

PARKLAND STRATEGY

Growing Toronto Parkland

Phase 2 What We Heard Report | Spring 2019

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Key Messages from Engagement

The Phase 2 consultation established a vision for the Parkland Strategy as well as engaged participants to identify parkland acquisition and improvement criteria. Below is a summary of key messages, categorized by the strategy's four principles:

EXPAND:

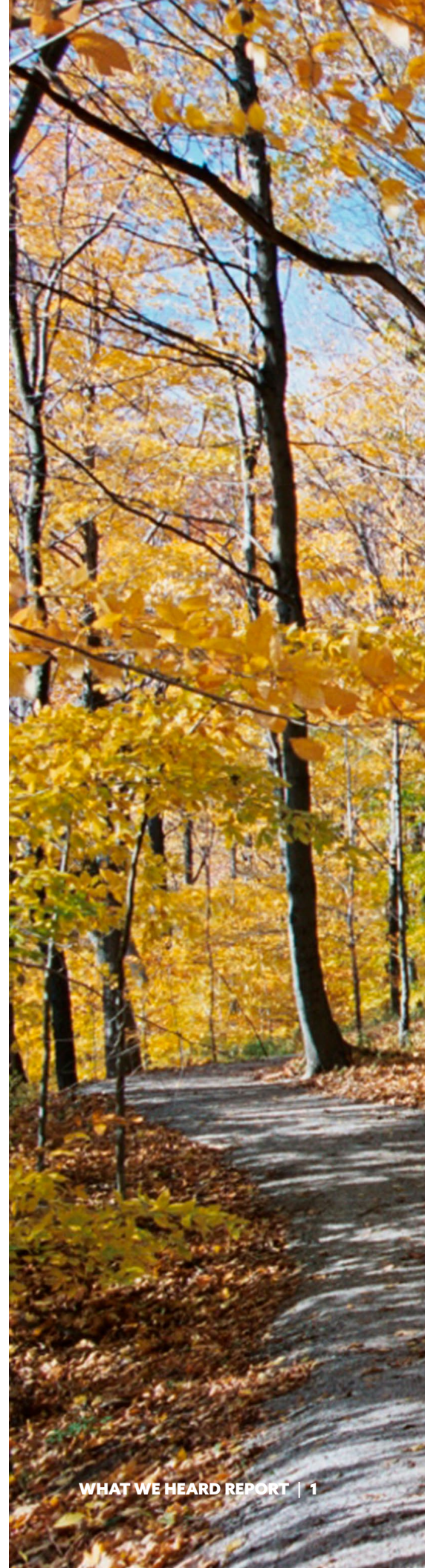
The park system needs to grow in the city. When asked about their experiences with park usage, many participants indicated there is not enough park space in the city. This is particularly true for residents living in Toronto East York, and for residents without private/shared green spaces.

Acquisition of parkland should be prioritized in areas with high population. The majority of participants identified the need to prioritize the development of new parks in dense areas with high populations. They also suggested the need to consider the impact of population growth in order to properly plan for the future of parkland within our city.

IMPROVE:

Improved programming and community uses are needed in our parks. Participants suggested the need for more activities and programs within our parks. This was especially true for residents living in Scarborough, Etobicoke, and North York.

Environmental considerations should be prioritized in park development and improvements. Specifically, participants discussed the need to better recognize the role of parkland as habitat for wildlife, and as contributing to environmental sustainability and climate change resilience.



CONNECT:

A connected park system is a priority for participants in considering both acquisition and improvement. Specifically, participants discussed the need for improved connections between, and to natural areas, through ravines and golf courses, and with school yards and other open spaces. Opportunities to establish these connections include the development of linear parkettes, as well as improved wayfinding.

INCLUDE:

Equitable access should be a key priority embedded in the Parkland Strategy. For participants, this means ensuring parks are accessible to a diversity of users, including children, seniors and persons with limited mobility. There was also discussion about the need to better improve and acquire parkland in areas with vulnerable populations.



HOW WE ENGAGED

Project Overview

What is the Parkland Strategy?

The Parkland Strategy is a 20-year plan for the enhancement of Toronto’s park system through the creation of new parks and the expansion and improved access to existing parks. The Parkland Strategy will guide future planning, decision-making, land acquisition, park investment and enhancement, and development review.

About this Report

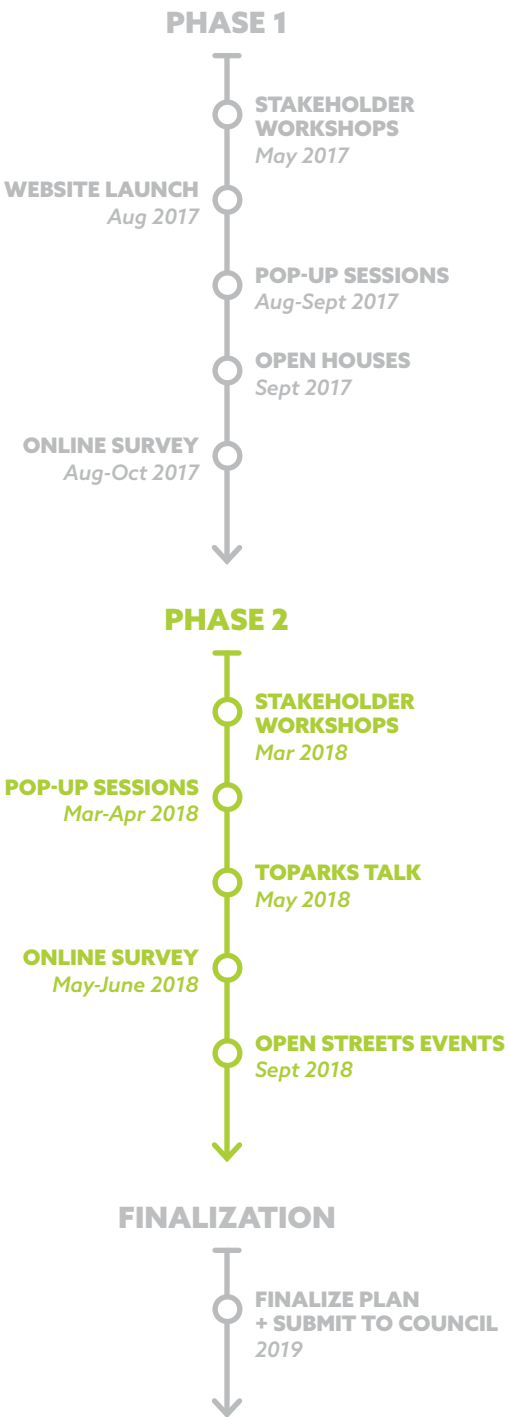
This What We Heard Report summarizes the key messages that emerged during the second phase of stakeholder and public consultations, held between January and September 2018 as part of the Parkland Strategy development process. This report summarizes all of the feedback and input collected during the Phase 2 engagement.

Please note consultation was conducted before the October 2018 municipal election. All findings and data is presented with previous district boundaries.

What We Heard Phase 1

The summary from Phase 1 can be found on the City website: www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/8b94-Parkland-Strategy-What-We-Heard_Phase1.pdf

ENGAGEMENT TIMELINE



Engagement Overview

Study Approach: Parkland Strategy Principles

The Parkland Strategy's four principles guide and support the vision by orienting the work of City staff, Council members and other stakeholders as they implement the Strategy.

As a valuable guide to ensure the application of the policies and recommendations, the principles are woven throughout the Strategy to ensure clarity and consistency in its direction and function.

How did we get to these principles?

At the outset of the project, the City of Toronto Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division identified three main themes to guide the work: Expand, Connect, and Share. Through the first phase of engagement, the concept of park improvements was raised by stakeholders as a clear and important goal the City could take action on, deserving of its own title. To reflect this, *Improve* was added alongside *Expand*, *Connect*, and *Share* as a Strategy principle. An additional workshop was held to discuss the "share" theme. Through discussion, it became apparent that the title "share" was confusing and unclear. There was consensus that the term *Include* better communicated the intent of the principle.

Engagement Goals

Using the feedback from the first phase, the purpose of Phase 2 engagement was focused on collecting feedback related to priority setting for both parkland acquisition and improvement. The goals of the Phase 2 engagement were:

- **Communication + Education:** Continue to communicate the PLS purpose, vision, priorities, and methodologies to develop mutual understanding of the benefits and challenges considered when addressing increasing parkland need.
- **Equitable Involvement:** Continue to reach out to participants who may not be typically involved in conventional public consultations.
- **Meaningful Input:** Incorporate input into the Strategy and continue to reach out to participants who may not be typically involved in conventional public consultations.

PRINCIPLES:

EXPAND

Expand new parkland to support growth and address gaps to create a flexible, adaptable parkland system that will support the needs of a livable, diverse city.

IMPROVE

Improve the access and function of the existing parkland system to promote community cohesion, ecological sustainability, and health and wellbeing through active living, access to nature, and the provision of appropriate spaces for rest, relaxation, and leisure

CONNECT

Connect parks and open spaces, physically and visually so that people, communities, and wildlife can navigate to and through the parkland system.

INCLUDE

Include everyone in parkland system by removing barriers so that parks and open spaces are inclusive and equitably accessible for people of all ages, cultures, genders, abilities, and income levels.

BY THE NUMBERS

1384

ONLINE SURVEY
PARTICIPANTS

50

TOPARKS TALK
ATTENDEES (in-person)

852

POP-UP EVENT
ATTENDEES

29

POP-UP
EVENTS

139

STAKEHOLDER
PARTICIPANTS

3

STAKEHOLDER
EVENTS



1000+ postcards
distributed



228 flyers distributed to
civic + community centres
+ Toronto Public Libraries

How We Engaged

During the development of the Strategy, the project team consulted with three main groups – stakeholders, advisory boards and councils, and the public – through different engagement approaches, as summarized below.

STAKEHOLDERS (INTERNAL + EXTERNAL):

Method: Stakeholder Workshops

On March 28, 2017, the City of Toronto Parks, Forestry & Recreation (PFR) Division hosted a stakeholder workshop focused on Phase 2 of the Parkland Strategy (PLS). The objectives of the workshop were to:

- Update stakeholders on Parkland Strategy work to date (with a presentation)
- Gather inputs on how to develop criteria to inform acquisition and improvement priorities
- Develop a draft vision statement

A total of 62 stakeholders attended the workshop.

ADVISORY BOARDS AND COUNCILS:

Method: Presentation and Discussion

City staff met with the Toronto Planning Review Panel, consisting of 32 residents selected through a randomized process to reflect the diversity of Toronto's population and bring new voices into the planning process. First, City staff presented the findings from Phase 1 and directions for Phase 2. The panelists in attendance were asked to respond to questions regarding priorities for acquisition, expansion and improved access to parks. They were also asked to consider how the goal of equitable access to parkland should be defined within the Parkland Strategy.

GENERAL PUBLIC:

Method: Pop-up Events

At the start of the project, the project team developed a list of both internal and external stakeholders to be included in the conversations and to assist with outreach to their networks. City staff attended over 29 pop-up events in the Winter of 2018, including 14 community centres, 2 community malls, and other community events such as festivals. Altogether, approximately 850 people had conversations with City staff at the pop-up events.

The Phase 2 pop-ups were specifically targeted to areas in North York, Etobicoke and Scarborough to ensure input from all parts of the city. Events downtown were limited to festivals, where there would be the opportunity to gain feedback from residents across the city.

Method: Online Survey

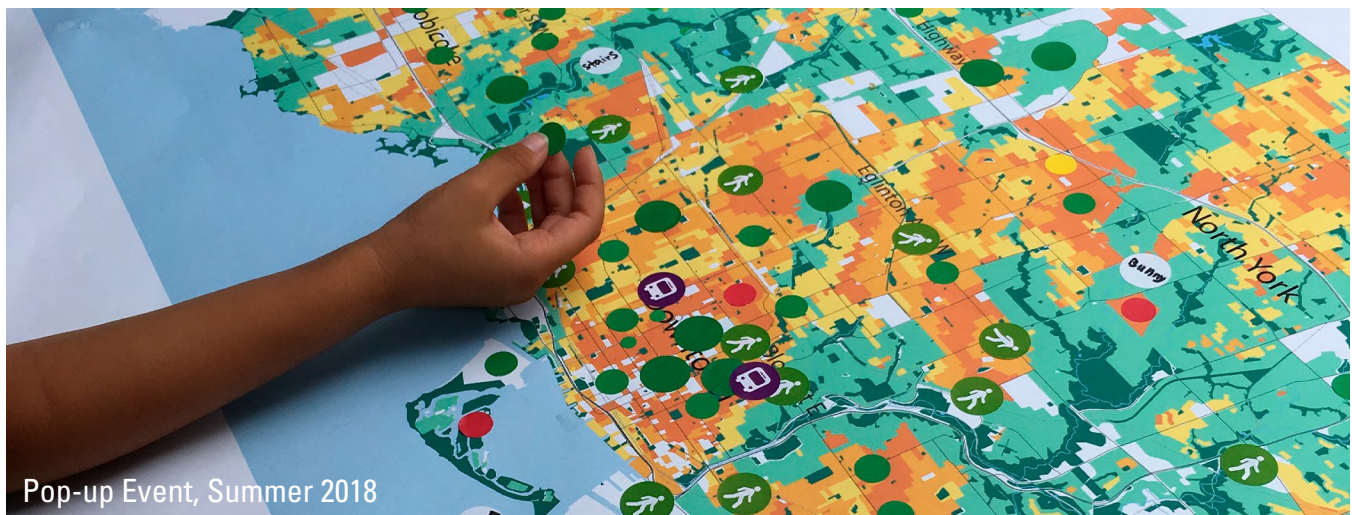
The Phase 2 survey was hosted on the Parkland Strategy website between May and July 2018. The survey was heavily promoted across the city and, in total, there were 1,384 valid responses.

The survey was used as both an educational tool as well as a way to collect detailed quantifiable information, specifically asking respondents to rank priorities for both acquisition and improvements to parks.

Method: TOParks Talk – Growing Toronto Parkland

On Tuesday May 29, PFR hosted their first TOParks Talk, with the theme “Growing Toronto Parkland.” This event featured a panel discussion with a diversity of speakers discussing how Toronto’s parks and greenspaces can be expanded, connected, improved, and shared. The purpose was to engage the public in current and future thinking about parks and open spaces. There were approximately 50 people in attendance, with over 320 views on Youtube as of the writing of this report.

At the event, there was also an opportunity for attendees to provide feedback on the draft criteria for acquisition and improvements of parks.



WHAT WE HEARD

Stakeholder Engagement

The stakeholder workshop was held for both internal and external stakeholders in order to:

- Provide an update on the PLS work to date
- To review and revise the draft vision statement
- To share and receive feedback on approaches to acquisition, specifically around prioritization criteria being considered.

The objectives of the workshop were to develop a shared understanding of the PLS directions and receive input on the vision and prioritization matrix for acquisition. The workshop included three components, as outlined below.

THE PARK SYSTEM IN 100 YEARS

Participants were asked: “What do you want the park system to look like in 100 years?”

Primarily, stakeholders identified a better-connected, greener and more equitable park system with programming for all Torontonians.

THE VISION

The project team asked stakeholders to review and comment on a draft vision statement.

Draft Vision:

Toronto's parks are welcoming, connected, accessible and support diverse needs for engaged communities and a sustainable natural environment, crucial for quality of life, now and for future generations.

Participants suggested the following:

- The vision should be aspirational, inspiring, and short
- All park users, including residents, workers and visitors, should be addressed
- Themes of ecological preservation and biodiversity, resilience, functionality and design, equitable access, open space network, and community engagement should be incorporated into the vision

A second workshop was held with internal City staff to further revise the vision.



Revised Vision:

Toronto is and will continue to be a city within a park. The system of parks are integral to Toronto's identity as a world-class, livable city, and are the backbone of Toronto's diverse and vibrant neighbourhoods. Parks are an extension of homes and living spaces, the centre of neighbourhoods and contribute to the sense of belonging. They provide places for people to meet, socialize, gather, play, celebrate and rejuvenate. Nature is also able to permeate the city through the interconnected web of parks and natural areas that, at its core, defines our system of parks.

As Toronto continues to grow and intensify, building on this rich legacy is crucial to not only preserve Toronto's image and brand, but actively cultivate and strengthen it. The system of parks must expand and improve as our city continues to transform and evolve to contribute to enhancing quality of life and a thriving economy, provide better access, and ensure a resilient and sustainable environment that supports people and wildlife alike.

To support the year-round needs of a growing and changing population, new, multi-functional parks of all shapes and sizes will be added to our existing system in lockstep with growth, alongside with creatively re-imagining and transforming many of the existing parks over time. Improved connections in and between our parks and open spaces will not only provide better access for people, but also better link land and water to create a connected, accessible, resilient and beautiful urban landscape.

PARKLAND ACQUISITION CRITERIA

Participants were given draft criteria for prioritizing parkland acquisition and asked to rank them as important, somewhat important, and not important, and to explain why. They were then asked to write down what criteria were missing, if any. It is important to note that acquisition is only one of the tools included in the PLS. Recommendations for improvements will also be considered. For the purpose of this stakeholder workshop, the focus was on acquisition criteria.

Priority criteria:

- Acquire in areas of too few parks
- High needs areas
- High population density areas
- Future growth

Overall comments on the criteria:

- The criteria are all interrelated and should be considered collectively.
- Many of the criteria and priorities will be different depending on the area and context.
- There should be an ability to consider “unique acquisition opportunities” that do not necessarily fall within the established criteria.

Ranking of the acquisition criteria:

- The criteria are difficult to rank since they are all important, interconnected and require nuance.
- Of the nine criteria presented, future provision rates and a well-connected park system were deemed the most important. Size of park, current provision rates, and land costs were considered least important.

New criteria:

Additional criteria was also developed. The top new criteria identified was based on environmental considerations (such as ecological preservation/conservation, biodiversity, protection of natural heritage resources).

A summary of the new criteria identified:

- **Environment:** (green spaces/natural heritage/ecology/biodiversity)
 - Areas with reduced tree canopy coverage and ecological diversity
 - Ecologically significant areas/naturalized areas/conservation areas
 - Lands with important ecological species or habitats
- **Climate change resilience:**
 - Areas that serve many environmental functions and needs (other than people-focused)
- **Active transportation:**
 - Areas in close proximity to future cycling routes and transit plans
- **“Awesomeness”:**
 - Design excellence and community involvement
- **Partnerships:**
 - Working with agencies and private-public partnerships to help grow, acquire, maintain parks and open spaces
 - Redefine acquisition so it does not include ‘ownership’
- **Housing types/built form:**
 - Single family home neighbourhoods vs. tower communities
- **Ease of access:**
 - Areas that are easy to access via multi-modal transportation

- **Cultural heritage:**
 - Archaeologically or historically significant
 - Significance to Indigenous communities
 - Opportunities to work with Indigenous communities
- **Demographics/vulnerable populations:**
 - Consider children and seniors
- **Sites where specific facilities are needed:**
 - Priority for areas identified as community facility deficient
- **Opportunities:**
 - Include criteria that considers unique opportunities

Advisory Panels

The Toronto Planning Review Panel met to provide input concerning the Parkland Strategy. After a presentation and a learning activity intended to simulate the experience of PFR staff making decisions about acquisition and improvements, they were asked to work together to suggest parkland acquisition and improvement strategies that are important for the City.

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

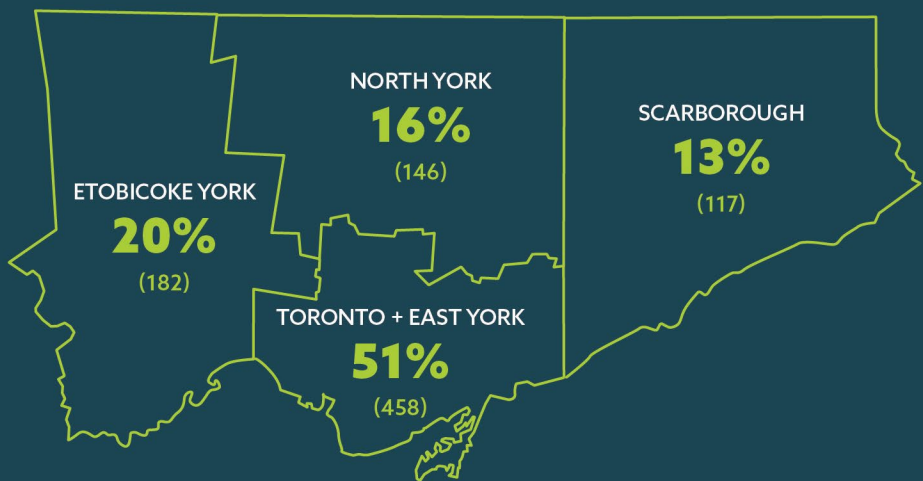
- Buying small parkettes and walkways that provide increased access and help to connect our park system
- Buying parkland where it is less expensive and growth is anticipated rather than where the population is already most dense and land is most expensive
- Considering what proportion of neighbourhood 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 (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.)
- 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
- Using parks to strengthen biodiversity

Public Engagement: Online Survey

The online survey included a list of questions about how respondents use parks (both local and city-wide in the city), as well as rankings of parkland acquisition and improvement priorities.

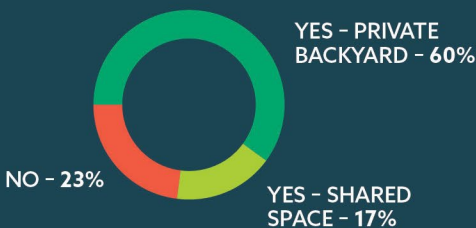
SURVEY RESPONDENTS AT A GLANCE

Survey responses per City District

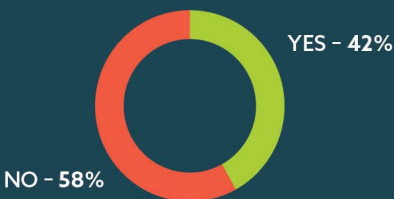


Note: These statistics and map are based on Toronto's district boundaries prior to the October 2018 municipal election, and do not reflect the change to ward's district boundaries in November 2018.

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

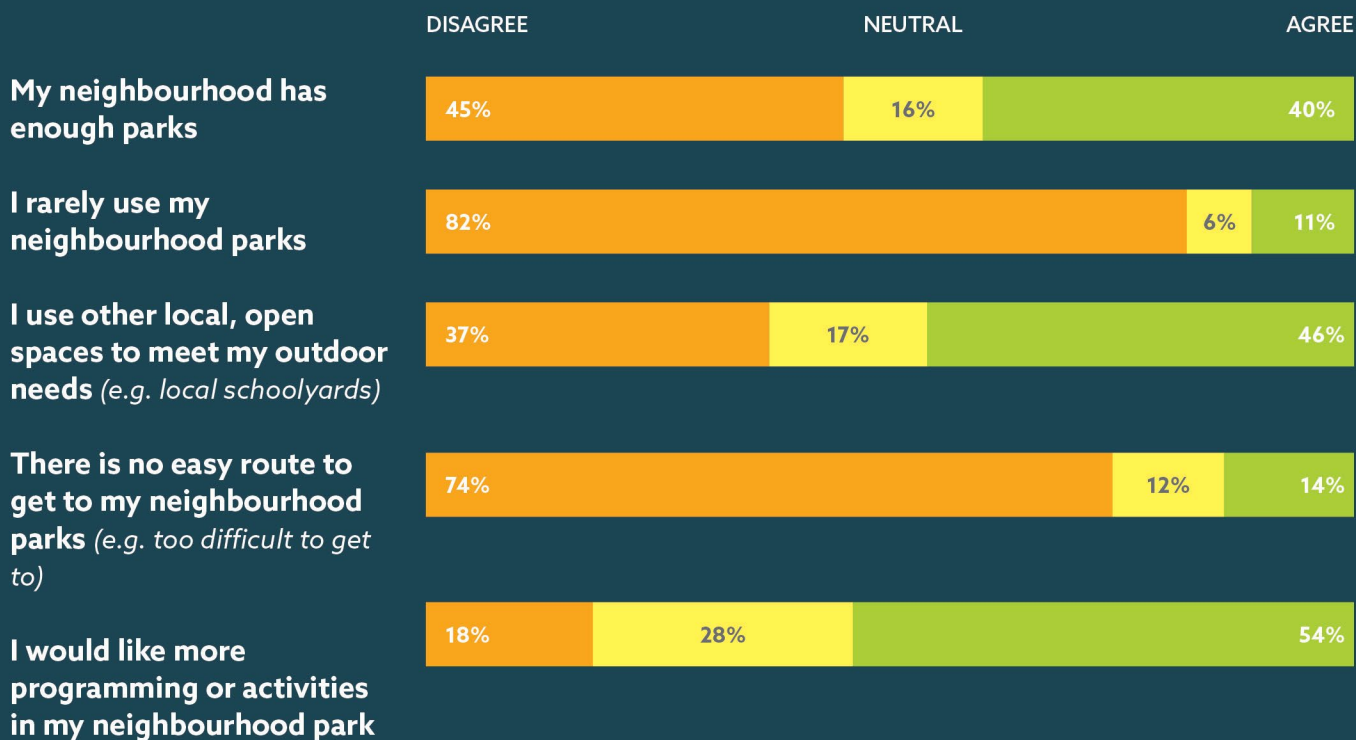


PARK USER EXPERIENCE

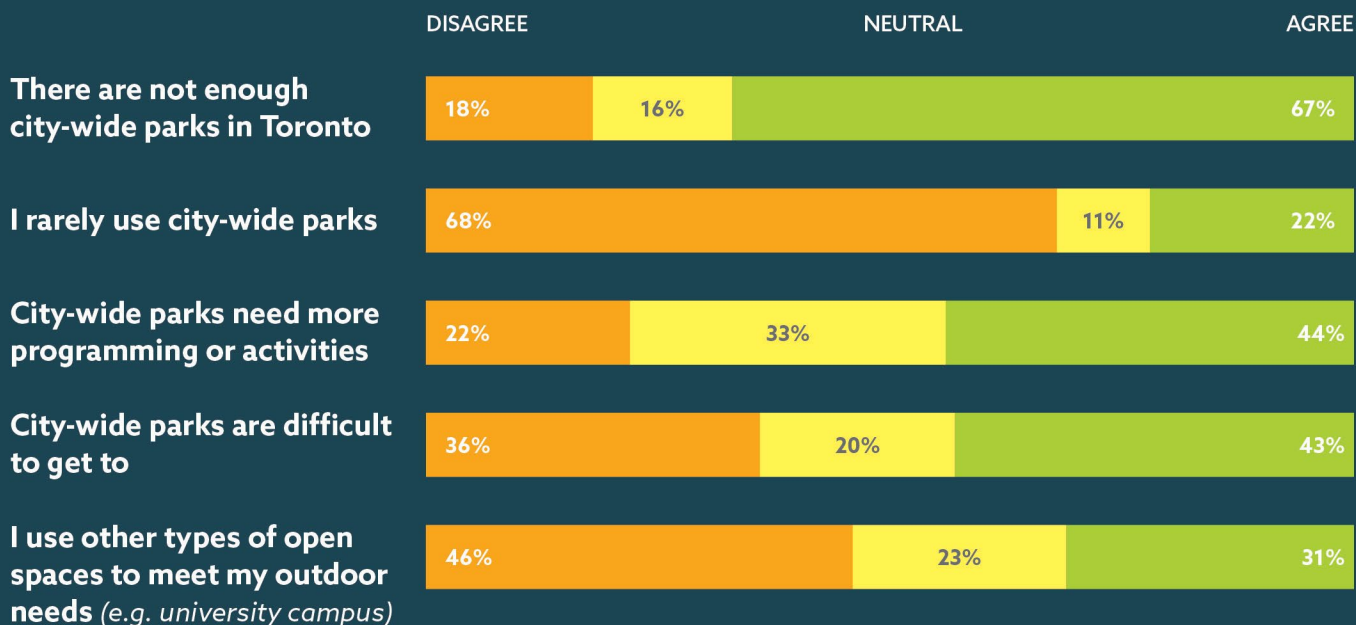
Participants were asked to share their view of their local neighbourhood parks and city-wide parks. The findings are summarized below:

- There is a desire for more parks in the city, especially in Toronto East York
 - Overall, respondents indicated that there are not enough local parks (45%) or city-wide parks (67%), particularly in Toronto East York.
 - Residents that do not have a private/shared green space indicated that their neighbourhood did not have enough parks more often than residents who do.
- Parks are well used
 - Majority of respondents use the park system, but tend to use their neighbourhood parks more than the city-wide parks.
 - Scarborough respondents reported using their local and city-wide parks less frequently than the other districts, as indicated below. Scarborough residents also responded that they use other local, open spaces more often than respondents from other districts.
- Better programming and increased activities in parks is desired, especially according to respondents from outside the downtown core
 - Majority of residents would like more programming or activities in both the neighbourhood parks (54%) and city-wide parks (44%). This is especially the case for residents of Scarborough.
- Local parks are easy to get to while city-wide parks are more difficult to access
 - The majority of respondents indicated that it is easy to get to their neighbourhood parks (74%) while many responded that city-wide parks are difficult to get to (43%).
 - Fewer Etobicoke respondents found city-wide parks difficult to get to. Etobicoke residents also responded using city-wide parks more often than respondents from other districts.

LOCAL NEIGHBOURHOOD PARKS



CITY-WIDE PARKS



RANKING PARK ACQUISITION PRIORITIES

The project team developed a list of acquisition priorities for respondents to rank in order of importance to get a sense of key priorities.

The acquisition priorities included:

- **Too Few Parks:** Provide more parks in areas where currently there are not enough parks
- **High Needs Areas:** Provide more parks in 'Neighbourhood Improvement Areas' (areas with high numbers of newcomers, residents with low income, and other vulnerable populations)
- **High Population Density Areas:** Provide more parks in areas where the local population is already high
- **Future Growth:** Provide more parks in areas where the local population is expected to grow in future years

High Population Density Areas was ranked as most important (34%) and *Future Growth* was ranked as least important (15%) overall by the most participants.

When parsed out by district, the rankings become more nuanced. A large proportion of respondents from Toronto & East York (39%) ranked the priority of *High Population Density Areas* as #1. The majority of respondents from Etobicoke and North York also ranked *High Population Density Areas* as most important. In contrast, only 19% of Scarborough residents ranked *High Population Density Areas* as most important, and indicated that *High Needs Areas* (35%) was their highest priority.

Similarly, Scarborough and Toronto & East York residents had different responses to the *Future Growth* priority. Only 9% of Toronto & East York respondents ranked Future Growth as most important, compared to 22% of Scarborough respondents.

"Downtown parks please! If the downtown is to be a place for families, it needs more parkland."

"Increase community stewardship opportunities over 'animating' parks. Communities should connect to their parkland by caring for it, not just 'using' it."

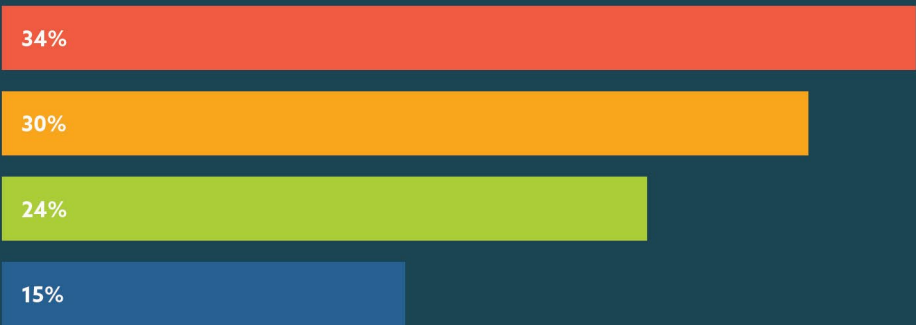
"Let parks be parks... less emphasis on 'animation' and 'additional uses'... and more on quality of space."

TOP ACQUISITION PRIORITIES

- HIGH POPULATION DENSITY AREAS
- HIGH NEEDS AREAS
- TOO FEW PARKS
- FUTURE GROWTH

All Participants

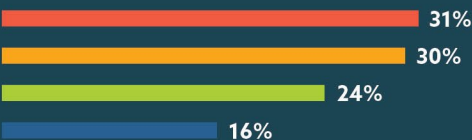
Percentage of total survey participants that ranked the priority as #1



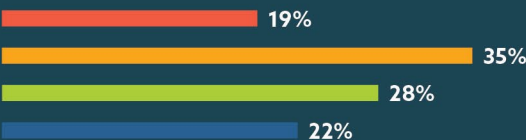
By District

Percentage of survey participants from each district that ranked the priority as #1

Etobicoke York Participants



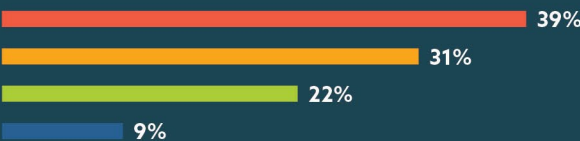
Scarborough Participants



North York Participants



Toronto + East York Participants



RANKING PARK IMPROVEMENT PRIORITIES

A list of priorities was provided for respondents to rank their top three priorities to understand the key priorities for park improvements.

A total of eight park improvement priorities were included:

- **Connect Natural Areas:** Where possible connect natural corridors to support biodiversity and nature connections
- **Increase Community Use:** Meet diverse needs and interests by designing park features that are open and inclusive (e.g. play structures, public art, gathering spaces)
- **Protect Sensitive Natural Areas:** Prohibit or limit human access to sensitive natural areas
- **Improve Travel to Parks:** More bike trails, walkways, transit stops
- **Connect Open Spaces:** Connect school yards, hydro corridors, rail paths, underpasses, etc. to parkland
- **Increase Number and Types of Park Features:** Re-design for additional uses
- **Provide More Access Points:** Where appropriate, increase access options such as trails, ramps, cut-throughs, or stairs into parkland
- **Animate Parks:** Provide or support programming through neighbourhood associations and/or local groups

(Note: The total counts for these improvements, as shown in the infographics on the following page, has been calculated by summing all selections of the improvement as a priority whether in rank position #1, #2 or #3).

The two highest ranked priorities were *Connect Natural Areas* and *Increase Community Use*:

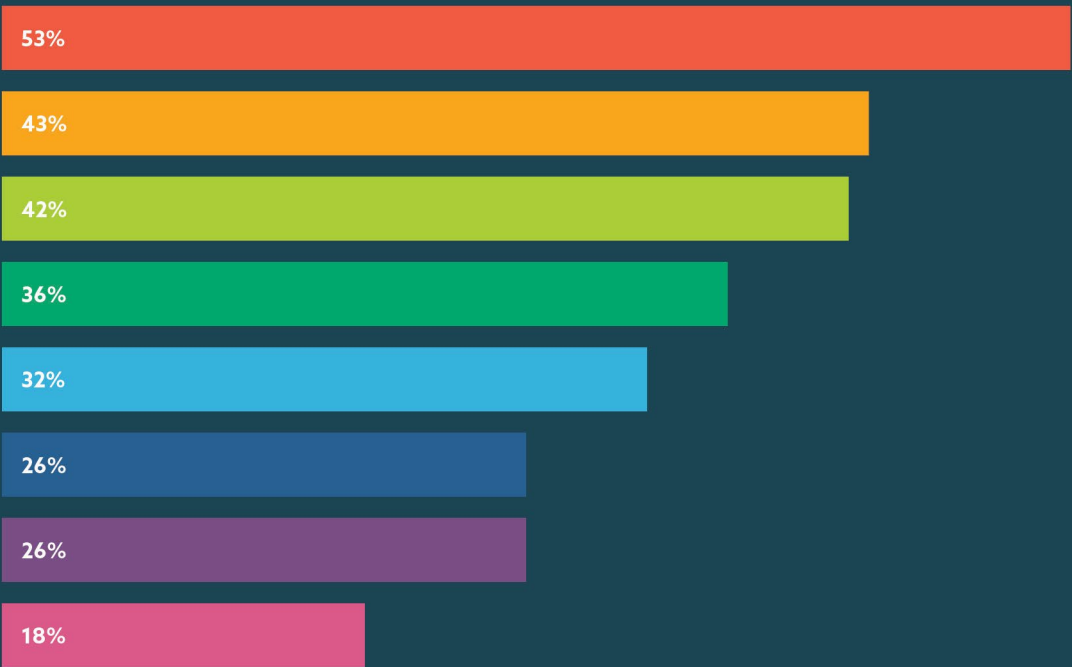
- **Connect Natural Areas:** The majority of respondents (53%) identified *Connect Natural Areas* as a priority for the PLS. District respondents from Etobicoke York, Toronto & East York and Scarborough ranked this as a top priority.
- **Increase Community Use:** *Community Use* was ranked as the second most important priority. Fewer Toronto & East York respondents ranked this as a priority (44%), compared to those in the other districts.
- **Animate Parks:** *Animate Parks* was selected by the smallest percentage.
- Other notable district by district distinctions with regard to ranking:
 - While *Protect Sensitive Natural Areas* was ranked third overall, much fewer North York respondents identified this as a priority.
 - There was a large variation in the ranking of *Connect Open Spaces*, specifically between Toronto & East York (43%) and Scarborough (22%).
 - Close to one-third more respondents from Etobicoke prioritized *Increase Number and Types of Park Features*, as compared to the other districts.

TOP PARK IMPROVEMENT PRIORITIES



All Participants

Percentage of total survey responses that selected each as a top priority (ranked #1, #2 or #3)



Top 3 By District

Percentage of survey participants from each district that selected each as a top priority

Etobicoke York Participants



Scarborough Participants



North York Participants



Toronto + East York Participants



Public Engagement: TOparks Talk – Growing Toronto Parkland

On May 29, 2018, PFR hosted their first TOparks Talk entitled *Growing Toronto Parkland*. This facilitated panel discussion highlighted the objectives and principles of the Parkland Strategy, as well as the challenges and opportunities for park expansion and improvements across the city.

Janie Romoff, Parks, Forestry & Recreation General Manager, introduced the event and highlighted park successes in the city, including the Bentway, improvements to Berczy Park and the proposed Rail Deck Park. Panelists from diverse backgrounds were invited to share their perspectives on the Parkland Strategy principles: *Expand, Connect, Improve* and *Share*. The panel discussion was moderated by Edna Ali, the Executive Director of the Toronto Youth Cabinet. Panelists were chosen based on their knowledge of and expertise on these Parkland Strategy principles, as identified to the right.

PANELISTS

EXPAND

John Gladki – Gladki Planning Associates

John Gladki, President of Gladki Planning Associates, shared key lessons from his experience working on the Regent Park redevelopment and the process of acquiring parkland for the site: 1) Prioritize park amenities at the start of the development process; 2) Be flexible with park location, size and program; and 3) Create and utilize partnerships with public and private sector.

CONNECT

Jake Tobin Garrett – Park People

Jake Tobin Garrett, Manager of Policy and Planning for Park People, shared his views on park connections and the ability of parks to make both physical and social connections in cities by bringing people together through shared experience. He specifically focused on the need for more connections outside the downtown core.

IMPROVE

Edward Tian – Founder of ‘Envision City’

Edward Tian, a recent high school graduate, discussed the importance of bringing youth perspectives into engagement and park improvement processes. As founder of Envision City, a program that promotes youth engagement in city planning, Edward discussed his experience working on the Huron-Washington Parkette Public Life study where the youth brought out wild and creative ideas for park improvements.

SHARE

Erika Hennebury – Strategic Manager, Toronto Arts Council

Erika Hennebury, the Strategic Programs Manager at the Toronto Arts Council, spoke to the role of equity in parks programming, with specific reference to her work with the Toronto Arts Council’s program ‘Arts in the Parks’. Arts in the Parks operates specifically in parks outside the downtown core, as an opportunity to better connect communities in those areas.

Through this event, attendees, both online and in person, learned about the work conducted by PFR, and had the opportunity to ask questions about the PLS and provide feedback on draft criteria.

Further discussion, prompted by questions from the live audience and Twitter, covered topics such as accessibility, privately owned public spaces (POPS), parkland dedicated spending, balancing recreation use with environmental protection, and how the expansive ravine system is a unique feature to Toronto.

Additional ideas raised by members of the public included:

- New parks should be situated: along LRT routes (specifically the Finch Ave. LRT), in the Yonge-Eglinton area, on top of condominiums, and within underutilized spaces
- Public connections to parks through ravines and golf courses should be considered
- Integration of green spaces with the rest of the city, specifically at the University of Toronto Scarborough should be prioritized
- Park improvements should include a series of linear parkettes, improved wayfinding and accessibility
- Equitable access means parks should be accessible for a diversity of users, including those with limited mobility



Next Steps

In tandem with the Phase 1 engagement findings, the Phase 2 engagement feedback summarized in this report will help to inform the work being compiled for the Parkland Strategy Final Report.

A summary of both documents (Phase 1 + 2 What We Heard Reports) and how feedback and input was incorporated into the study will be available in the final Parkland Strategy. The final report is expected in 2019.