

PARKLAND STRATEGY

Growing Toronto Parkland

Phase 1 What We Heard Report | November 2017

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Key Messages from Engagement

In determining the best way to measure parkland supply today and in the future, three overarching themes were identified to guide Toronto's parkland provision analysis moving forward: **expand**, **share** and **connect**.

EXPAND:

Participants greatly value the parks and open space system and, for the most part, are satisfied with the amount of park space in their local neighbourhoods. However, they also foresee potential challenges as the population grows and puts pressure on the city's existing parks, particularly in the areas experiencing rapid intensification (the downtown and other growth centres in the city). Many participants indicated the need to prioritize more parkland in these areas of high-density and growth.

Participants want to see creative approaches to parkland acquisition. Stakeholders asked the City to expand the parks system in two main ways:

- Expand the definition of parkland into unconventional spaces, such as hydro corridors, school lands, atop publicly accessible condominium podiums and within Toronto's streetscapes.
- Explore new approaches to parkland provision, specifically in relation to funding and coordination models (such as developing cross-divisional partnerships with different city divisions, pursuing private donations or sponsorships and updating coordination and delivery models).

Many participants understood that while large amounts of parkland may be difficult to acquire, the addition of **smaller greens spaces could take pressure off larger parks** and even off some other small parks.

Participants highlighted that **improving the quality** of Toronto's parks, such as incorporating year round amenities, is just as important as **increasing the amount** of parkland in their neighbourhoods.

99%

of online survey respondents agree that:

- **City parks are important to their quality of life in the city**
- **City parks and green spaces are important to Toronto's identity as a healthy, equitable and prosperous city**

Based on the online survey, the most **IMPORTANT BENEFITS** that parks provide are:

- **Quiet, restful enjoyment of nature**
- **Enabling healthy & active families**
- **Ecological needs for a sustainable city**

SHARE:

Participants valued both the ecological and recreational aspects of parks, but cautioned on the need to balance park use and conservation of natural areas.

Participants suggested a need to emphasize the **multi-functional role of parks in serving diverse populations**, communicating that parks providing a space for community building, such as being able to support education (through guided tours), artwork and spiritual practice that can improve mental health and wellbeing. There were also recommendations that sport and recreation facilities should be designed to be multi-functional to serve a diversity of residents with various needs.

Participants defined equitable access as the ability to respond to the needs of local areas (such as density, demand and quality) instead of solely determining equal access to a defined number of parks in each area and/or proximity to parks. Participants stressed the importance of considering diverse transportation methods (walk, cycle, transit, drive) as well as size, scale and amenities within parks.

Participants articulated that the distribution of parkland and parkland improvements should be **prioritized in neighbourhoods with greater need**.

Participants recommended approaches to plan for **equitable access through partnerships** with already existing services and structures, such as integration with community centres and libraries to access to parking, washrooms and drinking water.

CONNECT:

Many participants identified that **improved wayfinding** is crucial to help create better connections within and between parks. This includes better digital information (including apps) and physical signage that educates the public about entry points as well as park amenities.

A desire for a more **integrated park system** was a major theme throughout the consultations. Participants suggested the need for improved connections between city-owned parks and other open green spaces such as railpaths, hydro corridors, provincial lands, school lands and even golf courses.

Participants highlighted the importance of incorporating and acknowledging the significant historical, traditional, and cultural **relationships between Indigenous people and the land** through land based education.

Participants emphasized the need for **continued community engagement** and the development of cross-divisional City partnerships to support final decisions around how new parkland is acquired, where it should go and how it can be maintained and improved.

HOW WE ENGAGED

Project Overview

What is the Parkland Strategy?

The Parkland Strategy is a 20-year plan that will guide long-term planning for new parks, expansions, and improved access to existing parks. It will support decision-making and prioritization of investment in parkland across the city.

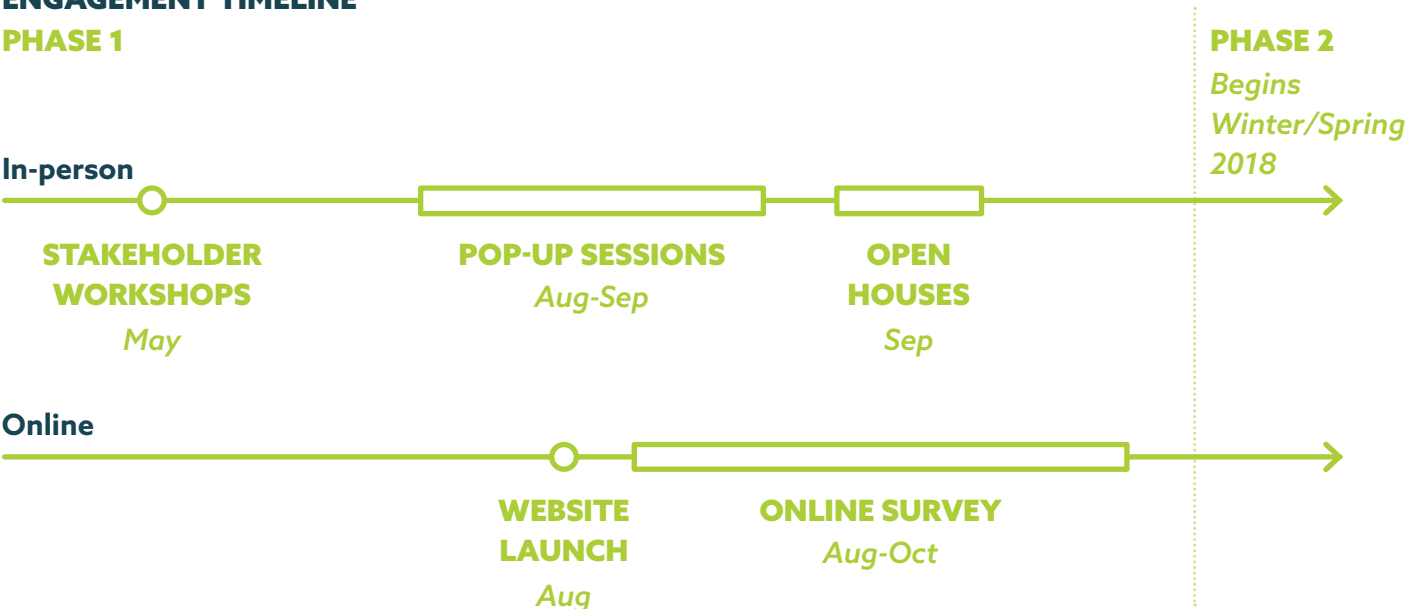
The development of the Parkland Strategy is occurring over two phases. The completed first phase focused on developing the parkland measurement and assessment methodology. This involved research and extensive public and stakeholder involvement to assess the current supply of parkland, gaps in the parks and open spaces system, and parkland needs across the city. The information collected and analyzed in the first phase informs the development of an implementation, policy and investment framework to support decision making about Toronto’s parkland needs in the future.

About this Report

This What We Heard Report summarizes the key messages that emerged during the stakeholder and public consultations held between May and October 2017 as part of the Parkland Strategy development process. The feedback collected has contributed to the development of the parkland measurement and assessment methodology, which is detailed in the Phase 1 Report (available at toronto.ca/parklandstrategy). The feedback will also inform work to be conducted in the next phase, ultimately feeding into recommendations in the final Parkland Strategy.

ENGAGEMENT TIMELINE

PHASE 1



Engagement Overview

Study Approach — Themes

In determining the best way to measure parkland supply today and in the future, three overarching themes were identified to guide Toronto's parkland provision analysis moving forward: **expand**, **share** and **connect**. These themes frame the challenge around how the parks system needs to grow to meet the demand of future population, while improving access and connections through the existing system. The public engagement conversations were further rooted in these three themes.

Engagement Goals

The goals of the Phase 1 engagement were to:

1. Introduce the overall project to Toronto residents and create awareness about the Strategy's goals.
2. Collectively explore the Strategy's themes of expand, share and connect to guide the discussion of needs and gaps in Toronto's parkland.
3. Gain guidance from the public and stakeholders for the Parkland Strategy team's technical analysis being conducted in both Phase 1 and 2.

EXPAND

Growing Parkland for a Growing City

Toronto's parks are its common grounds: places where people come together as a city to play, celebrate and explore. Toronto's population is expected to grow to 3.2 million people by 2032, and as the city grows, its parks system must expand and improve to meet demand.

SHARE

Growing Parkland for an Equitable City

Toronto was created out of six former municipalities, each with its own way of previously measuring and acquiring parkland. As a result, the park system looks different in each corner of the city. There are gaps in the parkland system where improvements are necessary to ensure equitable access to parks so that everyone can share in the benefits of parks.

CONNECT

Growing Parkland for a Connected City

Parks should be easily accessible to Torontonians. As the city's population grows, it is important that access to quality public spaces and places is improved. Improved connections to parks through a variety of green spaces (including hydro corridors, green streets and conservation lands) will not only have a positive effect on biodiversity and ecological functions, but will also create a more livable and green city.

How We Engaged

Phase 1 engaged three main groups, each through different engagement approaches. The different approaches were tailored to each group through the presentation of relevant information and targeted questions. The groups, methods, and goals for each engagement approach are outlined below.

STAKEHOLDERS:

Method: Internal and External Stakeholder Workshops

In May 2017, two workshops were held, one for internal stakeholders, and one for external stakeholders. Thirty-one City staff members attended the internal workshop. Thirty-two representatives from community groups, businesses and non-profits attended the external workshop.

The goals of the stakeholder sessions were to:

- Introduce the Parkland Strategy to subject area experts
- Explore challenges and solutions to parkland supply from the perspective of the stakeholders
- Discuss and identify equitable access criteria that can be used to evaluate parkland supply

The consultant team led separate small and large group discussions under two categories: **parkland supply and provision** and **equity**. Participants were given a feedback form at the end of the workshop to further articulate the **goals and opportunities** for their respective organizations.

ADVISORY BOARDS AND COUNCILS:

Method: Presentation and Discussion

City staff met with two advisory boards to inform them of the project and hear their overall insights on the project to date. This included:

- A presentation to the Planning Review Panel (September 16, 2017)
 - The Planning Review Panel is a representative group of Torontonians, made up of 28 randomly selected Panelists, who have been asked to work together over the course of two years to provide City Planning with informed public input on major planning initiatives. The purpose of the panel is to help ensure that initiatives are well aligned with the values and priorities of Torontonians.
 - PF&R staff gave an overview of the Parkland Strategy and requested feedback on the four park proposed functions: Ecology, Sport and Play, Community, and Health and Wellbeing. They were then asked to describe an acceptable and an unacceptable level of access to the park function in higher-density and lower-density areas.
- A presentation to the Aboriginal Affairs Committee (September 25, 2017)
 - The Aboriginal Affairs Committee is an advisory body to the Mayor and City Council. PF&R staff gave an overview of the Parkland Strategy to the Committee in order to inform them of the Strategy and seek their general feedback through discussion.

GENERAL PUBLIC:

Method: Pop-up Events

City staff attended 21 community events, festivals and community centres across the city throughout the late summer and early fall. Altogether, approximately 1300 people had conversations with City staff at the pop-up events.

The goals of pop-up sessions were to:

- Increase public knowledge about the development of the Parkland Strategy
- Reach a broader and more diverse range of Toronto residents (by meeting them in their neighbourhoods or places of interest)
- Encourage people to complete the online survey by visiting the project's website

City staff connected with the public through one-on-one conversations, distributed project postcards to bring awareness to the project, and encouraged them to take the online survey. To ensure representation from all areas of the city, staff used the survey responses to track the neighbourhoods where people were responding and subsequently set up pop-ups in low response areas.

Method: Online Survey

The Parkland Strategy project's website included a ten-minute online survey that was available to the public from August 23 to October 10, 2017. Approximately 2,400 people responded.

The survey was used as both an educational tool as well as to collect detailed quantifiable information from the public. The survey sought to understand the public perception on the amount of parkland available to them, and the reasons they use City parks.

Method: Open Houses

In September, the City of Toronto facilitated four open house events in each of Toronto's districts: Scarborough, Toronto & East York, Etobicoke York, and North York. Open houses took place on weeknight evenings, in public spaces such as civic and community centres. An additional open house engaged Live Green Toronto Volunteers. A total of 104 individuals participated at the open house events.



Open House at Scarborough Civic Centre, Sept 2017

By the Numbers

2400

SURVEY
PARTICIPANTS

1300

POP-UP EVENT
ATTENDEES

100+

OPEN HOUSE
ATTENDEES

60+

STAKEHOLDER
PARTICIPANTS

4

OPEN HOUSES
ACROSS THE CITY

21

POP-UPS AT
COMMUNITY EVENTS



3118

WEBSITE VISITS
from Aug-Oct

[toronto.ca/
parklandstrategy](https://toronto.ca/parklandstrategy)



34 TWEETS
55,929 IMPRESSIONS
647 ENGAGEMENTS
134 RETWEETS
from Aug 18-Oct 10

@TorontoPFR



1500+
POSTCARDS
DISTRIBUTED



13
FACEBOOK
POSTS

The goals of the open houses were to:

- Educate the public on the Parkland Strategy
- Collect input on the public perception of the gaps and needs in parkland provision across the city
- Understand the public's preferences and habits with regards to park use, frequency and park amenity/size

Outreach & Engagement

City staff and Councillors promoted the Parkland Strategy website and encouraged attendance at the open houses and participation in the survey:

- Postcards were printed and distributed during this period at key community events (through pop-ups) and at strategic locations (such as Mountain Equipment Co-op and the Royal Ontario Museum)
- Posters that encouraged residents to attend an open house and/or take the survey were distributed to libraries and community centres
- Social media, such as tweets and Facebook posts, were also used for promotions
- Internal and external stakeholders were invited to participate in in-depth conversations about the Strategy

WHAT WE HEARD

Stakeholder Engagement

The internal and external stakeholder workshops were held to refine the preliminary development of the Parkland Strategy, in particular, the Park Catchment Methodology. Large and small group discussions helped to frame the questions posed to the public about perceptions of existing parks, gap areas, and priority areas.

The following is a summary of the overall ideas captured from both workshops.

Foster strategic and creative thinking: There is a need for new and innovative ways of thinking when determining the definition of parkland, funding, and coordination models.

Consider new definitions of parkland: In addition to city-designated parks, other open spaces should be considered as contributing to an integrated park system, including ravines, hydro corridors, and other green spaces.

Explore alternative funding sources for parkland: Park development and acquisition funding through alternative sources such as private donations or sponsorships should be explored.

Streamline coordination: Updated coordination and delivery models are needed to speed up the park development process and ensure transparency.

Update parkland provision metrics and evaluations: There is a need for better data collection and evaluation methods. This could include the sharing of data sources from other divisions to support capital projects research. Improved metrics will also help educate City Council and the public regarding the value of parkland and the necessity to invest in park spaces in the city.

Balance use and conservation: There is a need to both protect natural environments and incorporate recreational use in the park system.



Stakeholder Workshop, May 2017

Ensure equitable access: Improvements to park access should respond to the needs of local areas by considering transportation, as well as the size, scale and amenities of parks. It is pertinent to consider the quality of parkland available, not just the quantity.

Improve connections to parks: Park system wayfinding and signage are important elements to improving how people access and move through parks. The Parkland Strategy should also consider how parks can be better integrated into the city, including an examination of how other urban spaces, community services, and facilities (libraries, community centers, schools, transit, etc.) can support or benefit from access to parks.

Incorporate Indigenous placemaking: The Parkland Strategy should encourage partnerships between the City and Indigenous communities to better incorporate Indigenous culture and history into parkland.

Foster partnerships and community engagement: Creating cross-divisional City partnerships to support parkland development and incorporating a diversity of voices (the public at large and stakeholders) into the Parkland Strategy should be a priority.

Involve stakeholders and the general public: Community participation is an important element of creating a usable and comprehensive Parkland Strategy that positively contributes to current and future quality of life within the city.

Advisory Panels

Toronto Planning Review Panel

Panelists were asked to comment on the four park functions identified by the Parkland Strategy team: Ecology, Sport and Play, Community and Health and Wellbeing. They also were asked to discuss access to parkland in both high-density and low-density areas. Their feedback is summarized below:

Park functions: In addition to the four park functions identified, parks also:

- Introduce and educate residents about ecology
- Play an important civic role supporting community groups, often facilitating celebration for different community groups
- Provide spaces for mindfulness and spirituality which support mental health and physical wellbeing
- Offer an aesthetic function in the city

Connectivity: Parkland should be connected with trails and pathways for improved connectivity and programming opportunities, such as guided tours.

Active Spaces: Sport and recreation facilities within parks should be designed to be multi-functional so as to accommodate different public use groups throughout the day.

Park Access in Higher-Density Areas:

Appropriate access to parkland in higher-density areas should include:

- Multiple pedestrian connections to the surrounding community
- Year-round use and access
- Regular maintenance and minimizing user conflicts through design
- Facilities that compliment neighbouring community centres and schools
- Sunlight access and protection from the wind

Park Access in Lower-Density Areas:

Appropriate access to parkland in lower-density areas should include:

- Access to shade, washrooms, and drinking water
- Paved pathways that can accommodate different user groups
- Civic and recreation facilities that people can access safely and conveniently
- Sufficient parking for large cultural and sporting events

Aboriginal Affairs Committee

Through an informal presentation and discussion, members of the Aboriginal Affairs Committee addressed the importance of incorporating elements of Indigenous land based education to encourage understanding and appreciation of Indigenous traditional use and culture. The input received through this presentation will be considered in the next phase of the Parkland Strategy, as well as shared with the Indigenous Placemaking Framework being led by Parks, Forestry & Recreation.



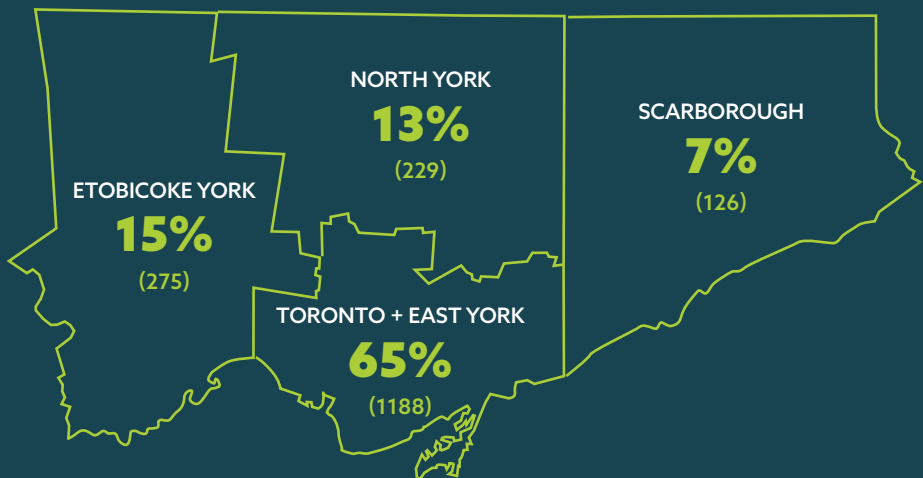
Public Engagement

The feedback received through the online survey and in-person events (pop-ups and open houses) are incorporated into the three themes that guided the conversations with the public.

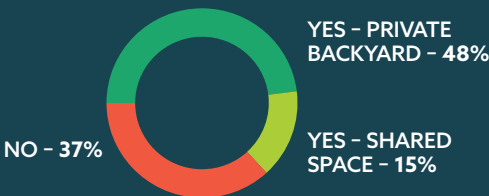
A summary of the public engagement findings is on the following pages.

ONLINE SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS AT A GLANCE

Survey responses per City District



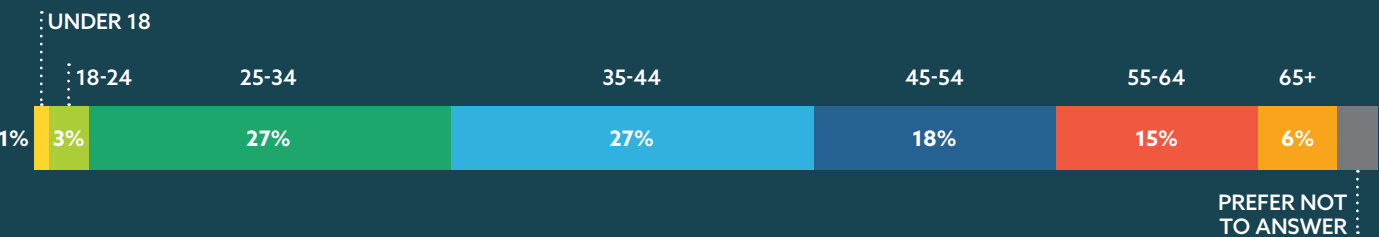
Do you have a private green space or backyard at your place of residence?



Are there any children or youth under 18 years in your household?



Age of survey respondents



EXPAND

In order to gain a better understanding of how to plan for new parkland in a growing and changing city, participants were asked to share their satisfaction level with the amount of park spaces in their neighbourhoods.

Parkland Satisfaction

Overall, participants indicated they were satisfied with the amount of parkland in their neighbourhoods, but also indicated that there are parks that are often over capacity (including parkettes, dog parks, playgrounds, and recreational spaces). Through the online survey results (see page 15), it was identified that the residents experiencing crowding in their local parks are primarily located within the downtown and surrounding areas, emphasizing the population density related to parkland supply across the city.

Future Growth & Acquisition

Many participants indicated that more parkland will be needed to accommodate the future growth in the city, especially in high-density and intensifying areas, such as the Downtown core.

Participants had different ideas and perspectives on how to address this growing need, including:

- A need for smaller green spaces to take the pressure off the larger, destination parks.
- A desire for large parks that would be accessible by condo dwellers downtown and in other urban centres experiencing significant growth.
- A desire for new, unconventional types of parks, such as publicly accessible park spaces on the podiums of condominium towers, in hydro corridors, more greenery within our streetscapes, and the shared use of schools and golf courses.
- A need to prioritize the acquisition and improvement of parks in lower income neighbourhoods.
- Improving the quality of parks, as well as identifying new park spaces.

"The downtown area needs more parks, it is like a concrete jungle."

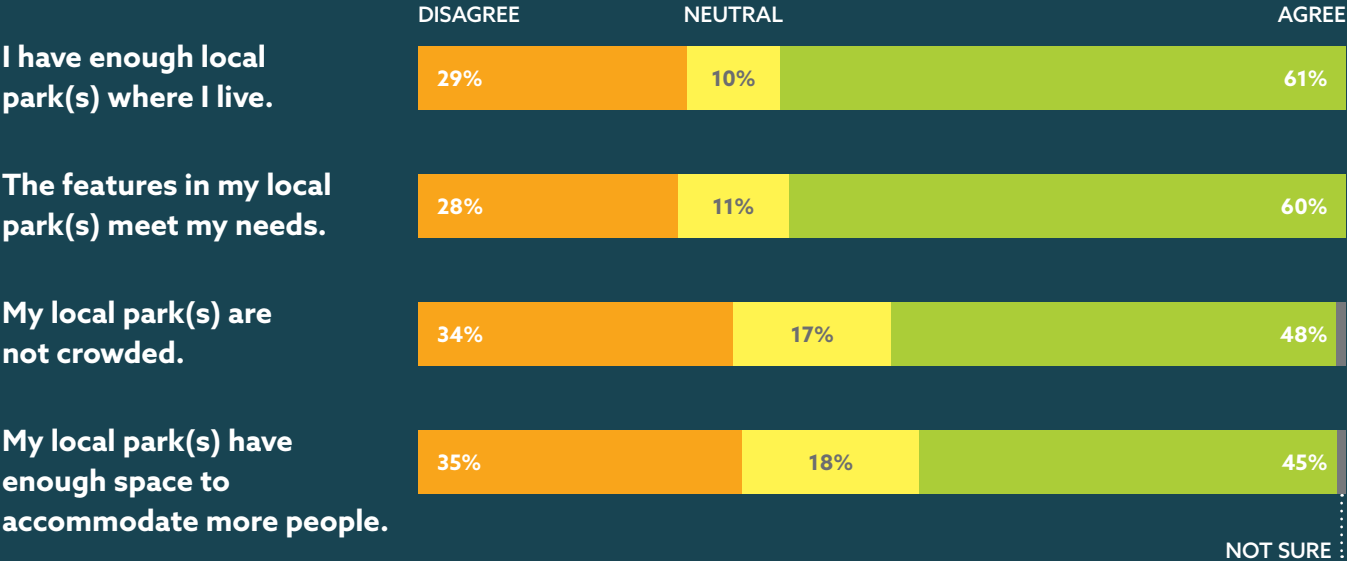
"I think we need to make our current parks more accessible, we don't need to build new ones."

"Acquisition should focus on main streets, and downtown."

"Parks should be created as first priority in areas with high densities and large concentrations of low-income people."

"RV Burgess Park is crowded but that is OK; the point of a park is that it is used by the people."

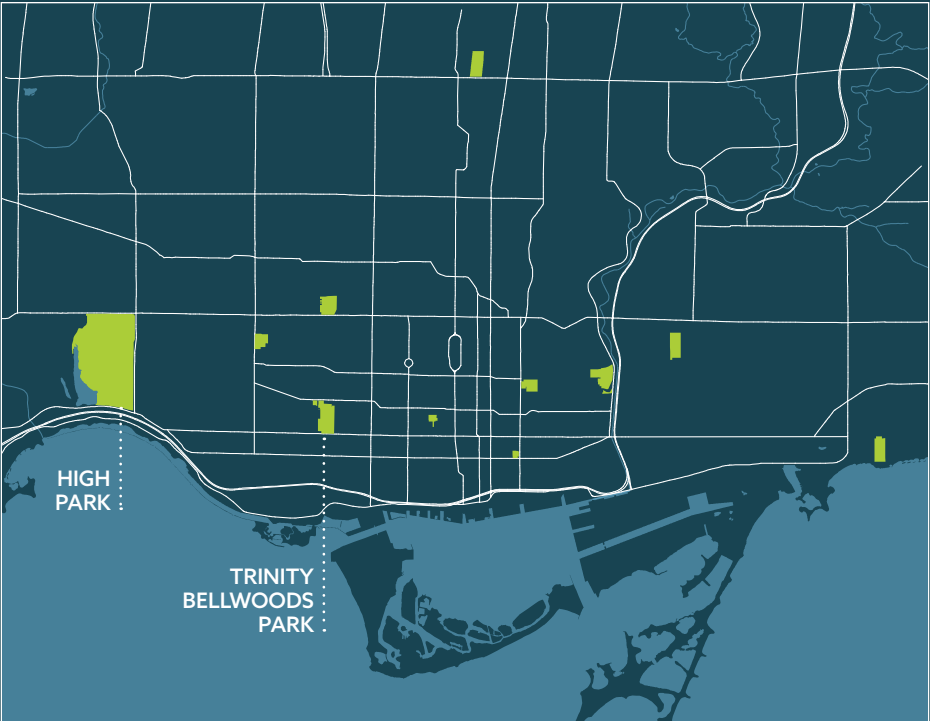
ONLINE SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS



Top 12 local parks that respondents feel are overcrowded:

Trinity Bellwoods Park and High Park were listed predominantly higher than other parks.

Other parks in the top 12 include Christie Pits Park, Withrow Park, Eglinton Park, Grange Park, Dufferin Grove Park, St. James Park, Beaches Park, Allen Gardens, Kew Gardens, and Riverdale Park West.



SHARE

In order to understand how to plan for equitable access, participants were asked to identify how they currently use/value parks and what barriers exist to using and accessing park space.

The Importance of Parks

Participants value their park spaces for a variety of reasons – however, the majority of participants identified that they use parks most often to enjoy nature and keep active and play (see page 17). This applies to both local neighbourhood parks and destination parks.

Parkland Area & Improvements

For cases where acquiring more park area may not be feasible or necessary, many participants identified ideas of improvements for existing parks. Many participants discussed their desire for a diversity of amenities and uses in parks, such as natural features, seating areas, pedestrian paths, and outdoor exercise equipment. While some participants discussed the need for more dog parks, others suggested they take up too much space. Some participants also suggested a need to acquire and improve parks in lower income areas.

While specific park improvements are beyond the scope of the Parkland Strategy, creative solutions may be required to address equitable access in high-density areas.

Barriers

Although the majority of survey respondents stated that distance is not a barrier to how often they visit parks, a portion of participants identified barriers that contribute to the inequitable access of parkland for those residents.

Participants outlined a number of barriers to both using and accessing parks, as well as potential solutions. A summary table (see page 18-19) includes some key barriers and solutions identified through the in-person engagement activities. The barriers to parkland is a complex issue, and as such, many of the responses relate to all three themes: expand, share and connect.

“Parks need to include and be planned for everybody. Everybody needs to be consulted... Everyone deserves access to mental and physical health benefits of parks.”

“The city of Toronto needs to look at other examples where conservation and recreation are in balance.”

ONLINE SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS

What is the most important way you use parks?



Your local neighbourhood park



A destination park

I DO NOT USE ANY PARKS

Is distance a barrier to how often you visit parks?



Your local neighbourhood park



A destination park



BARRIERS



POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Connectivity	<p>Active Transportation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Difficult/unsafe to walk or cycle to parks, specifically over highways, busy streets and when using stroller and/or wheelchair 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Create dedicated/improved walkways and separated bicycle lanes to parks.
	<p>Accessibility to Ravine:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Difficult to access ravines – therefore underutilized → Possible conflict between recreation and ecological preservation as ravines become more popular 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Invest in ravine improvements (eg. wayfinding, Google maps to include ravine access points, organize activities, stewardship groups and trail crews/ambassadors)
	<p>Distance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Distance to destination parks was seen as a barrier (Scarborough Bluffs, Tommy Thompson Park) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Consider shuttle buses
	<p>Wayfinding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Damaged park signs → Difficult to tell what parks have to offer and how they can be used 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Improve mapping tools and repair signage → Include better communication in parks and on park websites <p>[Note: The City is currently looking at updating wayfinding through the Toronto Parks and Trails Wayfinding Strategy.]</p>
Park Size	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Lack of adequate park spaces was identified within the downtown core, where condominium development is taking place → Downtown parks are too small 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Incorporate new and creative park spaces in the City, such as vertical park spaces in high-density areas (by using publicly accessible podium decks around towers) → Develop more parkettes, re-introduce native vegetation and incorporate greenery into the streetscapes (shrubs, flowers)



BARRIERS



POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Park Quality and Functionality

→ Too few attractions, events and special features

→ Make it easier for community groups to host events/activities (such as farmers markets, activities and events)

→ Lack a diversity of uses and amenities in parks (eg. benches, public washrooms, water fountains, tree canopy/shade)

→ Cater to neighborhood demographics (ie. include playgrounds for children where there are families in the area)

→ Include other amenities, such as shops/restaurants, either close to or in parks so it is more convenient to visit

→ Create temporary pop-up stations in winter

Safety

→ Bicycle and pedestrian routes near busy streets are unsafe

→ Ensure safer pedestrian and cycling crossings

→ Safety concerns after dark in parks (illegal activity taking place at nighttime)

→ Provide better lighting

→ Encourage more community programs in parks in the evenings

Equitable Access

→ Golf courses can act as barriers as local residents cannot afford to use them

→ A shared-use agreement for golf courses so the public can use them during evenings and certain times of the day

Parking

→ Park parking lots are typically used by commuters

→ More parking spaces required or better surveillance and enforcement of who uses the parking

→ There is not enough bicycle parking in parks

→ Add bicycle parking

CONNECT

In order to understand what connections are required to improve access, participants were asked to identify how long it takes them to travel to parks and to identify any connectivity gaps they experience.

Travel to Parks

Most online survey respondents indicated that they can get to their local park easily (see page 21). Though the proportion of respondents that indicated that they cannot easily access their local parks was small, their locations were spread across the city, indicating that connections to parkland is an issue that the entire city faces.

The majority of participants indicated that they walk to their local parks. Participants travelling to destination parks stated that they primarily drive or take transit. At the open houses, several transit riders indicated they spend approximately 45 minutes commuting to a destination park – a longer travel time than any of the other modes.

Connectivity Gaps

The connectivity gaps and recommended improvements identified are consistent with the barriers discussed in the Share section.

- Improve wayfinding
- Create connections between parks using existing railpaths and hydro corridors
- Better cycling paths from one park to another
- Ensure safer pedestrian crossings
- Golf courses identified as a barrier to connections between parks (as private spaces)

“We need more connectivity between parks across the City.”

“Provide directions to nearest park at each subway station. How many parks have I been a block away from and never known?”

“The downtown core needs to provide a better connection for migratory wildlife to travel between habitat patches in the GTA region.”

ONLINE SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS



How do you travel to parks?



Your local neighbourhood park



A destination park



Open House at Lawrence Heights Community Centre, Sept 2017

Employee Park Use

Although the Parkland Strategy uses residential population to study city-wide parkland supply, the employment population of an area can create additional pressure on parks. Employees during the work day would like to get outside and enjoy the benefits of Toronto’s parks. Employees stated that rest and relaxation is the most of the important way people use parks when at work.

ONLINE SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS

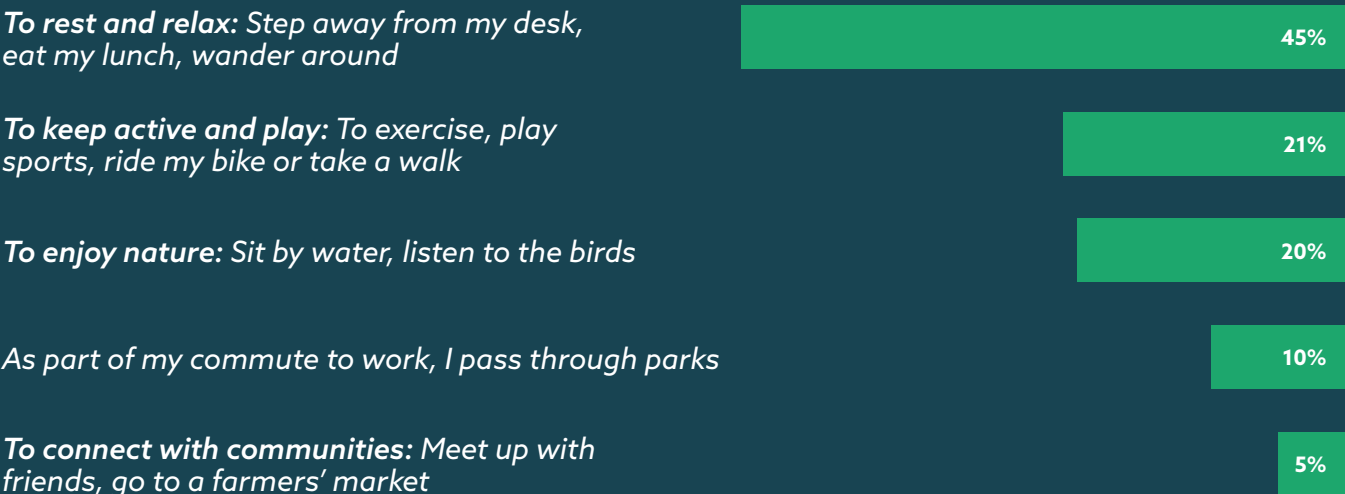
Do you visit city parks during your workday?



Travel Time to Parks on a Work Day



What is the most important way you use parks during your work day?



Next Steps

The Phase 1 engagement feedback summarized in this report will help inform the next phase of the Parkland Strategy. The information collected will be used to:

- Confirm and refine the park classifications and park catchments
- Lead to recommendations for improving connectivity to parks
- Inform policies that address barriers to accessing parkland
- Inform metrics of success for determining the appropriate amount and location of parks

With an understanding of existing and future parkland supply, the next phase in developing the Parkland Strategy will focus on the development of implementation guidelines, policies and tools to address the parkland needs identified in the Phase 1 Report (available at toronto.ca/parklandstrategy).

Following from the success of engagement in the Strategy's first phase, an updated consultation and engagement plan will be developed to include Councillors, stakeholders and the public – especially communities that have been hard-to-reach or underrepresented during engagement activities to date.



Thank you to everyone who took the time to participate in the Parkland Strategy engagement sessions and activities.

The next phase will be presented to the public in Winter/Spring 2018.