Local Places.

The Five Transformative Ideas are each supported by a number of initiatives that will inform a 25-year implementation strategy. These initiatives identify opportunities, and provide a vision for and explore concepts that are examples of the type of change that could occur. Moving from the vision and concepts illustrated in the Downtown PPR Plan to implementation will happen through a more detailed planning, design and implementation process, as set out in the graphic below. Each phase of the process will provide additional technical review and analysis, develop options for consideration, and will solicit further input and feedback from the community and stakeholders. The PPR Plan also promotes coordination among corporate and community partners for implementation.

Figure 1: From Vision to Implementation



The Downtown Official Plan Amendment (OPA) will provide a blueprint for growth and infrastructure in Toronto's core over the next 25 years. Leveraging opportunities that come with intensification, while addressing challenges associated with growth, the Downtown OPA sets the direction for the city centre as the cultural, civic, retail and economic heart of Toronto, and as a great place to live. Downtown is Canada's largest employment cluster with over 500,000 jobs, relying on Union Station, the subway system and the surface transit network to provide access to a city-wide and regional workforce. Close to 240,000 people live Downtown, with more than 7,500 residents added annually over the past 5 years. The Downtown, together with the 'shoulder' areas of South of Eastern and Liberty Village, has the potential to reach between 850,000 and 915,000 jobs by 2041.

The Downtown Plan requires new development to be commensurate with the provision of infrastructure, it is supported by five infrastructure strategies:

- Downtown Parks and Public Realm Plan
- Downtown Community Services and Facilities Strategy
- Downtown Mobility Strategy
- Downtown Water Strategy
- Downtown Energy Strategy

These strategies represent the first phase of work which identifies future infrastructure requirements to guide and support growth over the next 25 years within the Downtown Plan, which encompasses a 17-square-kilometre area from Bathurst Street to the Don River and from the waterfront, north generally to the CP rail corridor and Rosedale Valley Road. Each strategy is reported out separately, and outlines a series of plans, priorities and actions intended to align infrastructure planning with long-term growth.

Moving forward, an implementation strategy will be developed for the Downtown Parks and Public Realm Plan that will prioritize projects; review aligned initiatives and opportunities for quick start projects; and identify priority projects to advance feasibility studies for consideration in future capital budget.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

---

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

1. City Council adopt the Downtown Parks and Public Realm Plan attached as Attachment 1 to this report to serve as the vision for and to guide future review and implementation of the Downtown Plan.
2. City Council direct the Chief Planner, Executive Director of City Planning, General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation, and General Manager of Transportation Services in consultation with the Chief Financial Officer, to develop a Downtown Parks and Public Realm Implementation Strategy, in light of the City's broader Capital Plan,

and report back to Executive Committee in the fourth quarter of 2019. The implementation strategy should address among other matters:

- a. Identification of the priority parks and public realm projects that will require future technical feasibility studies;
- b. Existing aligned projects and/or initiatives that will support and advance the parks and public realm projects identified in the Downtown Parks and Public Realm Plan; and
- c. Parks and Public Realm priorities for consideration in future divisional Capital Budget Plans.

3. City Council direct the Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning, General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation and General Manager, Transportation Services to use the Downtown Parks and Public Realm Plan to review development applications within the Downtown Plan area to:

- a. inform the necessary infrastructure required to support the development application;
- b. assess the potential cumulative impact of other applications and previous approvals to determine the City's ability to secure the necessary infrastructure to support development; and
- c. apply planning mechanisms, potentially including the use of holding provisions, as necessary to ensure that growth and infrastructure needs are aligned.

4. City Council direct the Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning, General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation and General Manager, Transportation Services to report back every 5 years with updates to the Downtown Parks and Public Realm Implementation Strategy to be coordinated with the preparation of the City's future Development Charges By-law updates.

## **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

---

There are no direct financial implications resulting from the implementation of the recommendations in this report.

The Downtown Parks and Public Realm (PPR) Plan serves as the first phase of work that provides directional guidance on parkland and public realm improvements and potential infrastructure requirements for the Downtown. Given the range and complexity of projects identified in the PPR Plan, coupled with the 25-year planning horizon for the PPR Plan, an Implementation Strategy will be prepared.

This Implementation Strategy will prioritize projects, using a set of strategic criteria that provide a rationale for advancing different initiatives at different points over the 25-year

period. Criteria will include population and employment growth pressures, eligibility for capital funding, opportunities for capital project coordination and emerging opportunities/quick wins. A categorization of projects will also be undertaken. Complex projects with longer implementation periods will be flagged to advance through a Council-approved “stage-gate” capital planning process that provides Council with decision points related to scope, timelines and costs. This is a similar process that has been used by City Council to manage larger infrastructure initiatives such as transit and Rail Deck Park. Other typical projects will be required to undertake more detailed studies, such as technical feasibility and engineering studies, master plans, streetscape studies that may include Environment Assessments, or plans for smaller local initiatives. Through this work initial order of magnitude costing for the infrastructure projects will be completed.

Projects will also be assessed in terms of the degree to which they address infrastructure requirements related to growth versus benefit to existing populations. This will ensure that this work informs future Development Charges By-law reviews.

The Implementation Strategy will involve an analysis of the approved 10-year Capital Plan for the operational divisions involved. This analysis will determine whether the infrastructure elements are addressed, fully or partially, within the Capital Plan, and will point to those elements that may require additional investments. Opportunities for alignment of projects will be identified to ensure coordination of capital investments across divisions and agencies. Additional opportunities for partnerships with third parties – such as planned investments by Agencies, Boards and Commissions and other orders of government – will be explored.

The Implementation Strategy will identify the appropriate planning, funding and financing tools available to support future investment in parkland and the public realm. These tools include parkland dedication as a condition of development approval, parkland acquisition and improvements by the City using cash-in-lieu of development, Development Charges, Section 37 funds, Site Plan Control, and agreements to enable public access. Alignment and coordination of these individual tools will be required to support the Downtown PPR Plan and will be reviewed in the development of the Implementation Strategy.

Detailed infrastructure timing and funding will need to be prioritized against other City-wide capital projects and operating impacts both funded and unfunded as well as the City’s financial and resource capacity to deliver additional infrastructure works that will inform and guide the future Capital Budget Plan and Operating Budget processes.

The timing and provision of the necessary infrastructure to support growth in the Downtown will be a collective responsibility with the development industry for building a liveable Downtown. This may require that the City manage, as appropriate, development to align with the delivery of growth-related infrastructure. The Downtown Plan provides mechanisms to assist in coordinating the provision of infrastructure including: the requirement that developers undertake a Complete Community Assessment for their proposals that will determine and address their infrastructure (physical, community service facilities, green and parkland) requirements to support growth; the potential use of a “Holding” symbol in the event that growth is outpacing the

necessary infrastructure requirements; and opportunities to integrate and/or provide infrastructure within or in the area of the proposed development.

The Downtown Plan has proposed a new Alternate Rate Policy, as provided through Section 42 of the Planning Act. Policy included in the Downtown Plan directs that the "alternative requirement for parkland dedication at rates commensurate with the intensity of development". The Downtown Plan Official Plan Amendment staff report recommends that Council direct the Chief Planner and General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation to prepare a By-law by early 2019 that will amend the Municipal Code (Chapter 415) to enact an alternative requirement for parkland provision for the Downtown in accordance with the permissions under Section 42 of the Planning Act. The new Alternative Rate By-law is intended to be responsive to the realities of the land market and intensity of development in the Downtown. This tool will assist in supporting the implementation and funding of the PPR Plan over the next 25 years.

The Implementation Strategy for the PPR Plan is recommended to Council for completion and report back in Q3 of 2019.

The Interim Chief Financial Officer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial impact information.

## **DECISION HISTORY**

---

### **TOcore:**

At its May 2014 meeting, Toronto and East York Community Council (TEYCC) considered a staff report entitled "Comprehensive to the Core: Planning Toronto's Downtown," which launched TOcore: Planning Downtown, and directed staff to develop an integrated planning framework and infrastructure growth strategy for Downtown to enable long-term liveability and competitiveness. The report can be found here: <http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2014.TE32.47>

At its December 2015 meeting, City Council adopted a staff report entitled 'TOcore: Planning Toronto's Downtown – Phase 1 Summary Report and Phase 2 Directions' and directed City Planning, Parks, Forestry and Recreation, Transportation Services and Economic Development and Culture staff to develop a Parks and Public Realm Plan for Downtown to improve the quality and connectivity of public spaces and identify parkland improvements and acquisition priorities within the intensifying core. The report can be found here: <http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2015.TE12.43>

At its October 2017 meeting, City Council adopted a staff report entitled, 'TOcore: Proposed Downtown Plan' and directed staff to undertake stakeholder and public consultation on the five Downtown infrastructure strategies, including the Parks and Public Realm Plan, and report back by mid-2018 with final strategies and any recommendations for future work to implement the strategies such as capital approvals, Environmental Assessments and/or Master Plans. The report can be found here: <http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2017.PG22.1>

## **Aligned Initiatives:**

The development of this Downtown Parks and Public Realm Plan has been informed by a number of aligned initiatives.

### **City-wide Parkland Strategy**

In 2017, the Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division launched the City-wide Parkland Strategy. The Strategy is a 20-year plan that will guide the planning of the park system – including new parks and expansions, improvements and enhanced access to existing parks. It will support decision-making and prioritization of investment in parkland across Toronto. The vision and actions identified in the Downtown PPR Plan are aligned with the key objectives emerging through the City-wide Parkland Strategy.

The Parkland Strategy has developed an updated methodology to assess the provision of parkland in the city based on the amount of parkland per person, where it is located and its degree of accessibility to the population. This methodology has been used in the Downtown to assess and analyze parkland provision.

More information on the City-wide Parkland Strategy can be found here:

<https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/accountability-operations-customer-service/long-term-vision-plans-and-strategies/parks-forestry-recreation/parkland-strategy/>

### **Ravine Strategy**

Toronto's Ravine Strategy will help to support a ravine system that is a natural, connected sanctuary essential for the health and well-being of the city, where use and enjoyment support protection, education and stewardship.

Five guiding principles and twenty actions for Toronto's ravines were developed through extensive consultation with the public, interest groups, staff and key stakeholders. The guidelines represent the core set of ideas and values that will guide the City in future decisions for ravine management: protect, invest, connect, partner, and celebrate.

The Strategy will provide a strong framework for future decision making in ravines. It will help to better manage the multiple pressures and interests in these landscapes while ensuring that the foundation for all decisions is maintenance of a healthy ravine system that connects people with nature in a positive and sustainable way. The Ravine Strategy will help to find the balance between activities that are good for people, but also good for ravines.

The guiding principles and actions outlined in the Ravine Strategy are supported and aligned with the vision of the Core Circle in the Downtown PPR Plan.

More information on the Ravine Strategy can be found here:

<https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/accountability-operations-customer-service/long-term-vision-plans-and-strategies/parks-forestry-recreation/ravine-strategy/>

## **Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan**

Toronto Parks, Forestry and Recreation finalized the 20-year Facilities Master Plan (FMP) in 2017. This Plan will guide investment in parks and recreation facilities such as community recreation centres, ice rinks, and sports fields. In developing the FMP, consideration was given to demographics, the use and conditions of current facilities, recreation and leisure trends, facility best practices, and legislative changes together with public, stakeholder and staff input. It considered population growth in the Downtown and the rest of the City based on the projected development pipeline. The FMP identified the need for large scale facilities in the Downtown that require a significant amount of outdoor space, in addition to other small scale facilities such as splash pads, sports fields, basketball courts and outdoor skate parks. The visionary ideas presented in the Downtown PPR Plan were developed in alignment with the outcomes of the FMP.

More information on the Parks and Recreation Master Plan can be found here:

<https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/accountability-operations-customer-service/long-term-vision-plans-and-strategies/parks-forestry-recreation/parks-and-recreation-facilities-master-plan/>

## **Complete Streets**

“Complete Streets” are streets that are designed to be safe and attractive for all users: people who walk, cycle, take transit or drive, and people of varying ages and levels of ability. They also accommodate other uses such as sidewalk cafés, street furniture, street trees, utilities and stormwater management.

Ensuring our streets are designed to function well for all modes of travel will help people choose the mode that best suits their needs for a particular trip, and will combine into efficient transportation networks keeping all modes of traffic moving safely and managing congestion. On many streets, the sidewalk is where you can find street trees and landscaping, places to rest and socialize, public art and market space, such as store displays and outdoor cafes and patios. Streets support public life and are a critical component of the public realm. The Downtown PPR Plan identifies opportunities to reimagine 12 Great Streets, capturing the principles of Complete Streets.

More information on Complete Streets can be found here:

<https://www.toronto.ca/services-payments/streets-parking-transportation/enhancing-our-streets-and-public-realm/complete-streets/>

## **Policy Framework:**

### **Provincial Policy**

The Province sets out the overarching policy direction to guide land use planning decisions through in the Provincial Policy Statement (2014) and Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (2017). These documents recognize the importance of planning for public parks and the public realm. They set the expectation that municipalities will align planning for new parkland when approving new development and explicitly recognize that providing expanded and convenient access to an

appropriate supply of parks and open spaces will support the achievement of complete communities. The policy documents state that:

- parks and the public realm are integral elements of an active transportation network system of green infrastructure;
- a full range and equitable distribution of publicly-accessible built and natural settings for recreation is needed; and
- the provision of parks and public realm contribute to energy conservation and efficiency, improved air quality, reduced greenhouse gas emissions, and climate change mitigation and adaptation.

### **Toronto's Official Plan**

Official Plans are long-term visions for how a city should grow and are the most important vehicles for implementing provincial policies and plans. The City's Official Plan recognizes that Toronto's waterfront, ravines, watercourses, parks and other open spaces connect to form an extensive web of green space across the City, and that our parks and open space system will need to expand as the city grows and changes. It highlights that ongoing reinvestment in Toronto's parks and open space system is as important to city-building as creating new parks and open spaces. It directs that:

- new parks and amenities, particularly in growth areas, will be added, in addition to improving and expanding existing parks;
- parks need to be designed to be of a high quality and provide a variety of amenities to promote user comfort, safety, accessibility and year-round use and to enhance the experience of "place";
- access to existing publicly accessible open spaces will be protected and expanded;
- new and existing city streets will incorporate a Complete Streets approach and be designed to perform diverse roles including active transportation; and
- the use of private open space and recreation facilities, including areas suitable for community or allotment gardening, to supplement the City's parks, facilities and amenities will be promoted.

The Official Plan also recognizes that the public realm is a defining component of great cities, and the characteristics and qualities that makes cities great places to visit, also makes them great places to live.

## **COMMENTS**

---

### **1. TOcore Background and Overview**

'TOcore: Planning Downtown' (the Study) has been a comprehensive and integrated look at Toronto's Downtown, its relationship to the city and region around it, and the planning framework governing growth, development and the provision of infrastructure. The Study area is bounded by Lake Ontario to the south, Bathurst Street to the west, the CP rail corridor and Rosedale Valley Road to the north and the Don River to the East.

Initiating the TOcore Study in 2014, Council recognized that growth was outpacing the City's ability to secure the infrastructure necessary to support growth. It signaled that a new planning direction for Downtown was required and that it should be accompanied by an infrastructure growth strategy. Without integrated planning of growth and infrastructure along with a balancing of residential and non-residential growth, the liveability of Downtown and the competitiveness of the city as a whole was seen to be compromised.

The purpose of the Study is to ensure growth continues to positively contribute to Toronto's Downtown as a great place to live, work, learn, play and invest by determining how future population and employment growth will be accommodated and shaped, and what physical and social infrastructure will be needed, where it will go and how it will be secured.

Led by City Planning, the Study has been a collaboration among sixteen City divisions and two offices (Energy and Affordable Housing), as well as with several supporting agency partners.

Through TOcore, staff has developed a 25-year Downtown Plan to ensure that Downtown Toronto remains the thriving, liveable, and connected heart of a successful and prosperous city and region. To guide implementation, the Downtown Plan is supported by five infrastructure-related strategies that address: parks and public realm, community services and facilities, mobility, energy and water.

## **2. Growth and Challenges**

Downtown's population is projected to more than double from approximately 200,000 people in 2011 to a potential population of 475,000 by 2041. Downtown is Canada's largest employment cluster with over 500,000 jobs. By 2041, Downtown, together with the "shoulder" areas of South of Eastern and Liberty Village, has the potential to reach between 850,000 and 915,000 jobs.

An analysis undertaken to date shows that previous generations' infrastructure investments have been supporting recent growth and that the limits of this infrastructure capacity are being reached. Securing the physical and social infrastructure for new residents, workers and visitors is imperative if future development is to be accommodated while maintaining liveability.

The Provincial Policy Statement and the Growth Plan require the City to plan for an appropriate range of community infrastructure to meet the needs of residential and employment population increases and to foster complete communities. The Downtown Plan and its associated Infrastructure Strategies will put in place the mechanisms to allow the City to more directly tie and associate development approvals with the securing of new infrastructure in the Downtown. It is this linking of growth and infrastructure that will ensure the liveability of Downtown and reinforce its role as an economic driver and generator of jobs.

Within the Downtown and Central Waterfront the average units per hectare by project have grown steadily to almost a 100% increase since 2005, the year that the City's alternative parkland dedication rate was approved by the Ontario Municipal Board. During that same period, by comparison, only 19.63 hectares of parkland has been secured Downtown by the City. This has driven the parkland provision in the Downtown down to 9.4m<sup>2</sup> per person, which is 67 percent lower than the city's average area of parkland per person.

The forecasted population growth will mean even more people will be living and working in high-density, vertical communities. This in turn, will result in more people needing to use public parks and publicly-accessible open space to maintain their physical and mental health and well-being. It will also place an increase in demand on existing parks and open spaces, driving the need to provide additional parks and open spaces in all areas of the Downtown, including areas that are not necessarily going to experience the same levels of growth and intensification.

To safeguard liveability, infrastructure must keep pace with growth. Maintaining provision levels is challenging in urban environments where the intensity and rate of vertical growth generates parkland demand in areas where it is difficult to acquire new parkland. The response, in a complex built-up environment like the Downtown, requires creative approaches to maintaining an adequate supply of parkland that provides the full range of park experiences enjoyed elsewhere in Toronto.

The Downtown PPR Plan proposes measures to address the provision of parks for the current and future population within the Downtown to provide additional parkland for existing residents and minimize the widening gap between parkland provision and population. It examines the need for parkland to inform public and private investments in parks. It presents a range of implementation tools that will be used to realize the Plan's vision.

### **3. Process and Engagement**

The Downtown PPR Plan's public and stakeholder engagement process followed a three-phase process: 1) Understanding Issues, 2) Testing Ideas, and 3) Confirming Directions.

Phase One focused on developing an understanding of issues and opportunities the PPR Plan could explore. It also helped identify the locations and evaluation criteria for a Public Space Public Life Study.

In Phase Two, the study team sought feedback on ideas, including draft policies and the emerging Plan and ideas (which were developed, in part, with the feedback heard in Phase One). The team also used the locations and evaluation criteria identified in Phase One to undertake the Public Space Public Life Study.

Finally, in Phase Three, feedback was sought on a draft Downtown PPR Plan, through a multi-faceted public consultation program and focused on: a) Raising awareness that the City was developing the plan, b) Soliciting general public feedback to inform the plan, and c) Soliciting feedback from specific audiences with a keen interest in

Downtown's parks and public realm. Material has been shared and feedback sought through a range of tools, including:

- The project website ([www.toronto.ca/tocore](http://www.toronto.ca/tocore)), which: describes TOcore generally and the Parks and Public Realm Plan specifically; hosts presentations and videos, and documents of feedback shared by participants.
- An interactive map, hosted on the project website, which asked people to identify their favourite places and places they felt had 'great potential.' The map received over 600 place-specific comments.
- Favourite places 'pop-ups' and intercept surveys, where hundreds of participants shared their favourite places and described what drew them to those places.
- A 3-part lecture series, which involved guest speakers, 'pecha kucha' style presentations and long-form presentations, and attracted 150 – 500 participants each.
- Public meetings, including a TOcore Expo, a March 2017 Public Event and December 2018 Open House, all of which attracted hundreds of participants.
- Stakeholder focus groups, which sought feedback from: active transportation and water users, Business Improvement Areas, environmental and park stewardship advocates, 'friends of' groups, institutions, resident associations, and schools and sports associations.

The findings from the public and stakeholder engagement process will form the basis for the transformation of existing open spaces, the creation of new ones, and the interconnection of public realm systems that reinvigorate the downtown.

#### **4. Plan Highlights**

The Downtown PPR Plan presents a bold and compelling vision for our parks system and public realm network that puts public life, place-making and active mobility at the forefront of long-term planning, ensuring a lasting legacy for future generations. It looks at Downtown's public realm holistically, within the context of a mature urban fabric.

The Plan outlines Five Transformative Ideas that represent a paradigm shift in how to expand and improve the Downtown's parks and public realm. The four leading objectives of the Plan are:

- **Acquire and Expand:** Downtown has a parkland provision 67 percent below the citywide average. As the Downtown population continues to grow, creating new parkland and making existing parks bigger, where possible, is required. Acquisitions and expansions will be undertaken to address the notable gaps in the inventory of types of parks Downtown. In particular, this will include park spaces that are large enough to accommodate a range of programming and functionality, which is critical infrastructure needed to support Downtown's continued growth.

- **Improve:** Improvements to parks can be transformative. Existing parks can serve a wider range of park users when strategic investments to the infrastructure within the park are made to increase their utility and potential to meet local needs and to support growth.
- **Share:** Downtown has high quality and signature open space assets owned and operated by other public agencies (such as the Universities) and private landowners. Its cemeteries, existing and improved school yards and Privately Owned Publicly-accessible Spaces (POPS) contribute to Downtown's public realm, but do not replace the need for new and enhanced parkland. Collaboration and partnerships are needed to ensure the existing and future population has access to these spaces. Securing new POPS through development, for example, will contribute to expansion of the public realm.
- **Connect:** A well-connected system of parks and open spaces increases access to these valuable assets. The Plan recognizes that the existing street grid presents the opportunity to establish a network of active transportation routes and pedestrian connections. In addition, creating new connections into the parks and public realm system such as access points into the ravine system, improved access to Toronto Islands and linear parks creates opportunities to provide better access to existing parks and open spaces. Connecting parks and public realm expands the park experience beyond the park boundary itself thereby creating a cohesive green network and support community life.

These objectives are reflected in Five Transformative Ideas described below:

### **The Core Circle**

The Core Circle is a connected system of topographic and natural features that encircle Downtown. It is composed of the Lower Don Valley to the east, the Lake Ontario shoreline and Toronto Islands to the south, the alignment of the buried Garrison Creek to the west and the former Lake Iroquois escarpment and Rosedale Valley Ravines to the north. The Core Circle builds on Toronto's identity as a "city within a park" and provides opportunities to acknowledge and reinforce its history and natural setting. Improving access to this network for pedestrians and cyclists makes better use of these invaluable assets. Enhancing the natural character in and along the edges of the Core Circle will be encouraged, with access and use balanced with the need to sustain the long-term health of natural systems.

These natural and topographical features provide a link to the millennia-old Indigenous cultures of this region. They preserve aspects of the character of the pre-colonial landscape that are considered sacred to Indigenous peoples. Integrating Indigenous placemaking into the Core Circle is an opportunity to advance reconciliation.

Also situated around the edge of the Core Circle are several parks significant in size. These parks have been identified as Portal Parks and offer an opportunity to access the Circle through improved physical connections and the creation and enhancement of views. The Portal Parks include Corktown Common, Riverdale Park, Ramsden Park, Jack Layton Ferry Terminal and the St. James Town open spaces.

The Core Circle presents the opportunity to create a connected park system that encircles Downtown. Improving access and connections into the Core Circle makes it easier for residents, workers and visitors to make better use of and enjoy this existing asset.

## **12 Great Streets**

All streets Downtown are important and are expected to be beautiful, comfortable, safe and accessible. Downtown's Great Streets have city-wide and civic importance with a diverse character that conveys Toronto's public image to the world and sets the stage for festivals, parades and civic life. These streets hold cultural and historical significance and provide connections to the Core Circle. They are destinations in themselves, lined with landmark buildings, historic fabric and important public spaces. Downtown's Great Streets play an important role in supporting economic activity and fostering public life.

The Downtown PPR Plan identifies a network of 12 Great Streets to be prioritized for public realm improvements. These streets connect to the Core Circle and are defined by their location, scale and historic role in the city, existing civic significance and their potential contribution to the public realm network.

The 12 Great Streets are:

1. Spadina Avenue/Road
2. University Avenue
3. Yonge Street
4. Jarvis Street
5. Parliament Street
6. Bayview Avenue
7. Bloor Street
8. College/Carlton/Gerrard Street
9. Queen Street
10. King Street
11. Front Street
12. Queens Quay

The objectives of Acquire and Expand; Improve; Share; and Connect, can be applied to the Great Streets in several ways. By securing building set-backs for new developments and establishing appropriate public use within existing building setbacks, new and existing public realm can be shared. There may also be opportunities to expand the public realm on Great Streets using the existing allocation of space within the right-of-way. Finally, the Great Streets currently connect many significant parks and public spaces Downtown. When these streets are redesigned and rebuilt, there is an opportunity for their role as park connectors to be highlighted. All of the Great Streets meet the Core Circle, and provide an opportunity to connect into this significant park system.

The goal of the Great Streets is to reinforce their identity and distinct characteristics, highlight their cultural heritage, and identify and enhance their contribution to the Downtown parks and public realm system. Some of the Great Streets, such as Queens

Quay and a portion of Front Street, have been revitalized in recent years. Others, such as University Avenue and Bayview Avenue, have potential to be re-imagined over time as outstanding civic places and connectors that allow public life to flourish. The objectives for the Great Streets will manifest differently on each street and even on different segments along the same street, to reflect local context and the street's role within the Downtown.

### **Shoreline Stitch**

The Shoreline Stitch generally comprises the area encompassing the Union Station rail corridor, Gardiner Expressway and ramps, and Lake Shore Boulevard reaching from Ontario Place to Corktown Common. Its focus is to connect the east and west quadrants of the Core Circle, and to connect Downtown with the waterfront. Within the Shoreline Stitch is a series of interventions intended to limit the barrier effect of the existing transportation infrastructure and to stitch communities and their parks and open spaces together by improving connections such as pedestrian crossings, as well as expanding the park system through initiatives such as Rail Deck Park, and re-thinking underutilized spaces. The Shoreline Stitch interventions will increase accessibility to waterfront parks, improve connections to community assets and create new civic places.

Downtown is separated from Lake Ontario by major transportation infrastructure comprised of rail lines, the Gardiner Expressway and Lake Shore Boulevard. The Shoreline Stitch will improve north-south connections across transportation corridors, weaving the waterfront back into the fabric of Downtown. It will also improve east-west linkages along, over and under the transportation corridors between Ontario Place and the Don Valley, and connecting the east and west quadrants of the Core Circle. This will require an assembly of interventions, some ambitious and long-term such as decking over the rail corridor for public parkland purposes and others that are more modest but highly impactful, such as improving pedestrian crossings at streets across Lake Shore Boulevard. Stitching communities and their parks and open spaces together across major transportation corridors increases accessibility to waterfront parks, improves connections to community assets and creates new civic spaces and destinations.

### **Park Districts and Precincts**

A Park District is a grouping of neighbourhood parks, streets and other open spaces including laneways, school yards, church yards and ravines, which is designed to form a cohesive public realm network, with the goal of supporting community life and providing access to a wide range of experiences and programs. Each Park District will have a unique identity and be centered on one or more community parks or open spaces. They provide opportunities to create an expanded and improved ensemble of neighbourhood parks, streets and other open spaces. Park Districts will be designed as a cohesive whole, with a range of connected and accessible experiences and programs / functions within easy walking distance of residents and workers. A great variety of legacy parks exist Downtown. These parks act as anchors within each Park District and have the potential to expand and connect to adjacent streets and other open spaces to create a more vibrant legible and expansive network of parks and public spaces for all Downtown districts.

The Downtown PPR Plan identifies 16 Park Districts and recognizes an additional 7 Park Districts that have been developed through other planning documents.

In addition to the Park Districts, the Downtown PPR Plan identifies two Park Precincts: The Queen's Park Precinct and The Civic Precinct. The Park Precincts have distinct assemblies of parks, public spaces and streets, centered on important civic buildings. These precincts have provincial and city-wide importance, drawing tourists and supporting public gatherings for events such as cultural celebrations and assemblies. These two precincts form part of Toronto's unique identity.

All of the objectives, expand and acquire, improve, share and connect, apply within the Park Districts: expand existing parks and acquire new ones wherever possible, improve the existing assets to better serve communities, seek opportunities to share open space especially in the areas most under-served; and connect the parks and public realm within the park districts to create a cohesive network.

### **Local Places**

Local places provide an opportunity to re-imagine the physical design of the constellation of small spaces that form our everyday experience of the public realm. Where we lack larger parks to gather, or where they are simply too far away to experience on a day-to-day basis, we must look to the places in between to support Downtown's public realm transformation.

The Downtown PPR Plan describes "local places" as the public or publicly accessible spaces that form our everyday experience of the city. These spaces include: parkettes, laneways, schoolyards, churchyards, cemeteries, Privately Owned Publicly-accessible Spaces (POPS), Institution lands, and overlooked places.

Thinking creatively about local places is critical to capitalizing on our current land resources, shifting the balance towards a more liveable city.

In recent years, new parks and open spaces have been realized in places that we had previously forgotten. These include playgrounds and skate parks beneath underpasses, urban beaches opposite industrial port facilities and linear parks alongside and overtop of infrastructure. There is untapped potential in many of these forgotten space and opportunities to partner with agencies, boards and commission to share open spaces. Transforming these spaces will help to address the needs of a growing Downtown population. The small scale and flexible nature of these spaces enables them to respond to local needs, making them a tremendous asset to Downtown communities.

The Downtown PPR Plan sets out future thinking for parkettes, laneways (residential and mixed-use) and schoolyards, illustrating the opportunities that exist within many of these assets.

## 5. Next Steps

### Vision to Implementation

The Downtown PPR Plan sets out a series of transformative ideas at both the regional, district and local scale. The Plan will inform decisions about parkland dedication and acquisition, park improvement, programming and design of new and renewed streets, and inform future capital budget planning. The projects will need to be assessed and prioritized by the participating City Divisions (City Planning, Parks Forestry & Recreation and Transportation Services, and others) through the preparation of a detailed Implementation Strategy. Accordingly, the Implementation Strategy will develop a set of criteria to prioritize projects. These criteria will apply a strategic lens and provide a rationale for advancing different initiatives at different points over the 25-year lifecycle of the Plan.

Figure 2: Developing an Implementation Strategy



When an initiative aligns with one or more of these criteria, it will support further review and study to determine the technical feasibility and potential costs.

The draft set of criteria are as follows:

- Addressing Park Need and Population Growth
- Availability of Capital Funding
- Coordinated Infrastructure Investments through:
  - Synchronized City infrastructure projects
  - Partnerships with Third Parties
- Emergent Opportunity/Quick-win

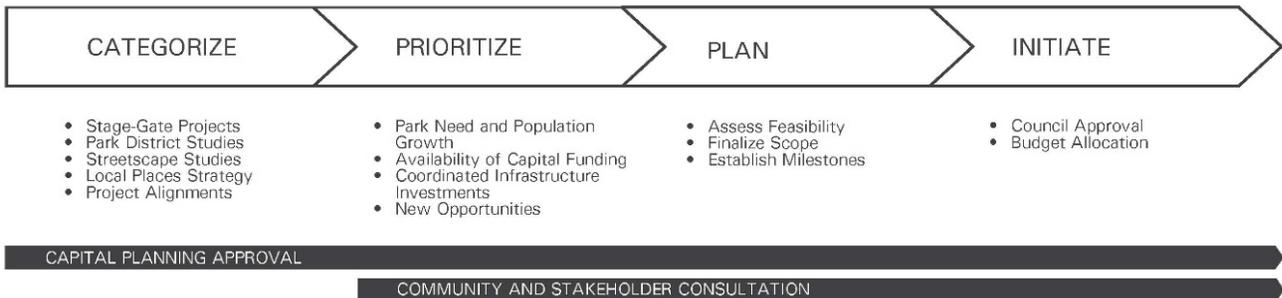
The ideas presented in the Plan range from ambitious and highly complex, to straight forward and small-scale. The initiatives related to the more ambitious ideas may take considerable time to bring to fruition, whereas many of the smaller initiatives could be implemented within a 5-year time frame or less. Many of the complex initiatives are made up of a series of smaller projects, making a long-term strategy to sustain the momentum a critical requirement for full realization of the vision.

The initiatives identified in the Plan include a range of improvements to existing parks (such as revitalizations and redesigns), expanding the public realm along Great Streets and acquiring new land for public parks. Some initiatives involve a neighbourhood-wide perspective on the network of parks and open space; these projects can be supported by small, local improvements that collectively can be highly impactful.

The Implementation Strategy will organize projects into categories based on the Transformative Ideas. All ideas, whether short- or long term, have short-term actions

that will mark a path to completion. The diagram below illustrates the approach to the Implementation Strategy.

Figure 3: Implementation Strategy Structure



### 1. Addressing Park Need and Population Growth

The Parkland Provision Methodology, in the Downtown PPR Plan, identifies areas of the Downtown that are most park deficient (based on the number of people served by each park and amount of parkland supply per person). This methodology also uses City Planning’s Development Pipeline to measure where parkland need will intensify based on new development. This enables the City to prioritize areas for parkland expansion and improvement based on geography. Where there are existing areas of low provision, the City will consider opportunity sites for park acquisition and expansion. In areas where growth is occurring and the parkland need is intensifying, the City will use the appropriate planning tools to secure parkland and public realm improvements through the Development Approvals Process. These tools are detailed further in the next section.

The Downtown Parks and Public Realm Plan, along with the other four infrastructure strategies, is key to linking the timely provision of parkland with growth. It will inform the review of development applications, including the Complete Community Assessment required as part of the Planning Rationale for development applications. To ensure growth is linked to the timely provision of infrastructure – including physical infrastructure, green infrastructure, community service facilities and parkland – City staff will determine whether the proposed development contributes to the creation of a complete community as assessed against the five Downtown Infrastructure Plans and/or Strategies.

### 2. Availability of Capital Funding

The proposed Downtown PPR Plan Implementation Strategy will prioritize projects based on the outcomes of the park provision assessment and review if those projects are aligned with items approved for the 10-year capital plan. Where there is identified need for new park or public realm infrastructure, but no capital plan alignments exist, recommendations can be made for initiatives to be included in the 10-year capital plan. Where new projects are identified, the costs will be outlined, sources of funding will be determined and the appropriate City Division will make a submission for approval through the City’s capital budget process.

### **3. Coordinated Infrastructure Investments**

#### *A. Coordinated City infrastructure projects*

Effective implementation of the Downtown PPR Plan will necessitate that City Divisions leading infrastructure projects engage with City Planning, Parks, Forestry and Recreation and Transportation Services when working within the Downtown boundary. This can be facilitated by the Municipal Capital Infrastructure Coordination office. When an initiative of this Plan is aligned with planned below grade work, the City should make every attempt to advance the public realm improvements as part of project completion. An example of this would be the planned water main replacement on many Downtown streets (as outlined in the Water Strategy) with the Great Streets identified in this Plan. The Implementation Strategy will identify opportunities to coordinate delivery of specific projects with other planned capital work.

#### *B. Partnerships with Third-Parties*

Infrastructure investment can come from other levels of government or government agencies, boards and commissions. The City of Toronto works in partnership with these organizations to leverage investment and participation in priority projects. Examples of these partnerships include securing public realm through transit planning with Metrolinx, and building shared community facilities with school boards. Elements of this Plan that align with existing initiatives underway by third parties should be prioritized to seize the opportunity to integrate expansion of the parks and public realm system within existing projects. An example of this is the proposed decking structure for Rail Deck Park which has been envisaged to enhance the planned Metrolinx Front / Spadina Regional Express Rail station.

### **4. New Opportunities**

There are concepts in the Plan that could be prioritized based on emergent opportunities. For example, the opportunity of The Bentway emerged through a philanthropic donation. It supports the objectives to connect, share and expand. It re-imagines under-utilized space and serves to connect existing public spaces. Quick-wins may also arise through the development approvals process when a land dedication to base-park condition can be enhanced with the infusion of additional capital resources to improve the utility, design and functionality of the space.

### **Realigning Tools to Meet Today's Realities**

Downtown's parks today are challenged to meet the range of needs and land area required to serve residents, employees, students, and tourists. Parks in Downtown must serve local populations, and by virtue of their location within the core, near attractions and employment centres, many parks draw visitors from elsewhere in the city and beyond. This places increased pressure on these spaces to provide amenities to support the park needs of local populations and itinerant users. The degree to which the City's parks system keeps pace with residential and employment growth can be improved by adjusting and making better use of the tools the City has at its disposal.

## **Provisions Under Section 42 of the Planning Act**

Bringing the Parks and Public Realm Plan to fruition will involve using a number of different tools. A primary tool for securing parkland and improvements to existing parks stems from the legislative authority through Section 42 of the Planning Act. The City can also leverage existing real estate assets to contribute land towards parks and the public realm. Other tools at the City's disposal for improving parks and streets include Development Charges and the tax base. Open space secured on development sites can be secured both through the planning approval process and during detailed site design.

Some implementation will be incremental through individual development applications (securing the provision of on-site parks) and others may be through larger exercises that will require further study.

## **Parkland Dedication as a Condition of Development Approval**

As enabled by Section 42 of the *Planning Act*, Toronto's primary planning instrument for acquiring new parkland is through land dedications or cash-in-lieu of parkland as a condition of development or redevelopment. Section 42 of the *Planning Act* sets out a standard rate for parkland dedication of 2 percent of the land area for commercial or industrial development and 5 percent of the land area for residential development.

The Act also permits municipalities to set their own alternative parkland dedication rates (within limits set by the *Planning Act*) by by-law to enable the City to require parkland dedication and cash-in-lieu as a condition of development and redevelopment over and above the *Planning Act* minimums. Prior to passing a new by-law that includes an alternative rate, an official plan is required to be in effect that contains specific policies dealing with the provision of lands for park or other public recreational purposes and the use of the alternative requirement. A parks plan is also required to be made publicly available prior to the adoption of official plan policy. The parks plan must examine the need for parkland in a city or specific geography.

Importantly, any alternative rate established by the City only reflects the expectation of the amount of parkland, or cash-in-lieu of parkland, that development is expected to contribute; it is not necessarily representative of the total amount of land that would be required to meet the City's need for new parkland.

New developments will be expected to contribute parkland commensurate with growth. A new alternative rate will be established for the Downtown that is based on intensity of development such as densities, built form types and scale, and/or the number of units associated with development, or other measures that will be determined by the City. This will mark a departure from the current static requirement of a percentage of the site size which does not account for the range of development intensity the Downtown is experiencing. The key principle that will be applied is that the more intense the development, the more parkland that will be required to be provided.

A policy requiring an appropriate alternative rate for parkland dedication Downtown is contained in the Downtown Plan, with that new rate to be secured through a by-law amendment to the Municipal Code that will be brought forward in 2019.

## **A. Land Dedications**

Where sites are large enough to accommodate new parkland, on-site land dedications will be prioritized. The City also has the ability to request that development provide its dedication outside of the property itself, referred to as an “off-site” contribution. Given the size and location of development sites in the Downtown, off-site land dedications will be pursued to ensure the provision of parkland is concurrent with growth and in areas that enhance and increase accessibility of the existing parks system in accordance with this Plan.

## **B. Cash-in-lieu of parkland**

Where the City exercises its right to accept cash-in-lieu of parkland, the alternative rate provision will be used to implement parkland acquisition and improvements serving the Downtown. This may include parkland and improvements outside the Secondary Plan area that serve the area.

## **Measuring Success**

The Downtown PPR Plan was launched with a Public Space Public Life (PSPL) study. This form of research provided a clear picture of how public space is being used in the Downtown and by whom. The data gathered through the study established a base line against which future investments, acquisitions and improvements can be assessed. Continuing to gather the PSPL data at regular intervals will provide the City with insights into how the implementation of this Plan has improved the experience of the public realm in Downtown.

The Downtown PPR Plan Implementation Strategy will recommend periodic reviews of the Plan. These reviews will include, at minimum, the following analysis:

- an update to the park provision assessment, including parkland need and future need based on City Planning’s Development Pipeline;
- an assessment of where growth has occurred during the review period and how parks and the public realm have been expanded, improved and connected commensurate with that growth;
- updates on the Public Space Public Life studies that have been undertaken during the review period;
- a review and update of the priority projects and associated actions for the next 5 years and beyond; and
- an inventory of uninitiated projects and priorities, and a review of their relevance when the impact of other opportunities and investments have been factored into the provision assessment, implementation strategy and PSPL data.

## 6. Conclusion

Downtown's parks and public realm is where civic life happens. Public spaces set the stage for daily social interaction in the city, as people travel to work or school, move around to shop or find something to eat, take in a festival or cultural event, get active in a park or playground, or just sit back and enjoy public life. Supporting the implementation of the Downtown Plan, the Downtown Parks and Public Realm Plan will guide the future of an expanded, improved, connected and accessible network of high-quality open spaces, ensuring the quality of life that Torontonians enjoy.

## CONTACT

---

Kristina Reinders, Senior Urban Designer, City Planning Division, 416-338-5780, [kristina.reinders@toronto.ca](mailto:kristina.reinders@toronto.ca)

Andrew Farncombe, Project Manager, Strategic Initiatives, Policy & Analysis, City Planning Division, 416-397-4629, [andrew.farncombe@toronto.ca](mailto:andrew.farncombe@toronto.ca)

Petra Wolfbeiss, Director, Policy & Strategic Planning, Parks, Forestry and Recreation, 416-338-6577, [Petra.Wolfbeiss@toronto.ca](mailto:Petra.Wolfbeiss@toronto.ca)

Robert Gibson, Manager, Area Studies and Acquisitions, Parks, Forestry and Recreation, 416-338-7639, [Robert.Gibson@toronto.ca](mailto:Robert.Gibson@toronto.ca)

Elyse Parker, Director, Public Realm, Transportation Services, 416-338-2432, [Elyse.Parker@toronto.ca](mailto:Elyse.Parker@toronto.ca)

## SIGNATURE

---

Gregg Lintern MCIP, RPP  
Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning Division

Janie Romoff  
General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation

Barbara Gray  
General Manager, Transportation Services

## ATTACHMENTS

---

Attachment 1: Downtown Parks and Public Realm Plan