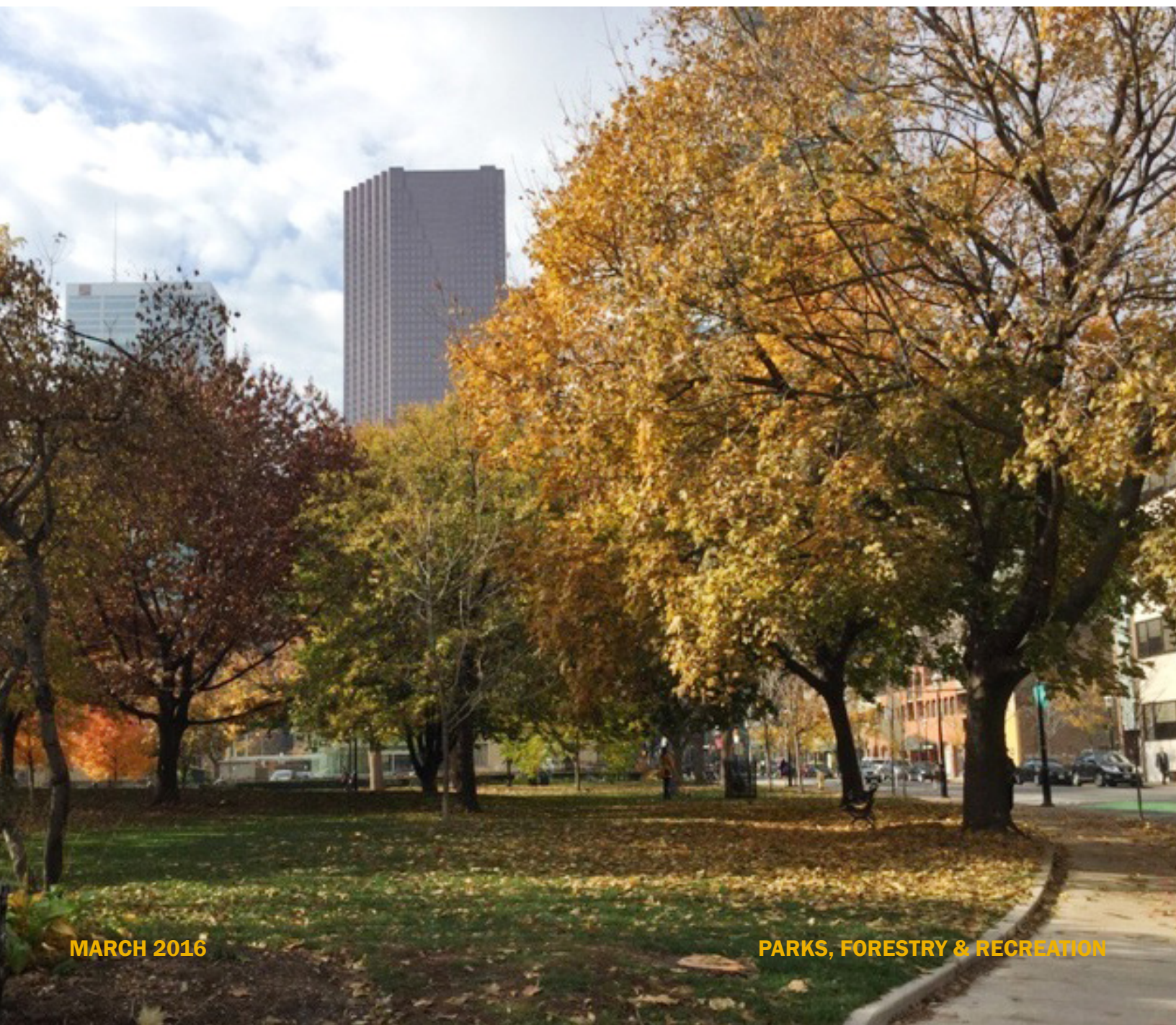


DOWNTOWN PARKS

TOcore PHASE I BACKGROUND REPORT



DOWNTOWN PARKS

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DOWNTOWN PARKS

TOcore PHASE I BACKGROUND REPORT

Parks are essential to making Toronto an attractive place to live, work, and visit. Toronto's parks offer a broad range of outdoor leisure and recreation opportunities, transportation routes, and places for residents to interact with nature, and with one another. Parks also provide important economic benefits: they attract tourists and businesses, and help to build a healthy workforce. They provide shade, produce oxygen, and store stormwater. Parks are necessary elements for healthy individuals, communities, and natural habitat.

Toronto Parks Plan 2013-2017

Together with City Planning Division and Transportation Services Division, Parks, Forestry & Recreation Division (PFR) are developing a Downtown Parks and Public Realm (P+PR) Plan as part of the TOcore study (www.toronto.ca/tocore). The purpose of the P+PR Plan is to improve the quality and connectivity of parks and public spaces and identify parkland improvement and acquisition priorities within Toronto's intensifying core. The study area is shown in Map 1. This document, prepared by PFR as part of TOcore's first 'taking stock' phase, provides an overview of the parks planning framework in Toronto, user trends and emerging challenges and opportunities to improve downtown parks and the urban forest.



Figure 1. HTO Park in the summer

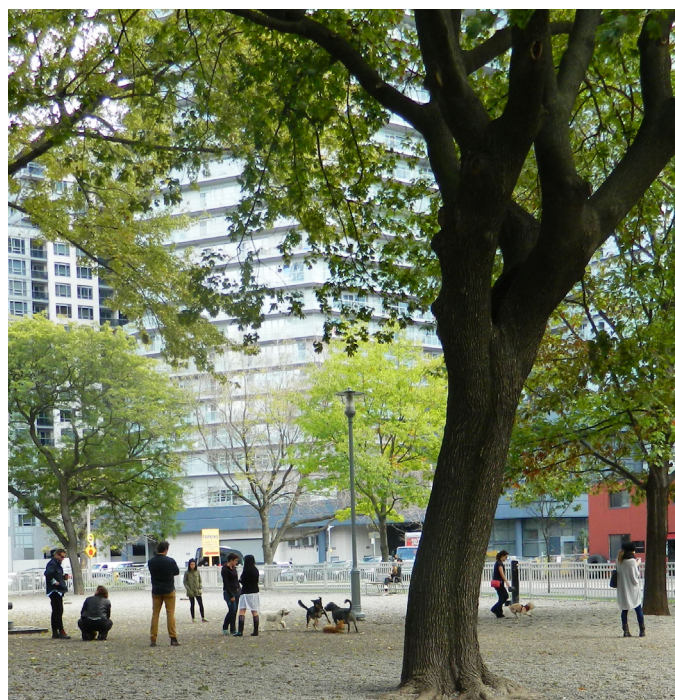


Figure 2. Clarence Square Park dogs off-leash area

1. TORONTO'S DOWNTOWN PARKS

Downtown parks include some of the most iconic, beloved and heavily used destinations in the city. Toronto's extensive system of parks and trails is one of the city's greatest assets and is essential to the quality of life that Torontonians enjoy. Contemporary downtown life continues to trend toward living busier lives in increasingly denser urban environments, smaller families but more dog ownership, and sharing public spaces with the almost a quarter million residents and half a million visitors and workers at all times of the day.

Downtown dwellers, like residents across the city, are conscious of improving their individual health and well-being and seek both active and passive recreational activities in beautiful, accessible and high-quality public spaces. Adding 'green' and 'nature' back into urban landscapes has always been a desirable urban condition, not only for aesthetic reasons, but for public health, healing and general fitness. These sentiments are reflected in numerous consultations with park users, which are outlined in this report.

Including the Toronto Islands, the total study area is roughly 1770 hectares (ha). The 127 existing City-owned and/or City-operated parks in this area cover 270 ha, or 15% of the study area. If the Islands are excluded, there are 121 parks amounting to 100 ha in the downtown. Assets and amenities in downtown parks typically reflect the size and location of the park and can range from benches and drinking fountains in parkettes to gazebos, sports fields, tennis courts, playgrounds, splash pads and public art in larger parks.

Many downtown parks are historically and culturally significant to residents and visitors, including Queen's Park, Allan Gardens, Moss Park, Riverdale Park West and Grange Park. Toronto's Waterfront is a signature feature that draws residents from downtown and across the city to parks such as HTO Park, Sugar Beach, Sherbourne Common, and more recently Underpass Park and Corktown Common.

Toronto's Parks Plan 2013-2017, adopted by City Council in 2013, established a parkland classification system as a tool to guide park planning, development and operations. The classifications consider purpose and function, typical characteristics, size, as well as park access and connections. Currently, PFR is in the process of using this system to classify all of Toronto's parks. For the purposes of this report, classifications have been proposed in order

to provide a general sense of the parks system downtown. In using this approach, 13% of total TOcore parkland could be classified as parkette (a total of 14.1 ha) serving local passive functions, whereas 49% (52.2 ha) of downtown parkland could have city-wide importance due to its unique cultural or historic character and location.

A System of Parks

Toronto is a city of neighbourhoods that are distinct by their rhythm, characteristics and cultural identity and Toronto's system of parks often reflect the uniqueness of different areas of the city. Overall, downtown neighbourhoods are growing, young families are choosing to live downtown and dog ownership is increasing. Physically, this growth means the emergence of new vertical communities and a higher density of people who tend to use nearby parks as their shared backyard. This outdoor living space creates unprecedented need for higher maintenance levels to ensure that, for example, horticulture beds, turf and trees are of high-quality and can withstand the increased intensity of use.

These trends will continue to shape the way parkland is improved and developed. By examining socio-demographic data, trends in park use and the existing park system, the City can begin to analyze whether current parks are meeting people's needs and identify improvement and acquisition opportunities.

Table 1 shows a sample of socio-demographic indicators as well as the amount of parkland (absolute and per capita) per neighbourhood. There is notable variation in these indicators across the study area and these variations provide one lens through which to analyze the role and importance of parks in localized sub-geographies.

With a sustained rapid increase in residential populations, employment and tourism in the downtown, the mix of local to city-wide parks is facing increasing pressures for both passive as well as formal permitted uses, especially in the rapidly changing neighbourhoods along the waterfront. PFR continues to respond to changing park use pressures by developing, improving and where possible acquiring parkland downtown.

Table 1. Comparison of parkland to selected socio-demographic indicators by downtown neighbourhood (excluding Toronto Islands)
Source: TOcore Phase 1 Community Services and Facilities Study

Neighbourhood	Total Pop 2006	Total Pop 2011	Couples with children	Single Parents	Average Household Income	City Parkland (Hectares)
Waterfront West	8,053	16,555	720	320	\$85,470	15.17
Cabbagetown	4,000	4,020	335	160	\$151,990	14.18
Bay Corridor	14,777	18,690	1,075	575	\$84,313	13.54
St. Lawrence-Distillery	6,378	6,890	340	465	\$68,248	12.99
Moss Park	10,997	10,245	330	440	\$49,181	8.95
Yorkville	9,755	9,990	505	275	\$138,660	7.27
Kensington-Chinatown	17,102	18,505	950	825	\$57,171	5.83
King-Parliament	7,226	9,480	360	245	\$95,920	4.25
King-Spadina	4,642	8,650	260	110	\$91,137	3.78
Regent Park	10,387	10,015	840	670	\$49,208	3.23
Church-Yonge	21,637	24,900	705	565	\$60,700	2.97
St. Jamestown	24,234	25,860	1,675	1,070	\$50,961	2.54
Waterfront Central	6,315	10,590	510	320	\$109,200	2.09
Annex	15,602	16,540	885	400	\$101,283	2.03
University of Toronto	5,906	7,820	420	225	\$78,506	0.61
Financial District	548	655	30	20	n/a	0.22
Total	167,599	199,405	9940	6685	n/a	99.65

Since 2005, a number of parks have been developed within the study area (Figure 10) including:

- Town Hall Square (2005, 0.15 ha)
- Wellesley Magill Park (2006, 0.24 ha)
- Ireland Park (2007, 0.1 ha)
- HTO Park (2007, 1.32 ha)
- HTO Park West (2007, 0.40 ha)
- Southern Linear Park (2009, 0.48 ha)
- Northern Linear Park (2010, 0.71 ha)
- Canoe Landing Park (2010, 3.1 ha)
- Sherbourne Common (2010, 1.47 ha)
- Water's Edge Promenade (2010, 0.95 ha)
- Sugar Beach Park (2010, 0.87 ha)
- Underpass Park Phase I (2012, 0.66 ha)
- Regent Park revitalization (2013, 2.63 ha)
- George Robert Grasett Park (2013, 0.013 ha)
- Underpass Park Phase II (2015, 0.44 ha)
- Lawren Harris Square (2015, 0.15 ha)
- Corktown Common (2015, 5.52 ha)

The following downtown parks have been secured and will be built over the next five years (Figure 10):

- Pier 27 (2016, 0.5 ha)
- Alexandra Park Central (TBD, 0.4 ha)
- Alexandra Park North (TBD, 0.22 ha)
- Clover Hill Park (2017, 0.26 ha)
- Mouth of the Creek Park (2017, 0.5 ha)
- Aitken Place Park (2017, 0.29 ha)
- South Market Park (2017, 0.11 ha estimated)
- York Off-Ramp Park (2018, 0.8 ha estimated)
- 11 Wellesley St. W. (2018, 0.61 ha)
- 525 Adelaide St W. (TBD, 0.065 ha)
- Corktown Common (TBD, 1.69 ha)

PARKS UNDERGOING REDESIGN OR IMPROVEMENT

There are also a number of important downtown parks that are undergoing a significant redesign and/or improvement process over the next two years that include, but are not limited to:

- Queen's Park (5.1 ha)

While still in the early stages, the redesign may include a forest management plan to support the care for the soil, turf and trees.

- Berczy Park (0.4 ha)

Create a more pedestrian friendly space through improved seating and gathering spaces, higher quality materials and extending surface paving beyond park boundaries.

- College Park (1.0 ha)

Major revitalization to improve connections to the park and create a flexible space that can accommodate changing patterns of use and a rapidly growing population.

- Grange Park (1.8 ha)

Development of a new stormwater management plan, a dog off-leash area, new play spaces and improved connections.

- Moss Park (3.5 ha)

Tentative plans to add more amenities and possibly rebuild the existing community centre and arena.



Figure 3. Berczy Park redesign (Credit: Claude Cormier et Associes)



Figure 4. Grange Park redesign (Credit: PFS Studio)

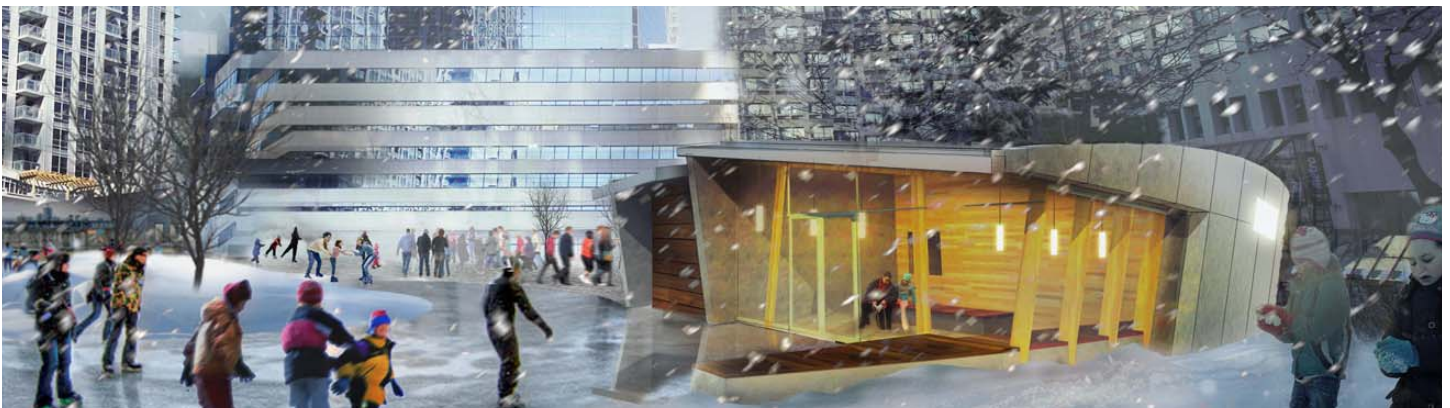


Figure 5. College Park redesign (Credit: RAW Design)

PARK ASSETS

Within the TOcore Study area, including the Toronto Islands, PFR maintains the following assets within its parkland:

- 44 Playgrounds
- 32 Picnic Areas
- 20 Tennis Courts
- 19 Washroom Buildings
- 13 Wading Pools
- 12 Baseball Diamonds
- 11 Fieldhouses
- 10 Fire Pits
- 9 Designated Dogs Off-Leash Areas
- 8 Outdoor Fitness Equipment Areas
- 7 Splash Pads
- 6 Basketball Courts
- 5 Indoor Pools
- 5 Community Gardens
- 4 Multipurpose Fields
- 4 Recreation Centres
- 4 Association of Community Centres (AOCC)
- 3 Volleyball Courts
- 2 Amphitheatres
- 2 Arenas
- 2 Farm/Zoo
- 2 Multipurpose Courts
- 2 Skateboard Areas
- 1 Outdoor Pool
- 1 Conservatory
- 1 Cricket Pitch
- 1 Frisbee Golf
- 1 Soccer field
- 1 Sports Pad
- 1 Children's Garden

These and other park assets were inventoried and will be validated through the TOcore Park Asset and Use Survey described later in this report.



Figure 6. Canoe Landing



Figure 7. Victoria Memorial Square Park

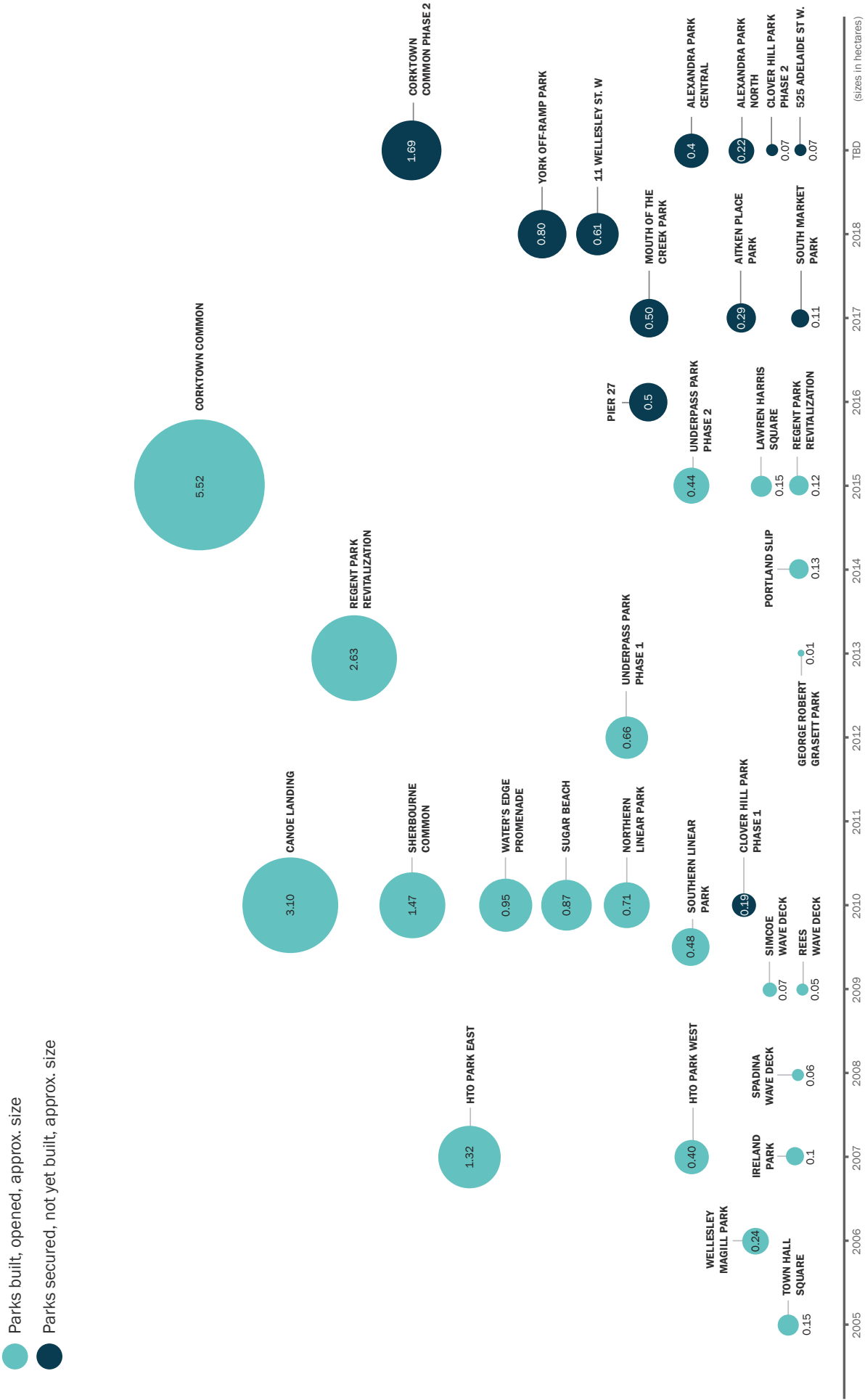


Figure 8. Toronto Music Garden



Figure 9. Trinity Square

FIGURE 10. PARKS BUILT SINCE 2005



2. PARKS PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Many Downtown activities are interdependent. The most obvious way these activities are linked is through Downtown spaces: the streets, parks, plazas and special districts. This is where people experience Downtown life most directly.

Toronto Official Plan

2.1. ACQUISITION AND PROVISION

The City of Toronto prioritizes the dedication of new parkland when development occurs. There are a number of legislative and policy tools that guide parks planning. These include the *Planning Act* (RSO 1990), the Provincial Policy Statement, 2014, the City of Toronto's Official Plan, 2006, Secondary Plans and the Municipal Code, as well as recommendations under three key service plans approved by Council that include the Parks Plan 2013-2017, the Recreation Services Plan 2013-2017 and the Strategic Forest Management Plan, 2012-2022.

Sections 42 and 51 of the *Planning Act* allow municipalities to require that land be conveyed for parkland as a condition of development or redevelopment in their Official Plan policy. Section 3.2.3.4 of Toronto's Official Plan states that: "all development will be subject to the dedication of 5% of lands for parks purposes for residential development and 2% for all other uses unless the alternative parkland dedication rate applies."

The Alternative Parkland Dedication Rate is applied in Parkland Acquisition Priority Areas. The rate is 0.4 hectares of parkland per 300 units, subject to caps depending on the size of the development site, which applies to all of the downtown. This rate has been in effect since 2008.

Sections 42 and 51 also allow municipalities to accept cash-in-lieu (CIL) of parkland dedication if the acquisition of parkland on a development site is deemed unsuitable. CIL is collected and held in reserve accounts for the purposes of parkland acquisition or parkland development. Toronto's CIL allocation policy is outlined in Municipal Code Section 415-25, as shown in Table 2. The CIL allocation policy also applies to any CIL collected using the Parkland Acquisition Priority Areas.

Table 2. Cash-In-Lieu Allocation Policy

	Throughout City	Within District
2% and First 5% CIL (from park dedication or Alternative Rate)		
Land Acquisition	25% acquire parkland throughout the City	25% acquire parkland within the District
Park Development	25% develop and upgrade parks and recreation facilities throughout the City	25% develop and upgrade parks and recreation facilities within the District**
Above 5% CIL (remainder from Alternative Rate calculation)		
Acquire parkland that is accessible to the area in which the development is located or to improve parks in the vicinity of the development.		

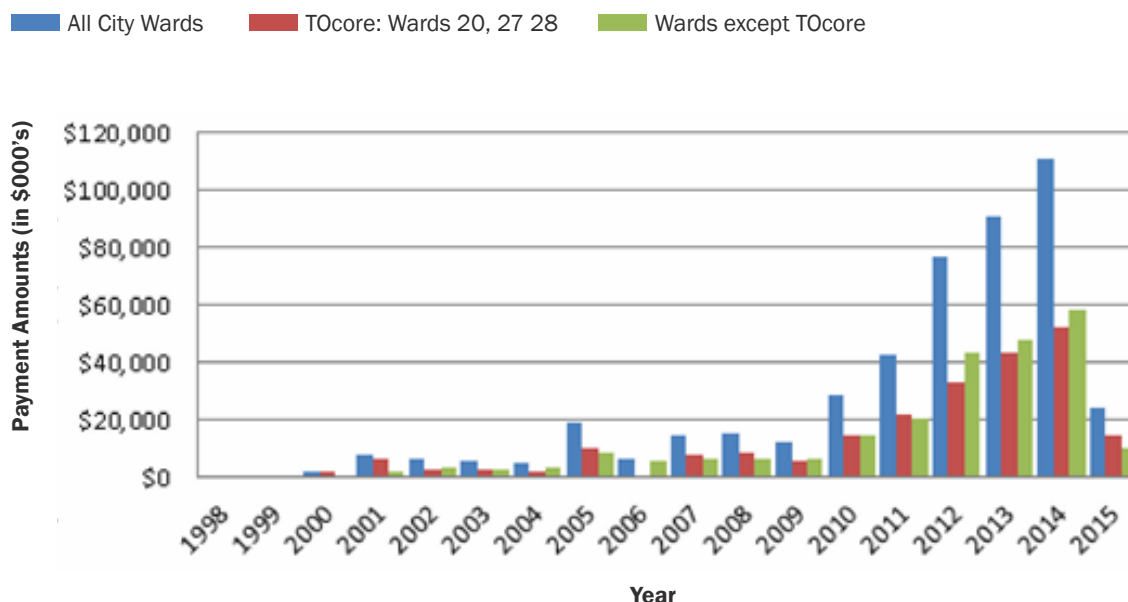
** Community Councils may recommend the allocation of up to 100 percent of the district portion of the parks and recreation facility development funds for the acquisition of parkland within the district where the funds were generated.

Any Alternative Parkland Dedication Rate CIL payments received in excess of 5% are to be used to acquire parkland that is accessible to the area in which the development is located or to improve parks in the vicinity of the development. The following section explains how much 2% and first 5% CIL funds have been collected in Wards 20, 27 and 28 (the three wards that make up downtown); how the above 5% CIL funds are being spent; and, how much uncommitted funds remain in the above 5% accounts.

Two Percent (2%) and First 5% CIL Funds

Figure 11 shows how much funding was collected for the 2% and first 5% CIL funds for Wards 20, 27 and 28 since amalgamation. From 2000 to 2011 the combined amount of payments brought in by Wards 20, 27 and 28 was \$85M. From 2012-2014, Wards 20, 27 and 28 brought in \$128M while all of the other Wards in the city received a combined total of \$149M. During a three-year timeframe, Wards 20, 27 and 28 received just under 50% of the total 2% and first 5% CIL funds across the city.

FIGURE 11. 2% AND FIRST 5% CIL PAYMENT AMOUNTS AS OF JUNE 2015



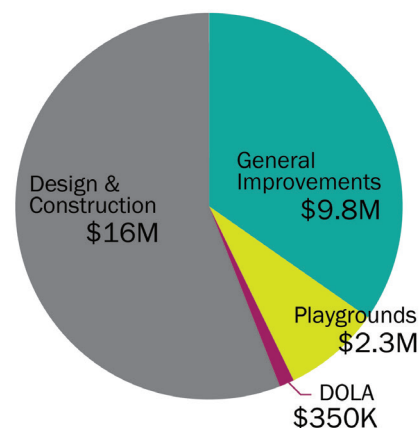
Above 5% CIL Funds

The City of Toronto began applying the Parkland Acquisition Priority Areas on January 1, 2008. The 2010-2014 project commitments for the above 5% CIL funds in Wards 20, 27 and 28 are shown in Figure 12.

In total, there were approximately \$28M in project commitments in the three downtown wards from 2010-2014. Overall, just under \$16M were committed towards the design and construction of existing parks (e.g. park redesigns). General improvements (e.g. lights, pathways, benches, other miscellaneous improvements) accounted for \$9.8M. Dogs off-leash areas (DOLA) received just under \$350K and approximately \$2.3M have been committed towards the development of playgrounds (new or replacement). As of June 2015, all of these commitments are parkland improvement projects and none of them are parkland acquisition projects.

FIGURE 12. ABOVE 5% CIL

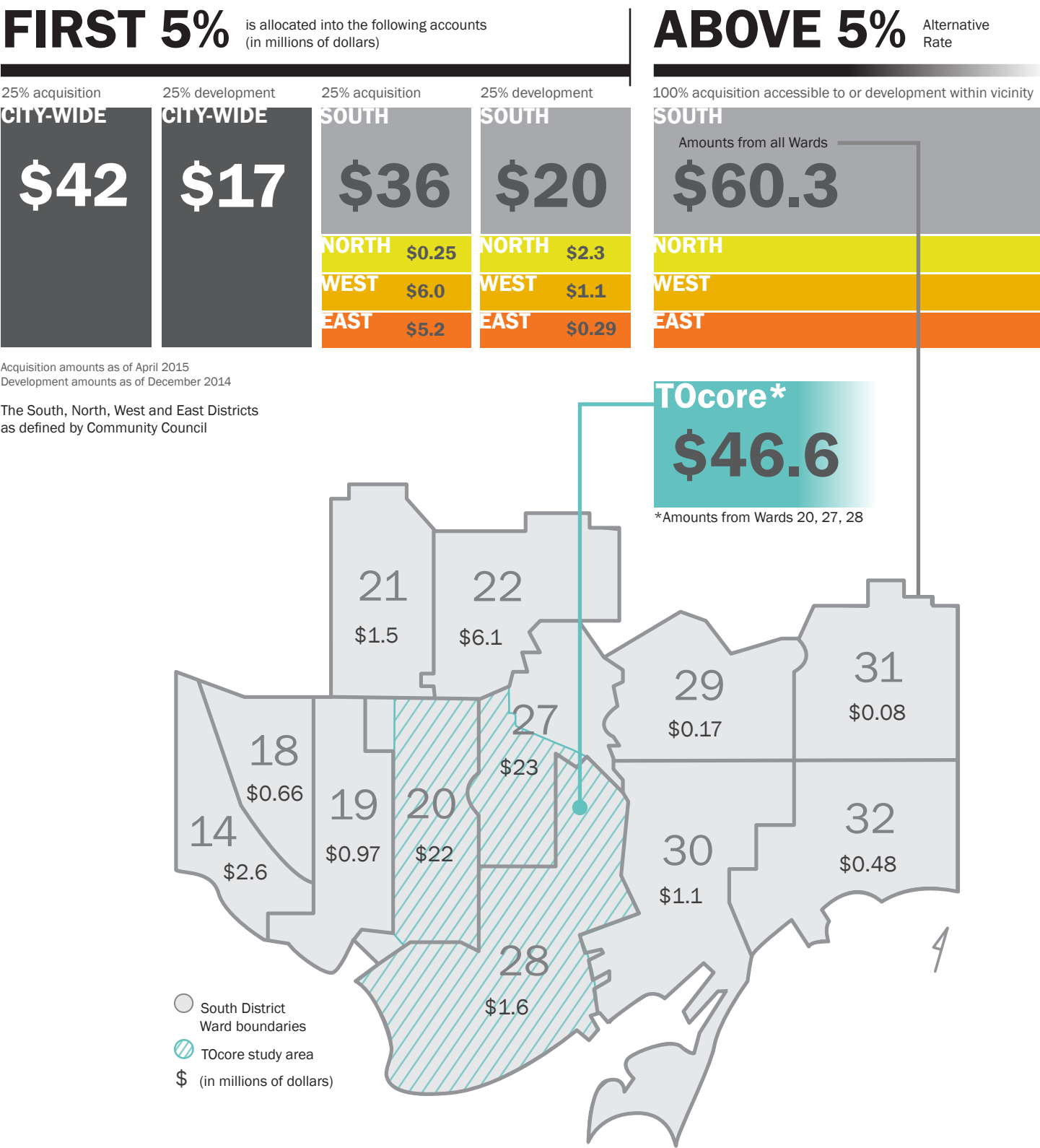
Parkland Improvement Project
Commitments 2010-2014,
Wards 20, 27, 28



Uncommitted CIL amounts

Figure 13 shows the amount in CIL uncommitted amounts as of spring 2015, of which the three downtown wards combined have \$46.6M.

FIGURE 13. SOUTH DISTRICT AND CITY-WIDE: 2%, FIRST 5% AND ABOVE 5% UNCOMMITTED CIL



Parkland Acquisition Challenges

1. Small Parcels

Parkland dedication requirements are based on the development site land area. As an area with high levels of intensification, most of the sites downtown are primarily infill developments with small parcel sizes that make land dedication on a site-by-site basis undesirable and difficult. In most cases, cash-in-lieu (CIL) of parkland is the best outcome that the City can achieve.

2. Expensive Sites

Even though a portion of CIL reserve funds are directed towards parkland purchase, in downtown’s competitive market, land values appreciate faster than the accumulated value of CIL funds. Therefore, CIL funds can be quickly exhausted after purchasing only a few sites downtown and it is a challenge to provide more parkland for an increasing population.

3. Outpaced in the Market

To purchase parkland using the CIL funds collected, the City has to compete in a robust real estate market with other landowners who have more nimble financing and decision-making models. As a result, private interests

are far more successful than the City in acquiring new properties. Furthermore, the City of Toronto Act forbids the municipality from paying more than the appraised value of the land, even though market prices are considerably higher.

Despite these challenges, since 2005, the City has delivered 21 new or expanded parks in the downtown through redevelopment including Regent Park, Town Hall Square in Yorkville, Canoe Landing and the Northern and Southern Linear Parks in the Railway Lands, as shown previously in Figure 10.

Moving Forward

The City is looking for opportunities to work with developers to combine smaller parcels of land through a number of developments to create larger parks. This was done successfully at 11 Wellesley Street West where parkland dedication from three development sites were combined to create a 0.61 ha park.



Figure 14. Moss Park basketball court (credit: Sam Javanrouhe, toleftpixel.com)

2.2. DESIGN AND BUILD

PFR has studied several park design and redesign processes to understand where challenges and opportunities were in the final stages of parkland development. The challenges and opportunities in these stages are due to the mixed approaches to determining the scope of work with consultants, public engagement strategies and interactions with Council, for example. The following lessons were learned:

1. A common conversation around design

Public confusion can occur around a park’s future redesign when the City, resident associations and/or Business Improvement Area’s (BIA) undertake separate public engagement processes. There is an opportunity to develop guidelines and improve partnerships on public engagement strategies that may identify a general timeline and various types of engagement initiatives, working group formations and communication techniques.

2. More reliable project budgeting

Sometimes unforeseen issues arise during the design and construction of parks. For this reason, Letters of Credit are taken when a developer constructs a new park as part of their development. To successfully draw down on these Letters of Credit, the process has to be streamlined so that the amount required can be added to the Capital Budget and approved for spending without having to go back to City Council.

3. Including management plans

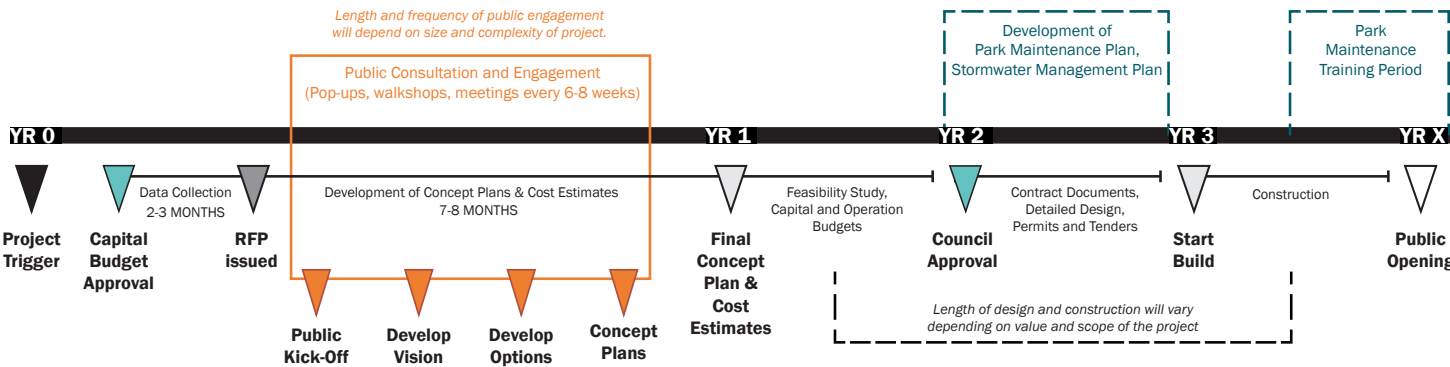
Management plans are not yet mandatory and could be included in the scope of work in any park design or redesign project. Management plans for stormwater and park management and maintenance set out clear guidelines, processes and expectations for how the park should perform and how to maintain that level of performance. This should aid the work of the park supervisors and all stakeholders involved in funding and undertaking maintenance work.

4. Blending form and function at the edge

In terms of urban park design, it can be advantageous to extend the look and feel of a park beyond its designated boundaries. For example, the Berczy Park redesign uses Section 37 funding to extend the surface material treatment into the streetscape. Design guidelines could be developed on materials, design standards, considerations and visualization techniques to communicate design ideas (e.g. more 3D renderings). This could be helpful to communicate standards developed for park design to Council, the public and developers. These expanded design standards should be added to the City of Toronto’s Streetscape Manual.

Based on the key informant interviews with PFR park planners and designers, a proposed standard process timeline was developed and is illustrated in Figure 15.

FIGURE 15. MAJOR PARK DEVELOPMENT PROPOSED STANDARD PROCESS



2.3. MAINTENANCE AND OPERATIONS

There are also challenges to sustaining the expected high-quality maintenance and programming of parks downtown such as overuse, incompatible uses (including drug use and homelessness) and encroachments of adjacent land uses. For example, large corporate or city-wide events cause significant damage to parks, often requiring the frequent replacement of turf. The emergence of vertical communities and higher volumes of residents using parks as their outdoor living space create higher maintenance demands downtown.

1. Higher costs for unique design and materials

In most cases, the cost to build parks in the downtown can be significantly higher because they are often destination parks for many residents and visitors. They also frequently contain more complex and unique designs and assets that make it difficult to source replacement parts (e.g. specially designed benches), require complex workmanship (e.g. pavers with complex designs) and have high daytime use making it difficult for crews to complete the work. For example, the splash pad at Sugar Beach has very complex filters and confined space requirements for maintenance staff.

Table 3 provides projected average costs of designing and building parks with city-wide interest or features, as well as local serving parks. When developing a business case for a new asset, some industry journals have suggested as high as a 15% cost of capital construction budget for calculating operating budget. The final percentage is always dependent on the final design and existing resource available such as labour and machinery, which in combination with the increased use and associated maintenance of downtown parks, increases the cost to operate these parks. City-wide parks require resources from a more reliable source of funding with an operating budget that matches high performance expectations.

Table 3. Average costs per m² of building parks, city-wide interest/feature vs. local serving

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
City-Wide Interest/Feature Parks (cost/m²)	\$485	\$500	\$515	\$530	\$546	\$563	\$580	\$597	\$615
Operating Budget (15% of cost)	\$73	\$75	\$77	\$79	\$82	\$84	\$87	\$90	\$92
Local Serving Parks (cost/m²)	\$168	\$173	\$178	\$183	\$189	\$194	\$200	\$206	\$212
Operating Budget (15% of cost)	\$25.20	\$25.96	\$26.73	\$27.51	\$28.31	\$29.13	\$29.97	\$30.84	\$31.74

2. Access to parks

In some cases, adjacent land uses or other city infrastructure can limit access to parks and make them difficult to maintain. Condominiums and commercial buildings that are built to the property line adjacent to parks introduce activities that damage the park (e.g. window washing equipment and parking vehicles) or make park access difficult for operations staff. Development agreements need to be prepared with a fair consideration to protect parks and park access. Consistent standards are needed for downtown parks and management agreements with condominium boards should clearly identify responsibilities and procedures to ensure standards are met.

3. Maintaining healthy vegetation

Operational and maintenance staff also note that growing healthy turf and trees is increasingly difficult downtown. Day-to-day foot traffic and the number of permitted activities is too heavy causing rapid compaction and turf ‘thinning’, resulting in bare patches. Irrigation systems have been installed in some parks with a dogs off-leash area to reduce the harmful impacts of urine on trees and turf.

Another significant challenge is the protection of sufficient amount of sunlight exposure on park vegetation to support growth. Increasingly, sunlit areas are being shadowed by tall buildings (e.g. College Park).

Strata parks (parks built over structures, such as underground parking garages) are particularly challenging for park design and growing large healthy trees. Despite membrane technology, they eventually leak into the structures below, requiring the removal of park features in order to make costly repairs to waterproofing systems. Complaints also arise from park activities (e.g. concerts) that disturb commercial spaces built underneath strata parks.

3. DOWNTOWN PARK USER OPINIONS AND BEHAVIOUR

The opinions of downtown park users have been collected over time through a number of initiatives, including development of the Parks Plan, various PFR surveys, as well as focused initiatives undertaken as part of the TOcore Parks and Public Realm Study during Phase 1 (2014-2015). These include interviews and workshops with Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff and a Park Asset and Use Survey.

3.1. PARK ASSET AND USE SURVEY, SUMMER 2015

From June to August 2015, PFR partnered with Ryerson University’s Bachelor of Spatial Analysis Program to contract volunteer students who, together with two additional volunteer students from York University and Seneca College, surveyed 127 downtown parks, including the Toronto Islands, in support of the TOcore Parks and Public Realm Study. This work provides a complete asset inventory of our downtown parks and captures a snapshot of how people are using the parks.

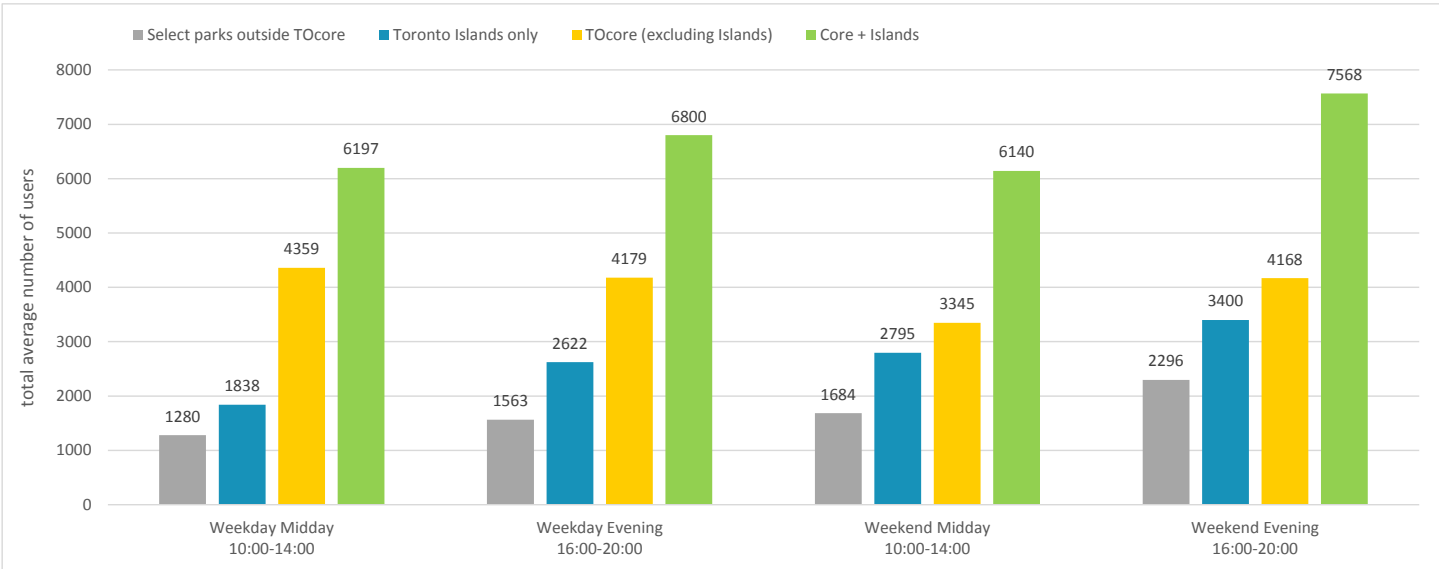
Over 8,000 assets were mapped and surveyors observed several thousand individual park uses and activities on both weekdays and weekends. All downtown parks were visited during the midday (10am to 2pm) and evening

(4pm to 8pm). Estimated age range, gender and group size were also documented. This dataset is the first measured snapshot of our downtown parks that will inform planning, design and maintenance decision-making by illustrating how rapid growth pressures are affecting our downtown parks.

The survey found that during the time this survey was conducted, the most common uses of downtown parks for all age groups were walking, sitting and cycling through the park, followed by playing (specifically for children aged 0-15). When comparing midday and evening users, there was no significant difference in the average number of park users, but there was slightly higher usage in the evening than midday. The Toronto Islands were more popular during the weekends than the weekdays, which is a similar trend for major parks just outside the TOcore Study area identified in Map 1. For downtown parks excluding the Islands, weekend evening park use was just as high as weekday use (midday and evening), with the lowest observed park use occurring during weekend midday (Figure 16).

The density of users during the study period was significantly higher on the Toronto Island Parks over the summer. Excluding the Islands, density of users (including stationary use and people passing through) was highest

FIGURE 16. TOTAL AVERAGE PARK USERS OBSERVED



at St. Mary Street Parkette, followed by Toronto Sculpture Garden, Bloor-Bedford Parkette, McGill Parkette and Ryerson Community Park (Table 4). When stationary and passing-through park users are separated, the top five parks with the highest density of users changes considerably. Tables 5 and 6 show the variation in the top five parks with the highest density of users based on only including stationary uses (e.g. sitting, eating and playing) or passing-through park uses (e.g. walking and cycling). The top five parks with the highest density of stationary users are St. Mary Street Parkette, followed by Bloor-Bedford Parkette, Bright Street Playground, Bobbie Rosenfeld Park and Margaret Fairley Park. The top five parks with highest density of passing-through park users are Toronto Sculpture Garden, followed by McGill Parkette,

Boswell Park, Toronto Waterfront Park and Ryerson Community Park.

The overall density comparison (Table 4) also ranks popular parks such as Trinity Bellwoods, Queen's Park and Nathan Phillips Square seemingly lower than some parkettes because the size of the parkland itself affects the density calculation (persons/hectare). In these parks, density may be low overall but high in concentrated areas (e.g. Trinity Bellwoods is densely used near the south end of the park). This spatial description is as important in understanding park pressures as is the overall density calculation when looking at TOcore as a whole. The analysis of the survey data will continue over the next phase of the TOcore Study.

Table 4. Top five average use densities of parks downtown, compared to selected parks.

	AVERAGE NO. OF USERS IN A DAY	PARK AREA (HA)	DENSITY (PERSONS/HA)
1. ST. MARY STREET PARKETTE	20	0.01	2000
2. TORONTO SCULPTURE GARDEN	96	0.07	1395
3. BLOOR - BEDFORD PARKETTE	50	0.04	1250
4. MCGILL PARKETTE	250	0.20	1241
5. RYERSON COMMUNITY PARK	245	0.22	1114
LIST OF POPULAR PARKS FOR COMPARISON			
QUEEN'S PARK	335	5.13	65
NATHAN PHILLIPS SQUARE	645	5.15	125
TRINITY BELLWOODS PARK	1,812	14.61	124
CHRISTIE PITS PARK	636	8.82	72.1
WITHROW PARK	566	8.14	69.5

Table 5. Top five average stationary use densities of parks downtown

	AVERAGE NO. OF USERS IN A DAY	PARK AREA (HA)	DENSITY (PERSONS/HA)
1. ST. MARY STREET PARKETTE	20	0.01	1900
2. BLOOR - BEDFORD PARKETTE	50	0.04	800
3. BRIGHT STREET PLAYGROUND	22	0.03	678
4. BOBBIE ROSENFELD PARK	130	0.19	666
5. MARGARET FAIRLEY PARK	81	0.12	652

Table 6. Top five average passing through use densities of parks downtown

	AVERAGE NO. OF USERS IN A DAY	PARK AREA (HA)	DENSITY (PERSONS/HA)
1. TORONTO SCULPTURE GARDEN	96	0.07	1090
2. MCGILL PARKETTE	250	0.20	1057
3. BOSWELL PARKETTE	11	0.01	900
4. TORONTO WATERFRONT PARK	629	0.62	625
5. RYERSON COMMUNITY PARK	245	0.22	618

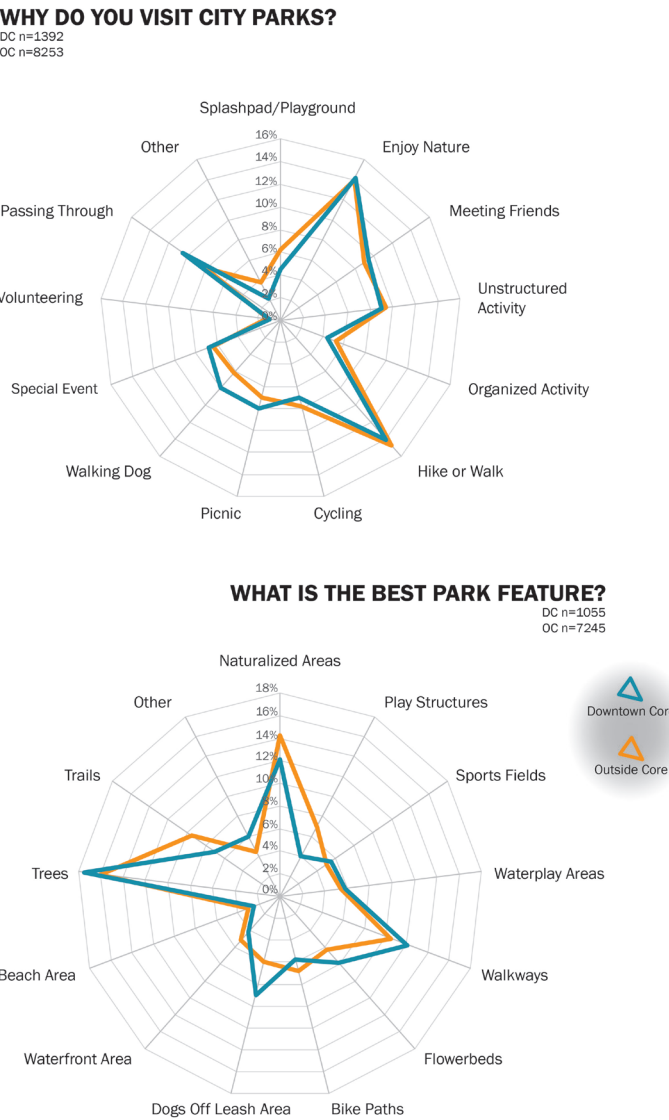
3.2. PARK USER SURVEYS

A number of public on-line surveys regarding parks have been conducted by PFR recently, including The Parks Plan Survey (2011), The Park User Survey (2014), the Visitor Survey for Toronto Island Park (2014 and 2015), and the People, Parks and Dogs Off-Leash Policy Survey (2013).

Across these surveys, the majority of respondents residing downtown said they enjoyed visiting parks for passive uses, walking, enjoying green space and nature. In The Park User Survey, about 90% felt that parks are important to their quality of life. When asked what they liked best about their parks, respondents to The Park User Survey said trees, naturalized areas and walkways. The respondents also used parks most often to enjoy nature, use walkways and trails, and for sports fields (Figure 17). The use trends are remarkable similar when comparing residents who live in the Downtown to those who live in the rest of the City. These use trends were again confirmed in the summer 2015 Park Asset and Use Survey results.

Visitor Survey for Toronto Island Park respondents felt that the Island parks were among the most beautiful in the city and the highest number of respondents at 50% visited these parks for the beaches and parkland, while about 20% visited for other activities. Of frequent visitors to the Islands, the most common themes for change included improving the transit experience in getting to and from the Islands, as well as better showcasing green spaces in the parks.

FIGURE 17. OPINIONS FROM PAST SURVEYS



3.3. PARK PERMIT TRENDS DOWNTOWN

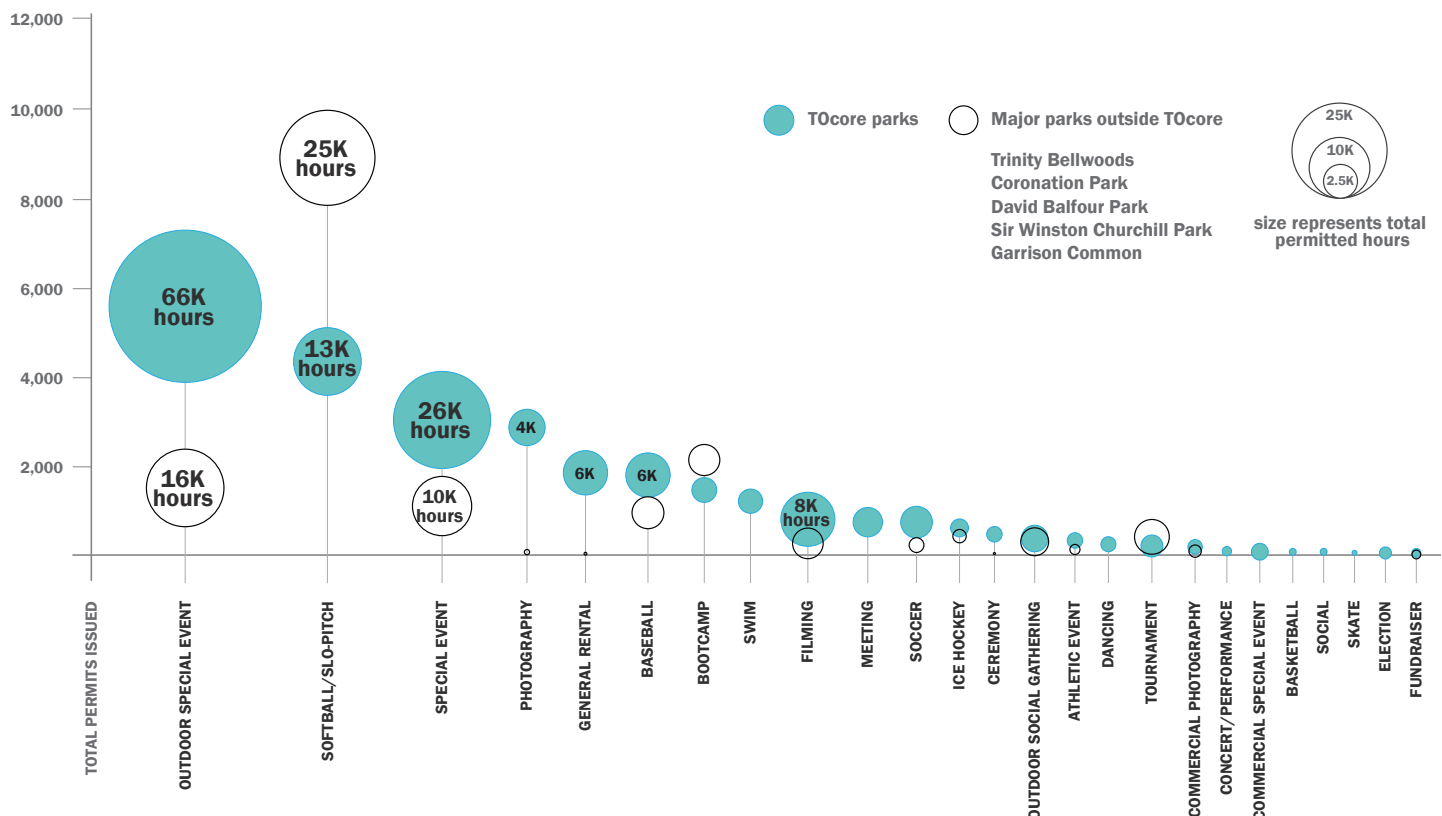
Since 2005, total permits for downtown parks have been increasing by 57 permits per year on average, while select major parks just outside of the study area (such as Trinity Bellwoods Park, Coronation Park, David A. Balfour Park, Sir Winston Churchill Park and Garrison Common) have increased by an average of 33 permits per year.

The increase in demand for park permits in the downtown could be explained by the increase in population and by the addition of new parks (such as Canoe Landing) or new functionality to some parks. Permit trends, however, do not necessarily indicate total park use, which could include non-permitted, unstructured and informal activities.

As shown in Figure 18, the parks with the most permit

hours are those that have facility assets which allow for a variety of recreational uses, including outdoor special events (e.g. music festivals, film festivals and fashion events), softball or slo-pitch or other special events. Over the past 10 years, 'outdoor special events' have been the top permitted events with just under 6,000 permits issued for these events, totaling approximately 66,000 hours. This is exceedingly higher than the five major parks outside TOcore (1482 permits at approximately 16,000 hours). The 'special events' category is also a popular permit sought downtown and includes activities like weddings or ceremonies (3013 permits at approximately 26,000 hours). In the study area, Riverdale Park West has had a sustained high level of issued permits, whereas Market Lane Park has experienced an increase in permitted activities, primarily from activities related to the St. Lawrence Market. These trends are expected to continue.

FIGURE 18. TOP 25 PERMITTED ACTIVITIES AND PERMIT HOURS, 2004-2014



3.4. TOcore PHASE I CONSULTATION

A first round of public consultation on TOcore took place in the spring and summer of 2015, with a number of open houses, online submissions and Planners in Public Spaces (PiPS) events. Some common themes heard about parks in downtown include:

- Parks are great places for everyone of all ages and interests to mingle
- Add more green space, improve tree canopy
- Use green corridors to connect green spaces
- Involve local businesses in the care of new trees
- Require developers to meet a specific greenspace ratio
- Address conflicting uses in parks, e.g. dogs vs. children
- Too many dogs in parks
- Connect small parks through better pedestrian and bike connections
- Provide more children's spaces in waterfront parks
- Integrate stormwater management in parks
- Commercial uses compete with people's enjoyment of parks

3.5. DOGS IN PARKS

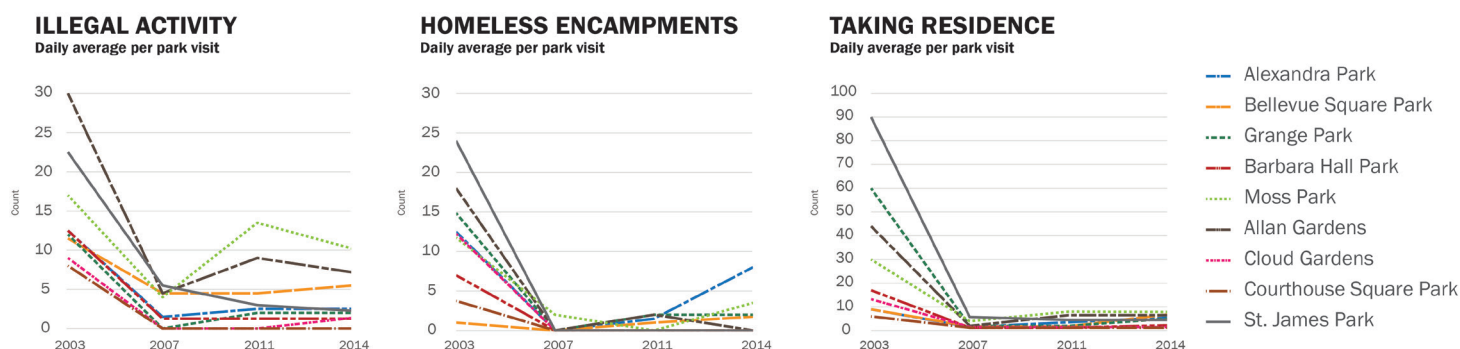
There is an increasing dog population and demand for dogs off-leash areas, in addition to a considerable increase in young families in the downtown and the need for more playgrounds and sports fields. This is

one of the prime examples of competing and often conflicting uses for space in parks. There is an emerging and important conversation on what on-site amenities developers can provide for residents in new buildings to take pressure off nearby parks, including dogs off-leash and playground areas. In the People, Parks and Dogs Off-Leash Policy Survey, about 54% of respondents said they used dogs off-leash areas, but 60% of respondents felt that greenspace should take precedence over dogs off-leash areas in parks. The Park Asset and Use Survey shows that practically all parks are used to walk or play with dogs. The highest concentration of dogs in parks is in the southwest Waterfront, King West, and Liberty Village areas, where the highest pace of growth and development has occurred recently with the highest density of 25-40 year old residents.

3.6. HOMELESSNESS IN PARKS

Homelessness and homeless encampments in parks is an issue that City Council committed to reduce in 2005 to ensure that parks remain accessible, equitable and safe. Through that commitment, the multi-agency Streets to Homes Program provides services to help homeless individuals find permanent housing. PFR's Parks Ambassador Program plays a key role in regularly identifying homeless encampments, securing support services, conducting annual park safety audits and managing individuals conducting illegal activities in parks. Since the program's inception in 2003, fewer encampments are now found in downtown parks. People taking up residence and conducting illegal activity in parks has also decreased downtown (Figure 19).

FIGURE 19. PARK AMBASSADOR SURVEYS



4. A HEALTHY URBAN FOREST

The urban forest includes all the trees within the city's boundaries. The trees in this forest provide a wide range of environmental, ecological, social, cultural and economic benefits. The benefits from air pollution filtration and energy savings alone have been valued at more than \$28 million per year. This value does not include the physical health benefits related to natural cooling and air quality improvement, or the documented mental health benefits of simply having trees in our neighbourhoods. This forest is a shared resource that benefits the entire community.

Toronto's Strategic Forest Management Plan 2012-2022.

Quality parks with a healthy urban forest are essential to creating a liveable environment in high-density neighbourhoods. Toronto's urban forest faces a number of challenges, both from invasive species, such as Emerald Ash Borer, to the impacts of urbanization and climate change. Urbanization continues to impact forest ecosystems by fragmenting habitat, reducing soil volumes for healthy root growth and tall buildings that block sunlight and reduce aerial space for tree crown growth. Decreased soil permeability from overuse (pets and people) and subsequent soil compaction, competition for root growth with underground utilities and infrastructure, and high salt levels in soils from winter de-icing agents all result in site conditions that limit the growth of larger shade trees and sensitive native species that support biodiversity in the city.

The City's Strategic Forest Management Plan sets a tree canopy target to increase the current canopy of 26.6-28% to 40%. There are policies and by-laws in place that support increasing tree canopy. Through consultation with Urban Forestry as part of Phase I of this study, a number of specific challenges were discussed for developing a healthy tree canopy downtown. The fundamental

challenge to this goal is the lack of space allocated to growing trees downtown. Trees that are shown on a concept plan for development are often foregone during the build stage to give way for underground utilities that were not properly considered during the design stage.

When required or prescribed tree planting is not possible, cash-in-lieu is accepted. However the fee is equivalent to the lowest possible cost based on greenfield planting (\$583 per tree) when in fact planting in a hardscaped context is more costly (approx. \$15,000 per tree). Moreover, existing trees are increasingly being lost as part of infill development in downtown and there are few effective tools that incentivize



Figure 20. Yoga in Victoria Memorial Square Park

developers to provide adequate soil structure and volume for tree plantings that do occur. Policies need to direct off-site tree planting when trees cannot be planted on-site and with adequate funding.

Opportunities for improved tree health and canopy in downtown include implementation of the Toronto Green Standard, which will require both City Divisions and developers to consider space for trees through any development proposals; better coordinate and complete comprehensive planning for all City capital projects; create better incentives for developers to plant and protect existing trees (including soil quality in building specifications); and, identify downtown tree protection zones.

5. EMERGING PRIORITIES

The downtown parks system has been and will continue to be developed and enhanced through policy improvements, partnerships with stakeholders, other City Divisions and Council. Moving forward, the TOcore Study will deliver a comprehensive plan that strengthens connections to existing parks that already anchor our downtown neighbourhoods, which add a great deal to the quality of life downtown. It will consider parks as part of a larger public realm system, including streetscapes and privately-owned and publically accessible spaces (POPS), such that the City continues to deliver high-quality public spaces that sustain a thriving and dynamic public life.

Based on consultation with the public and City staff, the following priorities have emerged and will be examined as part of Phase 2 of the Parks and Public Realm building block of TOcore:

- Expand and improve existing parks and acquire new parks and open spaces in the downtown
- Make connections, create green networks
- Explore solutions to challenges within the existing policy framework and tools
- Examine opportunities to balance current park uses and improve maintenance
- Improve accessibility to parks
- Protect and expand the urban forest
- Conduct a street tree analysis to determine the health of the urban forest Downtown
- Recommend priority routes for walking and cycling to improve mobility and active lifestyles
- Identify opportunities and priority areas for placemaking
- Conserve, enhance, connect and interpret the natural, cultural and heritage resources
- Find creative city-building ideas for establishing new open spaces and public realm connections
- Protect and improve micro-climate conditions in the public realm
- Survey the public and key stakeholder groups on park provision, improvement and expansion opportunities
- Explore alternative solutions for addressing gaps in park amenities, improvement, expansion, acquisition and experience



Figure 21. Toronto skyline from Riverdale Park East

PHOTO CREDITS

Cover Page: Karla Pena-Mendez, 2015

Figure 1, 2, 20: Rachel Paul, 2014

TOcore DOWNTOWN PARKS

Below is a list of the existing 127 parks and 2 civic squares that are included in the TOcore study area:

DOWNTOWN

- Alex Wilson Community Garden
- Alexander Street Parkette
- Alexandra Park
- Allan Gardens
- Anniversary Park
- Arena Gardens
- Asquith Green Park
- Barbara Hall Park
- Bathurst Quay
- Bellevue Square Park
- Belmont Parkette
- Berczy Park
- Bloor-Bedford Parkette
- Bobbie Rosenfeld Park
- Boswell Parkette
- Breadalbane Park
- Bright Street Playground
- Brunswick-College Parkette
- Canoe Landing
- Charles Street Parkette
- Clarence Square Park
- Cloud Gardens
- College Park
- Corktown Common
- Courthouse Square Park
- David Crombie Park
- David Pecaut Square (civic square)
- Ed and Anne Mirvish Parkette
- Frank Strollery Parkette
- George Hislop Park
- Glasgow Parkette
- Grange Park
- Gwendolyn MacEwen Parkette
- Harbour Square Park Lands
- Harold Town Park
- HTO Park
- HTO Park West
- Huron-Washington Parkette
- Huron Street Playground
- Ireland Park
- Isabella Valancy Crawford Park
- James Canning Gardens
- Jay MacPherson Green
- Jean Sibelius Square
- Jesse Ketchum Park
- Joseph Burr Tyrrell Park
- Joseph Sheard Parkette
- Julius Deutsch Park
- Larry Sefton Park
- Lawren Harris Park
- Lawren Harris Square
- Lillian H. Smith Park
- Little Trinity Church Lands
- Margaret Fairley Park
- Market Lane Park
- Marlborough Place Parkette
- Matt Cohen Park
- McCaul-Orde Park
- McGill Parkette
- Metropolitan United Church Grounds
- Milner Parkette
- Montague Parkette
- Moss Park
- Nathan Phillips Square (civic square)
- Norman Jewison Park
- Northern Linear Park
- Oak Street Park
- Old City Hall
- Olympic Park
- Ontario Street Parkette
- Opera Place
- Orphan's Green
- Parliament Square Park
- Paul Kane House Parkette
- Paul Martel Park
- Percy Park
- Peter Street Basin Park
- Princess Street Park
- Queen's Park
- Ramsden Park
- Randy Padmore Park
- Rees Street Park
- Regent Park
- Regent Park North
- Regent Park South
- Rekai Family Parkette

TOcore DOWNTOWN PARKS

- Riverdale Park West
- Robert St Playground
- Roundhouse Park
- Ryerson Community Park
- Sackville Playground
- Sally Bird Park
- Seaton Park
- Sergeant Ryan Russell Parkette
- Sherbourne Common
- Simcoe Park
- Sir William Campbell Museum House
- Sonya's Parkette
- Southern Linear Park
- Spadina Quay Wetlands
- St. Alban's Square
- St. Andrew's Playground
- St. James Park
- St. Jamestown West Park
- St. Mary Street Parkette
- St. Patrick's Square
- Sugar Beach Park
- Sumach-Shuter Parkette
- Taddle Creek Park
- Toronto Music Garden
- Toronto Sculpture Garden
- Toronto Waterfront Park
- Town Hall Square
- Trinity Square
- Underpass Park
- Victoria Memorial Square Park
- Village of Yorkville Park
- Water's Edge Promenade
- Wellesley-Magill Park
- Wellesley Community Centre
- Wellesley Park
- Winchester Park
- Winchester Square Park

DOWNTOWN - TORONTO ISLANDS

- Algonquin Island Park
- Centre Island Park
- Hanlan's Point Park
- Island Park
- Olympic Island Park
- Ward's Island Park

ADJACENT TO DOWNTOWN

- Bathurst Quay East
- Bickford Park
- Christie Pits Park
- Coronation Park
- David A. Balfour Park
- Garrison Common
- Little Norway Park
- Riverdale Park East
- Sir Winston Churchill Park
- Stadium Road Park
- Stanley Park North
- Stanley Park South
- Trinity Bellwoods Park
- Vermont Square
- Withrow Park