



Policy Direction Highlights - Booklet 2

DOWNTOWN PARKS & PUBLIC REALM

With a growing residential population, expanding workforce and increasing number of visitors, there is an ongoing need to improve and expand the public realm. Doing so can be challenging within a Downtown that is experiencing rapid intensification. There are opportunities to expand the parks and public realm network Downtown, but focus must also be placed on the quality of these spaces and ensuring these spaces are well located and designed.

Building on existing Official Plan policies, the TOcore Parks and Public Realm Plan will generate a bold and compelling vision for Downtown's park and open space system and public realm network, grounded in the Downtown context and putting public life, place-making and mobility at the forefront of long-term planning.

Connecting and Expanding Parks and Public Spaces

C3 C5 C6 C8 C10 C12 C13

Creating a parks and public space network through existing and future connections will take form through three approaches: connecting the Downtown to the surrounding regional Green Space System; focusing on 10 great streets that can improve connections between parks and public spaces; and stitching across the rail corridor, under the Gardiner Expressway and across Lake Shore Boulevard.

Park District Anchors are an assemblage of public places comprised of parks, public spaces and streets. Together they form a district and enhance or create a network that provides the spaces for community life.



TOcore Green Space System
(Credit: PUBLIC WORK)

C POLICY DIRECTIONS

C3: Create a “Core Circle” around Downtown by strategically connecting existing natural features including the Toronto Islands, the water’s edge parks, the parks and open spaces of the Don Valley, the Garrison Creek watershed and the historic Iroquois shoreline to enhance and grow Toronto’s parks and open space system and form a legible and connected network that further enhances biodiversity and resiliency.

C5: Improve access to the Toronto Islands to support their role as a city-wide park resource.

C6: Identify streets that connect to parks and open spaces and redesign them to offer a sense of journey, arrival and destination.

C8: Integrate Park District Anchors into a network to serve as the focal points for communities.

C10: Improve north-south connections for pedestrians and cyclists across the rail corridor and under the Gardiner Expressway to improve accessibility and legibility between Downtown and the water’s edge.

C12: Improve the east-west connections along the rail corridor and Gardiner Expressway/Lake Shore Boulevard corridor from Liberty Village to the Don River Valley.

C13: Support and encourage the development of a significant park space over the rail corridor between Bathurst Street and Blue Jays Way.

A Variety of Experiences and Functions

C14 C17 C18

Public spaces set the stage for daily social interaction in the city. Community is created in public spaces. Successful public spaces are adaptable to the changing needs and demands of users, they serve many functions and are designed to support year round public life. They should offer unique experiences that respond to a local context, while at the same time tell the story of the past.



Union Station - Sir John A. MacDonald Plaza
(Credit: City of Toronto)

Expanding the Public Realm through Development

C20 C21 C23

In much of Downtown, sidewalks are narrow and overcrowded. Fortunately, some of the greatest opportunities to expand the existing public realm are along the street frontage. Setting buildings back at-grade to expand the boulevard allows for improvements such as: increased space for pedestrians; the ability to plant street trees in optimal conditions; the provision of pedestrian weather protection; and other landscaping and amenities. In optimal conditions, space for sidewalk cafes, marketing areas and other seating or gathering places should also be secured.

C POLICY DIRECTIONS

C14: Design parks, open spaces, streets and POPS (Privately Owned Publicly Accessible Spaces) to be multi-seasonal, multi-functional, flexible spaces.

C17: Support and promote Indigenous storytelling and history through naming, wayfinding, monuments, interpretive features, public art, partnerships, and programming.

C18: Reinforce the cultural and natural heritage significance of parks, open spaces, ravines and the Toronto Islands.

C20: Require all new developments to provide minimum building setbacks at-grade to expand Downtown's public realm.

C21: Prioritize and encourage mid-block connections throughout Downtown to promote a range of pedestrian experiences.

C23: Locate and design POPS to be seamlessly integrated and connected into the larger parks and open space network.

Urban Forest as Infrastructure



The City's Official Plan calls for an increase in the amount of tree canopy to 40% of the City, from the existing 26-28%.

Street trees are subject to some of the most challenging conditions within urban environments due to several stressors such as poor soil conditions, shadow from surrounding buildings, extreme heat and water stress, pollution, and road salt, among others.

In addition, there are many competing interests for space within the right-of-way, limiting how and where trees can be planted. Given these challenges, it is critical to strategically plant street trees where they are most likely to thrive and where they offer the most positive contribution to the public realm.



St. James Park (Credit: City of Toronto)



Seating Area on Ryerson University campus
(Credit: City of Toronto)

C POLICY DIRECTIONS

C24: Identify parks, open spaces and streets for tree planting priority.

C26: Identify, in consultation with appropriate partners, strategic tree planting opportunities on institutional lands, and lands owned by agencies, boards and commissions with the purpose of enhancing and growing the urban forest.

Parkland Provision for High Growth Areas

C27 C29 C30

Downtown has been identified as one of the areas with the lowest level of parkland provision in the city. Downtown has 121 parks covering 100 hectares (247 acres) or approximately 6 percent of the land area, excluding the Toronto Islands. With an estimated population of 250,000, Downtown is in one of the lowest percentiles for parkland provision in the city. This is despite securing 21 new or expanded parks (19.6 hectares or 48.4 acres) Downtown over the past 10 years.

As residential and office populations continues to increase, the need for additional parkland will become more urgent. The Parkland Implementation Strategy section of the Parks and Public Realm Plan will provide recommendations to address the gaps in parkland provision and set priorities for improvements and acquisition for future development.

Place Making and Public Life

C32

Understanding how people use and move through public space is essential to the success of public life in our city. Toronto's first large-scale Public Space Public Life Study is gathering quantitative and qualitative data for how people move through and use public space. The purpose of the metrics is three-fold: to establish a baseline assessment of public life; to provide design recommendations for improvements to public space; and to prioritize capital investment.



Ryerson University campus

(Credit: City of Toronto)

C POLICY DIRECTIONS

C27: Develop a Parkland Implementation Strategy that will prioritize areas for new parkland acquisition, park expansion and improvements.

C29: Examine how the City's alternative rate policies and other growth oriented tools can be enhanced to better address parkland needs Downtown.

C30: Parkland implementation through development review will be aligned with Policy 3.2.3.2 of the Official Plan and will prioritize:

1. on-site parkland dedication;
2. off-site parkland dedication. Consolidating off-site dedication requirements to achieve larger parks is encouraged; and
3. cash-in-lieu for parkland only in instances where the 2 options above are not feasible.

C32: Conduct public life studies on a predetermined cycle to serve as a baseline against which public investments in the public realm can be assessed and opportunities for future investment can be identified.

Maintenance and Operations Geared to Intensity of Use

C33 C34 C35

Downtown parks are the most intensely used in the city. The emergence of vertical communities with high volumes of residents using parks as their outdoor living space, coupled with increasing numbers of workers, creates higher usage and maintenance demands on our Downtown parks. In addition, Downtown parks and squares are often used for well-attended city-wide events and festivals. This high intensity of use requires greater financial and staff resources to ensure that the parks remain clean, safe and well maintained.

Partnerships

C36 C37 C38

Successful implementation of the Parks and Public Realm Plan will require partnerships with communities; non-profit groups; public agencies, boards and commissions; Business Improvement Areas; and private property owners. Building partnerships will provide communities with a sense of ownership of local public spaces, support the expansion of the parks and public space network and assist the City to respond to local programming needs.



Playground at Sibelius Square (Credit: City of Toronto)

C POLICY DIRECTIONS

- C33:** Enhance the community stewardship of parks and public spaces.
- C34:** Review maintenance and operations strategies for Downtown parks and natural features.
- C35:** Application of a conservancy funding model in Downtown parks identified as having city-wide importance.
- C36:** Identify opportunities to partner with local school boards to provide recreation facilities that will be identified through the Facilities Master Plan and the Parks and Public Realm Plan.
- C37:** Support partnerships with public agencies, boards and commissions, institutions and private property owners to supplement the supply of City-owned parkland by securing public access to other privately owned open spaces.
- C38:** Develop a framework for partnerships that supports working with sponsors and philanthropic donors and other funding organizations to contribute to new parks, improvements, maintenance and enhancements.

Have you met our Avatars?



Sajith

57 years old | Immigrant | Owns in Rexdale | Drives a taxi

"Improving access to the Toronto Islands will make my family's annual picnic that much more enjoyable, and maybe we'll even make it down there more often!"



Ann

30 years old | Métis | Works & lives Downtown | Rents
Walks everywhere | About to start a family

"Torontonians need to know more about the Indigenous history of the land we live on. The proposed TOcore policy directions to promote Indigenous storytelling should definitely help."

Tell us about yourself

How will these policies improve the quality of your life?



You

Have Your Say

- How do you think these policies will improve Downtown?
- What policies would you change? How?
- Is anything missing?

This booklet provides you with an overview of the Policy Directions in the TOcore Proposals Report. To see them all please visit

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TORONTO.CA/
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