



James  Pasternak
Councillor | York Centre - Downsview

Toronto City Hall

City Hall, 100 Queen St. West, 2nd Floor, A22
Toronto, Ontario M5H 2N2

October 23rd, 2023

Dear Members of the Infrastructure and Environment Committee

RE: Connected Communities: Advancing Year-Round Trails between Earl Bales Park and York Mills Station

Toronto's ravine systems are vital to the city. They provide for storm water management, healthy ecosystems, as well as beautiful green spaces that are universally appreciated. In many communities, Toronto's ravines also provide for critical connectivity, allowing for residents to walk, bike, or otherwise get to parks and community centres, public transit stations, or into nature without requiring the use or expense of a car and to cross under highways like the 401 that otherwise divide neighbourhoods. Where year-round trail connections do not exist in Toronto, such as in the West Don River ravine system south of between Earl Bales Park and York Mills Station, it is incumbent upon the City to explore the ways they can be created to achieve these benefits.

In 2022, City Council passed IE27.6 – Review of City of Toronto Golf Courses and directed staff to advance the implementation of strategies that would improve ravine access and trail connections on City-owned golf courses. With the conclusion of the NRFP process for the management of City-owned golf courses (GG7.17), it is the appropriate time to explore how year-round trail access can be created around the Don Valley Golf Course, connecting Earl Bales Park to Yonge Street and providing access to and from adjacent residential communities without impacting regular golf operations. Today, the only formal trails that connect these areas pass through the middle of the golf course and are closed to the community between April and November.

Access to greenspace is also an important equity consideration, particularly where there are opportunities to improve mobility. Reliance on car-ownership and even the cost of TTC fares for families can be expensive, whether for day-to-day work and family obligations or when accessing recreation and the kinds of excellent programs offered by Parks, Forestry & Recreation. With many purpose-built affordable apartment buildings along Sheppard Avenue and close to this ravine, a connection could materially benefit many individuals and families into the foreseeable future.

With capital plans for some 10,000 trees and shrubs to be planted in 2025 in this section of the Don Valley ravine, now is the time to advance a plan that improves accessibility, while complementing golf course operations and supporting ravine habitat and conservation efforts.



RECOMMENDATIONS:

That City Council:

1. Direct the Acting General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation, in consultation with the General Manager, Transportation Services, to explore the feasibility of, and optimal alignment for, a year-round trail connection between Earl Bales Park and York Mills Station that will achieve the following goals:
 - a. Not interfere with regular golf operations within the Don Valley Golf Course;
 - b. Maximize connectivity and safety for trail users and adjacent residential areas through formalizing existing improvised trails that may be substandard;
 - c. Minimize impact on important habitat and hydrogeological features of the ravine; and
2. Direct the Acting General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation to explore opportunities for public trail community access outside of regular business hours through this section of the Don Valley on an interim basis in accordance with the Toronto Municipal Code and the goals in recommendation 1 above, while long-term trail designs are being evaluated and implemented.
3. Direct the Acting General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation, in consultation with the General Manager, Transportation Services, to report back with a recommended approach to work plan for advancing both interim and long-term year-round trail connections resulting from recommendations 1 and 2 above, as well as a preliminary capital and operating cost estimates, to the Committee by the first second quarter of 2024.

Sincerely,



Councillor James Pasternak

Toronto - Ward 6, York Centre – Downsview

Appendix 1:

