

Toronto Planning Review Panel

Summary of Results from the Toronto Planning Review Panel Meeting, held March 24, 2018

Executive Summary

The Planning Review Panel is made up of 32 randomly selected Torontonians. The Panel was created so that a representative group of Torontonians could help the City Planning Division guide growth and change in Toronto. They have been asked by the Chief Planner to work together over the course of two years to provide City Planning with informed public input on major planning initiatives. Members are tasked, in particular, with helping to ensure that these initiatives are aligned with the values and priorities of all Torontonians. On March 24th, 2018, the Panel met to discuss the Parkland Strategy.

The Parkland Strategy: the Panel's Suggestions

Panelists generally encouraged the City to use its scarce park resources wisely. Broadly, they agreed that the City should focus on:

- Buying small parkettes and walkways that provide increased access and help to connect our park system;
- Buying parkland where it is less expensive and growth is anticipated rather than where the population is already most dense and land is most expensive;
- Considering what proportion of neighbourhood residents have access to private facilities and amenities, and which neighbourhoods would benefit most from more parkland (e.g. those with lower incomes, those with higher numbers of seniors, and those with higher numbers of children);
- Working to expand access to and improve use of local recreation lands that are not part of the park system, such as school playgrounds and fields;
- Investing in ways to reduce barriers people experience getting to parks and using parks, rather than investing in buying expensive new parkland (e.g. addressing barriers for those with disabilities, safety and maintenance issues, and the lack of washrooms; improving the ease, speed, and cost of using transit to get to parks);
- Designing, improving, and programming parks so that they are used extensively for multiple purposes (fitness, learning, community building, access to natural features, beauty, etc.) rather than adding special attractions and niche features;

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- Considering new funding streams such as private donations, and increasing parkland contributions from developers when possible;
- Consulting and collaborating with Indigenous people so that parks planning incorporates Indigenous practices and parks are used as a means of educating the broader population about the history of the land; and
- Using parks to strengthen urban ecology and resilience.

Where possible, the Parkland Strategy should include these tactics. Other park improvement planning processes should consider this advice, where it applies. The Panel's detailed advice is included in a full summary, below.

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About the March 24, 2018, Meeting of the Planning Review Panel

The Panel met to provide input concerning the Parkland Strategy being developed by the Parks, Forestry, and Recreation Division. Materials shared with the Panel can be accessed at www.toronto.ca/planning/tprp by clicking on "Learn with the Panel".

Presentations & Learning Activities

Kim Statham, Project Manager, Policy and Strategic Planning, and project lead for the Parkland Strategy, presented an overview of the project and the work to date mapping the population-adjusted availability (or provision) of parkland in Toronto in 2016 and in 2032. Then, Laura Atkins, Manager, Policy and Strategic Planning, presented about the ways the City acquires parkland, including through development charges. Panelists had the opportunity to ask questions of both guests.

After the presentations, Cecilia Fernandez, Program Standards & Development Officer, led the Panel through an activity intended to simulate the experience of staff at the Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division making decisions about where and when to acquire or improve parkland across the city. Before beginning the activity, Panelists sat at one of four tables, corresponding to the district in which they live: Etobicoke and York, North York, Toronto and East York, or Scarborough. Each table examined maps of existing parkland in their district, as well as maps that illustrate the population-adjusted availability of parkland in their district today and in 2032. Each table was asked to decide how to spend a set amount of funds on purchasing new parkland in their district. The cost of parkland differed from district to district, given different land values in different parts of the city; the amount of money available in each district also differed due to the different amounts of local development occurring in each district.

Deliberations

After the learning activity, Panelists remained at their home district table and worked to develop recommendations based on what they'd learned. Each table was asked to work together to suggest parkland acquisition and improvement strategies that are important for the City to use in their district. They also worked to articulate other parkland goals that could be foregone or given up in order to successfully implement their recommended strategies.

Panelists reorganized themselves so that each table had members from the four districts. Each table was asked to work together to answer how the parkland strategy should define the goal of 'equitable access to parkland in Toronto', and to suggest additional goals that are critically important for the Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division to consider when seeking to maximize the value of parkland investments.

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Summary of Results

The results of the Panel's deliberations are summarized below. Following the meeting, this summary was drafted by the Panel's support staff based on documentation from the meeting and circulated to members for edits, and for them to approve that this summary reflects the broad consensus that the Panel was able to achieve during their meeting. Members were also welcome to submit additional, individual commentary for inclusion in this summary—this individual commentary is included, under the names of individual Panel members, in the subsequent section, if any was submitted.

Deliberation 1: Parkland Acquisition Strategies for each District

Panelists were split into four tables based on the district where they live. Each table was asked to suggest parkland acquisition and improvement strategies that are important for the City to use in their district. They also worked to articulate other parkland goals that could be foregone or given up in order to successfully implement their recommended strategies. Each table was asked to phrase their responses in the following format:

"We believe that when the City is deciding where to acquire, expand & improve access to parks in our home district, it is important that they [_____]. This is important because [_____]."

"We believe that when the City is deciding where to acquire, expand & improve access to parks in our home district, it is okay if they don't [_____]. This can be foregone because [_____]."

Residents of Etobicoke and York District

We believe that when the City is deciding where to acquire, expand and improve access to parkland in our home district, it is important that they...

1. Prioritize low-income communities. This is important because parkland is important to quality of life and low-income communities would benefit from parkland the most;
2. Prioritize high growth areas. This is important because that parkland will benefit the greatest number of people; and
3. Acquire the maximum amount of parkland possible, considering financial, social, and spatial conditions. This is important because acquiring the maximum amount of parkland now is a good investment for the future.

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We believe that when the City is deciding where to acquire, expand, and improve access to parks in our home district, it is ok if they...

1. Don't design parks to be fancy, and don't require every park to have the same amenities and frills, like specialized recreation equipment, especially in areas where residents already have access to these facilities. This can be foregone because we recognize that the City has a lot to achieve with extremely limited resources, and that there are significant differences in available resources and socioeconomic needs among different communities. We should focus on what is needed rather than what is desired; and
2. Don't accommodate developers as much during the development review process, including during negotiations concerning Section 37 contributions in lieu of parkland itself. A developer's contribution should significantly offset the impact of the development on the neighbourhood's population-adjusted parkland availability. A sufficient amount of parkland (or equivalent cash in lieu) to do so should be required in exchange for development approval.

Residents of North York District

We believe that when the City is deciding where to acquire, expand and improve access to parkland in our home district, it is important that they...

1. Prioritize creating new parks in a manner that creates a complete network and connects existing parks, for example, through bike and walking trails. This is important because it improves access for many people at a lower cost, and maximizes the utility of existing land;
2. Encourage park use by providing creative outdoor programming in a wider variety of local parks. This could include opportunities to learn about history and ecology. This is important because residents do not always think of going to their local park instead of larger parks that are further away; and
3. Plan for future need by investing in currently less-dense areas surrounding high-density, high-value areas like Yonge and Eglinton. This is important because creating new parks in less-dense areas will draw park users from dense areas and help draw increased population density to these areas.

We believe that when the City is deciding where to acquire, expand, and improve access to parks in our home district, it is ok if they ...

1. Don't acquire new parkland in high-value, high-density areas, even if it means they don't provide enough parkland to meet the current "demand" in these

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areas. Instead focus on enhancements to existing parks in these areas. This can be foregone because a higher quantity of parkland can be purchased for the same price in neighbouring areas; and

2. Don't focus on improving provision rate (i.e. increasing total amount of land) and instead focus on access and use. This can be foregone because there are many existing but underused parks.

Residents of Toronto and East York

We believe that when the City is deciding where to acquire, expand and improve access to parkland in our home district, it is important that they...

1. Remove barriers to accessing park space through improved landscaping, washroom access, parking, TTC connections, and pathways to surrounding areas. This is important because parks are meant to be for all residents — by removing barriers and making improvements, existing parks can be accessible to all; and
2. Make better use of and better connect residents to the Toronto islands and waterfront parks, such as Tommy Thompson Park. This is important because acquiring new land downtown is very expensive and difficult to do, and being close to the lake is a valuable experience for downtown residents. Increasing access to these parks, possibly through new infrastructure or partnerships with agencies like the TTC, could help to reduce the park deficit experienced by many downtown residents, in a more cost effective manner.

We believe that when the City is deciding where to acquire, expand, and improve access to parks in our home district, it is ok if they...

1. Don't provide the same level of public parkland in areas with sufficient access to private parks, backyards, and outdoor condominium amenities; and
2. Don't make large and expensive land acquisitions to establish new parks, focusing instead on many smaller, strategic acquisitions that provide connectivity.

Residents of Scarborough

We believe that when the City is deciding where to acquire, expand and improve access to parkland in our home district, it is important that they...

1. Focus on the areas that are currently most underserved by green space and provide these areas with parkettes and smaller parks. This is important because all residents deserve to have a place to enjoy nature and the outdoors. Smaller,

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more accessible parkettes that are located closer to their homes will encourage more people to take advantage of park space; and

2. Work so that everyone, particularly seniors and children, has access to parkland within a short walk of both work and home. This is important because children, seniors, and people with disabilities are less able to travel to larger parks that are farther away.

We believe that when the City is deciding where to acquire, expand, and improve access to parks in our home district, it is ok if they ...

1. Don't create larger parks, in order to provide everyone with some access to even small local parkland.

Deliberation 2: Equitable Access to Parkland in Toronto

Panelists reorganized themselves so that each table had members from each of the four districts. Each table was asked to work together to answer two questions:

1. *How should the Parkland Strategy define the goal of equitable access to parkland in Toronto?*
2. *Beyond equitable access, are there any other goals that are critically important for Parks, Forestry and Recreation to consider when seeking to maximize the value of parkland investments?*

Equitable Access: Working Group 1

We believe equitable access to parkland in Toronto means that...

Everyone can access a park that they like to use within a reasonable amount of time. Within a 10-minute walk of their home, everyone should have access to a public park that provides green space, fresh air, benches for commuters to rest, and a welcoming, natural aesthetic.

Larger parks, which draw residents from up to 30 minutes away, should always be accessible for those with mobility issues, and provide amenities such as bathrooms.

In addition, all parks should be safe and well-maintained. Geographically, we believe Toronto currently provides and should continue to provide a somewhat well-distributed park system across each of the six boroughs, regardless of neighbourhood income.

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Equitable Access: Working Group 2

We believe equitable access to parkland in Toronto means that...

Existing parkland should be redesigned or retrofitted to be more accessible for those with mobility devices and those with impaired vision. These accessible parks should be within a 25-minute walk from each resident. Recognizing the financial constraints, we do not believe that every park needs to be fully accessible.

We should encourage increased use of existing parks by connecting parks to each other through trails and walkways.

In the downtown core, equitable access means investing in vertical park spaces that account for the high population density and scarcity of land. Park spaces should be available everywhere people work and live.

Parks with specific types of amenities should be spread across the city and not clustered in specific regions. However, we should prioritize providing amenities in low-income areas where residents are less likely to have access to private spaces with those same amenities.

Equitable Access: Working Group 3

We believe equitable access to parkland in Toronto means that...

Ensuring access for different groups with different needs, especially children, the elderly, those with disabilities, and Indigenous people. Consultation with these groups is essential.

It also means ensuring everyone has knowledge of and access to safe and healthy park spaces (e.g. no needles, glass, or industrial waste), and basic opportunities for fitness, community, and learning. This means parks don't need to provide luxuries — instead we should focus making them equally well-maintained and safe, in both rich and poor areas

Finally, equitable access means considering different residents' abilities to travel to and within parks.

Equitable Access: Working Group 4

We believe equitable access to parkland in Toronto means that...

Everyone has the ability to travel to parks and move around comfortably within them, including those who use mobility devices or need washroom facilities. It also means

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multi-use parks allow for different people to use spaces in different ways. For example, skateboarders can find an appropriate space in a park close to them.

The culture of Toronto's diverse residents should be integrated into parks through elements such as vendors, events, and storytelling. Indigenous history in the area should be commemorated and communicated to park users through initiatives such as park plaques.

Residents should have some access to parks of all types and sizes, from parkettes to much larger parks. Each park should be just as beautiful and safe as parks elsewhere.

Other Critically Important Goals for Parkland: All Groups

In response to the question, "Beyond equitable access, are there any other goals that are critically important for Parks, Forestry and Recreation to consider when seeking to maximize the value of parkland investments?" Panelists also listed the following considerations.

We believe it is also critically important for Parks, Forestry and Recreation to consider when seeking to maximize the value of parkland investment...

- Acknowledging and incorporate Indigenous knowledge and practices into park planning;
- Using our park system as a way to involve Indigenous nations in honouring Indigenous history and creating public awareness of historically important events and locations;
- Working towards environmental preservation, biological diversity, and the revival of species native to the land;
- Incorporating resilience into park designs so that we always build for the future;
- Requiring developers to contribute a larger share toward park funding;
- Using new and different funding sources (such as private partnerships and donations);
- Making it possible for residents to use other public properties, such as TDSB sports fields, when they are available;
- Promoting the use of existing parks that are underused;
- Making parks safe and clean, so they can be used;
- Creating flexible, multi-use spaces in parks;

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- Creating a park network that is connected by trails, without creating homogenous parks that lack their own character. Navigating this network would require good wayfinding signage, maps, and mobile apps;
- Expanding parking for use during weekends, holidays, and festivities;
- Working to lower transportation costs or implement subsidies where this would improve connections to parks. For example, the Toronto Islands ferries could be discounted with a TTC fare; and
- Encouraging green and electric vehicles that promote cleaner air by locating charging stations at parking lots in parks.

Individual Commentary from Panelists: