

RE: Toronto Island Park Master Plan - item IE15-2

Dear Members of the Infrastructure and Environment Committee,

As a member of the Toronto Field Naturalists (TFN), I appreciate the care the City of Toronto has taken in considering nature in the development of the Toronto Island Master Plan (TIMP). Throughout the consultative process used to develop the TIMP, TFN has seen many of its suggestions for nature protection and restoration incorporated. The TIMP envisions opening access to the Islands year-round to many more visitors and broadening access to pedestrians, watercraft and bicycles throughout the Islands, including to areas currently inaccessible. This is in keeping with the City's ongoing efforts to provide a growing citizenry access to greenspace as outlined in its Parkland Strategy. There is no question as to the value associated with time spent in nature. But as my colleague at TFN has pointed out, how are we to balance the impact of increasing pressures on the Islands' natural spaces with their sustainability? If we frame the Islands' natural spaces as *capital*, how do we manage this natural capital to extend the *services* they provide to and beyond the 25-year horizon of the TIMP?

As the impact of climate change grows, we increasingly appreciate the capacity of nature to enable us to mitigate and adapt to these changes. Trees clean our air, absorb carbon, regulate our climate, cool our city and protect us from storms, and water ecosystems prevent flooding, erosion and improve our water quality. Collectively, these processes can be conceived of as services and resources provided by ecosystems that represent natural capital. Just as other forms of capital can provide a flow of goods and services, constituents of natural capital, our ecosystems, provide us with a range of resources and services. The value of natural capital is dependent on the health of the underlying ecosystem. When our wetlands are degraded or turned over to other land uses, we are subject to more flooding and increased costs associated with flood damage. We have forfeited the natural capital inherent in the intact wetland. Maintaining, restoring and managing ecosystems are key strategies for managing the services that they provide and the natural capital that they represent.

Increasingly, cities and other jurisdictions are evaluating and measuring their natural capital and constituent ecosystem services alongside traditional assets to enable informed decision-making about land use management. The City of Toronto's recent engagement of consultants to measure the natural capital of the city's ravine systems is just one local example (the [ecosystem services of Toronto's ravine system](#) were evaluated at \$822 million per year in 2018). The economic value of ecosystem services in Canada is estimated to be at least \$3.6 trillion per year (Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, 2018), more than double the nation's GDP. While Canada scores highly on the new Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services Index, ecosystems in some parts of the country are in decline, with resulting impacts to the services they provide. Canada's commitment to conserving 30% of land and water by 2030 is one measure intended to mitigate this decline.

Based on the environmental assessment included in the TIMP, the Toronto Islands possess some of the most valuable remaining patches of nature, including provincially significant wetlands and Environmentally Significant Areas. We have been counselled to carefully manage these areas to maintain their ecological integrity. To do otherwise is to mismanage the ecosystem services they provide, squander their natural capital and deplete access to the Islands' nature spaces that the TIMP seeks to increase.

The collective benefits provided by the resources and processes supplied by natural capital are imperative for our survival and well-being. We are quick to undervalue the services that nature provides for free and often do not account for them in our decision-making. We must consider the potentially damaging effect of increasing pressure on the fragile ecosystems of the Toronto Islands. Accordingly, TFN recommends a target to restore 30% of Island lands to nature, in keeping with Montreal's Biodiversity Framework and endorsed by the City of Toronto.

While we are pleased that there are plans for an advisory committee as a means of advancement and implementation of the TIMP, we urge the City to include nature advocates at the table. There is considerable expertise among the nature community that may be harnessed to support and advance the work of the committee and the ensuing work on the land.

TFN also calls for a commitment to regularly update Council on implementation of the TIMP. We recommend the first updates in three years rather than the five years proposed.

In closing, TFN welcomes opportunities to work with City staff and other stakeholders to protect the valuable natural capital our Islands represent.

Sincerely,

Kate Banks (TFN)  
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