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**Date:** April 24, 2023

**To:** [Infrastructure and Environment Committee](#); [Councillor Burnside](#); [Councillor Morley](#); [Councillor Saxe](#); [Councillor Colle](#); [Councillor McKelvie](#); [Councillor Perruzza](#); [Councillor Perks](#); [MayorTO](#)

**Subject:** High Park Movement Strategy IE3.7

Following a comprehensive review of the High Park Movement Strategy, the High Park Natural Environment Committee calls for urgent redress of two neglected park priorities:

- Protecting the natural environment
- Pedestrian safety

While we support certain elements of the proposed High Park Movement Strategy, we believe it fails badly in these crucial key areas.

### **Respect Designations and Protections**

Over half of High Park is of such outstanding natural quality that it is protected by layers of provincial and municipal designations (including Toronto's Official Plan regarding Environmentally Significant Areas and provincially significant areas). The City of Toronto has an obligation to ensure that these areas are protected for the long term from further degradation, and this obligation transcends the desire to provide recreation and cultural facilities and activities.

### **Address Strategy Results**

The 2021 High Park Movement Strategy survey had a high response rate. It found that most people walked to and within the park, that the top three attractions were nature, trails and Grenadier Pond, and that the greatest number (77%) ranked protecting and enhancing ecological integrity as a high priority.

Clearly, protection of the park's ecological integrity and human safety should be the top priorities of any plans made for High Park, but the proposed Strategy makes little mention of these important topics. Instead, this Strategy focuses on accommodating the more active forms of "active transportation", including high-speed cycling, to the detriment of both pedestrians and the natural environment.

### **Proposed Measures**

The High Park Natural Environment Committee calls for the negative impacts of recreational and cultural activities within the park to be minimized. In particular, we propose the following measures:

1. Close the park to vehicles two days a week or more. This benefits pedestrians and supports a more peaceful park experience.

2. Close West Road to vehicle traffic. It cuts through prime areas of black oak savannah and woodlands. It should be considered a paved nature trail.
3. Restrict bicycles and other rolling devices to roads that are open to vehicles.
4. Offer a shuttle service that is limited to the main attractions and remains on roads (not on paved trails).
5. Do not make exceptions for cyclists by time of day, even on a pilot basis. Early morning is prime time for wildlife that live in or pass through High Park.
6. Do not connect cycling lanes so that they encircle the provincially rare black oak savannah habitat (i.e., the proposed crossover through the Grenadier Restaurant parking lot).
7. Do not build any new facilities in the park, such as the proposed plaza and new bicycle lanes on West Road, without conducting a full Master Plan study. In accordance with legal requirements, new facilities that will attract more park visitors and impact the natural environment must not occur until there are plans in place to minimize the negative impacts.

### **Reallocation of Funding**

High Park's natural areas are under severe stress. Its ravine slopes suffer from erosion, soil compaction and a denuded understory. The main reason is extensive off-trail use from pedestrians, cyclists, and dogs. For the natural woodlands and forests to survive and thrive on these slopes, the park desperately needs:

- A sustainable trail system combined with fencing
- Enforcement of park rules
- Restoration of damaged areas

These concerns are acknowledged by City staff but are not addressed due to lack of funding. Rather than rebuilding roads and sidewalks that were recently rebuilt and adding beautification features in a park well known and highly sought for its natural beauty, we call on the City to use its limited capital resources to fund more pressing needs such as the protection and restoration of High Park's ravine slopes.

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*The High Park Environment Committee has been advising the City and  
advocating for the natural heritage of High Park since 1993.*