

## MIDTOWN RAVINES GROUP

Jan 22, 2020

Mayor John Tory and Members  
City Executive Committee  
City of Toronto

by email to: [exc@toronto.ca](mailto:exc@toronto.ca)

### **Re: EX 12.1: Ravine Strategy Implementation**

Mr Mayor, Members:

We are writing on behalf of the Midtown Ravines Group, an incorporated consortium of six residents associations bordering ravines in Midtown Toronto, to express our support for the recommendations in this report.

The recommended increases in funding —additional operating and capital funds, starting in 2021— are a long overdue recognition of the need for greater action in combatting the ongoing deterioration of Toronto's ravines.

#### ***Recommended increases in funding – wonderful!***

We strongly support the Mayor's declaration at his press conference last Thursday that he will ask Council to fast track the staff funding recommendations by providing additional operating funds for ravine cleanup and invasive species management, starting this year. We urge you to approve the increase in the 2020 Parks, Forestry, and Recreation (PFR) operating budget which he has proposed.

The need for invasive species management in the ravines is acute, and the Mayor's proposal recognizes this. We urge you to support it.

Toronto's ravines are deteriorating as we speak. Nature does not wait, erosion does not slow down, parks infrastructure continues to deteriorate. Each major storm —and there are more of them every year, thanks to global warming— erodes more of Toronto's ravine heritage. It is essential that Council provide funds for capital improvements that will arrest this deterioration.

We consequently strongly support the proposed increase of \$105 million in the ten-year capital budget for park infrastructure in the ravines. While we understand that it takes time to ramp up capital spending, the need for improvements in park infrastructure in the ravines is acute. We urge you to ensure that the tendering of capital projects occurs this year, so that work can begin as soon as funds become available, starting in January 2021.

#### ***Need for additional investment***

The proposed increase in capital spending on ravines is great, but it is limited to the ten ravine areas most in need of quick intervention. There are many other ravine areas in the City where investment is required.

We urge that you ask staff to report on the amounts of additional funding that will be required to deal with those other areas, as part of the reporting set out in recommendation 8.

We recommend below that recommendation 8 be amended to provide for a progress report in three years time, not five years. Whatever you decide regarding the timing of progress reports, those reports should set out what progress has been made and what further progress will cost, ideally before or soon after the next municipal election.

### ***Ecological integrity, invasives control – more needed!***

While we are delighted that the report recommends the investment of additional funds in ravine restoration and remediation, we must emphasize that the problem of dealing with invasive species is much bigger than what this report's recommendations will be able to deliver. Indeed, it is worth stressing that the invasive species management strategy allocates resources to the “easy wins”, the areas where invasives are not yet widely established.

We do not doubt that it makes sense to defend those areas as a first priority. But not dealing with the areas where invasives are widespread is like dealing with an out-of-control fire by just protecting nearby buildings. We really do need more.

We recognize that it will take time to build up a program to do more. We recommend that you request staff to report in 2022 on the additional funding that will be required to bring all of Toronto's ravines up to an acceptable standard of ecological integrity.

### ***Opportunities for citizen volunteers – can and should do more***

There are many citizens in Toronto who care deeply about the state of our City's ravines and who are willing to contribute time and resources to augment what City staff can do. Such work can include anything from participation in half-day work programs supervised by City staff to more extensive projects such as mapping invasive species locations or collecting seeds of old-growth trees.

We support the report's recommendations to use part of the additional operating funds to support additional volunteer engagement. Nevertheless, the quantum of recommended additional support—a 20% increase in volunteer engagement, an additional one or two Community Stewardship Program sites—is not very great.

We urge you to ask staff to report in 2021 on what more can be done, and what it will cost in additional staff resources. We also ask that, in making that report, staff report on potential volunteer training and certification programs that would enable staff resources to be leveraged by more volunteers as well as on opportunities for requiring group insurance that could be used to relieve the City of legal liability. The issue of City liability should be dealt with more proactively.

### ***Private-public partnerships – need protocol***

We are delighted to see the emphasis on the potential for private-public partnerships. The Loop Trail proposal and the Community Engagement Program initiative are both exemplary. But there is potential for much more.

We view our own Midtown Ravines Group as an example of community-based fundraising that can expand what City staff can do on its own. We are an incorporated non-profit organization, incorporated so that we can fund-raise and enter into agreements.

Together with TRRS (the Toronto Ravine Revitalization Study), we have raised funds to support UofT Faculty of Forestry research in midtown ravines. We have involved a number of schools in raising seedlings from seeds collected as an adjunct to the UofT research. And we

are in the process of contacting all private landowners abutting midtown ravines to involve them in a potential private-public partnership to expand what is done on public land.

Nevertheless, our efforts have been hampered by the lack of an established protocol for community-based partnerships. We cannot raise money from potential donors to do work on public ravine land without being able to clarify precisely how the money will be spent. Donors are not willing simply to contribute to the City's operating budget.

We badly need to establish a protocol that allows the establishments of partnerships that are true partnerships, providing a clear delineation of the contributions and responsibilities of each partner. While we have had a number of meetings with staff on this, developing the necessary protocol has proved difficult.

City Council has (at its February and May meetings in 2019) requested staff to report to the Infrastructure and Environment Committee on the feasibility of initiating partnership-based stewardship programs. The report before you notes (p. 35) that PFR will report to Council in 2020Q4 on partnering to provide new and enhanced park assets. We suggest that this request be expanded to include the development of workable protocols for effective partnering on operational programs aimed at enhancing ecological integrity.

### ***Reporting on overall progress and success — please, more often!***

While there are and will be reporting on specific subjects, the report proposes (in Recommendation 8) that a coordinated PFR-TorontoWater-City Planning report on the overall success of the Ravine Strategy's implementation be submitted only every five years.

While aware that it will take time to organize and make functional the many aspects of the implementation plan, we believe a review —with its associated opportunity for public input— should occur more frequently than every five years. Moreover, a five-year review cycle does not mesh well with the electoral calendar.

We suggest that Council should review the advancement of Ravine Strategy objectives at least once in each Council term, preferably early in each term so that issues that arise from such review can be dealt with effectively by each new Council.

### ***Summary***

While we have focused on a number of implementation issues and have suggested some modifications of the staff recommendations that could get more results, we do not want our suggestions to overshadow our enthusiastic support for the report.

The City owes a debt to all of the staff who have participated in the preparation of the Ravine Strategy and this implementation report. The results of what it recommends will hugely benefit residents of Toronto. We urge that you support it and provide for its funding.

Yours truly,

John Bossons, Co-chair  
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*The Midtown Ravines Group is an incorporated non-profit organization set up by six residents associations bordering ravines in Midtown Toronto to encourage and fund private and public work on ravine remediation.*

## SUMMARY OF REQUESTS

We ask that you:

1. Support the proposed increases in funding:
  - staff recommendation for additional capital funding: \$105 million over ten years, starting in 2021
  - Mayor's proposal for \$2.7 million increase in the PFR operating budget for litter control and invasive species management, starting in 2020.
2. Put more money into controlling invasives. Request staff to report in 2022 on additional funding that will be required to meet an objective of attaining an acceptable standard of ecological integrity in all of Toronto's major ravines.
3. Request staff to report on potential volunteer training and certification programs that would enable staff resources to be leveraged by more citizen volunteers.
4. Request staff to expand the Council-requested report on partnering to provide new and enhanced park assets to include a report by 2020Q4 on the development of workable protocols for private-public partnerships on operational programs aimed at enhancing ecological integrity.
5. Amend recommendation 8 of the staff recommendations to provide for reporting on the progress in achieving Ravine Strategy objectives in 2023 and thereafter at the beginning of each Council term.
6. Request staff to include in the recommendation 8 progress report a costing of the additional capital funding that will be needed to address the capital investment needs in priority ravine investment areas other than the ten priority areas identified in the staff report.