

From: [High Park Professional Dog Walkers Association](#)
To: [councilmeeting](#)
Subject: [External Sender] High Park Movement Strategy comments for council meeting
Date: May 8, 2023 2:52:52 PM

To Toronto City Council,

This letter is to express the concerns of the High Park Professional Dog Walkers Association regarding the current High Park Movement Strategy proposal to reduce and ultimately permanently disallow vehicle traffic and parking within High Park.

The High Park Movement Strategy proposal before council was not presented to the public. Council is voting on Strategy 1, complete closure of the park to vehicles, with an implementation period of partial closure, rather than Strategy 3, partial closure. Strategy 3 was the strategy presented to the public by the Infrastructure and Environment Committee at the open house, online, and in the media. Toronto residents and community stakeholders already had many issues with Strategy 3, and have not been given the opportunity to provide input on the current, more extreme, proposal before council to completely close the park to vehicles.

As community stakeholders and permit holders with the City of Toronto, the High Park Professional Dog Walkers Association represents more than 40 local small business owners, as well as the interests of our clients, who are residents of High Park, Bloor West Village, the Junction, Roncesvalles, Baby Point, Swansea, and surrounding areas. Our clients are local residents for whom High Park is their local park, and whose work or parenting responsibilities, mobility considerations, illness or other considerations require hiring a dog walking service during weekday daytime hours.

The proposal before council of the High Park Movement Strategy will limit the ability of our members and the general dog owning population to access the park. The proposed changes will affect access to the park year round, including the six months of the year that see limited cycling and other seasonal park usage. Dog owners and our members are in the park in all seasons and all types of weather. Our presence contributes to public safety in the large, isolated green spaces, particularly during less busy times and seasons.

Even on winter days, current parking usage inside the park is close to capacity, and during the summer, parking throughout the park is almost always near full capacity during weekday hours. Today, May 8, the restaurant parking lot was full at 10 am with kids still in school, demand only increases once school is out for the summer.

With the removal of access to parking within the park those who require parking to access the park will not be able to due to the number of perimeter street parking spaces being insufficient to meet the current needs. There is also discussion around removing parking and adding bike lanes on Parkside Drive, which would further reduce available perimeter parking.

Public transit is not an option for our businesses for safety and public courtesy

reasons. Dogs are also prohibited on public transit during morning and afternoon rush hours, preventing all dog owners from accessing the park via public transit for at least 7 hours per day.

Street parking presents safety issues with vehicle doors opening into bike lanes or live traffic, crowded sidewalks to limited entry points to the park, as well as being further from park amenities and the off-leash area during inclement weather such as thunderstorms, or dog emergencies. Professional walkers also carry first aid kits and have on several occasions helped injured park users with first aid from our parked vehicles. Additionally, parking on Bloor Street is unavailable during winter months due to snow mounds from plowing blocking the narrow parking spaces, an issue that has not been remedied over the three years the park has been closed to vehicles on weekends.

Prohibiting vehicles and parking within the park off-loads the minimal safety concerns of low speed vehicles in the park to more serious safety concerns on the surrounding streets. During Cherry Blossom closures, families are often seen darting across the Bloor St or Parkside Dr from street parking spots at distance from the main entrances.

As professional dog walkers, our aim is to provide excellent service that meets the needs of our local neighbourhood clientele, while limiting any negative impacts and interactions with the general public. The proposed reduction and then permanent elimination of vehicle access will limit our ability to visit High Park, forcing many dog walkers onto neighbouring narrow sidewalks and smaller parks with daycare providers and caregivers with young children.

We support additional traffic calming measures within the park, as well as much needed maintenance of existing infrastructure such as pedestrian crosswalks and expanded sidewalks. Additional enforcement of existing speed limits and stop signs will address safety concerns not limit people's ability to access the park.

We ask City Council to reconsider this proposal and maintain current parking capacity and vehicle access to parking in High Park so that all local residents are able to continue to enjoy the park as well always have.

Sincerely,

Emma Bongers, representative for

High Park Professional Dog Walkers Association (HPPDWA)