

Towards a Beautiful City: Update on Priority Items

Date: March 30, 2026

To: Executive Committee

From: Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning; General Manager, Parks and Recreation; Acting General Manager, Transportation Services; Chief Procurement Officer; General Manager, Solid Waste Management Services.

Wards: All

SUMMARY

This report provides updates on eight priority items identified by City Council through the April 2025 report titled "Towards a Beautiful City - A Path Forward" (2025.EX22.3) as well as a related Member Motion from July 2025 (MM32.14). It also responds to a separate City Council directive from May 2024 to improve the public realm through graffiti removal and the creation of 1,000 new murals (IE13.9). Responses to these items are organized under the following themes:

1. Governance, Oversight and Leadership for Design Excellence
2. Maintenance of the Public Realm
3. Education and Awareness

The public realm consists of streets, parks, plazas, the waterfront, and other shared spaces that support civic life. Responsibility for the public realm is shared across multiple City divisions, each contributing distinct expertise and resources to ensure quality, functionality, and safety. While not exhaustive of all activities, the key updates outlined within this report reflect this cross-divisional approach to deliver a public realm that is well-designed and maintained, meets diverse needs, fosters creativity and inclusion, supports sustainability and climate resilience, demonstrates good stewardship, and strengthens the City's economic health by positioning Toronto as a desirable place to live, work, and visit. Additional future progress that is advanced on these individual items will continue to be reported by the lead divisions through their regular reporting processes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning; General Manager, Parks and Recreation; Acting General Manager, Transportation Services; Chief Procurement Officer; and General Manager, Solid Waste Management Services recommend that:

1. City Council receive this report for information.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There are no immediate financial impacts resulting from the recommendation in this report. Staff will continue to assess the potential for any future financial implications, which will be identified and submitted for consideration through future budget processes as necessary.

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial impact information as presented in the Financial Impact Section.

EQUITY IMPACT

The initiatives outlined within this report seek to improve the livability of Toronto's public realm for all, including equity-deserving communities that may face barriers to participating fully in public life. The public realm - streets, parks, plazas, the waterfront, and other shared spaces - is essential for civic life, social interaction, physical activity, and creative expression. A well-designed and maintained public realm that promotes active mobility and invites people to use streets for strolling, relaxing, and spending time outdoors enhances mental well-being and happiness, and reduces the incidence of non-communicable diseases such as obesity, diabetes and depression. It also provides accessibility for people with disabilities, and improves public safety particularly for women, seniors, and gender diverse people. Public spaces with natural shade, native plants and permeable surfaces create a more resilient city by helping mitigate climate-related risks such as extreme heat, flooding and major snow events. Beyond functionality, public realm design is a driving factor for creating a welcoming, high-quality, and well-designed experience for users regardless of geography, ethnicity, race, age, gender identity, income or ability. These outcomes are also achieved by ensuring the public realm is well maintained, safe, and clean.

The initiatives outlined within this report reinforce equity and reconciliation objectives within the following plans and strategies:

- The City of Toronto Official Plan calls for complete communities and equitable, safe and convenient access to amenities that are needed for a high quality of life.
- Toronto's tree equity approach prioritizes the expansion of tree canopy cover to provide equitable access to the benefits of trees by using a tool that combines tree canopy and socio-economic data to determine areas of low tree equity.
- The City of Toronto Parkland Strategy has considered factors of equity across the parks system and incorporates low income as a key factor in showing where more parkland is needed, to align investment to support communities comprised of equity-deserving groups.

- Toronto's Complete Streets approach recognizes that streets should be developed to remove barriers so that people of all incomes, races, ages, genders and abilities can safely use and benefit from Toronto's streets.
- Toronto's Reconciliation Action Plan identifies actions to advance truth, justice and reconciliation, including the identification of opportunities for placemaking and placekeeping initiatives that strengthen Indigenous connections with land and water.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting on March 10, 2026, the Executive Committee requested the City Manager to accelerate the timeline for the 2026 Keep Toronto Beautiful initiative.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2026.EX29.15>

At its meeting on July 23 and 24, 2025, City Council requested staff report back on recommendations on changes to the development approvals process to ensure there is clear understanding on the part of developers, future property owners, and condominium boards about any applicable responsibility for the maintenance of public realm elements located in the public right-of-way; and to provide an overview of existing design requirements for public realm elements that enhance sustainability, including irrigation or other features that ensure long-term viability of plantings.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2025.MM32.14>

At its meeting on April 23 and 24, 2025, City Council requested staff report back with an update on five priority "Beautiful City" actions identified in the staff report dated March 31, 2025. City Council also directed staff to report back with updates on opportunities to install alternative waste receptacles in other green spaces across the city.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2025.EX22.3>

At its meeting on June 26 and 27, 2024, City Council requested staff report back with a plan for the overall beautification of the public realm in Toronto, including the feasibility of interdivisional design standards and the feasibility of creating an Office of a City Designer and Architect, responsible for the design, coordination and implementation of these design standards.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2024.MM19.26>

At its meeting on May 22 and 23, 2024, City Council requested staff report back on the feasibility of expanding the City's StreetARToronto program to create 1000 new murals throughout the City in partnership with Business Improvement Areas, private property owners, the arts community, and corporate partners including support and recognition for permitted graffiti and street art and prevention of graffiti vandalism; and to provide an update on exploring the feasibility of City-wide graffiti blitzes with the participation of appropriate divisions.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2024.IE13.9>

COMMENTS

This report provides updates on priority items identified by City Council through a report titled "Towards a Beautiful City - A Path Forward" from April 2025 and a related Member Motion from July 2025. It also responds to a separate City Council directive from May 2024 to improve the public realm through graffiti removal and the creation of 1,000 new murals.

The Value of Design and the Public Realm

Cities with a vibrant, well-designed, and well-maintained public realm are more livable, attractive, and resilient. As Toronto's population grows, its public buildings, parks, streets and other public spaces must evolve to meet increasing demand and intensity of use. Expanding, enhancing, and maintaining these areas is essential to ensure they remain vibrant and welcoming for residents and visitors today and into the future. The value of a high-quality public realm is reflected in a range of interconnected indicators:

Quality of Life

- A well-designed and maintained public realm promotes accessibility, safety, social interaction, physical health and well-being, and supports a stronger sense of community and belonging.

Creativity and Joy

- A high-quality public realm that emphasizes beauty enriches the human experience and plays an important role in supporting cultural and creative activities that enrich civic life across the city, including street festivals, outdoor performances, and the display of public art. It can also help reinforce Toronto's reputation as a global centre of design, creativity and innovation.

Economy and Civic Identity

- Well-designed public spaces and buildings contribute to Toronto's civic identity. A high-quality public realm helps position Toronto as a desirable place to live, work, and visit, thereby supporting local businesses, attracting investment, and improving the City's overall economic health.

Sustainability and Climate Resilience

- Well-designed public spaces serve as multifunctional environments that contribute meaningfully to climate adaptation, biodiversity, and community well-being. Sustainability design objectives help future-proof against environmental risk and reduce lifecycle costs through resource efficiency.

Equity, Trust and Relationship Building

- A well-designed and maintained public realm is a driving factor for creating a welcoming, accessible and safe experience for all users. It visibly demonstrates the City's motto *Diversity Our Strength* by enhancing trust and confidence in its ability to plan, provide and maintain community infrastructure for all.

Stewardship

- Investing in high-quality design can lead to long-term savings through the delivery of buildings, open spaces and design elements that have a long service life or that can be more economically maintained or repaired over their lifecycle.

These indicators align with the City of Toronto Corporate Strategic Plan, the City's Official Plan, and other corporate strategies such as Sidewalks to Skylines: A 10-Year Action Plan for Toronto's Economy; Culture Connects: An Action Plan for Culture in Toronto; Public Art Strategy; Parkland Strategy; Waste Strategy; Graffiti Management and StreetARToronto; Our Health, Our City; and TransformTO as well as Action Plans to support equity deserving groups.

The updates to the priority items addressed within this report are presented under the following themes:

1. Governance, Oversight and Leadership for Design Excellence
2. Maintenance of the Public Realm
3. Education and Awareness

Future work associated with each item is noted in the respective "Next Steps" sections of the report. These next steps provide a path forward to maximizing the value of design and improving the experience of residents and visitors in Toronto's public realm. Progress will be reported on by the responsible divisions through their regular reporting processes.

Theme 1 - Governance, Oversight and Leadership for Design Excellence

Leads: City Planning; Purchasing and Materials Management

The design of Toronto's buildings, streets, parks and other public spaces have a significant impact on the experience of residents, businesses and visitors. As the city continues to grow and transform, this experience needs to be intentionally guided in a manner that maximises quality of life, sustainability, sense of place, and economic return. The City has a critical leadership role in guiding this experience through:

- Investing in public projects and public works that lead by example and demonstrate design excellence;
- Providing specialist design review services as part of the development application process;
- Developing a strong policy foundation with accompanying standards and guidelines; and
- Increasing public and industry awareness about the value and importance of design.

1.1: Develop an Internal Governance Model (lead: City Planning)

In April 2025, City Council directed staff to develop an internal governance model for oversight, leadership and coordination with respect to achieving design excellence in

the public realm. Following this direction, a project manager position was established within the Chief Planner's Office to coordinate and advance this work. An interim Steering Committee was also established, comprised of representatives from City Planning; Transportation Services (TS); Parks and Recreation (P&R); Economic Development and Culture (EDC); Environment, Climate and Forestry (ECF); and Solid Waste Management Services (SWMS). The Steering Committee, which is also supported by a working group, has been established as an interim approach while work to develop a long-term governance model suitable for the Toronto context continues.

A strong governance approach within an organization enables outcomes that maximize opportunity and reduce organizational risk and project risk. In the case of the public realm, this approach should prioritize vision, quality, performance and experience across all levels of the city (small everyday spaces, places and elements; citywide systems; and signature and landmark projects). Specifically, a strong governance model for design excellence has the potential to enhance quality and design of the public realm in the following ways:

- An integrated approach to championing design excellence can provide a clear vision across the organization, shifting organizational culture and embedding design excellence as a shared value and objective;
- It can better align divisional and project-specific priorities with broader strategic objectives;
- It can clarify roles and responsibilities across the organization, thereby helping to coordinate efforts in terms of design objectives, planning, maintaining, and enhancing the public realm;
- It can improve consistency and quality of design outcomes through strategic analysis of risks and opportunities, and through a clear process of accountability and decision-making;
- It can establish high standards and high design aspirations for public projects of all scales: the city's character and the experience of residents and visitors is equally defined by small, everyday buildings, spaces, elements and moments as it is by our large landmarks.

A jurisdictional scan and interviews with key stakeholders has been initiated to identify a suitable long-term governance model for design excellence. This includes examining models with strong organizational design leadership (e.g. Montreal, Melbourne, Copenhagen, Barcelona); models with a specific Architectural excellence mandate (e.g. Edmonton, New York City, San Francisco); and models with legislated design mandates (e.g. New York City Chief Public Realm Officer). Early findings indicate that effective city-wide design leadership and vision are advanced through centralized advocacy and outreach, the cultivation of an organizational culture that values design excellence, and procurement programs with a focus on high quality design outcomes.

The governance review also includes academic research, stakeholder engagement, and a review and assessment of existing "as-is" business processes. Strategic opportunities to align with existing partnership approaches to governance, such as those provided via Business Improvement Areas and by Conservancies (e.g. The Bentway), will also be examined. Indigenous-specific perspectives will also be sought to ensure that opportunities to advance reconciliation objectives are considered.

The governance model developed through this work will include clarification and definition of mandate, scope, goals and objectives; roles and responsibilities; the decision-making process; oversight and accountability mechanisms; and future performance measures. A report back on this topic to the Executive Committee is planned for Q1 2027.

1.2: Advancing design excellence through procurement (lead: City Planning; Purchasing and Materials Management)

In April 2025, City Council directed staff to undertake an inventory and review of current procurement processes and identify any changes, additional processes, and best practices that should be considered moving forward to achieve design excellence as it relates to procuring design services for public buildings and public spaces.

Design services require attention to quality, budget, and operational costs to ensure that public funds are well managed and that communities are well served. The City undertakes numerous public realm projects, ranging in scale and types, such as cultural buildings, firehalls, community centres, public art, parks, streets, and plazas. Many of these projects carry the responsibility of shaping Toronto for generations to come. The City's procurement processes are an opportunity to advance a strong culture of innovation and creativity in design at the outset through approaches that balance aesthetics, functionality, cost, adaptability and durability.

Procurement Planning

A key aspect of project success starts with procurement planning. Prior to going to market, client divisions must precisely define project needs, assess in-house staff capacity, and determine if external design services are required. Research and coordination across relevant divisions, and with other stakeholders and Indigenous communities as applicable, ensures the project can be scoped thoroughly. A well-defined design brief, informed by completeness and accuracy of information, can then be drafted.

Procurement Models

The selection of the procurement method is a critical step in ensuring the best possible design outcomes. The range of procurement methods available are defined in Toronto Municipal Code Chapter 195, Procurement (Chapter 195), Article 6. This Chapter is founded on principles that require the selection process to be competitive and transparent and to deliver the "Best Value" for the City. In the context of city-building, where many projects have a multi-generational lifespan, Best Value is determined by a range of factors including long-term operating and maintenance costs. Determining the appropriate procurement method considers variables such as complexity, budget, timeframe, etc. Some common procurement methods currently used for design services are as follows:

- **Request for Proposals**

The method that is used most frequently within the City of Toronto for the design of large-scale public projects is a Request for Proposals (RFP). For projects involving design services for the public realm, including public buildings, the RFP model is tailored to deliver a Best Value outcome. Under this approach, technical proposals are

evaluated via weighted criteria that consider a combination of factors to identify the team that is most suited to deliver the project. Factors considered relate to specific project objectives but can include vision, technical and design approach, experience of key personnel, innovation, schedule, past performance, project management, and risk mitigation approach. All City of Toronto RFP's include specific evaluation criteria to ensure transparency and clarity of process. In alignment with Best Value objectives in Chapter 195, for RFP's, the contract is awarded to the proposal team with the highest score overall, not necessarily the team with the lowest cost.

- **Established Rosters**

An Established Roster is a list of suppliers (e.g. consultants, contractors) created by the City to purchase a specific type of good or service below a set value. Some examples of Rosters include professional consulting services (for heritage consultants, architects, landscape architects, engineering, etc.) and contract construction services. Rosters are established through a Request for Supplier Qualification (RFSQ) process. RFSQs are evaluated using a weighted scoring method where suppliers are evaluated and scored against set criteria to evaluate their ability to deliver the good or service specified. This ensures that design firms are selected based on qualifications, experience, and design capability and not necessarily lowest cost.

Rosters are especially useful for smaller capital projects, such as a renovation or remedial work, where a complex RFP process is not required. Some benefits of the roster system include shortened turnaround time and fewer resources needed to complete a procurement cycle; and a simplified process and dealing with a limited number of prequalified suppliers. Rosters can also provide a pathway for smaller and diverse design firms to participate in City procurement processes, as these opportunities typically focus on core competencies (e.g. design quality, innovative approaches, capability, availability) rather than requiring extensive portfolios or large-scale project histories.

- **Design Competitions**

Design Competitions, a form of Request for Supplier Qualifications (RFSQ), are generally used to select qualified suppliers for high profile projects or landmark sites. The benefits of this form of an RFSQ for a Design Competition are that they attract diverse design talent, including both emerging and established professionals, with the reach of exposure often extending beyond Canada. Competitions also foster creative approaches to design and problem solving, leading to unique and visionary solutions that might not always emerge through traditional evaluation processes. These solutions in turn can help generate public interest and excitement and have the potential to raise the City's profile through iconic designs (e.g. City Hall, Love Park). Two international design competitions were launched by the Parks and Recreation division in 2025 - the Ramsden Park Community Recreation Centre and the new park at 34 Hanna Avenue.

Best Practice Research

Staff undertook a jurisdictional and academic scan with the objective of identifying best practice models and processes that could be used to improve design outcomes in Toronto. As part of this process, interviews were conducted with select stakeholders from organizations including CreateTO, Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC), Toronto Public Library (TPL), Waterfront Toronto, the National Capital

Commission, and City staff from Edmonton, Montreal, New York, and Stockholm. Other groups engaged as part of this process included the Broader Construction Associations Consultation Group (BCACG), and the City of Toronto Design Review Panel. City staff also participated in a panel forum with the Toronto Society of Architects (TSA) on the topic of procuring design excellence, held in October 2025. Other relevant resources included those provided by the TSA as part of the review of Capital Construction Delivery being led by Engineering and Construction Services (ECS).

Some strengths with existing practices identified through this research process include:

- Selection of the appropriate procurement model is determined on a case-by-case basis;
- The Best Value selection process in procurement ensures that proposals are evaluated on a range of factors (qualifications, experience, past performance, vision etc.) rather than cost alone;
- The cost component of a submission is only reviewed following evaluation of the technical component;
- Transparency in the procurement process builds trust and confidence that the City's process is fair;
- Contractual obligations help guarantee the availability of key individuals on the design team (e.g. principal architect), with any substitutions requiring written approval; and
- Supplier debriefings, provided on request, help unsuccessful suppliers become more competitive and improves the overall bid quality on future procurements.

Some opportunities to enhance procurement processes and design outcomes identified through the research process are described below.

- **Qualifications-Based Selection (QBS) Evaluation for Design Services**

Qualifications-Based Selection (QBS) was identified as an evaluation method for design services that can deliver design quality, particularly for city-building initiatives where the project's complexity and/or scale make it difficult to fully define the scope of services, as is otherwise required through traditional solicitation evaluation.

QBS is a competitive evaluation method for the procurement of design consulting services based on professional qualifications. It is commonly used for the selection of uniquely skilled professional services such as architects and engineers. Under this method, suppliers only submit their technical proposals for evaluation (qualifications, experience, methodology etc.). The evaluation team ranks submissions based solely on these technical merits. The highest ranked supplier is then invited to work with the client to develop and agree on the scope of work. Once the scope of work is finalized, the supplier and the client negotiate a fair and reasonable fee for their services. If through this process the cost is beyond the project budget, the scope can be further revised to reduce it, or the client can decide to work with the next highest-placed supplier. The contract is not executed until an agreement is reached on both scope and fee.

The objective of the QBS evaluation method is to identify the most qualified supplier who can help the client deliver the project. A variation of this method is used in some jurisdictions, such as Edmonton, where a small cost weighting (e.g. 10%) is also factored into the identification of the highest ranked supplier. This reduced weighting on

cost ensures that the highest-ranked supplier is identified largely on their technical merit. Staff have determined that both evaluation methods have the opportunity to improve design and quality outcomes in Toronto.

The QBS method is mandated for use federally in the United States (US) specifically for the selection of engineering and architectural services. It is also used in the majority of US States and in some US cities (e.g. New York City). Within Canada it has been used locally by the Toronto Community Housing Corporation and by some cities in Alberta (Calgary and Edmonton) and British Columbia (Nanaimo and Coquitlam). Professional associations and industry groups that support the QBS procurement method include the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM), the Association of Consulting Engineering Companies (ACEC-Canada), the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada (RAIC), the Ontario Association of Architects (OAA), and the Ontario Association of Professional Engineers (OSPE).

- **Approach to Evaluating Fees: Median-Priced Scoring**

Examination of the cost component of an RFP takes place following evaluation of the technical component. This is sometimes referred to as a two-envelope process. In Toronto's current process, the supplier with the lowest cost is awarded the highest score in that category. This doesn't necessarily mean that that supplier is awarded the contract however it does impact the final overall scoring.

Some limitations of this approach were identified through research. For example, low fees can sometimes indicate that the scope of work may not be fully understood by a supplier, or that less experienced staff will be assigned to work on the project. In recognition of this, some jurisdictions assign scores for cost that are related to the median price of bids submitted, rather than the lowest. This approach encourages suppliers to submit pricing that balances design quality and cost-effectiveness, and that is more likely to align with market norms. It can also help mitigate risk that may be associated with poor quality that may arise through cost cutting. Additionally, it also recognizes the imbedded value of good design which, even if upfront design fees are higher, can deliver significant long-term savings through lower maintenance costs, reduced energy use etc. (i.e. Best Value). For these reasons, staff have determined that this median-priced approach to scoring also has the potential to improve quality design outcomes in Toronto.

- **Procurement Opportunities for Small and/or Local Design Firms**

Staff's research also identified an opportunity to raise the standard of design by providing more pathways for small and/ or local design firms to participate in the procurement process. Developing and growing local design talent can help expand the supply chain, and introduce fresh ideas and innovative approaches that challenge conventional practice. The City's Social Procurement Policy already includes provisions to improve access for small and medium-sized businesses and encourages supply chain diversity for procurements. Established Rosters also offer an entry point for smaller firms, with a focus on core competencies (e.g. such as design quality, creativity, and capacity to deliver a defined scope of work).

Next Steps

The evaluation methods described above can be utilized within the existing procurement formats described in Article 6, Chapter 195. No amendments to Chapter 195 are needed to implement these methods, or the median-priced approach to scoring, however, clear guidance materials are needed. Work to develop the templates, procedures, and training materials necessary to implement and formalize the Qualifications-Based Selection evaluation methods and the median-priced scoring approach will begin in Q2 2026. Recognizing that the experience from some initial projects will improve understanding and long-term effectiveness of these approaches, City Planning and PMMD staff will also work with other City divisions to identify suitable candidate projects that can be advanced through these procurement methods on a pilot basis in 2026.

More design competitions are planned in 2026 and beyond. Building on this experience, staff will continue to refine the competition process and explore opportunities to develop best practice guidelines for the use of design competitions within the City. Staff will also explore additional strategies to refine the City's procurement approaches for design services to enhance opportunities for small and/or local firms.

Theme 2 - Maintenance of the Public Realm

Leads: Transportation Services; Parks and Recreation; Corporate Real Estate Management; Environment, Climate and Forestry

The public realm is developed incrementally over time through public and private development, and the creation of new - or repair of existing - hard infrastructure, such as roads and bridges; community infrastructure, such as parks, squares, City-owned public art assets, and community centres; and green infrastructure, such as parks, trees and other natural assets. The City applies a range of standards (e.g. designs for lighting, pavement materials, bike lanes, tree planting, garbage bins) across multiple projects to help ensure that the public realm emerges in a cohesive and functional manner. Consistent use of standard materials, elements, and implementation procedures in the public realm make the city easier to read and navigate, supporting wayfinding, safety and a sense of place. Consistency and continuity also support efficient maintenance and enable appropriate cost estimates and budget allocation during project planning. The use of non-standard materials, designs and implementation procedures may be appropriate depending on the context (heritage resource; public art; playgrounds; priority landmark; location within a BIA etc.).

2.1: Public Realm Operations and Maintenance (lead: Transportation Services; Parks and Recreation; Corporate Real Estate Management; Environment, Climate and Forestry)

In April 2025, City Council requested a review of maintenance, service-level and operational practices to identify opportunities and associated costs to enhance the quality and care of the public realm.

Fundamentally, a Beautiful City is about improving the way people experience the public realm in Toronto. Part of that experience comes from ensuring the public realm is well maintained, safe, and clean. To support a positive day-to-day experience, public realm designs and standards must therefore be functional, enjoyable, and durable across their life cycle so that they can be well-maintained without unreasonable expense. Public realm maintenance demonstrates a commitment to good stewardship and contributes to other City objectives such as investing in people and neighbourhoods, community safety and the coordination of capital construction. This activity takes place as a broader component of the City's Corporate Asset Management Plan and recognizes that continual improvements to service levels and operational asset management practices are also essential to maintaining a high-quality public realm.

Responsibility for the public realm is shared across multiple City divisions. The following is a list of key enhancements made in 2025 to public realm operations and maintenance practices implemented by various divisions:

Corporate Real Estate Management

- Streamlined operational and maintenance activities for key assets through the creation of a new “Key Assets” team to provide specialized oversight to City squares and assets, such as City Hall and Nathan Phillips Square, Civic Centres, Union Station, and St. Lawrence Market and St. Lawrence Hall. This stewardship approach ensures that the City’s most prominent and visible public realm and civic assets receive dedicated attention and resources needed to meet the day-to-day demands while also planning for long-term needs and maintenance requirements.

Transportation Services

- Launched a service delivery review of contracted maintenance and capital delivery services;
- Launched a new paver repair program and completed administrative amendments to the paver maintenance policy;
- Enhanced the street sweeping program; and
- Launched an inter-divisional / inter-agency review of the Coordinated Street Furniture program to identify opportunities to reinforce Toronto's civic identity and improve the design, functionality and experience of pedestrian-level amenities.

Parks and Recreation

- Implemented Parks Audit recommendations to improve the consistency of parks operations and maintenance work through standardized and strengthened on-site quality checks by supervisors, validating and documenting work quality;
- Undertook field testing of electric park maintenance tools to evaluate efficacy, with the goal of identifying suitable products for lower emission operations;
- Conducted a parks-wide field audit of signs to document and map all signs and identify outdated, duplicate, irrelevant and damaged signs; and
- Continued to advance the Washroom Enhancement Program (WEP) to upgrade, enhance the user experience, and replace standalone public washrooms across the City's parks system, including the refresh of existing washrooms and the replacement of 10-12 standalone washrooms with modular units in 2026.

Environment, Climate and Forestry

- Made significant progress on implementing Auditor General recommendations to improve oversight of Forestry Operations;
- Decreased the tree pruning and tree stumping services backlog; and
- Employed the work management system to make evidence-based decisions on maintenance.

The GreenForceTO program is one example of a collaborative approach to public realm maintenance that delivers multiple benefits. Beginning in 2021, the City (represented by Transportation Services and Environment, Climate and Forestry) partnered with two local employment social enterprises, RAINscapeTO and Building Up, to hire and train individuals from Neighbourhood Improvement Areas or those experiencing barriers to employment for the maintenance of bio-swales, pollinator gardens and other green spaces that increase climate resilience and biodiversity. More recently, GreenForceTO began piloting an “Adopt a Green Infrastructure Site” program at five locations across Toronto, in which residents are engaged in the long-term care of green infrastructure in their neighbourhood.

Next Steps

Going forward, the lead divisions involved in operations and maintenance of the public realm will continue to update City Council or Committees of Council in accordance with existing directives and respective Committee mandates. Some examples of upcoming initiatives are summarized below.

Corporate Real Estate Management

- Continuing to advance the new stewardship approach to provide targeted oversight of key public realm and civic assets; and
- Continuing to implement a strategic and integrated approach to asset management and capital planning, ensuring that multiple City objectives can be achieved through the delivery of State of Good Repair or other capital projects.

Transportation Services

- Reviewing service requests and associated service levels (expected completion in Q3 2026); and
- Reviewing maintenance contracts to identify service gaps and improvement opportunities (expected completion in Q3 2026 with accompanying implementation plan).

Parks and Recreation

- Reviewing data from the 2025 parks signage audit to identify and plan for the gradual removal and replacement of unnecessary signs;
- By Q2 2026, in response to the Auditor’s recommendations, completing the benchmarking of service standards and finalizing key performance indicators for parks operations and maintenance; and
- Completing the conversion of two parks pilot locations to fully electric operations, to reduce emissions associated with parks operations and maintenance.

Environment, Climate and Forestry

- Developing a framework for improvements to the City's proactive and reactive tree maintenance programs including input from key industry stakeholders and the public; and
- Finalizing a Tree Survival Study which will identify factors affecting tree mortality and provide recommendations for improving growing conditions and improving newly planted tree health in different environments.

2.2: Considerate Construction (lead: Transportation Services)

In April 2025, City Council directed staff to develop a "Considerate Construction" guideline, with the objective of minimizing the impact of construction on the public realm.

In recent years, the City has introduced programs, policies, technologies, fees, and updated standards to reduce construction impacts on the public realm while improving safety, accessibility, comfort, and integration with the existing streetscape. These measures apply broadly to City-led infrastructure projects, utility upgrades, transit expansion projects, and private development. Additional efforts are underway to benchmark the City's existing construction site standards against leading practices in other jurisdictions and updating them as needed. To strengthen compliance, this work will result in a new public-facing construction guideline that clearly outlines construction site design standards and other requirements.

Toronto's existing construction standards aim to ensure safety, accessibility, and accountability during construction activities that occur on or near the public right-of-way. These include:

- [Construction Specification for Maintenance of Vehicular Traffic, Pedestrian and Cyclists in Work Zones \(TS1.00\)](https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/9819-ecs-specs-roadspecs-TS-1.00-Sep2024.pdf) outlines requirements for maintaining safe and accessible travel paths for all road users during construction. It applies to all project types and guides staff training, audits, and contract specifications.
- [Guidelines for Covered Walkways](https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2014/pg/bgrd/backgroundfile-66975.pdf) establishes standards for temporary, protective structures installed along sidewalks or pedestrian paths adjacent to active construction sites. These standards establish minimum dimensions, structural, lighting, public art requirements, and accessibility features to accommodate all users, including those with disabilities.

City staff conduct regular inspections for non-compliance, including with AODA standards, lane blockages, and duration of work to promote improved constructor behaviour. Violations are subject to enforcement actions including financial penalties. Contractor Performance Evaluation tools are used to assess suppliers working on City projects, and poor performance can result in temporary bidding suspensions. Recent updates to these tools strengthen criteria for maintaining safe and accessible public spaces, particularly for pedestrians and individuals with disabilities.

Transportation Services has recently introduced several initiatives delivered through the Congestion Management Plan and related work to reduce construction-related disruptions to the public realm:

- *Improved Coordination:* The Road Disruption Activity Reporting System (RoDARS) enables better coordination of road closures, which reduces the impact on the transportation network and public realm. Additionally, RoDARS fees, launched in April 2025, incentivize more responsible planning and efficient building practices to reduce the overall duration of right-of-way closures.
- *Enhanced Communication:* A new road restriction web page offers real-time updates on construction activities via an interactive map. Mandatory QR code signs at construction sites link to this page with a fee charged for non-compliance. Work is underway to review and update requirements and strategies for improving public access to construction activity information, particularly for City-led projects.
- *Expanded Traffic Agent Program:* With a target of 127 agents deployed by the end of 2026, Traffic Agents help ensure safe and efficient movement for all road users at key locations, including major construction sites.
- *Industry Engagement:* Targeted outreach and attendance at standing meetings with construction industry associations, along with annual training for utility contractors, are used to educate stakeholders on the City's construction standards and requirements, and support consistent compliance.

Next Steps

The following approaches to managing construction impacts through research, engagement, and policy development are in the process of being developed:

- *Improving Compliance:* Work is underway to increase resources and staff capacity to conduct both proactive and complaint-based inspections to ensure compliance with the approved work dates, traffic control plans, and the requirement to display a QR code for public access to project information.
- *Development of Guidelines for Construction Activities on City Streets:* Staff are reviewing existing standards for construction site protection on city streets in consultation with relevant colleagues and external industry groups. These standards will be updated as needed to reflect best practices that integrate protection elements with the surrounding streetscape in a safe and visually appealing way. Once this work is complete, staff will consolidate and present these standards in a visual, easy-to-reference, public document to improve understanding, compliance, and accountability. The outcomes of this work will be reported to the Infrastructure and Environment Committee in Q2 2027.

2.3: Alternative Waste Enclosures (lead: Parks and Recreation; Solid Waste Management)

In April 2025, City Council directed staff to explore opportunities to accelerate installation of alternative waste receptacles and other approaches to screening waste receptacles in the new Biidaasige Park; and to report to City Council with an update on opportunities to install alternative waste receptacles in other greenspaces.

Solid Waste Management Services (SWMS) Public Space Bin Collections oversees the waste collection program across all City of Toronto parks. To date, SWMS has installed

~12,600 waste bins across approximately 5,000 waste stations in 1,233 parks citywide. The waste bins include garbage, recycling, organics, and beverage-specific bins, strategically placed based on seasonal, individual park usage, and operational needs.

Waste bins are 95-gallons in capacity, have different lid types, consider AODA needs, are extremely durable, meet all operational requirements, are easy to move and cost-effective to deploy, and can be safely serviced by City staff using automated lifting equipment. The bins may not always conform to everyone's choice or aesthetic preferences, particularly in prominent locations or where waste stations are comprised of numerous bins. However, they provide a cost-effective and durable solution that fully satisfies budgetary considerations and operational and health and safety requirements.

As part of the opening of Biidaasige Park in July 2025, Parks and Recreation staff, in collaboration with Waterfront Toronto and SWMS, implemented two alternative waste enclosure designs at select locations within the park. A total of ten enclosures were installed, while standard waste bins remain in use throughout the rest of the park. SWMS staff have reviewed options and the feasibility of installing additional enclosures in other greenspaces. The review has identified that while enclosures may help “conceal” the bin behind a more visually appealing exterior design, this approach would not be suitable for waste stations requiring a larger number of bins. Furthermore, to ensure accessibility, the design of any new enclosures in the public realm would require a more extensive ergonomic review, specifically for the height of its disposal opening

The current operation utilizing bins (without enclosures) in parks allows for a cost-efficient collection system that is compatible with existing city vehicles and fleet equipment. Should City Council direct further expansion of an enclosure program, operational impacts should be considered. Additional budget as well as criteria to determine suitable locations would also be required. For example, for every additional enclosure deployed there would be an estimated increased budget pressure of approximately \$6,500 per enclosure, along with requirements for additional contract management (to monitor the asset durability and address and warranty and replacement needs), asset management program, and capital replacement budget planning. There would also be further planning requirements to determine funding sources for the enclosures as they would not be directly tied to the utilization of direct services under the Solid Waste Rate Program. There would also have to be ongoing repair and maintenance budget and staffing resources approved by City Council and funded through the general tax rate.

Next Steps

The pilot program at Biidaasige Park will continue to be evaluated by City staff (P&R and SWMS) along with Waterfront Toronto, taking into account factors such as functionality, durability, response to weather (rain, snow loads, salting etc.) and any operational impacts. As SWMS has determined that the waste bin pilot program in parks is presently running well and with limited service requests and complaints, no expansion to other green spaces is planned at this time.

2.4. Overview of design requirements for public realm elements (e.g. planters) that enhance sustainability and the long-term viability of plantings (lead: Transportation Services; Environment, Climate and Forestry)

In July 2025, City Council directed staff to report back with an overview of existing design requirements for public realm elements, such as planters, that enhance sustainability, including irrigation or other features that ensure long-term viability of plantings.

The City applies design standards to ensure the long-term viability of landscaping elements in the public right-of-way. Over the past ten years, enhancements to older standards and adoption of newer standards (particularly related to green infrastructure) have been adopted to improve the long-term viability of plants within the right-of-way. The enhanced and new standards were developed and are updated as needed to reflect leading practices through collaboration between various divisions including Transportation Services, City Planning, Toronto Water, and Environment, Climate and Forestry.

The majority of existing standards are publicly accessible on the Construction Specifications and Drawings for Green Infrastructure web page:
<https://www.toronto.ca/services-payments/building-construction/infrastructure-city-construction/construction-standards-permits/standards-for-designing-and-constructing-city-infrastructure/>.

These standards include:

- Green Infrastructure Standards
- Toronto Green Streets Technical Guidelines
- Design Criteria for Green Infrastructure in the Right-of-Way
- The Streetscape Manual
- Life Cycle Activities for Green Infrastructure
- Construction Specifications and Drawings – Includes detailed specifications and standards to ensure compatibility with green infrastructure for infrastructure installations
- Tree Pit Design (TS 850) standard, which specifies continuous soil trenches and stormwater integration
- Landscape Design Guidelines for Stormwater Management Ponds
- Continuous Soil Trench with Soil Cells
- Toronto Green Standard v4

The collection of standards listed above are comprehensive and reflect current best practices of design. There are a few previous design standards that were implemented that staff upgrade as capital projects and budgets become available to align with the contemporary standards noted above. Outdated installation and tree planting methods that provided limited soil volume, such as tree containers, are no longer considered as part of new design projects.

Next Steps

Work is underway to identify gaps and assess new or updated policies, by-laws, processes, and programs that support the long-term maintenance and beauty of natural elements in the public right-of-way, including planters. These elements have multiple owners, and Transportation Services, in collaboration with City divisions and external partners, is undertaking work to clarify the challenges and determine targeted solutions. Potential actions include by-law updates, funding mechanisms, program development, stewardship agreements, and the creation of more effective asset management approaches. This is expected to be a multi year, multi faceted initiative. Staff will report back in Q2 2027 on progress. City Planning is also collaborating with a multidivisional team to develop an implementation strategy for Growing Green Streets, aimed at expanding Toronto's tree canopy and green infrastructure within the City's right-of-way. This work includes initiatives to enhance implementation tools that support efficient, predictable, and sustainable design outcomes.

2.5 1000 New Murals and City-wide Graffiti Blitz (lead: Transportation Services)

In May 2024, City Council requested the General Manager, Transportation Services, in consultation with the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture, to provide an update on the feasibility of expanding the City's StreetARToronto program, to create 1000 new murals throughout the city and conduct City-wide graffiti blitzes, with the participation of appropriate divisions.

StreetARToronto (StART) was launched in 2012, as a central feature of the City's Graffiti Management Plan. An innovative public/private partnership of the Transportation Services Division, StART is a proactive approach to reduce graffiti vandalism and add colour, character, and visual appeal to city streets by creating legal opportunities for street artists to showcase their talent, and develop their skills and portfolios through experience and mentorship. The program also contributes to the City's commitment to reconciliation, diversity, equity and inclusion, through the hiring of artists across all spectrums. For the period of May 2024 to December 2025, 428 new murals were delivered across the city as part of StART programs.

In 2013, Transportation Services collaborated with Corporate Real Estate Management, Municipal Licensing & Standards, Parks & Recreation, Toronto Water and Toronto Community Housing Corporation to issue an RFP and enter into the first of three successive 5-year multi-division/agency contracts with an external contractor, for the removal of graffiti vandalism from City assets. For the period of May 2024 to December 2025, approximately 1,500 graffiti removal work orders were resolved. It is worth noting that a single work order may include numerous graffiti tag removals in a concentrated area.

Next Steps

Transportation Services will continue to work with its division and agency partners to coordinate city-wide graffiti vandalism removal blitzes in spring and fall 2026. Transportation Services staff managing the StART program will continue to work with artists and arts organizations across the city, and with relevant divisions and agencies, to produce approximately 250 murals per year, in addition to monitoring and maintaining

over 3,000 existing murals installed since the program began in 2012. At current funding levels, it is anticipated that the target of 1,000 new murals identified by Council in May 2024 will be met in a 4-year period, i.e. by end of 2028.

Theme 3: Education and Awareness

Public education campaigns play an important role in sustaining a high-quality public realm by raising awareness and fostering a sense of shared responsibility and accountability. When residents, businesses, and property owners are aware of the long-term value of quality design and upkeep, they are more likely to engage in stewardship activities or report service or maintenance issues. The City can also help foster a culture where a well-designed, inclusive, and vibrant public realm is expected, respected and celebrated through awards and recognition programs.

3.1: Enhanced Clean and Beautiful Campaign (Lead: Transportation Services; Environment, Climate and Forestry)

In April 2025, City Council directed staff to review and enhance a “Toronto Clean and Beautiful” campaign to shift culture, raise awareness, and bring together multiple partners, stakeholders and private landowners in enhancing the public realm.

In 2004, the City of Toronto launched the Clean and Beautiful City initiative to improve urban cleanliness through a focus on collecting litter. As part of this effort, the 20-Minute Makeover was introduced to engage both public and private sectors in cleaning up public spaces. The first spring cleanup attracted over 44,000 participants. From 2004 to 2012, the spring cleanup campaign was managed by Strategic Communications and Solid Waste Management Services (2004–2009), followed by the Strategic Partnerships unit in the City Manager’s Office (2010–2012). In 2013, responsibility shifted to the Environment, Climate and Forestry division. Supported by successive Mayors, the initiative has evolved into Clean Toronto Together (CTT).

CTT invites residents, businesses, students, and City staff to clean parks, ravines, beaches, and other public areas during a three-day event each April. Participants must register their cleanup and receive safety tips and litter-sorting guidance. The City does not supply cleanup materials like bags, gloves, or tools. CTT reached a peak in 2019 with 1,403 events and over 200,000 participants. Glad Canada, the lead sponsor from 2013 to 2019, played a key role in this growth. In 2025, the campaign saw 699 events and more than 67,000 participants. A cleaning blitz was also launched in summer 2025, as part of the Mayor's initiative to keep public spaces clean, safe and well-maintained.

Clean-up efforts are an ongoing multi-divisional effort: in the spring of each year, Transportation Services undertakes a seasonal clean-up blitz to remove litter and debris that has accumulated on City streets over the winter. Following the initial spring clean-up, Transportation Services undertakes its annual sweeping program in accordance with adopted service levels. Transportation Services also coordinates maintenance blitzes with several divisions focused on activities to keep Toronto beautiful, including hard-surface weed removal, graffiti removal, and other related horticultural and streetscape maintenance activities across the city. Complementing these efforts, Solid

Waste Management Services undertakes an extensive public education campaign once a year to remind residents not to litter. In 2025, this litter campaign ran from June 16 – July 16.

Next Steps

The seasonal street clean-up blitz will be expedited in 2026 and delivered by Transportation Services as soon as weather conditions allow. The next CTT event is scheduled for April 24–26, 2026. The following additional measures will be undertaken to raise awareness, invite Torontonians to help keep the public realm clean and beautiful, and bring together multiple partners, stakeholders and private landowners in enhancing the public realm:

- Implement a multifaceted awareness campaign to increase public participation and highlight the City's commitment to clean, safe and vibrant public spaces. This initiative will be led in partnership with Communications and supported by relevant City divisions.
- Expand CTT by launching a self-directed litter cleanup program running from May to October, for seasonal participation and aligning with best practices from GTA municipalities such as Hamilton, Mississauga, and Vaughan.
- This could also include collaboration with Toronto school boards to develop CTT educational materials and support the annual School Cleanup Day, including the provision of cleanup supplies, positioning schools as both a program stream and a pathway to expanding CTT into school communities.
- Explore corporate sponsor opportunities to offset marketing and programming costs, including the reinstatement of cleanup supplies for groups in need.
- Organize City-led flagship cleanups during the CTT event days to encourage participation from individuals and small groups.
- Assess the potential to expand the number of litter cleanups within existing City stewardship programs from May to October.

3.2: Changes to the Development Approvals process to ensure developers, future property owners, and condominium boards are aware of their public realm maintenance obligations (lead: City Planning; Development Review)

In July 2025, City Council directed staff to report back on recommendations or changes to the development approvals process to ensure there is clear understanding on the part of developers, future property owners, and condominium boards about any applicable responsibility for the maintenance of public realm elements located in the public right-of-way.

Maintenance responsibilities for landscaping elements in the public right-of-way is a shared responsibility across multiple divisions (Transportation Services; Parks and Recreation; Environment, Climate and Forestry); and adjacent property owners. The responsibilities for owners or occupiers of land adjoining the street are described in City of Toronto Municipal Code Chapter 743, Article V (Chapter 743). Specifically, Section 743-36 requires adjacent property owners to maintain the boulevard (i.e., the sidewalk, and other public-owned space in front of the property) at their expense, including vegetation and landscaping, in accordance with City standards. This responsibility includes routine care such as weeding, cleaning litter, collecting leaves and fallen fruit, and ensuring vegetation does not obstruct public access or visibility. These

responsibilities apply regardless of whether the boulevard is part of a development subject to a planning application. Property owners must also maintain any landscaping features permitted by encroachment agreements. The City is responsible for maintaining street trees (planting, pruning, removal and replanting) and any landscaped areas installed by the City (e.g. green infrastructure, medians, traffic islands).

While the City has the ability through Site Plan Control to impose a discreet range of conditions that may pertain to the maintenance of the public realm tied to a specific development, including conditions related to general maintenance could create confusion around which obligations are part of Site Plan approval versus those that apply generally under the Municipal Code. Furthermore, the use of a Site Plan Agreement to codify maintenance responsibilities could, over time, result in a misalignment between Site Plan requirements and Municipal Code requirements. Given these concerns, it is staff's opinion that continued educational initiatives under the Municipal Code are the preferred mechanism for educating landowners about their maintenance responsibilities. Transportation Services and Environment, Climate and Forestry will work with Communications and other relevant divisions to develop a coordinated education and communications approach that brings greater clarity to the different roles and responsibilities associated with public realm maintenance.

Conclusion

This report presents a summary of initiatives across the City to strengthen the design, maintenance, and overall experience of Toronto's public realm. Recent progress includes establishing interim governance for design excellence, launching targeted maintenance programs, introducing procurement changes to elevate design outcomes, and implementing tools to minimize construction impacts. These actions, together with the next steps outlined in this report, set the foundation for an approach that responds to growing demands on the public realm and rising expectations for quality and care. Responsibility for the public realm is shared across multiple City divisions. By continuing to invest in design excellence and stewardship, these inter-divisional efforts will ensure Toronto's streets, parks, and other civic spaces remain vibrant and welcoming for all.

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