



# Parks Plan 2013 – 2017



Parks, Forestry and Recreation

# **Vision and Mission**

## **Parks, Forestry and Recreation Vision**

Toronto is a vibrant city offering safe, welcoming and well-maintained parks and trails, a sustainable and expanding urban forest, and quality recreation facilities and programs supporting diverse needs for active, healthy lifestyles and engaged communities.

## **Parks, Forestry and Recreation Mission**

To improve the quality of life of Toronto's diverse communities by providing safe, beautiful parks, a healthy, expanding urban forest, and high quality, community-focused recreational experiences.

**The following vision and mission statements will guide park services over the next five years:**

### **Parks Vision**

Welcoming, well-maintained, safe and sustainable parks.

### **Parks Mission**

Enrich communities and lives by designing, building and operating quality parks.

## **Acknowledgements**

Parks, Forestry and Recreation thanks the many individuals and groups who contributed their time, resources, expertise and ideas to the development of the 2013–2017 Parks Plan. We extend a special thank you to those who participated in the public and stakeholder consultations and/or responded to the online survey. Representatives from City divisions and agencies also contributed to the development of this document. The information, insights and suggestions provided by all contributors have added tremendous value to this plan.

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# Table of Contents

<b>Executive Summary.....</b>	v
<b>1. Introduction.....</b>	1
1.1 Background and plan framework .....	1
1.2 The Parks Plan process.....	4
1.3 The value of parks.....	5
<b>2. The Existing System.....</b>	7
2.1 The physical system.....	7
2.2 Using parks .....	12
<b>3. Context for the Parks Plan .....</b>	17
3.1 Policy context.....	17
3.2 The effects of a changing city on parks .....	18
3.3 The effects of a growing city on parks .....	19
3.4 A changing environment — climate change.....	20
3.5 The parks system in its historical context .....	21
<b>4. Communicate and connect with users .....</b>	23
4.1 Introduction .....	23
4.2 What we heard on communicating and connecting with users .....	23
4.3 Direction 1 - Improve communication and outreach .....	24
4.4 Direction 2 - Increase opportunities for resident, group and stakeholder involvement .....	24
4.5 Direction 3 - Improve the permitting system to enhance park use .....	29
4.6 Conclusion.....	32
<b>5. Preserve and promote nature .....</b>	33
5.1 Introduction .....	33
5.2 What we heard on preserving and promoting nature.....	33
5.3 Direction 4 - Improve the management of natural areas.....	34
5.4 Direction 5 - Improve natural environment trails .....	39
5.5 Direction 6 - Integrate emerging trends and technologies in park operations .....	40
5.6 Conclusion.....	42
<b>6. Maintain quality parks.....</b>	43
6.1 Introduction .....	43
6.2 What we heard on maintaining quality parks .....	43
6.3 Direction 7 - Advance the quality and consistency of parkland and trails .....	44
6.4 Direction 8 - Improve park spaces .....	48
6.5 Direction 9 - Demonstrate, educate and inspire through horticulture and urban agriculture .....	49
6.6 Conclusion.....	52

<b>7.</b>	<b>Improve system planning.....</b>	53
7.1	Introduction .....	53
7.2	What we heard on system planning .....	53
7.3	Direction 10 - Develop a 20-year Parks, Forestry and Recreation facilities plan to guide future investments in facility provision and land acquisition .....	54
7.4	Direction 11 - Develop tools to guide and enhance the use of parkland.....	56
7.5	Direction 12 - Continue to increase accessibility .....	62
7.6	Conclusion.....	65
<b>Conclusion – Parks Plan .....</b>		66
<b>Appendix A: Parks Plan Consultation Summary .....</b>		67
<b>Appendix B: Parks Classification System .....</b>		77
<b>Endnotes .....</b>		83

## **List of figures**

Figure 1:	Parkland as percentage of city area (2012) .....	9
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## **List of tables**

Table 1:	Parks Plan guiding principles .....	2
Table 2:	Parks Plan consultation participation .....	4
Table 3:	Parks, Forestry and Recreation assets.....	7
Table 4:	Number of permits issued for park facilities (2012).....	12
Table 5:	Parks permits available through Parks, Forestry and Recreation.....	30

## **List of maps**

Map 1:	City of Toronto parks system lands (2011) .....	8
Map 2:	Walking Distance to City parkland.....	9
Map 3:	Downtown and Central Waterfront development activity .....	19
Map 4:	City of Toronto Parkland with natural heritage features (2013).....	36
Map 5:	City of Toronto major multi-use trails on parkland (2013).....	61

# Executive summary

## Building on Success

The Parks Plan 2013-2017 is the first of its kind for the City of Toronto. This document will guide Parks, Forestry and Recreation's delivery of service over the next five years. The Parks Plan directions and recommended actions aim to connect people and communities with parks, advance greening and environmental sustainability, improve the quality of parks, and build a legacy park system for Toronto.

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.

The City of Toronto recognizes the importance of parks and trails and the benefits they provide. Since *Our Common Grounds*, the Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division strategic plan adopted by City Council in 2004, the Division has built on its vision of "a city within a park" by maintaining and improving the parks system. Toronto residents use and value parks in great numbers. For example, in the Parks Plan survey, 93% of respondents said that parks are an indispensable part of the city. While this Parks Plan is built on a strong foundation of public support, it also outlines the broad range of issues that form the context for parks planning.

This Parks Plan offers a vision of how Parks, Forestry and Recreation can continue to improve in areas that require greater focus, and how to build on its strengths. A key priority through this plan is to encourage the public's use and involvement in parks, while at the same time preserving these spaces for future generations.

The 2013-2017 Parks Plan recognizes and addresses the following trends:

- A growing and increasingly diverse population means more users, and competition for use of limited park space
- A population that is aging, and increasingly inactive
- High demand for amenities like horticulture, community gardens, shade, drinking water and washrooms
- High demand for community involvement in park programming, design and decision making
- Increasing involvement of partners and volunteers
- Need to protect environmentally sensitive areas, and to preserve parks for future generations
- Damage to parks and trails from excessive and unsustainable use
- Increasing extreme weather, including droughts and storms that damage parks

- The requirement to adapt facilities and services to comply with the Accessibility for Ontarians with a Disability Act
- Need for data collection to provide consistent information on park use

Extensive research and public consultation identified four key themes, which form an organizational framework for the Plan. For each theme, current practices and public feedback point to the following 12 Parks Plan directions. Detailed recommended actions are found in the table that follows.

### **Communicate and connect with users**

1. Improve communications and outreach
2. Increase opportunities for resident, group and stakeholder involvement
3. Improve the permitting system to enhance park use

### **Preserve and promote nature**

4. Improve the management of natural areas
5. Improve natural environment trails
6. Integrate emerging trends and technologies into parks operations

### **Maintain quality parks**

7. Advance the quality and consistency of parkland and trails
8. Improve park spaces
9. Demonstrate, educate and inspire through horticulture and urban agriculture

### **Improve system planning**

10. Develop a plan to guide facility provision and land acquisition
11. Develop tools to guide and enhance the use of parkland
12. Continue to increase accessibility

The Parks Plan directions will strengthen the capacity of the Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division to manage the overall parks system. Competing demands, new expectations and high use of parkland in a growing city, as well as sustainability, equity and accessibility considerations require coordinated action from City divisions, external partners, residents and stakeholders across the city. Planning for great parks is an ongoing process. This Parks Plan focuses on the delivery of parks services, and sets priorities for further planning and new investment.

## **Summary of Directions and Recommended Actions**

### **Communicate and connect with users**

Directions	Recommended actions
1. Improve communications and outreach	1.1 Improve promotion and access to information regarding parks and trails by implementing a comprehensive communications and outreach strategy
2. Increase opportunities for resident, group and stakeholder involvement	<p>2.1 Establish an urban park ranger program to facilitate community involvement, provide public education, support problem solving and increase staff presence in parks</p> <p>2.2 Create and implement a community engagement framework that provides guiding principles and sets priorities for community engagement in the parks system</p> <p>2.3 Develop a centralized volunteer management system</p> <p>2.4 Continue to expand donation, partnership and sponsorship opportunities</p>
3. Improve the permitting system to enhance park use	<p>3.1 Improve the permitting system by increasing online information and services</p> <p>3.2 Conduct a review of the permitting system from a customer service perspective</p> <p>3.3 Enhance reporting standards for permits to measure the use of parks, and to achieve equity goals through permitting</p>

## **Preserve and promote nature**

<b>Directions</b>	<b>Recommended actions</b>
4. Improve the management of natural areas	<p>4.1 Implement a program to strengthen the management of sensitive natural areas to ensure that environmentally significant areas are protected and continue to function and flourish for the long term</p> <p>4.2 Determine thresholds of use and develop criteria and measures to protect parkland from excessive use</p> <p>4.3 Increase staff knowledge and skills to better manage environmentally sensitive lands</p>
5. Improve natural environment trails	<p>5.1 Develop and implement a program to plan, design, manage and maintain natural environment trails on parkland and in ravines to ensure the protection, restoration and enhancement of natural areas</p>
6. Integrate emerging trends and technologies into parks operations	<p>6.1 Continue to improve water, energy and fuel efficiency through operating and landscaping practices, the use of new and alternative technologies, and through ongoing fleet and small engine improvements</p>

## Maintain quality parks

Directions	Recommended actions
7. Advance the quality and consistency of parkland and trails	7.1 Enhance and automate the Parks Inspection Program to ensure park quality, safety, and accessibility  7.2 Work with the Municipal Licensing and Standards Division to improve bylaw enforcement in parks  7.3 Continue to design high quality, sustainable parks that provide a sense of place for residents and communities
8. Improve park spaces	8.1 Improve park maintenance and park amenities such as seating, shade areas and washrooms, with a focus on creating social gathering spaces in parks and along trails
9. Demonstrate, educate and inspire through horticulture and urban agriculture	9.1 Strategically place horticulture displays in high visibility areas and expand signage, education and volunteer experiences  9.2 Augment urban agriculture programming through increased public education, training, and enhanced support services, and through investment in garden creation, renewal and repair

## Improve system planning

Directions	Recommended actions
10. Develop a plan to guide facility provision and land acquisition	<p>10.1 Develop a 20-year Parks, Forestry and Recreation facilities plan</p> <p>10.2 Update the strategy for the acquisition of parkland to continue to prioritize parkland acquisition in underserved areas and address City priorities</p> <p>10.3 Work with City Planning and other divisions and partners to identify opportunities and enhance the City's capacity to expand the parks system</p> <p>10.4 Complete a comprehensive inventory and mapping of parks, trails and assets</p>
11. Develop tools to guide and enhance the use of parkland	<p>11.1 Implement the park classification system to guide planning and decision-making across the system of parks and trails</p> <p>11.2 Develop policies, standards and measures to support the appropriate use of parks and trails that guide planning, design, space allocation and permitting, and that address emerging and exclusive uses</p> <p>11.3 Improve and coordinate trail mapping, classification, maintenance, way-finding and connections to other public realm elements</p>
12. Continue to increase accessibility	<p>12.1 Engage disability stakeholder groups in developing requirements to improve the universal accessibility of park amenities and features</p> <p>12.2 Ensure that parks and trails meet or exceed provincial accessibility requirements</p>

# 1. Introduction

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. It is also a system influenced by significant social and environmental change. Some of the many factors influencing Toronto's parks and trails are:

- a growing and changing population
- evolving expectations about the role of parks
- extensive new park development on the waterfront
- environmental pressures
- limited resources for addressing the needs of a growing city.

Comprehensive and informed planning is an important response to these opportunities and challenges.

The purpose of the Parks Plan is to guide the City of Toronto's delivery of park services over the next five years. The plan outlines priorities for the development, management and operation of public parkland across the city. It will inform policy-making, guide decision-making, and define a program of investment. The Parks Plan aims to balance the vision of an extensive and popular parkland system with the need for sustainable levels of use and maintenance.

## 1.1 Background and plan framework

The 2004 Parks Forestry and Recreation Strategic Plan, *Our Common Grounds* set out 53 recommendations for the division over a 15-year period. *Our Common Grounds* re-established the vision of Toronto as a 'city within a park' and recognized inclusion, respect, diversity, health, innovation, openness and excellence as the values of the Division. *Our Common Grounds* recommended the development of a plan for the City's parks and trails.

In 2010, City Council approved the development of a city-wide Parks Plan guided by the seven principles listed in Table 1. These principles build on the values established in *Our Common Grounds* and are all equally important. Table 1 summarizes the Parks Plan guiding principles.

**Table 1: Parks Plan guiding principles**

<b>Parks and Trails as City Infrastructure</b>	Parks and trails are vital components of city infrastructure and must be recognized for the contribution they make to a vital city. The system of parks and trails is part of a continuous city-wide green space system that also includes the natural heritage system, publicly accessible open spaces and streetscapes. This system provides recreational opportunities to residents and visitors and makes connections within the city and outside the city. As a green landscape component of city infrastructure, it provides relief from the built-up, urbanized environment typical of a large city like Toronto.
<b>Equitable Access for All Residents</b>	The system of parks and trails is a valuable city resource that must be accessible to residents in all parts of the city and must respond to the needs of a diverse population regardless of age, level of ability, income or cultural background.
<b>Nature in the City</b>	The natural heritage framework within the city is an important component of the city's green space system, which performs many ecological functions important to the health of the city and should be protected, restored and expanded. As well, this natural framework is a component of a larger bioregion of tree canopy, natural habitat and watersheds that extend beyond the city's borders. The interaction of city residents, especially children and youth, with healthy and meaningful natural spaces should be protected and enhanced, as the city becomes an increasingly urbanized and structured environment.
<b>Placemaking</b>	A high standard of quality and visual appeal must be emphasized in the planning, design and ongoing management of public parks and their associated assets. Attractive and comfortable spaces, when provided on a consistent basis across the city, invite use by residents and contribute to the overall quality of the public realm within the city. The unique identity of neighbourhoods can be celebrated through the design of local parks. Parks and open spaces should project a strong positive image within neighbourhoods and collectively should build the image of the city as a whole.

<b>Supporting a Diversity of Uses</b>	The parks and trails system must respond to a wide range of demands from active and passive users. Lifelong active living, fitness and active sports need to be encouraged as well as passive recreation and quiet enjoyment. As well as supporting the needs of active and passive users, parks also need to accommodate spaces for natural areas and habitat, tree canopy, community events, urban agriculture and cultural expression.
<b>Community Engagement and Partnerships</b>	<p>Community involvement is a key ingredient in the planning, design and operation of parks and trails which must be fostered. Stewardship and volunteer participation should be encouraged to complement existing city resources and help to provide high quality parks and trails that best serve their communities. An effective program of communication with the public on all matters related to parks and trails should be maintained on a regular basis.</p> <p>Creative opportunities to engage community and business partners to complement existing funding through fundraising, partnerships and sponsorships should be explored and implemented.</p>
<b>Environmental Goals and Practices</b>	<p>It is essential that environmentally responsible practices and green initiatives be incorporated into the day-to-day planning, design, operation and maintenance of the City's system of parks and trails and the City's key environmental goals, as set out in the Official Plan and other supporting legislation, are met. Parks and trails should be designed to meet current standards of environmental sustainability and green development.</p>

## Plan Themes and Directions

Four key themes emerged through the Parks Plan consultation activities, research, and review of current park services. These themes are informed by and support the Parks Plan guiding principles listed in Table 1. They provide a structure for the plan and outline the broad strategies required for achieving the parks vision for 2017. The Parks Plan themes are:

- 1. Communicate and connect with users**
- 2. Preserve and promote nature**
- 3. Maintain quality parks**
- 4. Improve system planning**

Each theme is accompanied by a set of directions to be achieved through this plan. These directions will be monitored and measured over the next five years during the Park Plan's implementation.

This Plan begins by describing the existing system of parks and trails, including the services Parks, Forestry and Recreation provides, and how they are used. The policy, demographic, environmental and historical contexts follow. Chapters four through seven each address one of the four themes – summarizing the findings of research and consultations, as well as the challenges and opportunities facing Toronto's parks. Each of these chapters concludes with directions and recommended actions for the next five years.

## 1.2 The Parks Plan process

The Parks Plan was developed concurrently with the *Strategic Forest Management Plan* and the *Recreation Service Plan*. This creates a set of complementary plans that will guide the work of the Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division for the next five years.

The Parks Plan development process included the following activities:

**Public consultation** In July 2011, City Council approved a Parks Plan consultation and communications strategy. Consultation took place from October 2011 to January 2012 and provided a range of options for participation. An online Parks Plan survey was available on the City of Toronto web site between October 20 and December 22, 2011. Residents participated in four ‘town hall’ meetings (one per City district). Stakeholder groups attended five similar meetings, and some provided written submissions. Consultation toolkits were also available to groups wanting to conduct their own sessions, and seven focus group sessions were held to engage newcomers, youth, people with disabilities as well as park donors and sponsors. Over 400 residents participated in the consultation sessions, and there were over 100 participants in the focus groups. The consultation process resulted in thousands of comments that informed the development of this Plan.

**Table 2: Parks Plan consultation feedback**

3,754	Number of online surveys completed
10,943	Comments in response to open-ended questions in the online survey
3,765	Comments from town hall, stakeholder, and focus group meetings
14,708	Total comments received through consultation activities

**Consultation with staff and other City Divisions** Staff from across Parks, Forestry and Recreation provided input through focus groups, on-site meetings and follow-up sessions. Engagement of internal City stakeholders included one inter-divisional consultation session and a series of individual meetings. Major external stakeholders such as the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, and Toronto school boards also provided input through written submissions and meetings.

**Data gathering and environmental scan** Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff compiled information on park assets, programs, services, and initiatives, and reviewed findings from previous surveys and needs assessments. Information and reports from other City divisions, Statistics Canada, academic literature and other sources were gathered and reviewed. The Division also conducted a comparative analysis of park service planning approaches and themes in other jurisdictions and researched park use and service delivery trends.

### 1.3 The value of parks

Toronto residents value their parks. In an annual survey of 500 people conducted most years between 2001 and 2012, more than nine out of ten people reported that parks and recreation make an important contribution to quality of life in Toronto.

Satisfaction levels with Toronto's parks remained consistently high during this same period\*. Similarly, the Parks Plan consultation conducted in the fall of 2011 also demonstrated that:

- **People use parks** 77% of respondents (or a member of their household) visited a park more than 20 times in the past year
- **People value parks** 93% strongly agree that parks and trails are vital city infrastructure that must be planned and funded adequately
- **People take pride in Toronto's parks** 55% are very proud of Toronto's parks, 37% are somewhat proud

**Parks are essential to the quality of life in cities.** They offer a broad range of outdoor leisure and recreation opportunities, conserve our natural environments, and bring people from all walks of life into contact with nature, and with one another. A large body of research describes the many ways in which parks and green spaces improve people's lives and contribute to successful cities.

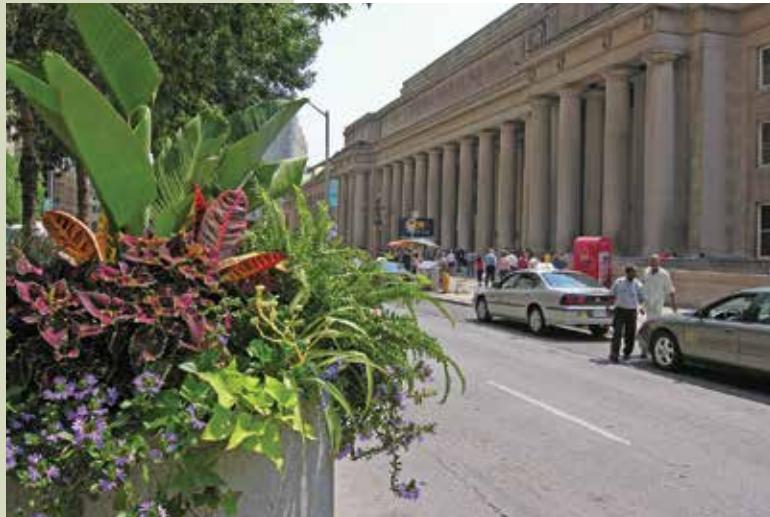
**Parks provide green city infrastructure that is as important as streets and sewers.** Parks protect and nurture natural environments. They provide habitat for plants and animals, support biodiversity, and protect geological and geographic features. They help improve water quality and flood management. Parks play a vital role in keeping the air clean and cool by counteracting the damaging effects of pollution and buffering against the effects of climate change<sup>1,2</sup>.

"All successful cities astonish with their human-made and natural beauty. People choose to live and businesses choose to invest in beautiful cities."

Toronto Official Plan



\* As part of its omnibus "Focus Ontario" survey (2001 – 2012), the Environics Research Group asked questions in behalf of Parks, Forestry and Recreation. Surveys were conducted annually, with the exception of 2002 and 2004. The survey changed to a Web-based format in 2012, and prior years were telephone based. Results are based on a probability sample of 500 adults aged 18 and older living in Toronto, including users and non-users of City parks and recreation services.



**Local and city-wide economies benefit from parks.** Research shows that parks can significantly increase property values, attract and retain businesses, increase tax revenues, create jobs, revitalize communities and draw tourism<sup>3,4</sup>. These economic benefits in turn support healthy communities and help cities to prosper.



**People and communities benefit from parks.** Parks host a wide range of individual, family, community, and public activities, from individual quiet contemplation to large cultural and sporting events. Studies show that parks strengthen families, provide a sense of community connection, bring diverse people together, and offer venues for community support and development, as well as volunteerism and citizen engagement<sup>5,6</sup>. Many parks reflect local history and help weave Toronto's rich cultural heritage into the city's spaces.



**Parks are important resources for individual and community health.** Parks provide affordable and enjoyable places to be active. Many studies link access to parkland with increased physical activity and physical fitness<sup>7,8</sup>. Contact with nature also enriches psychological, emotional and spiritual well-being. Access to green space reduces stress levels, decreases negative mood, reduces feelings of depression, and provides other benefits to mental health and well-being<sup>9,10</sup>.

## 2. The Existing System

Toronto's system of parks and trails is tied to the city's geography and history. The park system is a product of the amalgamation of seven municipal parks systems in 1998 and includes a wide array of park spaces, significant natural areas and many opportunities for active and passive recreation. This section provides an overview of the City's park system.

For the purposes of the Parks Plan, the term "parkland" refers to land, and land covered by water, facilities, vegetation, buildings and structures that is managed by Parks, Forestry and Recreation and used as public open space or a golf course.



### 2.1 The physical system

In 2012, Toronto's parks system consisted of approximately 8,000 hectares of city-owned and/or operated parkland, which amounts to 12.7% of the city's land base. It includes over 1,600 parks. The amount of green space available to residents is much higher if we consider other publicly accessible lands such as school properties, cemeteries, institutions and hydro corridor lands.

The Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) owns approximately 46%, or 3,700 hectares of Toronto's public parkland. Parks, Forestry and Recreation manages these lands, generally natural areas located along the river valleys and the Lake Ontario shoreline, under a long-standing maintenance agreement. Parks, Forestry and Recreation also manages and maintains some additional land through leases and other use

**Table 3:**  
**Parks, Forestry and Recreation assets:**

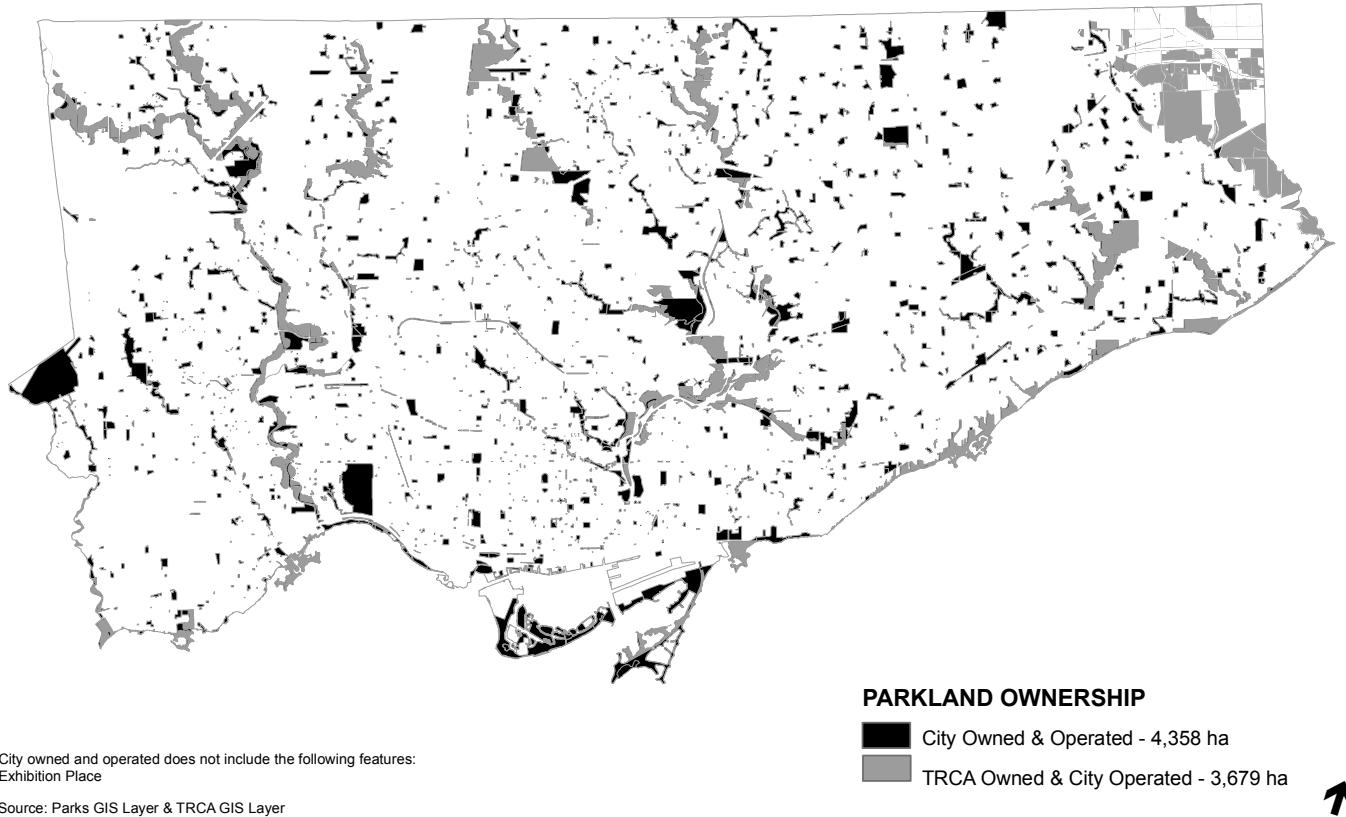
858	playgrounds
676	sports fields
145	bocce courts at 55 locations
121	park field houses
55	basketball courts and 52 half courts
93	splash pads
106	wading pools
59	designated dogs off-leash areas
53	outdoor artificial ice rink sites, with 66 ice pads and one ice trail
54	community garden sites
11	outdoor and 1 indoor allotment garden site
14	lawn bowling locations
7	skateboard facilities
5	golf courses
4	stadiums
3	BMX facilities
3	animal attractions
3	conservatories
2	ski and snowboard centres
23	beaches
636	tennis courts at 199 locations

**Parks, Forestry and Recreation operates additional facilities, many of which are located on or beside parkland**

134	community centres
63	indoor pools
59	outdoor pools
40	arenas and indoor skating rinks with 48 ice pads
1	track & field centre
1	indoor playground

agreements, such as some hydro corridor lands. Toronto's parkland includes the proposed Rouge National Urban Park, Canada's first national urban park. As this park transitions into federal stewardship, Parks, Forestry and Recreation will continue to inform and support its operation and programming.

**Map 1: City of Toronto Parks System Lands (2011)**

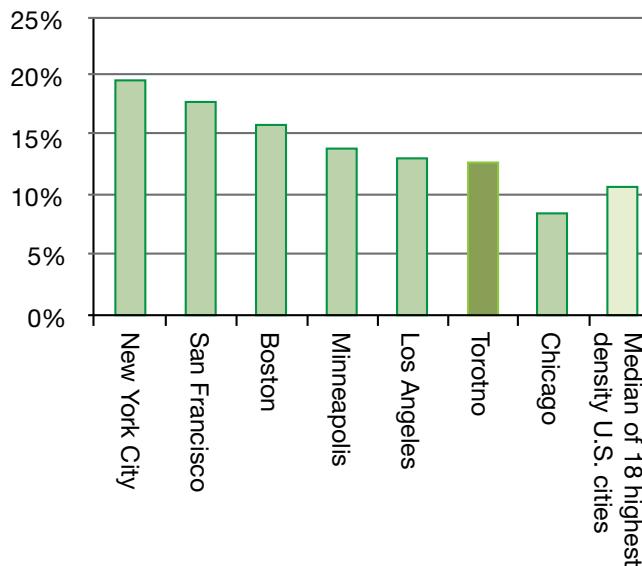


### The natural environment

Toronto's system of natural areas lies within a larger regional ecosystem that extends north beyond the City through six main watersheds — Etobicoke Creek, Mimico Creek, Humber River, Don River, Highland Creek and Rouge River — all the way to the provincially protected Greenbelt and the Oak Ridges Moraine, and runs along the Lake Ontario shoreline. The parkland managed by Parks, Forestry and Recreation overlaps with this natural area system and includes valleys, ravines, watercourses, forests, meadows, wetlands, beaches and bluff areas. Roughly 42% of Toronto's natural areas are on City owned or operated public parkland.

**Figure 1: Parkland as a percentage of city area (2012)**

Source: Trust for Public Land

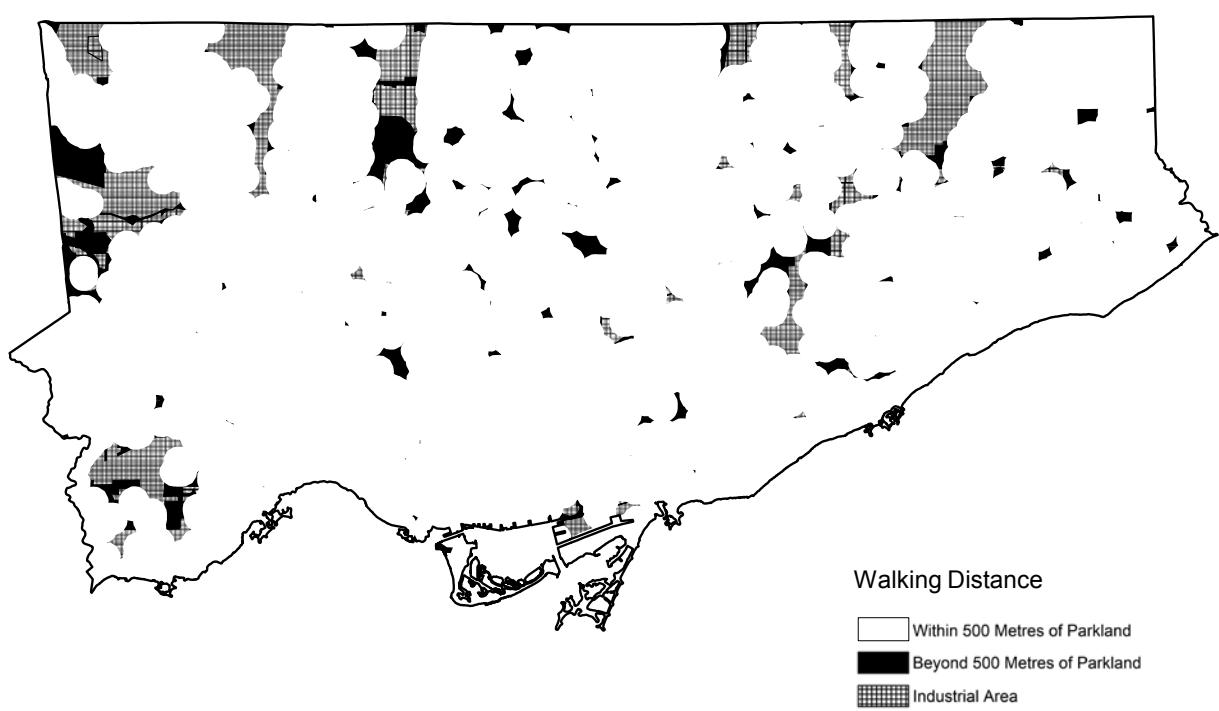


### Parkland — amount and proximity

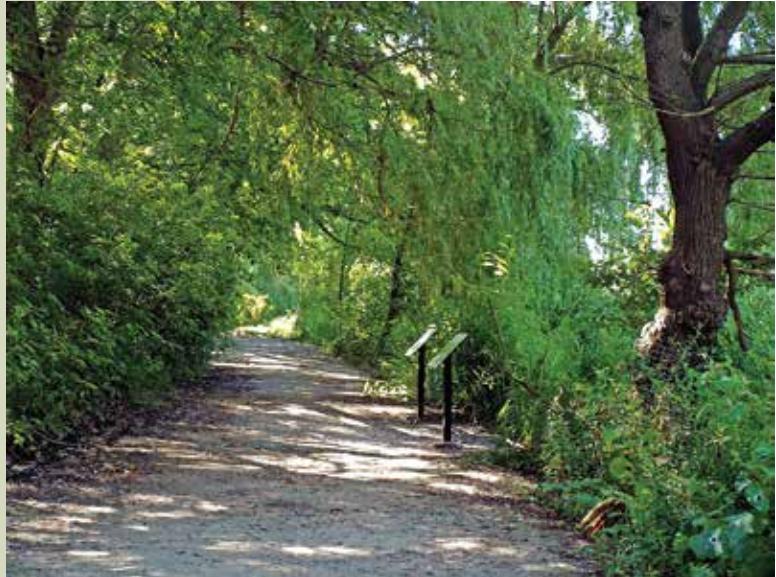
Toronto's level of parkland as a percentage of total city area is comparable to other North American cities with high population densities<sup>11</sup>.

Although there are pockets where city residents live further than 500 metres from parkland, Map 2 illustrates that most residents are within 500 metres, or approximately a five-to-ten minute walk, from a park.

**Map 2: Walking Distance to City parkland**



**Part of a greater whole** City parks and trails form part of an extensive open space network of private and public spaces across the city. These include streetscapes and street rights-of-way, cemeteries, golf courses, hydro corridors, and publicly-accessible private open spaces such as courtyards, university grounds, an extensive system of schoolyards, and non-municipal parks.



**Types of parkland** Toronto's many parks differ in their size, setting, features, facilities and amenities. Some are very large and offer natural areas, space for many recreational activities and a wide range of features and amenities. Others are small and designed for local use and passive recreation, such as sitting on a bench and enjoying a garden.

**Trails** Toronto has approximately 300 kilometres of off-street, multi-use trails for hiking, biking and walking. City-wide connections are provided by major trails that lie along the waterfront, in Toronto's ravines and valleys and in some larger parks. Trails vary in size, surfacing, amenities, use and accessibility. Most multi-use trails are

integrated into Toronto's Bikeway network, a series of connected bicycle routes that include off-street paths in parks, bicycle lanes and other routes on streets. Informal, natural environment trails in ravines and natural areas account for an additional 300 kilometres of trails on City parkland.

**Turf** The parks system includes approximately 3,000 hectares of maintained turf. This includes golf courses, stadiums, sports fields, lawn bowling greens, linear greenways and open areas for passive leisure.



**Animal operations** Toronto's parks system includes three animal attractions—Riverdale Farm, High Park Zoo and Far Enough Farm. Together, these are home to over 100 animals, and over 300 birds. Parks staff is responsible for animal care at Riverdale Farm and High Park, with Far Enough Farm under third party management as of March 2013.

**Horticulture** Parks, Forestry and Recreation designs, plants, and maintains 40 hectares of horticulture. The parks system includes three conservatories and two production greenhouses which grew 900,000 flowers and plants in 2012.

**The waterfront** The full linear distance covered by the City of Toronto shoreline, including the waterfront parks and the Toronto Islands, is 177 kilometres. Roughly one third of this shoreline is public parkland. The associated land area includes 1,600 hectares of waterfront parkland containing swimming beaches, trails, boardwalks, gardens, picnic areas, public boat launches, and wetlands.

Toronto's central waterfront revitalization is underway. Waterfront Toronto's<sup>†</sup> 'leading with the landscape' development strategy is building new and improved parks to attract private investment. Parks are playing a key role in achieving economic revitalization. More than \$278 million has been committed to parks and open spaces projects from the three levels of government by 2021. Over \$138 million was spent by 2012 to create new, or improve existing, parks or public spaces including Sugar Beach, Sherbourne Common, sports fields, and trails.

When ownership of new waterfront parks is transferred to the City of Toronto, Parks, Forestry and Recreation assumes responsibility for their operation and maintenance.

The scale and impact of this park development is significant. Waterfront renewal will ultimately deliver more than 300 hectares of improved parkland, with the goal of revitalizing the waterfront, improving public access and creating a network of high quality public parks and open space that will attract tourism and investment. With high capital investment, quality of landscape design and high public use and expectations, newly created waterfront parks will require equally high levels of maintenance and programming.



<sup>†</sup>Formally created in 2001 as a permanent and independent organization, Waterfront Toronto (formerly Toronto Waterfront Revitalization Corporation) is supported by the three orders of government and has a 25-year mandate to oversee, lead and implement the transformation of 800 hectares (2,000 acres) of brownfield lands on the waterfront into beautiful, sustainable mixed-use communities and dynamic public spaces.

## 2.2 Using parks

Toronto's parks are often lively places, animated by people who make use of the wide range of facilities and take part in activities and events available to residents and visitors. Data on the number of park visitors – and their demographic make-up – is not readily available. This is particularly true for unstructured park visits. City growth statistics, changing park maintenance requirements, staff observations, and rising demands for sports fields and other facilities suggest that park use in Toronto is on the rise.

Some indication of use and demand is available through park permits, ferry tickets, program participation, and volunteers. This section provides a window into park use by describing some of the many activities that take place in parks and on trails.



### Permits

In 2012, more than 7,000 individuals and groups made over 150,000 permit bookings for a wide range of activities in parks and park facilities. This resulted in approximately 1.4 million permitted hours of park and facility use, including one-time permits for events such as family picnics, seasonal permit holders such as soccer and cricket leagues, and ongoing permits for tennis, lawn bowling and other similar clubs. While reliable data is not currently available for the number of individual visits to City parks as a result of this permitted activity, Parks, Forestry and Recreation is working to develop ways of collecting this data to better measure park capacity and utilization.

Permit information indicates that outdoor permit use is on the rise. The number of permitted hours for outdoor facilities increased by 3.6% between 2008 and 2012. The number and variety of permits issued demonstrates the range of demands on the parks system.

**Table 4: Number of permits issued for park facilities (2012)**

64,000	Sports fields (baseball, soccer, multi-purpose)
62,500	Sports courts (tennis courts, dry pads)
9,500	Parkland/open space (events, gatherings, photography)
7,000	Clubhouse
3,000	Allotment gardens
2,300	Outdoor ice rink
1,750	Stadium
4,000	Other outdoor permits



## Ferry services

The Toronto Island Ferry Service operates five passenger vessels and four dock facilities. The ferry service is the primary means of transportation to and from the Toronto Islands for island residents. The ferries also transport Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff, Water Filtration Plant staff, Toronto District School Board Island Public/Natural Science School staff and students, and park visitors every day. Parks provides year-round service between the Jack Layton Ferry Terminal and Ward's Island Dock, and seasonal service to the Centre Island and Hanlan's Point Docks. In 2012, the ferry service transported over 1.2 million passengers on nearly 17,000 round trip crossings from the Jack Layton Ferry Terminal. The past decade has seen an average ridership increase of 1 to 2% (12,000 – 24,000 people) per year.

## Programs

Parks, Forestry and Recreation supports a wide array of activity in parks through the following programs, facilities and recreation opportunities:



- **Five golf courses** include a par three facility and full-length (18-hole) golf courses. In 2012, golfers played over 167,000 rounds. Golf course revenue supports other Parks, Forestry and Recreation programs.



- **Ski/Snowboard** Centennial Park and Earl Bales Park host two ski and snowboard centres, where Parks, Forestry and Recreation provides snow-making, grooming, maintenance, and equipment rental. Lift ticket sales fluctuate depending on the weather. For 2011 and 2013, lift tickets for each hill exceeded 11,000 for the season, with a lower turnout in 2012 due to warm weather. Learn-to-ski and snowboard courses are also popular at both hills with over 3,000 registrations per season in 2012.

**Urban agriculture** refers to crop and livestock production in and around cities. In Toronto, urban agriculture activity has grown steadily in recent years in tandem with broader efforts to create a healthy and sustainable food system. Many forms of urban agriculture are currently being practiced in the city by a wide variety of public, institutional, private sector and community stakeholders.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation supports urban agriculture with gardens and greenhouses, bake ovens, farmers markets, and community kitchens in recreation centres across Toronto.

The Division's urban agriculture programs enable residents across the city to garden independently and in groups. Parks, Forestry and Recreation also supports Toronto's Food Strategy by teaching, demonstrating and inspiring urban agriculture. In 2012, these programs reached almost 6,000 residents through onsite gardening and public education activities and events.

- **Children's eco programs** These programs use parks and ravines as a base for children to learn about nature, environment and healthy living. Their home base is in High Park and features the award-winning High Park Children's Garden – an organic education garden. The new Children's Teaching Kitchen is an environmentally friendly straw bale building. Programs include family drop-ins, cooking programs, curriculum-linked school programs and summer eco camps. In 2012, over 3,300 residents and 160 volunteers participated in programs and events, and participation levels are rising. The program also supports Community Recreation staff in recreation facilities to develop similar programs across the city. To date, 20 programs have been created with one new site added per year.



- **Community gardens** In 1999, City Council adopted a Community Garden Action Plan that included the goal of establishing one community garden in each of the city's 44 wards. To date, 54 community gardens in 25 wards are operating on City parkland. Community gardens bring people together, promote health, foster stewardship, beautify neighbourhoods, and increase opportunities to access affordable and healthy foods. To establish community gardens in parks, groups follow a process that ensures long-term garden sustainability. Demand for gardens is rising. Between 2009 and 2013, 16 new community gardens were created (a 41% increase). In the same time period, the waiting list to establish new gardens grew from 40 to 80 gardens (a 100% increase).



- **Allotment gardens** Parks, Forestry and Recreation operates 11 outdoor allotment garden sites with over 1,500 individual garden plots. It also operates an indoor site at Riverlea Greenhouse with 173 growing benches. Current opportunities for expansion are limited. Waiting lists for plots grew from 322 to 554 residents (a 72% increase) between 2009 and 2013.



- **People, parks and dogs** The City of Toronto recognizes the social benefits of dogs and the need for dog owners to have access to the parks system. There are currently 59 off-leash areas on parkland, approximately half of which were created after 2007 when new policy was developed to provide a consistent approach to the provision of off-leash areas within the city's parks system. Demand for off-leash areas continues to grow, with 7 dog parks on the waiting list for development in early 2013.

## Volunteers

Thousands of people engage with parks by volunteering their time. Volunteer programs offered by Parks, Forestry and Recreation are listed below. In addition, many volunteers contribute through community-based, organizational and corporate events, and independently in their local parks. Three examples include:

- **Parkland naturalization** The community planting program worked with 4,500 volunteers in 2012. This program engages people of all ages in events to plant native trees, shrubs and wildflowers at naturalization sites. In 2012 the program's signature Trees Across Toronto event secured financial support from corporate partners and engaged thousands of volunteers in planting native trees and shrubs.
- **Community stewardship** This program involves volunteers in ongoing maintenance and monitoring at naturalization sites. Participants are trained in basic ecology, plant identification, and monitoring, and work in teams assigned to specific sites. Over 200 volunteers were active in 2012 at approximately 10 sites
- **Riverdale Farm Stewardship Group** This group brings together volunteers with business skills, local community and Farm participants, the ward councillor and Parks staff to seek out sustainable funding and establish the Farm as an educational hub. The **Riverdale Farm Ambassadors** initiative enables interested individuals, groups, and organizations to engage in a range of Farm-related dialogue, programming and volunteer activities.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation also enters into lease agreements to enable the programming and use of parkland by non-profit and for-profit service providers throughout the city. Many of the city's boating clubs and marinas, for example, operate out of park system sites. Agreements are also in place with educational program providers, heritage and cultural groups, sports and recreational organizations and with the Toronto District School Board, which operates the Island Public/Natural Science School on Centre Island.





Art events, programming and temporary installations attract tourists, enhance neighbourhood vitality and make art a dynamic part of the city experience. Parks, Forestry and Recreation encourages the permitted use of suitable park space for art events and programming, and supported the development of *Arts Events in Toronto Parks — A Handbook for Arts Organizations*, published by the Toronto Arts Council. Many new park designs also incorporate art-focused spaces, such as an amphitheatre space outside Warden Hilltop Community Centre and a stage in Edithvale Park.

# 3. Context for the Parks Plan

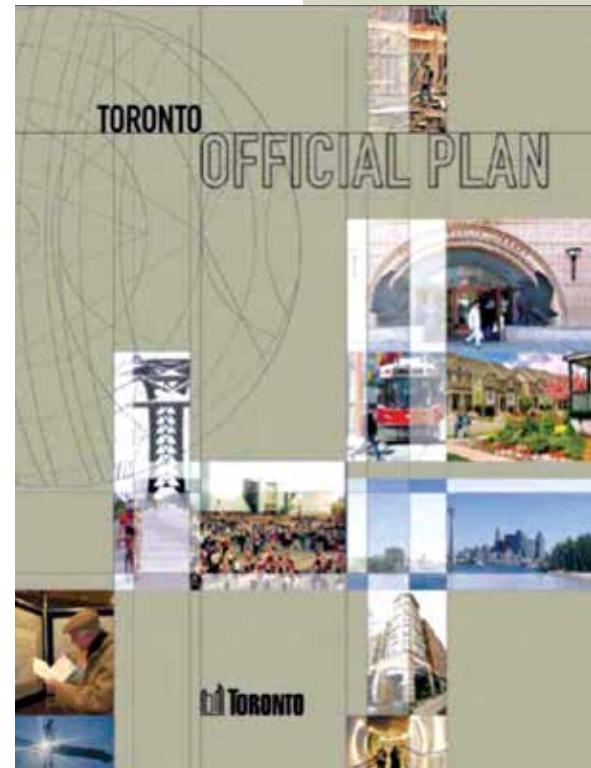
This chapter describes the context for the parks system. This includes key policies affecting parks, demographic data and changes, environmental issues, and some important historical milestones in Toronto's urban development. Along with key trends, this context informs the Parks Plan and its directions.

## 3.1 Policy context

The Parks Plan works in conjunction with the *Recreation Service Plan* and the *Strategic Forest Management Plan*. There are important connections between these plans. With Urban Forestry, Parks shares responsibility for trees, trails and natural area preservation, and residents' recreation interests are often met in park settings.

The City of Toronto Official Plan guides city development through to 2031. It lays out a vision of a city in which nature is thriving, and accessible, public spaces are connected, clean and beautiful, and people are engaged in civic life<sup>12</sup>. Many of its policies influence parks and trails including these prime examples:

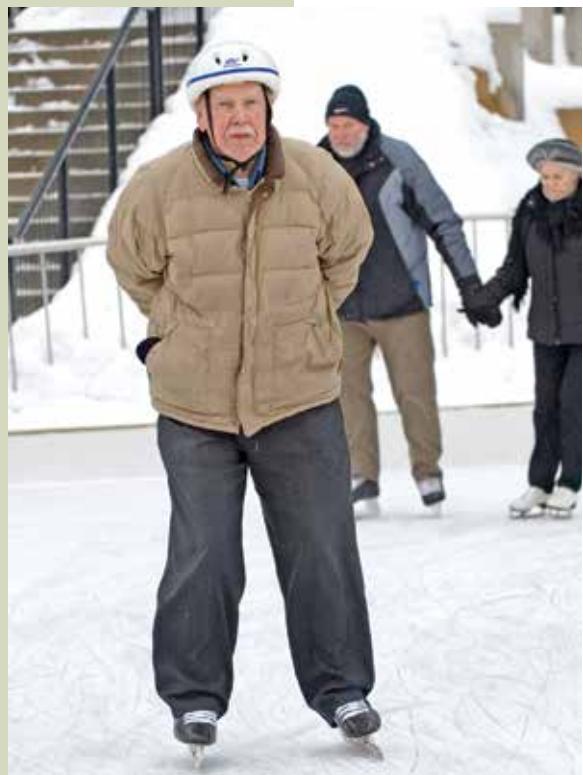
- *Green Space System and Waterfront policies* seek to preserve green space, ensure public access, and build connectivity
- *Public Realm policies* support accessible parks, natural areas and open spaces to meet needs for recreation, nature and heritage
- *Parks and Open Spaces policies* seek to build the park system, and outline parkland requirements for new development
- *Natural Environment policies* protect natural areas from pollution and development impacts and address water flow, habitat connectivity and the urban forest
- *Parks and Open Space Areas land use designations* identify lands in which development is restricted, to preserve natural areas and parks



*The City of Toronto Municipal Code*, Chapter 608, Parks, contains bylaws that are applicable to park user conduct, park uses, activities, vehicles, animals, trees, watercraft, and commercial enterprises in parks. It allows for regulation and enforcement of these activities to ensure parks are safe and enjoyable for people today and into the future. It stipulates what is and is not allowed in municipal parks, and defines many activities that require a permit<sup>13</sup>. The *City of Toronto Ravine and Natural Feature Protection Bylaw* is also important for parks. It promotes the management, protection and conservation of ravines and associated natural and woodland areas and features, including trees.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation also supports the achievement of city-wide strategies and plans, such as the *Wet Weather Flow Master Plan*, the *Climate Change Adaptation Strategy*, and many others.

### 3.2 The effects of a changing city on parks



The City of Toronto's total population is estimated at almost 2.8 million people in 2013<sup>14</sup>. This makes Toronto the fourth largest municipality in North America, after Mexico City, New York City and Los Angeles. The City of Toronto's annual population growth rate has increased steadily for the last ten years, and is now increasing at an annual rate of 38,000 people. Toronto is expected to have a population of 3.0 million by 2031<sup>15</sup>. As the city's population grows, the parks system needs to grow and evolve to continue to respond to resident needs. In recent years, the Toronto population has grown older, more culturally diverse, and less physically active. The numbers of low-income families and neighbourhoods has increased. A high level overview of key demographic trends is provided below. For a more detailed account, please see the Parks, Forestry and Recreation *Recreation Service Plan*.

**Toronto has an aging population.** Parks must maintain space for passive recreation, and still provide opportunities that enable residents of all ages to be active. In the future, an aging population will increase the demand for accessible parkland, facilities and amenities.

**Torontonians are not active enough.** Physical activity is linked to a reduced risk of many physical and mental health conditions<sup>16</sup>. Over one-fifth of youth and one-quarter of adults in Toronto are overweight or obese, and the majority of children aged 6-to-19 are not meeting the recommended daily requirements for physical activity<sup>17</sup>.

**Canadians are shifting to informal and individualized activities.** Participation rates in organized sports across Canada are declining among all age groups<sup>18</sup>. The most popular adult leisure-time activity is walking, followed by gardening, home exercise, running, swimming, and bicycling<sup>19</sup>. This shift toward unstructured activities is accompanied by a growing interest in the use of trails for recreation, exercise and active transportation<sup>20,21,22</sup>.



Other trends relevant to park service planning include:

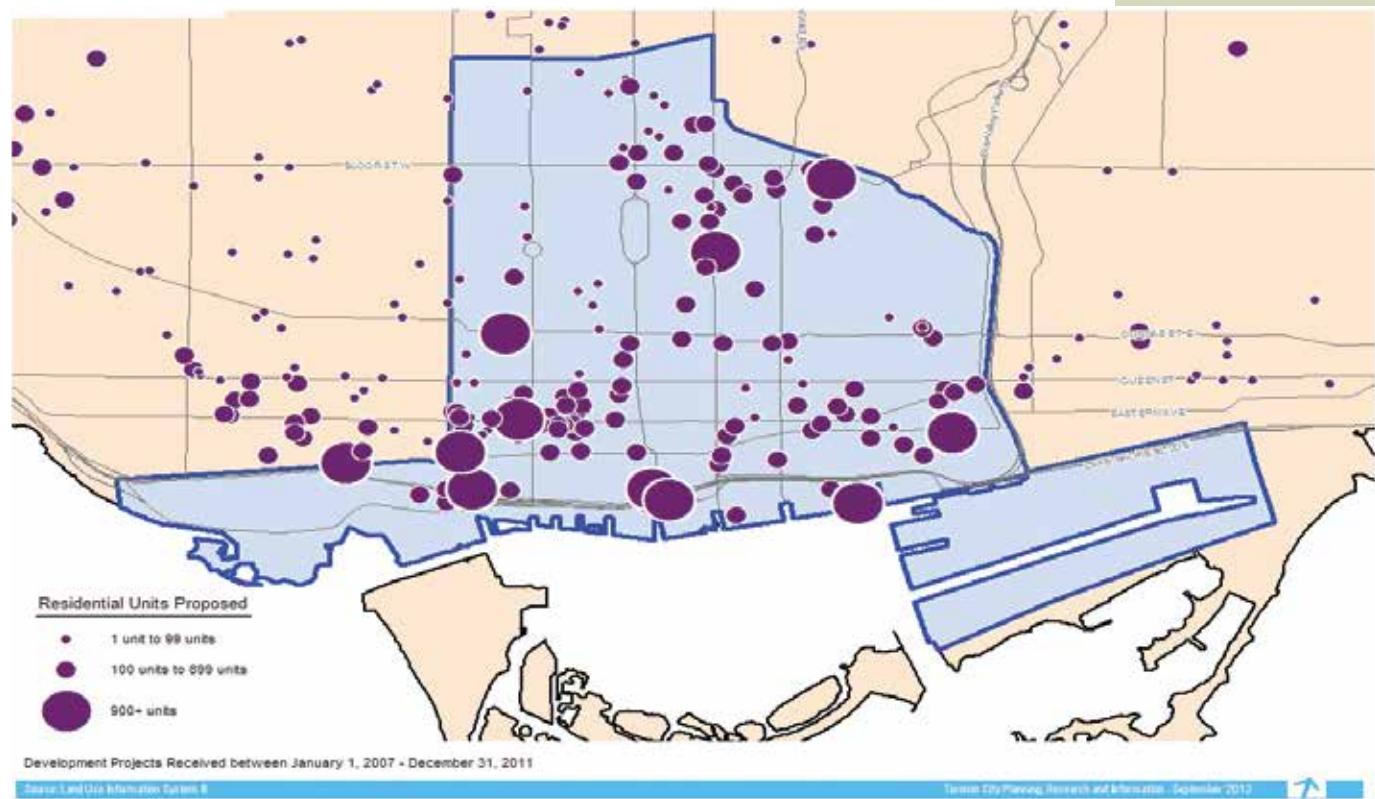
- **Volunteerism** — More than one-tenth of Canadians volunteer with sports and recreation organizations. This accounts for one-fifth of all volunteer hours, the highest for any sector<sup>23</sup>.
- **Lack of free time** — This is increasingly reported in surveys as a reason for not recreating<sup>24,25</sup>.
- **Climate change** — The effects of climate change can prolong warm weather activities into the winter months and decrease days available for winter activities such as skiing.

### 3.3 The effects of a growing city on parks

Toronto is Canada's most populous city, and it continues to grow. In keeping with Toronto's Official Plan, most of the expected population growth in Toronto will be concentrated in the Downtown and Central Waterfront areas, the four City Centres, and along the "Avenues".

Toronto has experienced a surge of both residential and non-residential growth. It leads North American municipalities in high-rise development with 184 high-rise buildings under construction as of February 2013. New York City (91) and Mexico City (88) follow in second and third place, and combined have fewer high-rise buildings under construction than Toronto<sup>26</sup>. High-rise construction in Toronto makes up 92% of all residential units approved since 2006<sup>27</sup>.

Map 3: Downtown and Central Waterfront development activity



The Downtown and Central Waterfront area is the main location for strong residential and office development, with 45% (67,700) of residential units, and 31% of the proposed non-residential development<sup>28</sup>. Availability of parkland in these areas is low relative to other areas of the city. Limited land availability and high land prices make it challenging to increase public parkland for a rapidly growing population.

Residential development is strong throughout Toronto, which means that more people will use Toronto's entire network of existing parkland. Addressing the challenge of increasing density requires strong and creative parks planning. It also signals a need for an overall rethink of the planning, design and management of green space in high-density areas by the City of Toronto, its development partners and residents in order to ensure that residents in high density areas across the city will continue to have access to parkland that meets their needs.

### 3.4 A changing environment – climate change

#### **Wet weather flow management**

Parkland soaks up stormwater and snow melt, and can help to store, carry, and filter water runoff. Some parks contain stormwater management infrastructure such as water ponds. The City has a 25-year *Wet Weather Flow Master Plan* that aims to reduce flooding, water pollution, erosion and other environmental damage. Aspects of this plan rely on parkland, and staff in Parks, Forestry and Recreation work closely with Toronto Water staff to implement it.

Toronto's *Climate Change, Clean Air and Sustainable Energy Action Plan* focuses on climate change mitigation. The related *Climate Change Adaptation Strategy* aims to prevent or minimize the negative effects of climate change. Recent climate change modelling commissioned by the City of Toronto predicts that Toronto's weather patterns will continue to change<sup>29</sup>. The predicted effects of climate change will affect Toronto's parks and trails. While some will be advantageous —fewer resources required for winter snow clearance, for example — most will present challenges:

- Shorter winters bring more freeze-thaw cycles that damage pavement and vegetation
- Warmer winters will also allow for the introduction of invasive species, such as insect pests, from warmer climates
- Extreme weather events result in wind, drought, and flooding damage to parkland
- Longer and more frequent extreme heat damages trees and vegetation, raises watering requirements and increases the need for parks to provide cooling opportunities and shade
- Reduced water levels in Lake Ontario affects marinas and stress wetlands that provide habitat for wildlife

The Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division plays an important role in both climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies. Actions such as reducing the use of fossil fuels, planting native and drought-tolerant vegetation, tree canopy expansion and supporting stormwater management are some examples of current park system responses to climate change.

Intense rainfall on August 19, 2005 was one of eight extreme weather events in Toronto between 1988 and 2008. The storm washed out a part of Finch Avenue, and caused flash flooding to creeks, rivers and ravines, eroding stream banks and damaging trees and parks. The damage to public and private property is estimated at \$400–500 million — the most expensive storm in Toronto’s history. In more recent years, including 2012, torrential rains have caused flash flooding in several ravines and parks. Bridges and trails have been washed away, and extensive damage has been done to trees, vegetation and other park infrastructure.



Edwards Gardens, 2012

### 3.5 The parks system in its historical context

Toronto parks started out as places for leisure and recreation. Established in 1856 as the city’s first park, Riverdale Park was home to the city’s zoo and its main sports fields. A focus on parks as important natural environments emerged decades later. It was not until the 1940s that the City recognized the value of its natural heritage with a Master Plan calling for the creation of a conservation region. When Metropolitan Toronto was created in 1953 it established a parks system grounded in Toronto’s river valleys and developed city-wide parks with natural areas, partly in response to the need for lands for flood protection.

Both of these shifts correspond to the circumstances of their time. At the turn of the last century Toronto was a rapidly growing and industrializing city with a large population, particularly children, in need of spaces to play and relax. In the 1950s, the dramatic effects of Hurricane Hazel and signs of environmental change brought on by increasing industry and technology raised interest in parks as places for nature conservation.

Today, Toronto’s growing size and diversity is influencing the role of parks. With more people living in the city the need for parks to serve as communal gathering places and respite from an increasingly dense urban environment is increasing. Across the globe, policymakers, professionals and the public recognize the potential for parks to contribute to broader social goals related to public health, community building, education, transportation, youth development, community revitalization and more. More holistic understanding about connectivity and the public realm also demonstrates that parks no longer function as individual green spaces, but together create a parks system that is part of a much greater whole.

These are positive and exciting changes that offer great opportunity to plan and develop parks as a shared resource for all. They also create new challenges, as parks simply cannot be all things to all people. Parks, Forestry and Recreation, traditionally focused on preserving and maintaining green space through on-the-ground operations, is increasingly faced with managing issues of competing demand, new expectations and intensive use. This requires new thinking, approaches, and tools for planning, managing and sharing parkland.

The following chapters provide information on how Parks, Forestry and Recreation currently plans, manages and operates Toronto's public parkland, followed by a set of directions that provide outcomes to be achieved through the Plan's implementation. Each chapter focuses on one of the four Parks Plan themes —communicate and connect with users, preserve and protect nature, maintain quality parks, improve system planning — and concludes with a set of future directions.

# 4. Communicate and connect with users

## 4.1 Introduction

Connecting people to parks involves raising awareness about what the parks system has to offer, making information available to residents and visitors, and providing opportunities for people to use parkland in ways that meet their needs. It also includes facilitating volunteerism and stewardship, working with partners to improve parks, and engaging residents in park planning, design and programming.

This chapter will outline the results of the Parks Plan consultation as it relates to communicating and connecting with users. This is followed by a series of directions and recommended actions, in the context of the existing opportunities and challenges.

## 4.2 What we heard on communicating and connecting with users

Residents and stakeholders emphasized the need for increased and improved communication using multiple methods, including an improved website, print materials, maps, on-site information in parks, and social media. Marketing is needed, as are improved way-finding, maps and signage that provide context, for example by explaining naturalization.

The public and stakeholders expressed that they are seeking more detailed and up-to-date information about parks to:

- Increase awareness about park features that attract users – especially through maps
- Inform their decisions about park use
- Learn about volunteer and engagement opportunities
- Learn about the natural environment

Many Parks Plan consultation participants reported that Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff should consider the needs of newcomers, people with disabilities, and other groups facing communications barriers when making information available.

Participants said that dialogue and consultation should be increased and improved through more local outreach. Some participants recommended more meetings and surveys, and many commented that consultations should be well publicized, sincere, involve experts and be inclusive so that not only the loudest voices are heard. Community Advisory Groups were identified as a good structure for local consultation.

Consultation participants expressed a desire for more, and more meaningful, involvement in parks, indicating that people need



6% of all comments from the Parks Plan consultation were about improving communication about parks.

95% of Parks Plan survey respondents report that it is important that the City engage people when planning and designing parks, and partner with community groups, corporate donors and volunteers to provide the best services possible.  
(see page 26 for one example)

Half of Parks Plan survey respondents reported that information about the ways in which residents can get involved with parks is not readily available.

more information about how they can get involved. Involvement can take many forms, with parks friends groups and Adopt-a-Park programs identified as good options. Many participants suggested increasing volunteerism to support stewardship activities and seasonal events. The consultation results indicate that people engage in parks through participating in events and programming, as well as by using the permit system.

Participants reported that dedicated, qualified and available staff is important for engagement, and that Parks, Forestry and Recreation requires additional staff capacity and resources in this area. Comments suggest that the Division's role is to facilitate involvement. They felt that staff should partner with a variety of stakeholders and that clear guidelines between Parks and park interest groups are needed.

64% of Parks Plan survey respondents stated that they are willing to donate to a charitable foundation for the operation, maintenance and improvement of City parks.

Many participants felt that sponsorship and fundraising bring important resources to parks. However, participants also indicated that risks to public space must be carefully considered, including concerns about commercialization and the equitable distribution of these funds. Opinions about how to recognize the contributions of private partners and sponsors varied, with some supporting limited and tasteful recognition and others opposed to commercialization, particularly with respect to naming rights. Suggestions to enhance

partnership include a streamlined process and an adequate staff capacity to support partnerships. Comments also indicated that it should be easier to get information on needs and priorities, and to donate time or money.

Consultation comments indicated that the permitting system should be better publicized, simplified and made more accessible.

**Based on consultation results and research conducted for the Parks Plan, the following directions are proposed in support of communicating and connecting with users:**

1. Improve communications and outreach
2. Increase opportunities for resident, group and stakeholder involvement
3. Improve the permitting system to enhance park use

### **4.3 Direction 1 – Improve communications and outreach**

Promote Toronto's extensive parks and ravines as one of the most unique, important and exciting features of the city. Get both tourists and residents to realize the value and the potential of the parks.

*Consultation participant*

Information about parks and trails is currently available through the Parks, Forestry and Recreation website, pamphlets and maps, and in city-wide publications such as the FUN Guide. Park signs provide information and direction, communicate rules, and encourage learning. Current signage on City parkland is variable with respect to its style, content, age, placement, accessibility and condition.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation communicates with the public regularly through the process of maintaining parks, responding to community requests, and providing services. Residents can also

get parks information through 311, which can currently access interpreters in 180 languages and offers TTY service for hearing impaired callers.

Limited information is currently available to the public on the accessibility of parks and trails for people with disabilities. Some progress has been made by updating the Parks website, but people with disabilities need information that lets them plan and prepare for park visits. An updated and accessible website with user-friendly information on accessibility is needed, as is signage and wayfinding that considers needs associated with a range of disabilities.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation recognizes the need to improve communications as a way to encourage park use, improve access to parks and trails, and build support for park values, including respect for the natural environment.

### **Recommended action**

#### **1.1 Improve promotion and access to information regarding parks and trails by implementing a comprehensive communications and outreach strategy.**

Improvements to website content, navigation and accessibility, and exploration of social media options are in high demand. Updated and useful resources and maps for hard copy and online dissemination will significantly improve access to information, support public education and facilitate community involvement. Signage improvements will be made where possible to enhance way-finding and access to information about natural and cultural heritage. Innovative methods for effectively communicating with specific target communities, such as newcomers, seniors, as well as potential park donors and partners will be pursued. The Division will enhance information about parks, trails and facilities that are accessible for people with disabilities.

## **4.4 Direction 2 – Increase opportunities for resident, group and stakeholder involvement**

### **Park planning and design**

When planning and designing new parks or park improvements, Parks, Forestry and Recreation typically involves the community through meetings, open houses or workshops. Consultation ensures that parks meet community needs and expectations, and can also lead to other forms of community involvement by drawing together motivated residents who may follow up with fundraising or other activities for specific park improvements.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation will build its capacity for community engagement. Staff will identify ways to ensure involvement early on in the decision-making process, timely outreach, and multiple consultation formats. Additionally, staff will seek to provide convenient meeting times and locations, ensure the inclusion of diverse residents, and consistently report back to participants.



Work with and support local groups in the planning process by providing them tools to be successful.

*Consultation participant*



Make staff more visible—friendly ambassadors, increase opportunities for public involvement in stewardship opportunities.

I live adjacent to a small neighbourhood park. I know that we and our neighbours would like to contribute to the upkeep of our park, but are not sure how to do it.

*Consultation participants*

## Volunteerism and stewardship

Toronto's parks system benefits from volunteers including local associations, park groups, event organizers, fundraising committees, advisory groups and more. Volunteers contribute time, effort and energy to augment and support the work of staff. This creates a shared sense of purpose, promotes community building, engages diverse residents, and supports park quality.

Park-related volunteerism includes one-time events, short-term initiatives and long-term involvement, such as through Advisory Councils, park friends groups and others. Parks, Forestry and Recreation volunteer programs that support parks include the Parkland Naturalization, Community Stewardship, Community Garden and Children's Eco Programs.

Community initiated and supported clean-ups, planting, and playground construction events are important ways that local groups, schools and corporations get involved in parks. Individuals and groups also work with staff to provide informal maintenance support such as litter picking and weeding. Additional volunteer activities take place through partnerships, for example the High Park Stewardship Volunteer Program, coordinated by the non-profit organization High Park Nature. Volunteerism in parks augments, not replaces, work done by City staff, and enhances the quality of parks.

**Stewardship** refers to the careful, responsible and sustainable management of resources. In the context of parks, it refers to a sense of shared responsibility to protect natural and cultural resources. Many forms of park volunteerism contribute to stewardship.

There is a need to better define, communicate, facilitate and manage the many volunteer opportunities that exist throughout the park system in order to make them more visible and accessible to residents. Practical guidance, resources and tools are also needed to support staff in managing volunteers.



## Partnership

Parks, Forestry and Recreation partnership relationships can be informal or formal, short or long term. They can involve community, public or private sector partners and address programming, services, volunteerism, park improvement, fundraising, sponsorship or any combination of these activities.

Partnerships that bring new resources into the parks system are increasing, and Parks, Forestry and Recreation facilitates partnership, donation and revenue opportunities available through partners, funders, community groups, and individual donors.

Since 2008, there has been steady growth in both financial and in-kind contributions, with \$3.1 million secured in 2012 alone. Typical projects include playground refurbishment and replacement, sports field improvements, rink and sports court refurbishment, park beautification and tree planting. Approval processes are in place to ensure that projects are viable and match existing priorities.

Collaboration with fundraising partners supports this work. The Toronto Parks and Trees Foundation is a registered charity that promotes park fundraising at the community level and can support community groups in administering funds. Park People is a city-wide group that raises public awareness about parks, and encourages and supports the growth of friends of groups to animate and improve local parks.



**The High Park Zoo** was slated to close following the City's 2012 Core Services Review. Rather than accept the loss of this historic attraction, a group of residents came together to raise funds for the \$230,000 annual zoo operating cost. Volunteers distributed flyers, sold colouring books and other items, set up donation boxes, and engaged local schools in fundraising.

As momentum grew, fundraisers partnered with the Toronto Parks and Trees Foundation to receive donations, and engaged community and other partners to provide support such as meeting space and website services. The Honey Foundation provided a \$50,000 matching grant for \$50,000 received in community donations. Another \$30,000 anonymous donation was made.

Over a six-month period from February to September 2012, these activities raised \$283,350 and the Friends of the High Park Zoo was established as an incorporated non-profit organization. Through ongoing fundraising, and with \$50,000 in matching grants pledged by the Honey Foundation for 2013 and 2014, this passionate group plans to continue to raise the funds needed to keep the zoo open over the long term.

Make it easier for people to donate to specific parks or projects.

*Consultation participant*

Parks, Forestry and Recreation will continue to work with partners to provide opportunities and benefits that could not otherwise be afforded, while ensuring parks are accessible to all. This work will consider the equitable distribution of resources within the park system by encouraging partners to support existing capital projects, developing partnerships that engage and benefit the

City's diverse communities, and by working with community partners to identify new opportunities for partnership activities and benefits for communities across the city. Parks, Forestry and Recreation recognizes that recognition of support should be tasteful, appropriate, and not detract from the public's enjoyment of parks.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation understands that some communities and neighbourhoods are under-served and may require more targeted outreach to build their capacity for engaging with the park system. The Division will work to assess local demographics and needs, and collaborate with local community organizations on how to remove barriers to community participation, parkland redevelopment and program participation.

### **Park interest groups**

Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff is increasingly receiving requests from residents and groups to collaborate with organizations that work to enhance local parks. Since the founding of the organization Park People in 2011 for example, the number of "friends-of" parks groups has grown significantly, up to 75 in 2013. As the number of parks groups increases, there is a need for dedicated staff time and expertise in community engagement so that high quality parks operations are maintained, and the rising demand for public involvement is met.

## **Recommended actions**

- 2.1 Establish an urban park ranger program to facilitate community involvement, provide public education, support problem solving and increase staff presence in parks.** Urban park rangers will serve as the primary point of contact for individuals and groups wanting to engage with the parks system and build relationships with community stakeholders. They will promote community involvement opportunities, help individuals and groups to navigate the parks system, ensure that people are connected to existing involvement opportunities, and facilitate community-led innovation with respect to public involvement in parks. As an identifiable staff presence in parks, urban park rangers will interact with the public, support park monitoring and problem solving, and provide bylaw information and education. These activities will improve customer service and support public involvement in parks.

- 2.2 Create and implement a community engagement framework that provides guiding principles and sets priorities for community engagement in the parks system.** A community engagement framework will recommend an approach for ongoing consultation and dialogue to ensure active community participation in the planning, operation and programming of parks. The framework will set out values to guide engagement, and establish engagement priorities and processes. It will evolve and change over time, and be based on input from communities and partners.
- 2.3 Develop a centralized volunteer management system.** An effective volunteer management system will enable Parks, Forestry and Recreation to maintain information on volunteer opportunities, and enhance the ability of Parks staff to connect residents with appropriate and meaningful volunteer experiences. The system will support volunteer supervision, retention and recognition.
- 2.4 Continue to expand donation, partnership and sponsorship opportunities** Parks, Forestry and Recreation will develop an inventory of park improvement needs and publicize these needs to promote partnership opportunities. Parks, Forestry and Recreation will clarify and streamline partnership definitions, objectives and processes. Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff will build capacity and skills to support partnership, and encourage the equitable distribution of partnership funds across the park system.

#### **4.5 Direction 3 – Improve the permitting system to enhance park use**

Permits contribute to park use, programming and animation by enabling individuals and groups to reserve park space. Park permits let users access specific spaces or facilities on a regular or occasional basis, prevent conflict between users, provide information that park staff need in order to plan for service delivery, and can help to prevent the overuse of facilities. The revenue from park permits also supports the maintenance and operation of parks.

Current data collection systems focus on facility type and permitted hours, and gather little information on how many users are served and who those users are. Even less information is available on groups who provide programming through the permit system and maintain their own monitoring systems. Improved data collection methods to better understand and report on park use through the permitting system are a priority for Parks, Forestry and Recreation. This will support improved service planning and help to assess and address equitable access.

**Table 5: Parks permits available through Parks, Forestry and Recreation**

Seasonal Permits	One-time & Spot Permits	Outdoor Special Event Permits	Commercial Permits
<p><i>Issued for:</i></p> <p>Rinks, pools, sports fields, stadium, tennis courts, allotment garden plots, room rentals and indoor gyms.</p> <p>Seasonal permits are issued for activities that operate continually over the course of a season, such as tennis clubs and soccer leagues.</p>	<p><i>Issued for:</i></p> <p>Site bookings that are occasional or short in duration e.g. one day or multiple days.</p> <p>Examples include booking space in parks or park facilities for wedding ceremonies, still photography, filming, picnics and social gatherings, or sports events.</p>	<p><i>Issued for:</i></p> <p>Events that are open and free to the public, and organized by non-profit groups.</p> <p>Examples include concerts, community fairs, and cultural events.</p>	<p><i>Issued for:</i></p> <p>Providers that charge fees to offer organized recreation activities or services on parkland (e.g. yoga, boot camps). This includes permits for commercial dog walkers and commercial filming.</p>

Each permit type has its own application process, with requirements and timelines that reflect the type of use and potential impact to the park and local community involved in the event, as well as processing by other City agencies such as Toronto Public Health.

Permit fees are set by City Council and reviewed annually. When permit fees present a barrier to use, not-for-profit groups may apply to have fees reduced or waived in accordance with the Council-approved Reduction in Permit Fees Policy. Parks, Forestry and Recreation recognizes that the requirement for insurance associated with many permits can present a logistical or financial challenge for some groups. It is currently not possible to waive this requirement, however Parks, Forestry and Recreation is exploring ways to address this issue.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation provides fair and equitable access to its facilities. However, some of the challenges faced by the public in accessing parks through the permit system include:

- **Awareness of the permit system as a doorway to park use** The Parks, Forestry and Recreation website provides user-friendly information on permit types and the application process. To date however, the permit system has not been actively promoted to residents. Future communications and community engagement will enhance public information and education about the permit process as a portal for community park use and involvement.
- **Ability to navigate the system** The permit system works well for many users, particularly those who use it regularly and are familiar with its requirements. However, first time and occasional users, as well as residents facing linguistic, cultural and communication barriers, can find it difficult to navigate. A review of the permit system from this perspective is required in order to improve access for all users.

- **Policies to address emerging needs and challenges** The recent introduction of fees for some users of sports fields include a direction from Council to create a policy to prevent groups from booking large blocks of time they do not use, which makes permits less available for others. Additional policies and guidelines are needed to address emerging permitting issues, such as enabling community-based markets that support access to food and small-scale local economic development in high need areas, while protecting parks from inappropriate commercial activity.

## Recommended actions

- 3.1 **Improve the permitting system by increasing online information and services.** An online permitting system will be developed to make it easier for residents, groups and organizations to book permits, and to improve customer service. Online information about park and facility availability will be expanded to further improve the customer experience and increase opportunities for park use and participation. Improvements to the permit process will also include the ability to purchase ferry tickets and book golf tee times online.
- 3.2 **Conduct a review of the permitting system from a customer service perspective.** Review of the permitting system will examine ease of use and cost as access barriers. Improvements will be made through consultation with community and permit groups, and with park stakeholder groups. Parks, Forestry and Recreation will also consult with other City Divisions that affect permit access to find ways to further improve access.
- 3.3 **Enhance reporting standards for permits to measure the use of parks, and to achieve equity goals through permitting.** Improved permit management and data collection will provide valuable information on the use of parks facilities and on user groups. This will support park and facility planning, as well as the assessment and achievement of equitable access goals. Data improvements will enable more informed decision-making and better access to permit information for residents and groups.

## 4.6 Conclusion – Communicate and connect with users

Parks, Forestry and Recreation recognizes that public support and involvement improves parks, and that it needs to build its capacity to encourage and facilitate participation. In the short term, this involves improving communications and better promoting and streamlining existing options for public involvement in, and contribution to parks. In order to effectively meet rising demand for community involvement over the long term, community engagement must be embedded into Parks, Forestry and Recreation operating frameworks and strategies. This is reflected in the directions below:

Directions	Recommended actions
<b>1.</b> Improve communications and outreach	<b>1.1</b> Improve promotion and access to information regarding parks and trails by implementing a comprehensive communications and outreach strategy
<b>2.</b> Increase opportunities for resident, group and stakeholder involvement	<b>2.1</b> Establish an urban park ranger program to facilitate community involvement, provide public education, support problem solving and increase staff presence in parks <b>2.2</b> Create and implement a community engagement framework that provides guiding principles and sets priorities for community engagement in the park system <b>2.3</b> Develop a centralized volunteer management system <b>2.4</b> Continue to expand donation, partnership and sponsorship opportunities
<b>3.</b> Improve the permitting system to enhance park use	<b>3.1</b> Improve the permitting system by increasing online information and services <b>3.2</b> Conduct a review of the permitting system from a customer service perspective <b>3.3</b> Enhance reporting standards for permits to measure the use of parks, and to achieve equity goals through permitting

# 5. Preserve and promote nature

## 5.1 Introduction

At 12.7% of the city's land area, the park system represents a significant proportion of the city, and the majority of the Toronto's green space. It includes many of the City's natural areas that consist of remnants of the native landscape including forests, meadows, wetlands and shorelines. It also includes other unique lands, such as Tommy Thompson Park, a five kilometre long peninsula created through lakefilling. A large proportion of natural area parkland lies on lands owned by the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) and managed by Parks, Forestry and Recreation for park, recreational and conservation purposes.

In Toronto, as in most urban centres, natural areas and systems are under pressure from environmental factors such as city building, invasive species, and heavy recreational use. Today's decisions will affect future generations, and responsible stewardship is essential. Extensive and innovative work is being done in Toronto to protect, restore and enhance natural area parkland. These activities support the achievement of City environmental goals described in the Official Plan and related initiatives. The Parks Plan builds on this work.

This chapter will address what we heard on preserving and promoting nature, followed by a series of directions and recommended actions, in the context of existing opportunities and challenges.

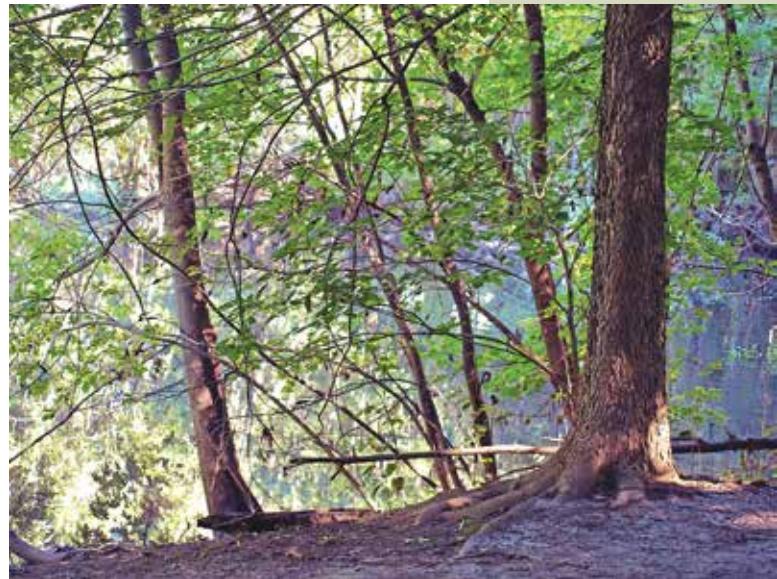
## 5.2 What we heard on preserving and promoting nature

Almost 93% of survey respondents reported that it is 'very important' that the City strives to protect Toronto's natural areas, woodlands and ravines. Moreover, 85.5% state that it is 'very important' that the City strives to ensure that parks and trails meet current environmental standards and are maintained, designed and used in an environmentally responsible way. Overall, survey results demonstrate a very strong appreciation for the natural environment and urban forest.

Many participants expressed a desire for education on a variety of topics such as nature, environmental practices and proper park use. They also indicated that Parks, Forestry and Recreation should encourage more hands-on stewardship activities and events. Specific suggestions included expanding the existing Community Stewardship Program, more clean-up and planting events, invasive species removal, linking stewardship with school curricula, and more outdoor environmental programming.

Natural areas provide many ecosystem services such as:

- oxygen production and air purification
- habitat
- temperature moderation
- noise reduction
- shade
- erosion control
- flood control
- soil formation
- pollination
- nutrient cycling
- water filtration



11% of all consultation comments received addressed natural areas, ravines and trees. Almost all expressed support for protecting and enhancing nature in the city.

99% of Parks Plan survey respondents agree that natural areas and woodlands are important features of City parks and ravines.

Many residents and stakeholders value natural areas and support their expansion. Some participants reported a desire for less mowing and manicuring, while others prefer traditionally maintained park environments. Residents and stakeholders expressed concern about the potential impacts of development on natural areas. Additional suggestions for protecting natural areas included strong policies and enforcement to prevent and address encroachment, and restricting the recreational use of sensitive natural areas.

Education for all age groups! When people understand the delicate balance of nature and how nature helps us in the city (oxygen + respite from the concrete) they will be more inclined to respect it and then possibly take care of it.

*Consultation participant*

99% of Parks Plan survey respondents reported that it is important to protect trees in City parks and ravines.

There was strong and consistent support for growing the tree canopy. Tree watering, regular tree maintenance and the replacement of aging and unhealthy trees were identified as important activities. Residents and stakeholders suggested that Parks, Forestry and Recreation should plant more native tree and plant species. Many comments referred to the need for strategies aimed at managing invasive species. Invasive species control was also frequently mentioned as an opportunity for public involvement in natural environment and park stewardship activities.

Consultation participants identified parks as important sites for environmental initiatives and innovation. Suggestions included using parks as demonstration sites for environmental initiatives, more funding for environmental work, exploration of new technologies and increased collaboration with other City Divisions.

**Based on consultation results and research conducted for the Parks Plan, the following directions are proposed in support of preserving and promoting nature:**

4. Improve the management of natural areas
5. Improve natural environment trails
6. Integrate emerging trends and technologies into parks operations

### 5.3 Direction 4: Improve the management of natural areas

#### Natural areas

Approximately 13.5%, or 8,595 hectares of Toronto's land area consists of natural areas — most of this is forest and meadowland that lie within the ravine system and along the lakeshore<sup>30</sup>. Almost half of the publicly accessible/owned natural area land is City-owned parkland, the rest is owned and operated by the TRCA and other agencies and private owners. Toronto's natural areas are part of a large regional ecosystem that extends beyond the boundaries of the City all the way to the Oak Ridges Moraine and Ontario's Greenbelt, an area of protected green space, farmland, forests, wetlands and watersheds.

Natural areas give form and identity to the city and provide habitat for flora and fauna. Some offer opportunities for recreation and leisure. Their natural beauty promotes an appreciation for nature and provides relief from the hard surfaces of the city. Natural areas also provide many ecosystem services needed for human health and well-being such as air and water purification.

Toronto's Official Plan outlines that strong communities and a competitive economy need a healthy natural environment. It sets policies and land use designations that protect, restore and enhance the natural environment. The city's natural heritage system is a mosaic of natural features and functions that includes significant features such as landforms, watercourses and associated riparian (riverbank) zones, valley slopes and floodplains, forests, wetlands, meadows, beaches and bluffs. These habitats support an impressive variety of plants and animals including significant species and provide many irreplaceable ecological functions.

Protecting the natural heritage system from encroachment and inappropriate uses is important given the relatively small amount of natural area that remains in Toronto. With the city's population expected to grow to 3 million residents by 2031<sup>31</sup>, there will be growing pressure on natural areas as people seek out opportunities to experience nature. A challenge will be to ensure that natural parklands and the significant natural areas within them continue to function and flourish so that they can be enjoyed by future generations.

### Environmentally Significant Areas

Environmentally significant areas (ESAs) are areas of local and regional environmental significance. These areas contribute disproportionately to biodiversity in Toronto. They provide habitats for rare, threatened or endangered species, and contain unusually large or diverse habitats or rare or unusual landforms. They serve as wildlife migratory stopover locations, concentration points or water storage and recharge areas. The Official Plan requires that ESAs be identified and protected. Eighteen ESAs are designated in the Official Plan. Dozens of additional sites across the City have been identified and are expected to be added to the Official Plan through amendment. The majority of areas that meet the ESA criteria are located within publicly owned parkland in valleys and ravines and along the waterfront. Where these are located within the public parks system, park planning, management plans, budgets and enhanced operating practices will be required to protect these areas and ensure that their use is compatible with the preservation of their natural features and functions.



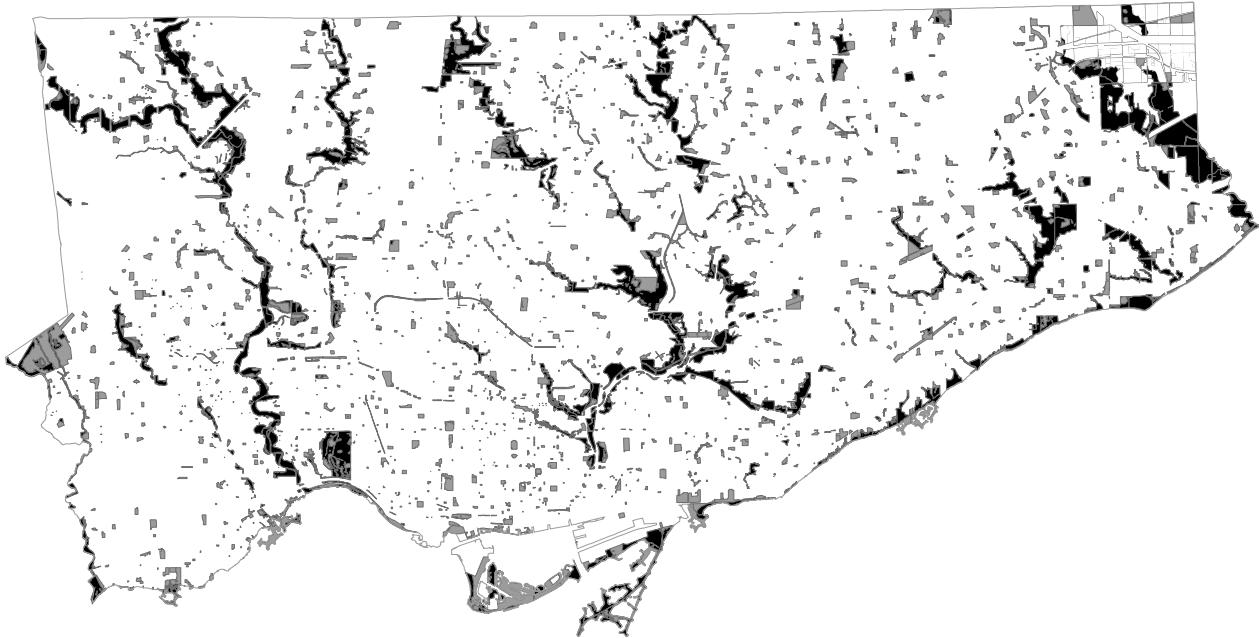
"The ravines are to Toronto what canals are to Venice, hills are to San Francisco and the Thames River is to London. They are the heart of the City's emotional geography, and understanding Toronto requires an understanding of the ravines."

*Accidental City*, Robert Fulford

It is wonderful to have these oasis places especially with the growing inner city density and life in high rises. It is very important for air quality too.

*Consultation participant*

**Map 4: City of Toronto Parkland with Natural Heritage Features (2013)**



Source: City of Toronto Natural Heritage Study, 2001  
Natural Heritage defined as areas with significant habitat, areas in the  
riparian zone and areas with a slope greater than 10 degrees

January 2013

**Park Area with Natural Heritage Features**  
**City of Toronto Parkland**

### Natural area management

Parks, Forestry and Recreation leads natural area management on City of Toronto parkland. Natural area management involves close collaboration with the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA), Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (OMNR) and other City divisions, such as City Planning, Toronto Water and Transportation Services. Ideally every natural area should receive natural area management and monitoring on a regular basis. However, limited resources mean that attention is focused on areas of known priority and threat, for example those with rare species.

A key challenge for natural area planning and management is making decisions that produce the best quality experience for residents and visitors while protecting the ecological integrity of the natural environment. As Toronto's population grows and pressures on natural areas increase, achieving this balance is increasingly difficult. Current natural area management issues include:

- Rising recreational and other use pressures
- Insufficient infrastructure to direct activity away from sensitive sites
- Impacts of climate change, such as extended seasons, extreme weather and spread of new invasive species
- Limited public awareness of how to respect the natural environment and the value of natural areas
- Encroachment by private landowners onto parkland, for example the extension of structures or fill onto parkland

## **Heavy use and sustainability**

Rising population density and limited opportunities for parkland growth are resulting in more people using the City's parkland. This is, for the most part, a positive trend that can be supported by

adjusting maintenance practices and the design and distribution of park features and amenities. In some settings, however, overuse or misuse negatively affects the quality and sustainability of parkland.

Natural areas are vulnerable to heavy use, as they have low 'wear tolerance' and natural ecosystems deteriorate relatively quickly under conditions of overuse.

Other park spaces, such as sports fields and popular event sites are also affected. High demand for soccer, cricket and other sports leaves many existing fields in poor condition from intensive overuse, and large or frequent events can strain the overall park environment.



Natural environments have a threshold (or "tipping point") for disruption beyond which severe and possibly irreversible damage is done to ecological health.

Knowing where thresholds exist and when they are reached is important for understanding and managing the impacts of use. It allows for the development of early warning systems to identify at-risk locations so that timely action can protect them.

The use of parkland needs to be compatible with its physical capacities. Parks, Forestry and Recreation currently has little data on how many people use city parks, how parks are used, and how high levels of use impact parks. This makes it challenging to prevent issues that might arise and as a result problems are dealt with case-by-case, often once damage has already been done.

### **Case study: Impact and cost of overuse in Queens Park North**

*Queen's Park North is a tremendously popular event site. While past numerous events created a sense of vibrancy, they strained the physical environment, stressed the tree canopy, compacted the soil, and damaged turf, pathways and park amenities. Some of this damage was a result of event organizers not adhering to permit conditions, such as keeping vehicles out of the park. The City of Toronto issued a moratorium on permits in this park for 2012 so that restoration work, at a cost of over \$600,000, could take place. It was concluded that permitting the park for events in the future needs to be based on ecological markers (e.g. tree roots exposed by soil compaction), the condition of park amenities, soil conditions, weather and overall use levels.*

I have attended festivals in parks and unfortunately this is very damaging to the trees and grasses. I think Toronto needs a number of festival sites for festivals so that the parks don't sustain a lot of damage.

*Consultation participant*

Research and experience in Toronto and elsewhere show that with careful planning, management and public education it is possible to encourage use and protect green spaces<sup>92</sup>. Better information is needed to measure and monitor capacity issues in different park spaces such as sports fields, natural areas and event sites. With this information, site-specific design, management, public education and other proactive strategies will be put into place to prevent, manage and mitigate the negative impacts of high use. Education is needed to ensure that residents and trail users better understand their impact on these areas.

## Recommended actions

- 4.1 Implement a program to strengthen the management of sensitive natural areas to ensure that environmentally significant areas are protected and continue to function and flourish for the long term.** Parks, Forestry and Recreation will establish a program that uses Environmentally Significant Area (ESA) mapping to identify, select and prioritize management areas and develop practices for their management and maintenance in order to support the consistent and long-term management of natural areas. This program will ensure that Parks, Forestry and Recreation and its natural area management partners operate with a shared framework that identifies natural area management objectives, establishes short and long-term priorities, assigns clear roles and responsibilities, identifies management strategies and supports monitoring.
- 4.2 Determine thresholds of use and develop criteria and measures to protect parkland from excessive use.** Some parkland (e.g. natural areas) is particularly vulnerable to heavy use. Parks, Forestry and Recreation will establish criteria to determine appropriate use and set measurable thresholds beyond which protection measures will come into effect. Criteria will include factors such as soil compaction, ability to sustain turf and vegetation, industry standards, location, features, use, tree canopy, and environmental protection requirements. Protection measures may include design, land allocation, management, permitting, restricting use, strategic acquisition, park standard adjustments and other approaches. The availability of these combined tools will support short and long-term efforts to encourage use and protect parkland for all Torontonians.
- 4.3 Increase staff knowledge and skills to better manage environmentally sensitive lands.** With the addition of newly identified Environmentally Significant Areas (ESAs), natural area management principles and practices need to be integrated into day-to-day park management and maintenance. Strategies to achieve this include staff training, and the review of park standards to ensure alignment with natural area management principles and Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) sustainability guidelines.

## 5.4 Direction 5 – Improve natural environment trails

The extensive network of more than 300 kilometres of informal, natural surface (dirt) trails within parkland and ravines is an important part of Toronto's overall trail system. These trails are highly valued by hikers, dog-walkers, school and camp groups, mountain bikers and nature enthusiasts. This trail network is currently largely unmanaged, resulting in both a lost opportunity to enhance the parks system, and a liability for the City. Risks include damage through unauthorized trail creation, unsustainable trail use and related ecological damage through erosion, vegetation trampling and soil compaction.

As Toronto's population grows, there is a growing need for careful planning, design, management and maintenance of these trails to ensure the protection, restoration and enhancement of natural areas while enabling access to safe and enjoyable recreation.

Crothers Woods is a 52-hectare ecologically significant mature maple-beech-oak woodland in the Don River valley. Hikers, joggers, mountain bikers, dog walkers and nature enthusiasts actively use this ravine parkland. After decades of use as an unplanned and informal trail system, significant environmental damage included trampling of plants, erosion and soil compaction. This led to the creation of the Parks, Forestry and Recreation Natural Environment Trails Program, an innovative, community-based initiative to improve the long-term sustainability of recreational nature trails while protecting the woodlands, meadows and wetlands that surround them.

Through extensive data collection including trail user counts, user surveys and community engagement, the Crothers Woods Trail Management Strategy was created and implemented to guide the preservation and restoration of existing natural heritage features while creating safe, logical, and sustainable trails. The program engaged users in the construction of new multi-use natural-surface trails, closing and restoring eroded and unsustainable trails, and constructing several trailheads to develop approximately 10 kilometres of sustainable natural surface trails. These trails are promoted through print materials and the City's website and have become a popular destination for residents and visitors. At the same time, these trails protect the natural environment by directing users away from sensitive areas and create opportunities to educate and engage residents through stewardship activities such as invasive species removal.

This program offers a model for improving natural trails across the City, which require comparatively little to plan, build and manage, and can yield high returns in terms of environmental protection, education, community involvement and recreation.



Embrace natural surface (dirt) trails — people are looking for this kind of experience.

*Consultation participant*

## Recommended action

- 5.1 Develop and implement a program to plan, design, manage and maintain natural environment trails on parkland and in ravines to ensure the protection, restoration and enhancement of natural areas. This trail network represents an important opportunity to advance natural environment objectives in the city's ravine ecosystems. Parks, Forestry and Recreation will establish a program to support sustainable trails that are planned, designed and managed to protect natural areas and engage residents through stewardship. As part of overall trails planning efforts, this program will improve connectivity between multi-use and natural environment trails, making the trail system more cohesive for users.

### Healthy turf, vegetation and flower beds improve urban environmental quality by:

- Providing a cooling effect and oxygenation to improve air quality
- Filtering contaminants before they reach ground water
- Holding soil in place, preventing erosion
- Providing habitat
- Providing shade

## 5.5 Direction 6 – Integrate emerging trends and technologies in park operations

Parks, Forestry and Recreation is governed by the City of Toronto's environmental policies and contributes to the achievement of City environmental goals and objectives. The Division also partners with the Toronto Region and Conservation Authority to fulfill our shared green mandate. A wide range of initiatives incorporate environmental sustainability into parks. These include:

- **Integrated Plant Health Care (IPHC)** This is an active plant management strategy based on an understanding of how plants grow and function. It combines plant maintenance practices such as soil management with Integrated Pest Management (IPM), which reduces pest populations to acceptable levels using pesticides as a last resort only. IPHC practices respond to community needs, are environmentally sound, healthy and sustainable, and protect the City's financial investment in parkland. The introduction of a pilot Plant Health Care crew for turf operations, along with specially trained sports field crews in 2013 will help to expand the use of IPHC on parkland.
- **Green design and development** For park buildings, this is guided by Toronto's Green Development Standard, guidelines for greening surface parking lots, bird friendly development guidelines and through the City's green roof strategy.
- **Fleet and equipment greening** All small equipment purchases meet or exceed emission standards. Regular maintenance, replacement and use of food grade grease further supports greening. In 2012, the Parks fleet included 58 environmentally-friendly vehicles.

**'Greening' park infrastructure** The large parking lot at Edwards Gardens and the Toronto Botanical Garden has been transformed through sustainable design to manage rainwater on-site and improve water quality. Sustainable materials and technologies, tree planting and pedestrian and cycling infrastructure contribute to the site's capacity to reduce the urban "heat island" effect. Its design incorporates measures to encourage infiltration, reduce runoff rates and capture pollutants. This will improve the stability and water quality of the Wilket Creek system, an area being restored due to damage caused by severe storms. The project also serves as a green development demonstration site.

- **Water conservation** Many park irrigation systems are linked to a central computer that controls irrigation levels based on weather data to improve the efficient use of water, with irrigated sports fields watered before dawn where possible to prevent evaporation loss. Ongoing integration of low-flow plumbing fixtures, timer-controlled splash pads and retrofitting drinking fountains with user control or automatic stop devices will continue to improve water efficiency. Parkland naturalization, use of native and drought tolerant plants, and landscape design to match local ecosystems further contribute to water conservation, and water efficiency is increasingly factored into park-specific plans.



## Recommended action

- 6.1 Continue to improve water, energy and fuel efficiency through operating and landscaping practices, the use of new and alternative technologies, and through ongoing fleet and small engine improvements. Park operations are more effective and efficient when they reflect best practices and take advantage of available technology. Current activities that demonstrate positive results will be continued, such as automated irrigation systems and Integrated Plant Health Care. Parks, Forestry and Recreation will also explore new practices through pilot projects in order to continue improving the sustainable management of park facilities, amenities and operations.

## **5.6 Conclusion – Preserve and promote nature**

As the city grows and pressures on natural areas rise, balancing the conservation of the natural environment with the provision of outdoor recreation opportunities will become an increasingly important aspect of park planning, management and operation. Parks, Forestry and Recreation recognizes that protecting and enhancing the city's natural environments is a collective responsibility, and that its work in this area requires a holistic approach that emphasizes collaboration, coordination, education and community engagement. Strong planning, clear objectives and tools are needed to support these efforts. This is reflected in the directions below:

<b>Directions</b>	<b>Recommended actions</b>
<b>4. Improve the management of natural areas</b>	<b>4.1</b> Implement a program to strengthen the management of sensitive natural areas to ensure that environmentally significant areas are protected and continue to function and flourish for the long term  <b>4.2</b> Determine thresholds of use and develop criteria and measures to protect parkland from excessive use  <b>4.3</b> Increase staff knowledge and skills to better manage environmentally sensitive lands
<b>5. Improve natural environment trails</b>	<b>5.1</b> Develop and implement a program to plan, design, manage and maintain natural environment trails on parkland and in ravines to ensure the protection, restoration and enhancement of natural areas
<b>6. Integrate emerging trends and technologies into parks operations</b>	<b>6.1</b> Continue to improve water, energy and fuel efficiency through operating and landscaping practices, the use of new and alternative technologies, and through ongoing fleet and small engine improvements

# 6. Maintain quality parks

## 6.1 Introduction

Quality refers to what people value and expect, and how their needs are satisfied. High quality parks are vibrant, welcoming, safe and sustainable spaces. They meet the recreational and leisure needs of local residents, and benefit the broader community by creating social, cultural, environmental and economic value.

For the purpose of the Parks Plan, quality means that a park is clean, safe, beautiful and well maintained. A quality park also meets community needs and creates a sense of place. These elements of quality were common issues raised throughout the Parks Plan consultations and are contained in many park quality definitions and programs in other municipalities<sup>33,34,35</sup>. The Parks Plan seeks to improve Toronto's parks system by focusing on these basic aspects of park quality to ensure that parks and trails across the city are clean, green and comfortable for users.

This chapter will address what we heard on quality parks, followed by a series of directions and recommended actions, in the context of existing opportunities and challenges.

## 6.2 What we heard on maintaining quality parks

Participants in the consultation expressed general satisfaction with the quality of Toronto's parks. However, many directed comments at improving maintenance levels, practices and consistency.

Participants reported a need for more waste bins, litter pick-up and waste removal. Turf and trail maintenance and general repairs were identified as areas for improvement. The frequency of comments about maintenance, conflicting uses and a rising number of festival permits suggest that participants may recognize the impact of high levels of park use.

82% of survey respondents rated the availability of attractive and comfortable city parks as 'very important'. Comments identified a need for basic park amenities and emphasized that these must be maintained in good condition. Consultation participants made few requests for significant new park features. They did, however, frequently request more benches, as well as more washrooms and improved access to washrooms.

Participants recognized the value of the tree canopy and stated a desire for more shade, which was rated as 'very important' by 83% of survey respondents. Some comments indicated a desire for improved access to drinking water. Survey findings and consultation comments also demonstrated interest in raising the appeal of parks through horticulture, with a focus on variety and native species, as well as through public art.

98% of Parks Plan survey respondents reported that it is important that parks are attractive and comfortable places to visit for residents and tourists.

76% of Parks Plan survey respondents are satisfied with the overall quality of City park facilities and amenities.

9% of all Parks Plan consultation comments were about basic park amenities – many addressed benches, and washrooms.

87% of Parks Plan survey respondents agree that flower gardens are important features of City parks.

Results confirm that a sense of safety in parks is important. Survey respondents reported that they felt somewhat safer in parks than on trails, and noted concerns about physical hazards such as bicycles and dogs. Participants identified increased bylaw enforcement, security presence and improved lighting as ways to improve park safety. Participants also identified a general need

for more enforcement related to dogs off leash and dog waste issues, littering, natural area protection and encroachment. They also stressed the importance of ensuring that permit holders are accountable to the terms of their agreements.

89% of Parks Plan survey respondents reported that they feel safe in parks.

Many believe that a lack of respect for parks and conflict between different user groups affects park quality. Comments indicated the need for appropriate activity areas with clear delineation of uses to ensure that users respect one another. Greater community involvement in determining park use and public education were suggested as ways to address this. According to participants, public education is an important strategy for increasing understanding of the natural environment, and promotes respectful park use.

**Based on consultation results and research conducted for the Parks Plan, the following directions are proposed in support of maintaining quality parks:**

7. Advance the quality and consistency of parkland and trail
8. Improve basic park amenities
9. Demonstrate, educate and inspire through horticulture and urban agriculture

### **6.3 Direction 7 – Advance the quality and consistency of parkland and trails**



#### **Maintenance**

Well-maintained parks and trails create a welcoming and safe environment for users, who in turn contribute to creating safe and welcoming parks through their activity and respect for the park environment. This cycle enriches communities, and it starts with a consistent level of maintenance. Park maintenance involves keeping assets in good repair, turf maintenance, litter pick-up, washroom cleaning, graffiti removal, playground inspection, snow removal, maintaining gardens, and much more.

**Standards** Existing park service delivery standards support a consistent level of maintenance across the city. The standards set out requirements for keeping parks attractive, green, clean and safe. Factors like volume and intensity of use, neighbourhood density, season and park type guide the frequency and type of maintenance activities in different parks. These in turn determine staffing levels as well as equipment and material supply needs.

Service delivery standards specify exactly what needs to be done, when, how often and to what level in each season. They provide detailed lists of duties to be undertaken and describe the expected outcomes. Park service delivery standards are living documents that evolve with changes in budget, updates to industry best practices, and to respond to trends that affect park operations such as weather patterns and new recreation activities.

When standards are shared with partners, the public and stakeholders, the public will have clear expectations. For example, current Winter Maintenance Standards specify areas to be cleared of snow, salted or sanded, and specify areas that are not maintained in winter.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation is addressing challenges to consistently achieve service standards. In 2013, four new and specially trained turf maintenance teams will focus on grass cutting, sports fields, and baseball diamond grooming. A new work management system is being developed that uses technology and mobile devices to track daily park maintenance activities.

**Parks Inspection Program** This program was developed in 2010 to monitor the condition of Toronto's parks. It is based on successful programs in other urban park systems, such as New York City, and was adapted to suit Toronto's park system<sup>36</sup>. The program is a tool for staff to monitor park maintenance. It provides information on the achievement of existing park service delivery standards and is a way to measure and track park quality.

Results are used to plan maintenance work and to flag common problems found across many parks. When safety issues are identified, they are reported immediately and the area is made safe until the issue is resolved. Minor repairs are addressed within 48 hours and a follow-up inspection is conducted.

### Safety and security

Park use and enjoyment is affected by whether people feel safe. Weather, heavy use, aging materials, vandalism and conflicting use of space (e.g. cyclists and pedestrians on shared pathways) are among the factors that can create safety hazards for park users. To minimize these physical hazards, Parks, Forestry and Recreation applies standards for design and maintenance, meets legislated safety requirements and removes tree hazards and hazardous vegetation.

As long as the parks are well maintained and appealing I think that is the most important thing the city can do!

*Consultation participant*

#### **Park standards:**

- Provide a foundation for parks and open space decision-making
- Document existing knowledge and experience
- Set and communicate expectations

I am proud of our parks system and the improvements in maintenance in recent years. I believe that sufficient taxes should be levied to maintain its excellent contribution to our urban lives.

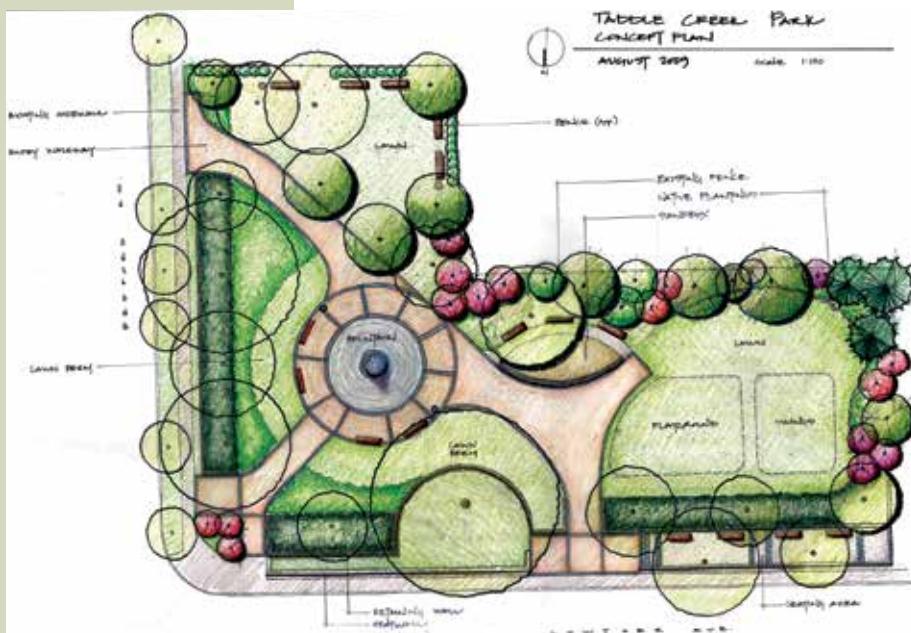
*Consultation participant*



Parks, Forestry and Recreation works with community groups, police and other stakeholders to reduce crime and make parks safer through design, maintenance and public involvement. Much of this work is informed by Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED), a widely used planning and development approach that reduces opportunities for crime and emphasizes physical environment modifications. Parks, Forestry and Recreation incorporates CPTED and safety audit information in park design, and conducts safety audits with police, stakeholders and park users as requested. The regular presence of police and park staff also deter illegal activity. The Park

Ambassador Program works with the Streets to Homes program to connect homeless individuals in parks to shelter and other services. It also supports education and engagement focused on park safety. The most effective park safety strategy is to encourage park use. When a large number of people use parkland in a positive way, others feel more secure and benefit from informal 'eyes on the street' surveillance.

Another mechanism for making parks safer is through education and enforcement. Parks Enforcement Officers in the Municipal Licensing and Standards Division conduct routine patrols and respond to complaints about activities such as illegal dumping of waste and animal-related complaints such as off-leash dogs. Animal Services staff addresses animal issues, most of which are dog-related. Due to financial pressures, re-organization and the need to re-allocate resources, the enforcement presence in parks and on trails has been reduced. New strategies are needed to make the best use of existing resources.



### Planning and design

Planning and design is the foundation of a successful park space. Parks, Forestry and Recreation engages the public and stakeholders in park design and development processes. This helps to ensure that parks and trails match what people want and need, helps to establish shared understanding among diverse stakeholders and keeps the public informed about development in their system of parks.

Parks provide unique opportunities to honour, share, connect and celebrate Toronto's geography, history, diversity and creativity. Respect for area history and culture is typically included in the terms of reference for new parks and park renovation design projects, and is generally specified in larger area plans such as neighbourhood revitalization plans and public realm master plans that also guide park development and design.

**Design standards** Parks need to withstand heavy use while remaining functional, safe and attractive. Parks, Forestry and Recreation applies safety, shade, design, environmental, and accessibility requirements to new park development, re-development projects and state of good repair work. Design and development standards provide a baseline for decision-making and enable the same core design quality in all parks. Design standards also provide a good starting point for unique and community-driven design elements and innovation. Along with improving quality and consistency, design standards help to build a sense that parks, regardless of their location, are part of the same system.

## Recommended actions

- 7.1 Enhance and automate the Parks Inspection Program to ensure park quality, safety, and accessibility.** Parks Inspection Program results will enable Parks, Forestry and Recreation to set clear targets, monitor progress and meet quality objectives. The program will be adapted to reflect the park classification system and will be expanded by adding new inspection requirements focused on accessibility, shade and safety. Introduction of mobile devices for recording information will facilitate implementation and ensure the availability of consistent, high quality and timely data for reporting.
- 7.2 Work with the Municipal Licensing and Standards Division to improve bylaw enforcement in parks.** Enhanced public education and enforcement through greater collaboration between the Parks, Forestry and Recreation and Municipal Licensing and Standards Divisions will contribute to an increased sense of safety and security for park users. Additional benefits include support for park maintenance and natural area protection efforts. Enforcement relies on a combination of Parks Bylaw, Waste Enforcement and Animal Services Officers. Existing Officers will be 'cross-trained' to enable them to conduct enforcement of a broader range of activities and become a stronger enforcement presence. Additional opportunities for improvement include adapting seasonal staffing schedules to respond to park use patterns, bringing bylaw signage up to date, and increasing public education.
- 7.3 Continue to design high quality, sustainable parks that provide a sense of place for residents and communities.** Parks, Forestry and Recreation will continue to create design and development standards to improve the consistency and sustainability of park spaces, features and amenities. Public involvement in planning and design will be strengthened through a community engagement framework.

## 6.4 Direction 8 – Improve park spaces



### Seating, washrooms and shade

Parks host a wide variety of uses, including social gatherings ranging from couples taking walks to family picnics and other events. Seating, shade, washrooms, and other amenities support social gatherings in parks. Currently, the wide variety of quality and placement of benches and picnic tables makes maintenance and replacement challenging. Parks, Forestry and Recreation will develop a more comprehensive approach to seating that supports socialization, provides different options and addresses placement, accessibility and maintenance.

Aging washroom infrastructure makes some difficult to maintain, as does misuse and

vandalism. Dedicated washroom cleaning crews are helping improve the cleanliness of washrooms, but capital investment is also needed.

Parks are heavily used, especially by children, at times when risk of exposure to ultraviolet radiation is high. Strategic shade provision in parks can also serve as heat mitigation in areas with high concentrations of residents vulnerable to the health effects from extreme heat<sup>37</sup>. Demand for shade is high. Parks, Forestry and Recreation collaborates with Toronto Public Health in the application of the City's Shade Policy and Guidelines. Parks, Forestry and Recreation is developing a design standard for shade provision at priority sites such as playgrounds, pools and water play areas. This will provide options for natural (trees or vegetation) and constructed shade (permanent or portable structures).

Parks need more gathering areas and seating. They need more things to attract various people to come and stay for awhile.

Washrooms need to be clean, open and accessible for everyone, including people with disabilities and children.

Shade, shade, shade! Love it. Need it. Keep it coming. More trees!

*Consultation participants*



Greenwood Park shade roof

## **Recommended action**

- 8.1 Improve park maintenance and park amenities such as seating, shade areas and washrooms, with a focus on creating social gathering spaces in parks and along trails.** By investing in improving and maintaining basic park infrastructure, the public will be greeted by cleaner parks and higher-quality amenities. The Division will also invest in additional maintenance in heavily used parks and parks facilities. Benches, picnic tables and other seating options will be improved, and new social gathering areas will be created that combine group seating with features such as horticulture, washrooms and shade. Washrooms will be enhanced and made accessible where possible for people with disabilities. New plantings and structures will increase shade cover and promote gathering. Existing playgrounds, pools and water play areas, as well the use of heat vulnerability maps will help prioritize the installation of shade structures where need is highest.

### **6.5 Direction 9 – Demonstrate, educate and inspire through horticulture and urban agriculture**

Horticulture and urban agriculture create unique opportunities for demonstration, education and inspiration in park settings. As public interest in park involvement rises, both of these areas of activity need to be enhanced to meet the need for beautiful, productive and well-used parks.

#### **Horticulture**

Colourful arrangements in neighbourhood parks, spectacular flower beds along University Avenue and specialized plantings like the unique Toronto Music Garden add beauty to the city and attract visitors. Parks, Forestry and Recreation manages about 40 hectares of horticulture — 36 hectares are perennial and shrub plantings, the remainder are annual flower beds. Horticulture contributes to the beauty, character and identity of the city with unique plant collections, seasonal shows in three conservatories, and picturesque gardens such as James Garden Park. Horticulture helps make parks appear well kept and safe, inviting residents and tourists into parks and beautifying neighbourhoods and the city as a whole.



Between 2003 and 2008, a group of committed local residents developed a vision and raised funds to transform a corner of the Reservoir in David A. Balfour Park into Rosehill Garden, a place of respite and beauty. The community takes an active stewardship role in the garden - raising funds, reporting on issues, and coordinating a Volunteer Circle that helps to maintain the garden. Parks, Forestry and Recreation works closely with volunteers, providing compost and mulch, arranging yard waste pick up, and doing repairs and upgrades.

Park horticulture is adapting to reflect changes in public expectations, climate, priorities and available funds. This includes an ongoing shift to replace some annuals with low maintenance but high impact perennials and shrubs. Efforts to enhance the contribution of horticulture to park quality include greater use of native species, development of specialized gardens, such as the Children's Sensory Garden in Earl Bales Park, and increasing community involvement in horticulture.

I appreciate the emphasis on planting native species, especially in naturalised areas. They show people the possibilities of growing local, native plants in their home gardens.

More community gardens to teach communities about flora, horticulture and organic gardening.

*Consultation participants*

### Urban agriculture

Urban agriculture activity has dramatically increased in recent years. Parks, Forestry and Recreation currently supports small-scale urban agriculture through community and allotment gardens.

Allotment gardens are available through seasonal permits to individuals. Allotment gardens are faced with the issue of demand exceeding supply, and yet some plots allocated to individuals still go un-used and un-tended. Some sites have been subject to complaints about plot appearance, and declining state of good repair of allotment garden infrastructure. In 2012, development of procedures and guidelines began to address some of these issues, such as the development of maintenance standards and a community stewardship model to enhance community involvement in maintenance and monitoring.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation hosts only a small number (54) of Toronto's community gardens, operating in 25 of the city's 44 wards. Current challenges include balancing high demand for new gardens with an intensive development process (i.e. establishing a garden can take up to one year), limited program resources, and increasing competition for park space in high-density areas of the city. The high cost of testing soil for gardens proposed in hydro corridors and other brownfields can also be cost-prohibitive.

Investment and activities over the next five years will focus on achieving the goal of one community garden per ward, and on garden renewal and repair. An inventory of spaces suitable for urban gardening is being developed to inform future garden creation, with a focus on expanding in areas of the city with concentrations of low-income residents with little access to garden space. Emphasis will also be placed on further expanding the reach and impact of the program through enhanced public interpretation and education. Building on its success, the Community Gardens Program model will be adapted to engage residents in park horticulture to provide opportunities for education, skills development, place-making and park improvement.



## Recommended actions

- 9.1 Strategically place horticulture displays in high visibility areas and expand signage, education and volunteer experiences.** Improved strategic placement and composition of flowering trees, shrubs, flowers, grasses, and groundcovers will raise the profile of parks and engage more people. High visibility horticulture can, for example, ‘draw’ people into parks with hard-to-see entrances and enhance existing features such as entrance gates. Greater use of mass plantings, native species, and low maintenance plants and flowering trees will create a contemporary look and make the most of available resources. Parks, Forestry and Recreation will also increase interpretive information and develop a volunteer horticulture program to enhance the connection of people to their parks.



- 9.2 Augment urban agriculture programming through increased public education, training, and enhanced support services, and through investment in garden creation, renewal and repair.** Program expansion will continue to focus on the goal of establishing community gardens in every ward of the city. Repair and renewal of existing gardens will make them more functional and attractive, and allow for more on-site interpretation and education. Parks, Forestry and Recreation will expand the educational component of the program by increasing the number of workshops delivered and seeking out additional opportunities to share information with the public.

## **6.6 Conclusion – Maintain quality parks**

The need to maintain the existing system of parks and trails by focusing on basic services and amenities was a strong and recurring theme throughout the consultations. People want parks to be consistently clean, green and comfortable no matter where they are across the city. Park maintenance is the primary park service delivered by Parks, Forestry and Recreation and accounts for the bulk of the Parks operating budget. Improvements in this area will benefit users and communities across the city, as will improvements to seating and sense of place through design, horticulture and urban agriculture. This is reflected in the directions below:

Directions	Recommended actions
<b>7.</b> Advance the quality and consistency of parkland and trails	<b>7.1</b> Improve consistency of maintenance standards delivery across the park system <b>7.2</b> Work with the Municipal Licensing and Standards Division to improve bylaw enforcement in parks <b>7.3</b> Continue to design high quality, sustainable parks that provide a sense of place for residents and communities
<b>8.</b> Improve park spaces	<b>8.1</b> Improve park maintenance and park amenities such as seating, shade areas and washrooms, with a focus on creating social gathering spaces in parks and trails
<b>9.</b> Demonstrate, educate and inspire through horticulture and urban agriculture	<b>9.1</b> Strategically place horticulture displays in high-visibility areas and expand signage, education and volunteer experiences <b>9.2</b> Augment urban agriculture programming through increased public education, training, and enhanced support services, and through investment in garden creation, renewal and repair

# 7. Improve system planning

## 7.1 Introduction

Park planning must lay a foundation for a strong network of parks within a growing and changing city. For the purposes of the Parks Plan, system planning includes park classification, asset management, use of parkland, connectivity, accessibility and parkland acquisition. The plan aims to strengthen system-level planning and management in these areas to improve the delivery, quality and consistency of park services and strengthen the parks system as a legacy for Toronto.

This chapter will address what we heard on system planning, followed by a series of directions and recommended actions, in the context of existing opportunities and challenges.

## 7.2 What we heard on system planning

Some 99% of survey respondents agree that parks and trails are vital components of city infrastructure that must be planned and funded adequately. Consultation participants recognized the value of distributing park experiences and facilities across the park system. Comments identified the need for more publicly accessible parkland in high-density areas, particularly in the waterfront and downtown areas. Many participants requested an overall expansion of natural areas, and the preservation of open green spaces and passive use areas.

For 79% of survey respondents, it is very important that Parks, Forestry and Recreation strives to ensure that parks support a variety of uses. Comments indicated that park design and facilities should be appropriate to park location, size, and function, and should consider accessibility. Site planning and landscape design were identified as tools for preserving passive areas in parks, delineating active facility spaces and preventing conflict. Design and site planning should both be used to protect natural areas and ensure logical placement of amenities.

Comments indicate that park design and features should reflect and respond to community demographics, and that Parks, Forestry and Recreation should monitor the demand for and use of park facilities. Some participants felt that permit use should also be carefully monitored to ensure that exclusive use does not compromise community use of a park.

The importance of community involvement in planning, design and decision-making was frequently mentioned. The need for inclusive engagement that encourages input from the ‘silent majority’, or those who are not currently engaged, was emphasized. Suggestions included identifying and engaging under-represented residents through collaboration with community organizations.

84% of Parks Plan survey respondents agree that city parks offer something for everyone.

77% agree that while the system of parks should support diverse uses, some activities are not appropriate in some parks.

83% agree that the City plays an important role in ensuring parks are used appropriately.

Consultation findings indicate that the connections between parks and trails, including other green spaces and the public transit system, are important, as is way-finding and signage. Residents and stakeholders also requested more trails, more accessible trails, more trail maps and solutions for use conflicts, particularly between pedestrians and cyclists.

I would like to see more linkages between parks – trails that people can use to ride, jog or walk from one part of the city to another.

*Consultation participant*

Equity is a concern for 76% of survey respondents. They indicated that it is very important for Parks, Forestry and Recreation to ensure universal access to parks, and that parks meet Torontonians' needs regardless of where they live, and no matter what their level of ability, income or cultural background. Comments referenced the importance of being close to a park and the equitable distribution of park amenities and maintenance across the city. Many residents and stakeholders flagged the need to improve accessibility for older adults and people with disabilities. Design standards that incorporate accessibility, welcoming and accessible entrances and access points, improved linkages with public transit, and better communication about accessibility were among the recommendations made.

**Based on consultation results and research conducted for the Parks Plan, the following directions are proposed in support of improving system planning:**

10. Develop a plan to guide facility provision and land acquisition
11. Develop tools to guide and enhance the use of parkland
12. Continue to increase accessibility

### **7.3 Direction 10 – Develop a plan to guide facility provision and land acquisition**

Toronto's parks system includes a wide range of facilities such as playgrounds, sports fields and ball courts in various stages of their lifecycle. Facility development is currently driven by a combination of population growth, user demand, availability and condition of existing facilities and available land.

#### **Parkland acquisition**

As Toronto's population increases, so do the demands and public expectations on parks and trails. In order to meet these demands, it is necessary to expand the inventory of parks and trails. The City's main tool for acquiring new parkland is the parkland dedication process, which requires that land developers dedicate a portion of their sites to the City for public parkland, or where this is not feasible, provide a cash-in-lieu of parkland payment. In areas with residential development pressures or low levels of parkland provision, higher dedication rates are required. Half of the funds are used for park development, and the remainder for strategic land purchases. The City of Toronto is also able to expand the parks system through jurisdictional transfers of surplus City-owned properties, and through new TRCA acquired lands.

Acquisition is guided by Official Plan policies and by the City's Parkland Acquisition Strategic Direction Report (PASDR). The PASDR addresses a range of parkland needs and includes a focus on local park provision. Developed in 2001, it sets out priorities for parkland acquisition through ten Local Priority Areas, two District Priority Areas (larger parks with higher-level recreation facilities), along with City-wide priorities, such as filling gaps in valley, waterfront areas, and hydro and rail corridors. In addition, the PASDR uses three lenses for understanding and identifying specific acquisition priorities — areas of major change, areas of gradual change and stable areas.

Addressing low parkland provision levels can be challenging. Available land is often scarce, fragmented or costly. This challenge is particularly pronounced in the downtown area, where much of the city's development is concentrated. An updated acquisition strategy with a proactive approach for acquisition in high-density areas, and increased collaboration with City Planning and other divisions is required to align parkland acquisition with the City's development process and goals.

### **Asset planning, mapping and management**

Parks, Forestry and Recreation manages facility and land assets valued at over \$5.5 billion. The location, type, size, condition and accessibility of these assets affect resident use of parkland. Effective asset planning and management is essential to maximize benefits, reduce risks and meet the needs of residents across the city.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation is improving its electronic mapping capabilities. Part of this work involves gathering data on park assets such as pathways, sports fields, ice rinks and playgrounds. Current mapping efforts are also delineating parkland areas and acreage by maintenance type such as turf areas, woodland areas, horticultural beds and paved areas.

Detailed and up-to-date park asset maps will be valuable tools for parks planning, management and operations. They will make it easier to see gaps, relationships, patterns and opportunities within individual parks, and in the system as a whole. Basic electronic park mapping will be completed in 2013, after which additional layers of asset information will be added.

Map data will be used to create interactive online parks system maps for the public. These will provide up-to-date information and raise awareness about parks, help residents and visitors plan park experiences, and support community involvement.

In addition to the value and convenience of the maps themselves, the mapping data currently being collected links all park assets together in a comprehensive inventory and work management system. This will reveal details about assets and their condition and help to better prioritize work and improve lifecycle monitoring to ensure timely repair and replacement. Data on areas defined by maintenance type will assist in workforce planning and the equitable allocation of resources. By providing detail on the distribution of park assets, map data will also support park development and facilities planning.

## Recommended actions

- 10.1 **Develop a 20-year Parks, Forestry and Recreation facilities plan.** The facilities plan will prioritize investment, maintenance and repair of existing park facilities such as sports fields, tennis courts and splashpads. The plan will use data related to population growth, principles of equity and the continual improvement of service to the public to also guide the distribution and development of new facilities.
- 10.2 **Update the strategy for the acquisition of parkland to continue to prioritize underserved areas and address City priorities.** Park provision planning will continue to prioritize the development of local parkland in areas with low provision levels. A revised strategy will establish methods for setting short- and long-term parkland acquisition priorities to reflect demographics, existing high-density areas, current development patterns and future development plans. The park classification system and the Parks Plan guiding principles will also help inform planning.
- 10.3 **Work with City Planning, other divisions and partners to identify opportunities to expand the park system.** For the parks system to grow in step with Toronto's population, all the stakeholders in the acquisition process need to work together to align goals and support a parkland acquisition process that builds a strong parks system for future generations.
- 10.4 **Complete a comprehensive inventory and mapping of parks, trails and assets.** The availability of a comprehensive asset management system and related park maps will support park planning, management and operations. Making park information and maps more available, such as on the City's web site, will also enhance public information and engagement.

## 7.4 Direction 11 – Develop tools to guide and enhance the use of parkland

### Park classification system

One of the key challenges in operating a system of over 1,600 parks is to provide a clear and consistent framework for making decisions related to the operating and management of parks. Parks, Forestry and Recreation receives hundreds of requests annually for changes to park facilities, new uses in parks, commercial activities, and a variety of other proposals.

Sometimes I must travel to access what it is I would like to do, but that is fine. If all the parks were the same in every area, we would never need to explore our city and other areas. That is the beauty of having diverse activities in different areas.

*Consultation participant*

This plan proposes a classification system for Toronto's parks that will provide a consistent framework for the management and operation of the parkland system in Toronto. Each proposed park type in the system accommodates a range of activities and uses, and collectively the classification system functions as a tool to guide decision-making and support consistent practices and approaches in the planning, design, acquisition, management, development and maintenance of parkland across the city. The classification system builds on classifications used by the former municipalities of the amalgamated City, and the classification Council adopted in the 2001 Parkland Acquisition Strategic Directions report.

Each of the five park types includes a description of its role within the parks system. This includes facilities to support appropriate park activities for different park types. Each park type also has associated maintenance requirements and levels. The park types describe typical parks within a given category; however, some variation is expected for some parks. In general, park types are separated by their size, their range of facilities, location in the city, and how the average user will get to the park. See Appendix A for a more detailed description of the classification system by park type.

### **Parkettes**

Parkettes (typically <0.5 hectare in size) serve local residential neighbourhoods within walking distance. In dense urban areas parkettes can also serve daytime users from office buildings. Parkettes provide passive enjoyment, quiet retreat, and informal play where space allows. They often provide aesthetic focal points in their neighbourhoods through sculpture, feature plantings and other design features.



### **Neighbourhood Parks**

Neighbourhood Parks (typically >0.5 hectare in size) provide opportunities for passive recreation and limited amounts of active recreation. Activities and programming of the park respond to local needs, must respect other park uses, adjacent residences and the character of the neighbourhood. Neighbourhood Parks act as a neighbourhood focal point and are generally located within a five to ten minute walking distance of their intended users. They are typically located on local streets with good access and visibility to the surrounding neighbourhood.



### **Community Parks**

Community Parks (typically >3 hectares in size) provide opportunities for passive recreation and a wider range of active recreational uses than those offered in Neighbourhood Parks. Community Parks serve most community residents within a reasonable walking distance and are typically located in busier parts of the community, fronting on collector streets or arterials with some transit access. They often serve as a focal point where several neighbourhoods can come together to use specialized features, programs and larger park area. Community Parks can include sports fields, and other major recreation facilities, as well as seating areas, gardens and open park areas that are suitable for community gatherings or events. Facilities can be lit and programmed if properly screened from adjacent residential areas. Parking is generally not provided.





### District Parks

District Parks (typically >5 hectares in size) offer a range of passive and active recreation options, including open areas for spontaneous play, areas for quiet leisure, and horticulture displays, as well major facilities like sports fields, community centres, arenas, ice rinks, and pools. These parks serve residents who travel beyond their immediate communities to use specialized facilities. District Parks are generally located on major streets, provide convenient access to transit service, pedestrian and cycling routes. They typically provide on-site parking

to support park uses and events. Trails and bikeways are typical within the parks and they connect to other systems. District Parks accommodate specialized, programmed outdoor recreation facilities, and large-scale community events with amenities like lighting, change rooms, washrooms, and concessions. Active and programmed uses are balanced with passive use areas, landscaped areas and natural features.



### City Parks

City Parks (typically >15 hectares in size) provide passive and active recreation activities that attract users from across the city and may contain natural heritage or cultural features that are destinations for tourism. These parks are typically located on major streets with good transit access and connections to cycling and pedestrian routes. They can extend across large areas of the city, provide natural

environment connections and accommodate significant trail systems. City Parks can include stadia, ski hills, golf courses, amphitheatres, sports complexes, major trails or significant natural areas. City Parks are typically large and can have different shapes: they can be linear, follow ravines and rivers, utility corridors and other elements of the city's built form. The natural environment, wildlife habitat, and tree canopy are significant features in City Parks.

The larger and busier park types (e.g. Community, District, City Parks), provide more specialized functions to a wider area than Neighbourhood Parks and Parkettes, but they should also provide areas of passive or quiet use, to the adjacent residents. Within each type there are parks that are more heavily used because of their location, cultural or natural environment significance or prominence as a destination. As a result, there may be different expectations for their design, programming and maintenance over other parks of the same type. Parks that are attractions for tourists can be promoted as special destinations that raise the city's profile.

Parks in each type can take on different forms depending on their location within the city fabric and their relationship to roads, natural features, utility corridors and other land uses, sometimes resulting in linear park forms such as greenways

that provide connections and accommodate park users in different ways than other parks of the same type.

Natural environment areas (e.g. woodlots, ravines, meadows) can be incorporated and protected in all park types, especially where natural features extend beyond the park boundary. Natural areas and features can also impact on the overall capacity of any park type, as planning for park facilities and programming of use has to respect the natural features. These features are protected and incorporated in each park type as much as possible.

## Managing park use

**Competing interests and conflicting use** Ensuring fair and equitable allocation of parkland and park services for a vast range of users with diverse needs, while also meeting natural environment objectives, requires a balancing of different interests. Strategies and tools to manage competing interests and prevent conflict between diverse user groups are essential. Examples of current issues raised by Parks Plan consultation participants include feelings of threat from off-leash dogs, and from cyclists or others passing walkers from behind at high speed. Currently, various park planning, design, use management, and education activities are applied as needed. A more systematic approach that builds on these activities is required that includes:

- **Distribution of diverse park use opportunities within the parks system** should ensure space for different uses – while not necessarily available in every park – is reasonably available within the parks system.
- **Space allocation within parks to accommodate different uses** should include spaces for both active and passive use, emphasize multi-purpose spaces that can accommodate a range of uses appropriate for a park's type and location, and offer experiences for people of all ages and abilities. Site planning and design must create spaces that are complementary, and ensure that competing uses are separated by buffers where appropriate.
- **Education and engagement** activities should encourage park users to respect one another and follow rules of etiquette. The community of users should be active participants in problem-solving and in developing individual parks and a system that meets community needs and desires.
- **Additional tools to guide and enhance the use of parkland** can include planning, design and permitting guidelines for different park types. For some large, unique or heavily used parks, individual park management and maintenance plans can further guide park use, and set standards for maintenance to support appropriate and sustainable park use.



Hillcrest Park, which is laid out in a way to isolate small children from teenage activities from adult tennis and allotments from nature areas, is exceptionally well planned. I recommend using this model for planning and community safety.

The park system as a whole certainly must support diverse uses, and reflect the multicultural richness of our community. This is very important. However, no single park, however large, can be expected to meet all needs.

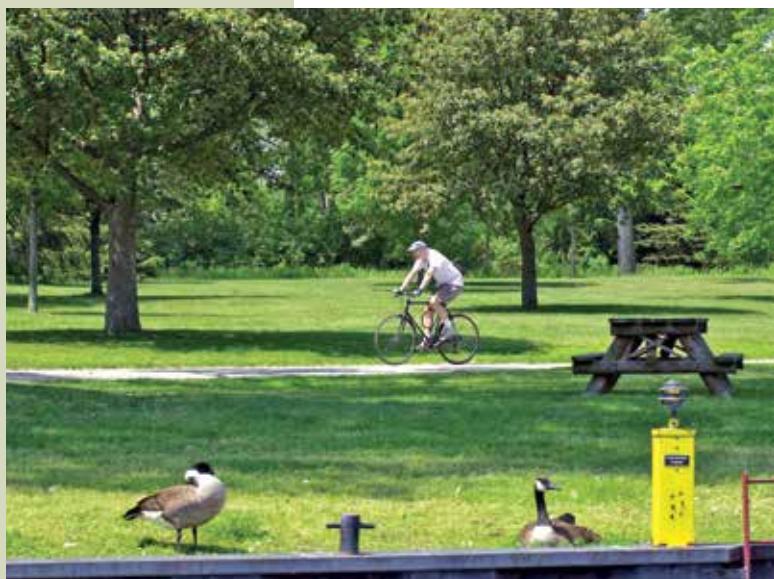
*Consultation participants*

**Exclusive use** Some park sites, locations or facilities are made available for specific purposes or for the exclusive use of specific user groups. The installation of monuments and public art may affect how a given space can or cannot be used. Park permits also provide time limited exclusive use of park spaces. Dogs off-leash areas and community gardens are among the park features that also tend to serve specific user groups, making less parkland available to the general public.

The availability of some dedicated space can add value to parks and communities. Examples include the health benefits of participation in a sports league, the sense of place provided by memorials and public art, and animation through community gardens. As Toronto grows and demands on the parks system rise, the potential for exclusive uses to build up incrementally and reduce access to parkland for the general public also rises. This is particularly relevant in areas with low parkland provision. In order to provide the best balance between the benefits and risks of exclusive use over the long-term, planning must consider exclusive use, and a city-wide policy on exclusive use is required.

**Park use requests** Being open to and incorporating new park uses, technologies and other opportunities is important. Equally important is the recognition that some activities may not be appropriate or feasible in some parks.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation receives regular requests for emerging activities and initiatives in parks. No comprehensive framework currently exists to guide decision-making about these requests. As a result, decisions are often made on an ad hoc basis. This may lead to unfair outcomes, and does not ensure the best use of existing opportunities or the long-term development of a parks system in the public interest. Tools are needed to evaluate proposed park uses in a consistent manner based on how appropriate, feasible and sustainable they are.



### Connectivity and trails

Links between parks, and the integration of parks with their surroundings, local amenities, and other city systems (e.g. public transit, sidewalks, on-street bikeways) allows for greater public access and enjoyment.

Trails are a key component of connectivity. Parks, Forestry and Recreation together with the Transportation Division manages a trail network of approximately 300 kilometres of paved and granular multi-use trails, or trails that are shared by pedestrians, cyclists and others. Another 300 kilometres of informal natural environment trails exist in parkland and ravines.

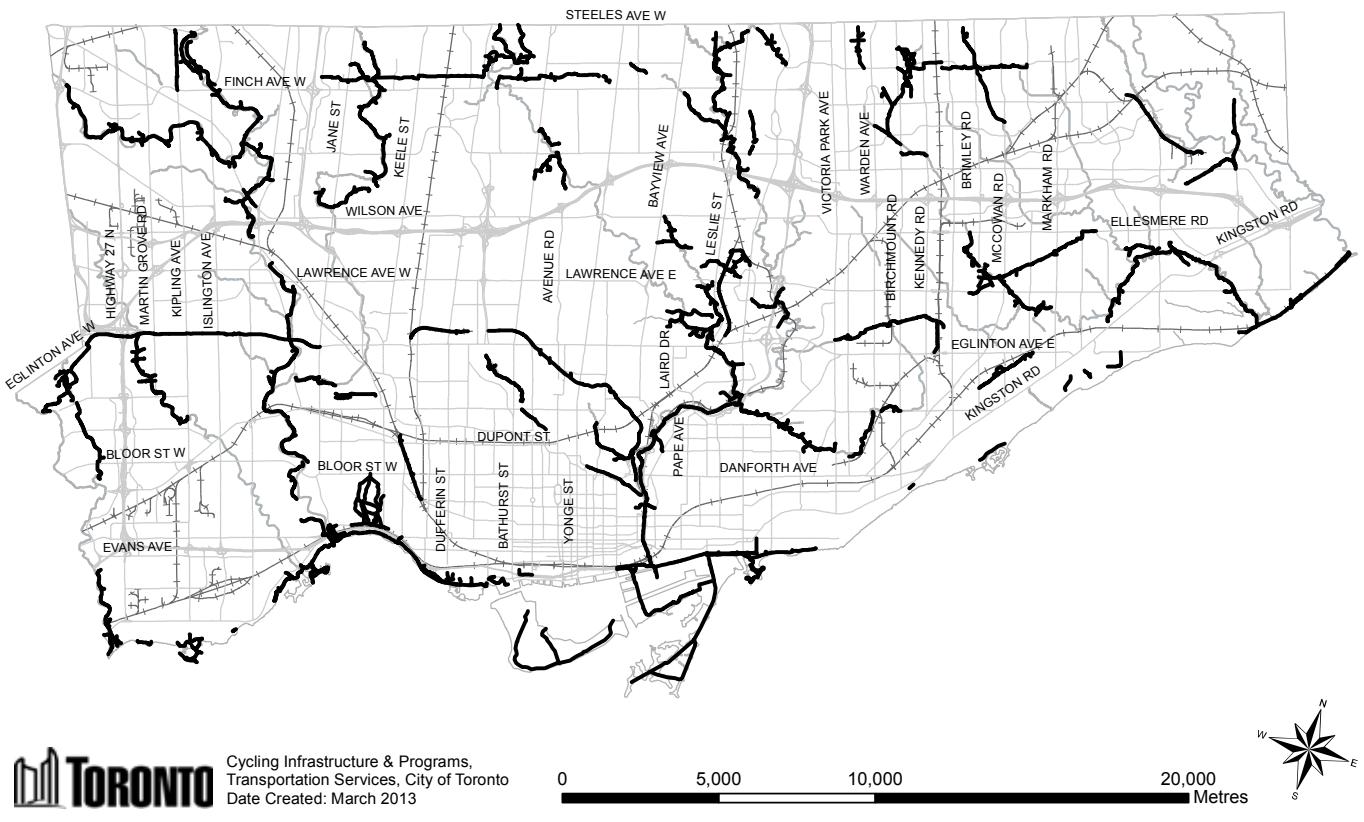
Challenges to full and appropriate use of the trail system include incomplete and disconnected trails, the lack of consistent signage for way-finding, and high maintenance demands. Parks, Forestry and Recreation will continue to plan and manage the trail systems with Transportation and its partners to improve the trail system for users. Maintenance standards are being developed for these trails to ensure a consistently high quality trail experience.

Connecting parks by trail systems allows people in park-deficient areas to access other parks.

More maps of the trails, paths, walkways. Clearly marked access points for the paths.

*Consultation participants*

**Map 5: City of Toronto major multi-use trails (2013)**



Some major multi-use trails intersect with or cross through natural areas, creating connections with the natural environment trail system.

## Recommended actions

- 11.1 Implement the park classification system to guide planning and decision-making across the system of parks and trails.** The park classification system is a tool to guide park planning, development and operations. Classification of the City's parks will support consistent park decision-making, so that all parks can be developed, programmed and maintained in ways that are appropriate to their size, location, and neighbourhood context.
- 11.2 Develop policies, standards and measures to support the appropriate use of parks and trails that guide park planning, design, and decision-making regarding emerging and exclusive uses.** As the city grows and more people use parks, a strengthened policy framework and related standards and tools are needed to guide consistent decision-making regarding the appropriate short and long-term use of parks. This will help Parks, Forestry and Recreation balance demands for use with equitable access and natural environment protection priorities. Examples of identified issues include protecting open, multi-purpose park spaces, managing rising demand for commercial use of park spaces, and managing the exclusive use of parkland.
- 11.3 Improve and coordinate trail mapping, classification, maintenance, way-finding and connections to other public realm elements.** Better coordination in developing the natural environment and multi-use trail networks will improve the consistency and connectivity of trails. This will improve trail experiences and safety for users. It will also support and enhance trail planning, management and operations.

## 7.5 Direction 12 – Continue to increase accessibility



### Accessibility

The Parks Plan guiding principle ‘equitable access for all residents’ recognizes that the parks system must respond to the needs of a diverse population regardless of age, ability, income or cultural background. This section of the Plan addresses accessibility for people with disabilities. Other issues of access are covered in Chapter Four, Communicate and connect with users.

The City of Toronto strives to ensure that all residents, regardless of ability, can access and use public parkland. This involves improving the overall accessibility of parks

and trails, developing specialized accessible sites and features, and creating a culture of accessibility to inform the delivery of all park services. Parks, Forestry and Recreation works to improve the accessibility of parks and trails on an ongoing basis. These efforts are guided by stakeholder engagement, in-house and other research, and legislative compliance requirements.

Accessibility improvements support all users.

*Consultation participant*

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (2005) lays out the goal of an accessible Ontario by 2025. It sets out accessibility standards in five areas: 1) Customer Service, 2) Transportation, 3) Information and Communications, 4) Employment, and 5) Built Environment. Compliance with Customer Service standards was achieved in 2010. Transportation standards came into force in 2012, and both the Employment and Information and Communication standards in 2013.

Built environment standards will be the last to come into force. They will address areas such as trails and beach access, eating areas, play spaces, paths of travel such as sidewalks, parking, and service elements like maintenance. Park design, construction and retrofit activities currently address many requirements expected in the AODA standard. Ensuring system-wide compliance will require a focused and planned approach to incorporate AODA requirements into short- and long-term capital planning, budgets, projects and timelines. It will also require significant investment in park infrastructure, facilities, features and amenities.

**Playground accessibility** A playground capital replacement and enhancement program enables ongoing accessibility improvements. Parks, Forestry and Recreation works with community groups, stakeholders, ward councillors, and play equipment manufacturers to incorporate innovative accessibility features into new playgrounds. Accessibility is also incorporated into all playground upgrades by adding equipment to address diverse disabilities such as adaptive swing chairs, transfer stations to facilitate play structure access, ground level interactive panels, sensory activities and elevated sand and water stations. Additional features can include engineered wood mulch or rubberized surface, at grade paving, and wheelchair accessible picnic tables. Over 100 playgrounds were upgraded with accessibility improvements between 2007 and 2012. In addition, accessible swings are being added to existing playgrounds across the city.

The parks might be accessible but the equipment isn't, and there aren't always cuts on the sidewalks to allow variety in access points or trails through the park.

*Consultation participant*

### Stonehouse Park

Park and playground improvements completed in 2012 include engineered wood fibre safety surface, concrete curb edging with sunken curb for easy access onto safety surface area, accessible swing seat, accessible see-saw, accessible components of junior and senior play structure and accessible play panels.



*Stonehouse Park playground before September 2012 improvements*



*Stonehouse Park playground after September 2012 improvements*

An accessibility audit system is currently in place to rate building accessibility, but determining the accessibility of parks is more complex. Park settings are diverse and can include physical limitations with respect to accessibility. External factors like weather can influence accessibility, for example by affecting the condition of park paths. Parks staff is preparing a baseline inventory of accessible park assets. This will include developing methods and indicators to identify what qualifies as accessible and creating an accessibility rating system. Once complete, these activities will provide more effective park planning and service delivery tools. They will also make it possible to communicate meaningful information about accessibility to users.

Engagement with the disability community takes place primarily through the multi-stakeholder Parks, Forestry and Recreation Disability Steering Committee, which provides feedback and regular advice on the accessibility of parks and trails. Parks, Forestry and Recreation recognizes that efforts must continue to develop an organizational culture in which universal accessibility is part of everyone's work. A more holistic approach that connects accessible park elements into a seamless accessible experience of living in the city will benefit everyone. A fully accessible picnic area for example, depends on the availability of detailed information online and in multiple formats, an accessible permit system, and many specialized design elements to make it accessible such as proximity to public transit or parking, a route to the site, washroom facilities and signage, picnic tables, waste disposal options and appropriate maintenance. Achieving this level of accessibility will require enhanced engagement with the disability community and more consistent application of universal design principles.

## Recommended actions

- 12.1 Engage disability stakeholder groups in developing requirements to improve the universal accessibility of park amenities and features.** Involvement by members of the disability community will support the enhancement of existing, and development of new, park design and development standards and guidelines.
- 12.2 Ensure that parks and trails meet or exceed provincial accessibility standards.** Ongoing efforts to upgrade park accessibility will continue. Indicators to assess the accessibility of parkland will be developed and applied to measure and monitor accessibility. Accessibility will be an integral consideration for Parks, Forestry and Recreation planning initiatives, for example facilities planning.

## 7.6 Conclusion – Improve system planning

The directions in the section of the Plan are focused on ensuring the availability of solid data, up-to-date systems and strategies, sound policy, and a suite of associated tools and supports. This will build Parks, Forestry and Recreation capacity for effective planning, development and management. Competing demands, new expectations and high use of parkland in a growing city, as well as equity and accessibility considerations also require coordinated action from City divisions, external partners, residents and stakeholders across the city. This is reflected in the directions below:

Directions	Recommended actions
10. Develop a plan to guide facility provision and land acquisition	<b>10.1</b> Develop a 20-year Parks, Forestry and Recreation facility plan <b>10.2</b> Update the strategy for the acquisition of parkland to continue to prioritize underserved areas and address City priorities <b>10.3</b> Work with City Planning and other divisions and partners to identify opportunities and enhance the City's capacity to expand the park system <b>10.4</b> Complete a comprehensive inventory and mapping of parks, trails and assets
11. Develop tools to guide and enhance the use of parkland	<b>11.1</b> Implement the park classification system to guide planning and decision-making across the system of parks and trails <b>11.2</b> Develop policies, standards and measures to support the appropriate use of parks and trails that guide park planning, design, and decision-making regarding emerging and exclusive uses <b>11.3</b> Improve and coordinate trail mapping, classification, maintenance, way-finding and connections to other public realm elements
12. Continue to increase accessibility	<b>12.1</b> Engage disability stakeholder groups in developing requirements to improve the universal accessibility of park amenities and features <b>12.2</b> Ensure that parks and trails meet or exceed provincial accessibility requirements

# Conclusion – Parks Plan

Toronto's Parks Plan 2013-2017 will connect people with parks and trails, advance greening and environmental sustainability, improve the quality of parks and trails and strengthen Toronto's parks system. This Plan builds on the social, environmental and economic value of parks, advancing seven guiding principles approved by City Council:

- Parks and trails as city infrastructure
- Equitable access for all residents
- Nature in the city
- Placemaking
- Supporting a diversity of uses
- Community engagement and partnerships
- Environmental goals and practices

The Plan's 12 directions and 28 recommended actions are based on significant input from residents and stakeholders, and are informed by demographic, social, and environmental trends, along with city development patterns and growth expectations. They respond to the seven principles adopted by Council, and implementing these actions will result in noticeable park improvements across the city and at the community level leading to an improved quality of life for all residents.

This Plan will also strengthen the capacity of Parks, Forestry and Recreation to engage in clear and equitable decision-making when dealing with issues of competing demand, expectations for new spaces and activities in parks, and the increasing intensity of parkland use. An inclusive approach to planning and operating parks will create vibrant places for communities to gather and connect with nature. Moreover, system-wide improvements in accessibility, connectivity and sustainability will result in a vital parks system that is a legacy for future generations.

Once approved, the plan will guide investments and strategic priorities over the next five years. An implementation strategy will be developed to support the full and effective implementation, which will also involve collaboration with other City divisions, external partners and residents and stakeholders across the city.

# **Appendix A: Parks Plan public consultation summary**

## **Process**

Between October 2011 to January 2012, Parks, Forestry and Recreation conducted a survey and hosted four town-hall-style public meetings, five stakeholder meetings, and seven focus groups. Written submissions were also received from stakeholder groups. Over 3,750 surveys were received, and more than 14,700 comments were gathered from all sources. Consultation activities were based on the seven Council-approved Parks Plan guiding principles.

A summary of the consultation questions asked, the comments received from all sources, and the survey results is provided below.

## **Discussion questions asked at the public and stakeholder consultation meetings:**

1. Over the next five years, what should the City of Toronto focus on, to improve the quality of its parks, trails and open spaces?
2. What do you think the barriers are to achieving equitable access for all residents and how can they be overcome?
3. As the city continues to grow and develop, what should the City do to protect and enhance its parks, trails and natural areas?
4. In your opinion, what are the top two priorities that the City should focus on over the next five years to support the diverse park needs of city residents?
5. How can residents, community groups and businesses help to develop, sustain and maintain City parks?

## **Open-ended questions asked in the survey:**

1. Please suggest ways that the City can improve the planning and maintenance of its parks and trails.
2. Please suggest ways that the City can ensure its parks and trails are accessible to all.
3. Please suggest ways that the City can improve on its protection of Toronto's natural areas, woodlands, and ravines.
4. Please suggest ways that the City can make its parks better places to visit and enjoy.
5. Please suggest ways that the City can improve on how it supports a variety of activities in its parks.
6. Please suggest ways that the City can improve on how it supports and encourages individuals and groups to get involved in the planning, design and operation of City parks.

7. Please suggest ways that the City can encourage community partnerships, donations and sponsorships to expand and improve its parks and open spaces.
8. Please suggest ways that the City can ensure that it designs and maintains its parks using environmentally responsible practices.

The comments received at consultation meetings and through open-ended survey questions were categorized according to major themes within each principle. Additional analysis was done to capture ideas that were represented across multiple principles. Overall, comments received from the general public, stakeholders and focus group participants paralleled one another.

#### **Comment summaries by theme**

A high level summary of the major consultation themes resulting from the comments received from all sources, and of the main messages within each, is provided below. More detailed summaries of the comments received is provided in the “What we heard” sections of chapters four, five, six and seven of this report.

**The twenty (20) most common themes account for over 80% of all comments received:**

<p>12% of all comments</p>	<p><b>Improve and increase maintenance and repair</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Install more garbage bins, and increase garbage removal and litter pick-up</li> <li>• Improve washroom condition and cleanliness</li> <li>• Improve turf, trail and horticulture maintenance</li> </ul>
<p>9% of all comments</p>	<p><b>Increase and maintain park amenities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase the quantity and quality of park seating (benches and picnic tables)</li> <li>• Improve access to park washrooms through extended seasons and longer, more consistent hours of operation</li> <li>• Some comments suggested trail enhancements to accommodate different user groups</li> <li>• Requests for specific amenities and facilities, such as sports courts and splash pads, were received</li> </ul>

7% of all comments	<p><b>Protect, preserve and enhance natural areas and ravines</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prevent damage from development, encroachment and unsustainable recreational use</li> <li>Increase native species and reduce invasive species</li> <li>Expand natural areas and ensure that they are maintained</li> <li>Encourage, support and increase environmental stewardship activities</li> <li>Increase public education on environmental practices and sustainable park use</li> <li>A mix of comments was received about mowing more vs. mowing less</li> </ul>
6% of all comments	<p><b>Improve public communications and information</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve park promotion and communication with the public</li> <li>Increase the availability of user-friendly, up to date information and maps</li> <li>Make information available through multiple channels e.g. website, flyers</li> <li>Improve Parks website content and navigation</li> <li>Make information on how to get involved in parks more readily available</li> </ul>
5% of all comments	<p><b>Increase and improve public involvement in parks</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Many residents want to be more involved in park planning, programming and decision-making</li> <li>Improve and increase local outreach, consultation, events and other options for dialogue and public involvement</li> <li>Ensure that consultation is well publicized, sincere, meaningful, inclusive and involves subject matter experts</li> </ul>
5% of all comments	<p><b>Enhance fundraising and private sector partnerships</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Partnerships, sponsorships and fundraising bring important resources to parks, however careful consideration of associated issues such as commercialization of parks, privatization, and equitable distribution of resources is needed</li> <li>Enhance and streamline the partnership process</li> <li>Recognition of partners and sponsors should be tasteful and limited</li> <li>Make it easier to donate, and provide information on specific needs and priorities</li> </ul>

<p>4% of all comments</p>	<p><b>Enhance community partnerships</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase Parks, Forestry and Recreation ability and staffing to facilitate community partnerships, for example through Friends of and Adopt-a-Park groups, programs and to support overall public involvement in parks</li> <li>• Parks, Forestry and Recreation should partner with diverse local, park user and interest groups, and with businesses, school systems and other City Divisions</li> <li>• Ensure clear relationships and guidelines for community partnerships</li> </ul>
<p>4% of all comments</p>	<p><b>Trees are important elements of parks</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is strong support for increasing the tree canopy and shade in city parks</li> <li>• Ensure regular tree maintenance, as well as removal and replacement of diseased and dead trees</li> <li>• Ensure that newly planted trees are watered, especially during hot dry summers</li> </ul>
<p>4% of all comments</p>	<p><b>Ensure a balance between different park uses and user groups</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is a need to balance and preserve natural, more passive areas in parks with more active uses such as sports fields</li> <li>• Site characteristics and area demographics should be considered in balancing park use</li> <li>• Exclusive use of parks, e.g. through permits, can encroach on community use of parks</li> <li>• Some comments suggested separate areas for children, more playgrounds and more recreation options, and more community gardens and food production spaces</li> </ul>
<p>4% of all comments</p>	<p><b>Address issues related to dogs in parks</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Park users should be more respectful of bylaws and “dog etiquette” e.g. poop and scoop, dogs on leash when not in off-leash areas, keep dogs out of natural areas</li> <li>• More enforcement on dog-related issues is needed</li> <li>• Some comments suggested more off-leash areas or separate parks for dogs</li> </ul>

3% of all comments	<p><b>Improve connectivity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve the connection of parks and trails with other green spaces, public transit, and with their surroundings</li> <li>• Improve the connectivity of trails and paths with one another</li> <li>• Improve way-finding and signage to enhance connectivity</li> </ul>
3% of all comments	<p><b>Maintain safety and security</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safety in parks is important and should be maintained</li> <li>• Physical hazards such as bike riders, off-leash dogs and trip hazards should be reduced</li> <li>• Bylaw enforcement should be increased</li> <li>• Some comments suggested a greater security presence, more and improved lighting</li> </ul>
2% of all comments	<p><b>Improve and streamline policies and practices</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complex policies and practices can be difficult to navigate, creating barriers to park use and involvement for some individuals and groups</li> <li>• There is a need for increased enforcement of existing policies and bylaws</li> <li>• A wide range of suggestions were made on policy issues such as smoking, recycling, and design, and on park use e.g. cycling, mountain biking, and fishing</li> <li>• Staff are important contributors to high quality parks</li> </ul>
2% of all comments	<p><b>Increase volunteerism in parks and on trails</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve the promotion of volunteer opportunities</li> <li>• Increase hands-on activities, events and opportunities for stewardship</li> <li>• Suggestions included more clean-up days, planting events and invasive species removal activities</li> </ul>
2% of all comments	<p><b>Improve the permitting system</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve and simplify the permitting system to make it more accessible</li> <li>• Cost is an access barrier for some groups, for example non-profit groups and newcomers</li> <li>• The permitting system and related policies should be better publicized</li> </ul>

2% of all comments	<b>Ensure high quality park design</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Park design should incorporate nature, have better aesthetics and be more welcoming</li> <li>• Increase and improve public art, horticulture and special features such as fountains</li> <li>• Ensure that design is focused on and incorporates accessibility</li> </ul>
2% of all comments	<b>Enhance signage in parks and on trails</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve the quality, placement and content of park signage, including way-finding</li> </ul>
2% of all comments	<b>Park funding and budget allocation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A wide variety of comments addressed park funding sources, levels and how funding should be spent</li> <li>• Many suggested that parks funding is important and that maintenance of the existing park system is a priority</li> <li>• Additional topics included the equitable distribution of funds across the park system, and the need for adequate staffing and service levels</li> </ul>
2% of all comments	<b>Improve the accessibility of parks and trails</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve accessibility for older adults and people with disabilities</li> <li>• Suggestions included more accessible washrooms, improved trail accessibility, improving the accessibility of amenities, and making park entrances easier to find</li> <li>• Improved accessibility benefits all users.</li> <li>• Ensure the equitable distribution of parks, and of park amenities and maintenance</li> </ul>
2% of all comments	<b>Increase public education</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase public education on the value of parks and on the respectful use of parks</li> <li>• Increase public education on environment and nature in order to increase public understanding and appreciation of natural areas and ravines</li> <li>• Park signage and interpretation, workshops, outdoor green programs, demonstration sites and partnerships with schools were suggested as ways to increase education</li> </ul>

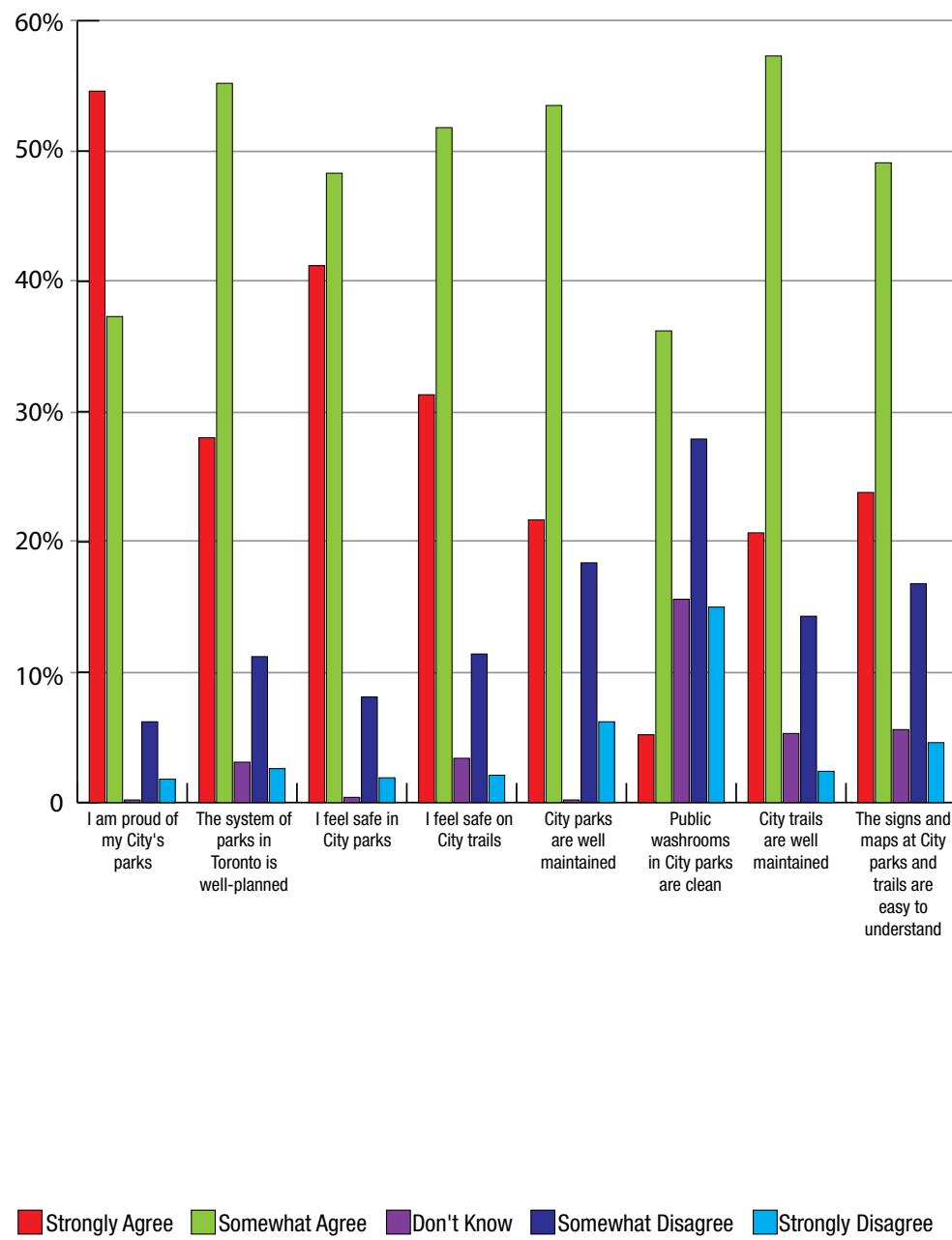
The remaining 20% of comments addressed a broad range of issues. These included the importance of ‘keeping up’ with the city’s population and acquiring more parkland, particularly in areas with high levels of development; public interest in urban agriculture; ways to encourage the use of parks in all seasons; comments on ferry, permit and other costs; improving customer service and general comments on each of the Parks Plan guiding principles.

## Survey responses

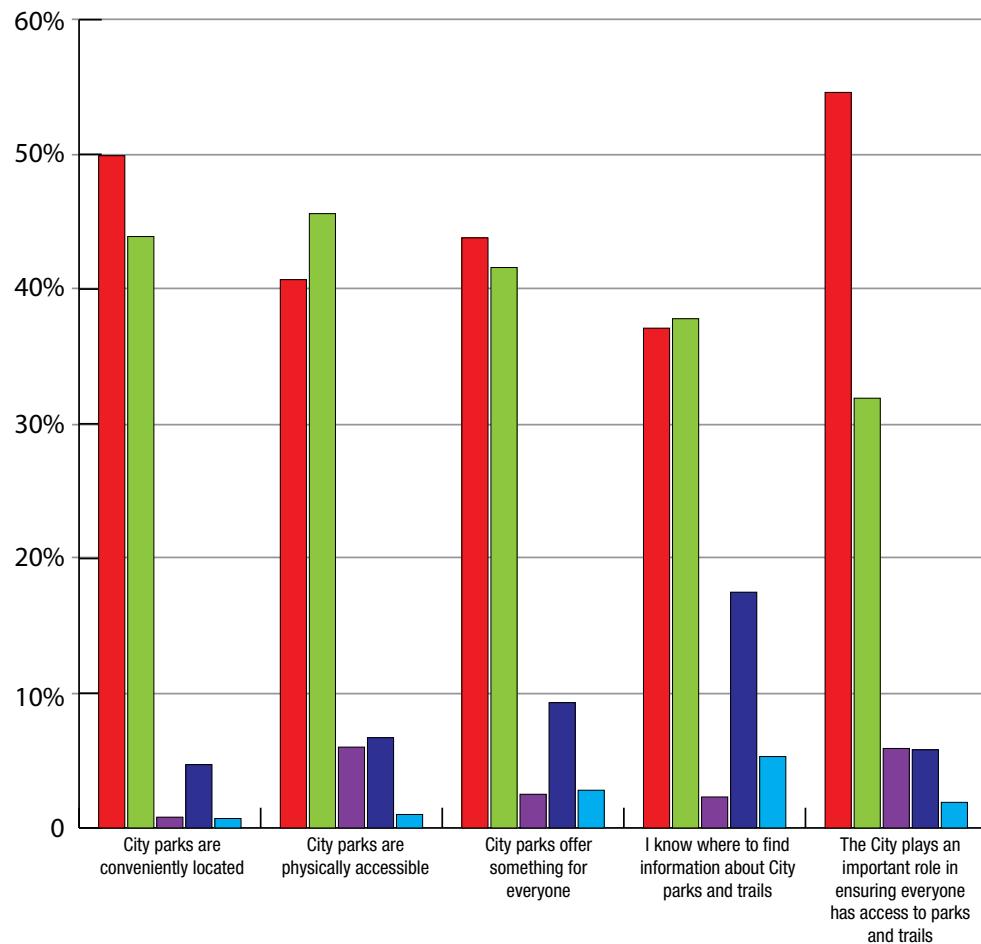
In addition to open-ended questions, the Parks Plan survey asked a series of questions that asked respondents to rate a series of statements. Survey question results are provided below.

The Parks Plan survey was available on the City of Toronto website between October 20 and December 22, 2011. It was advertised in the Our City newsletter to all households, through press releases and advertisements in the major and ethnic media, and promoted through local parks networks and stakeholder organizations. The survey was not a random sample of Toronto's population. Survey results were statistically weighted by district, ethnicity, income, and household size to match the population in order to improve the representativeness of the sample. While this method has limitations for statistical computations, the large response rate warrants confidence that the needs and priorities of Toronto residents have been fairly identified and represented.

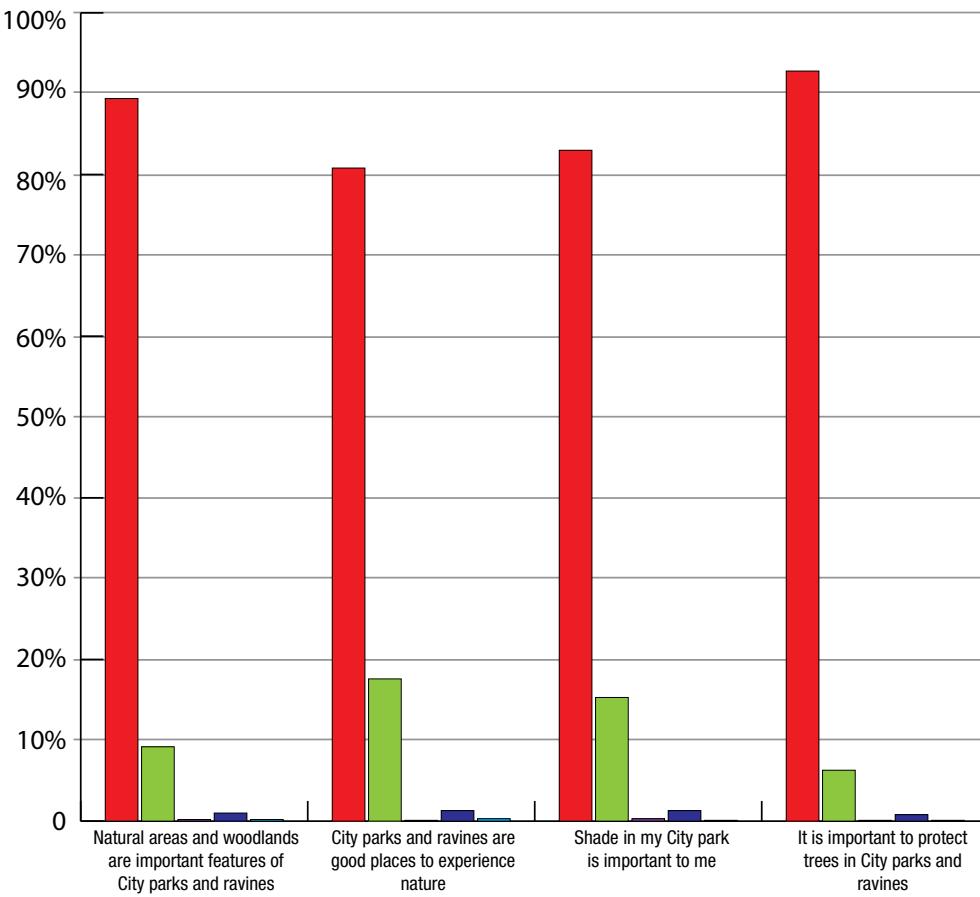
**Figure 1: Survey responses on Parks and trails as city infrastructure**



**Figure 2: Survey responses on Equitable access for all residents**

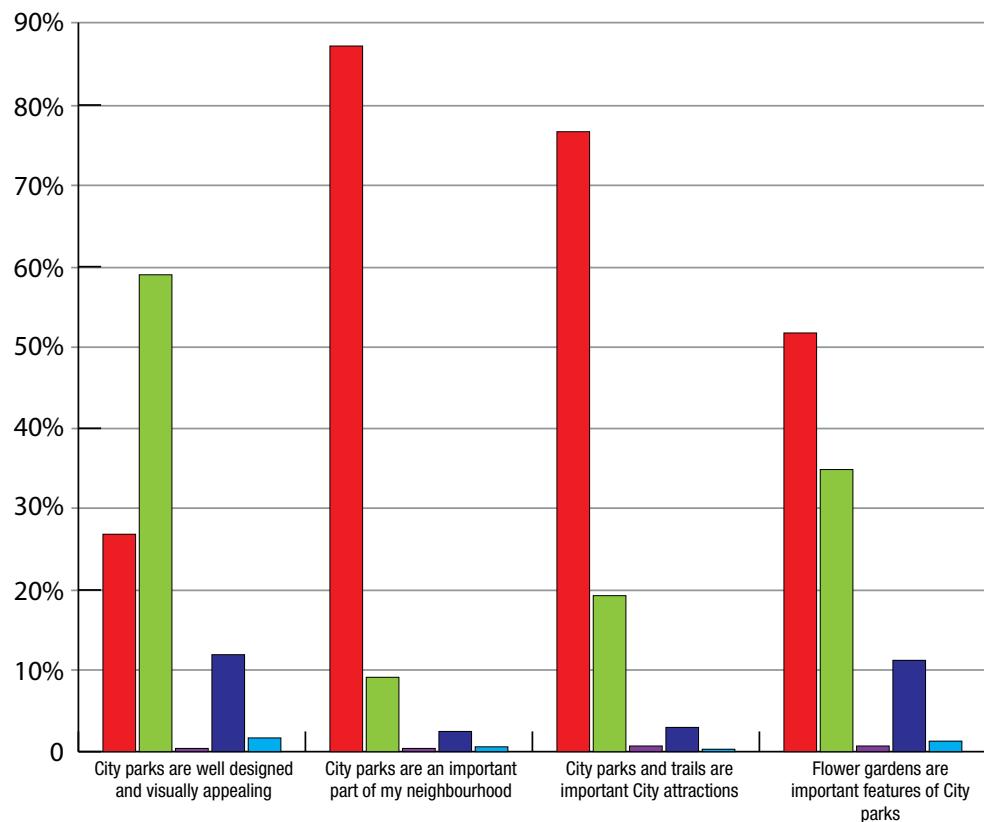


**Figure 3: Survey responses on Nature in the city**

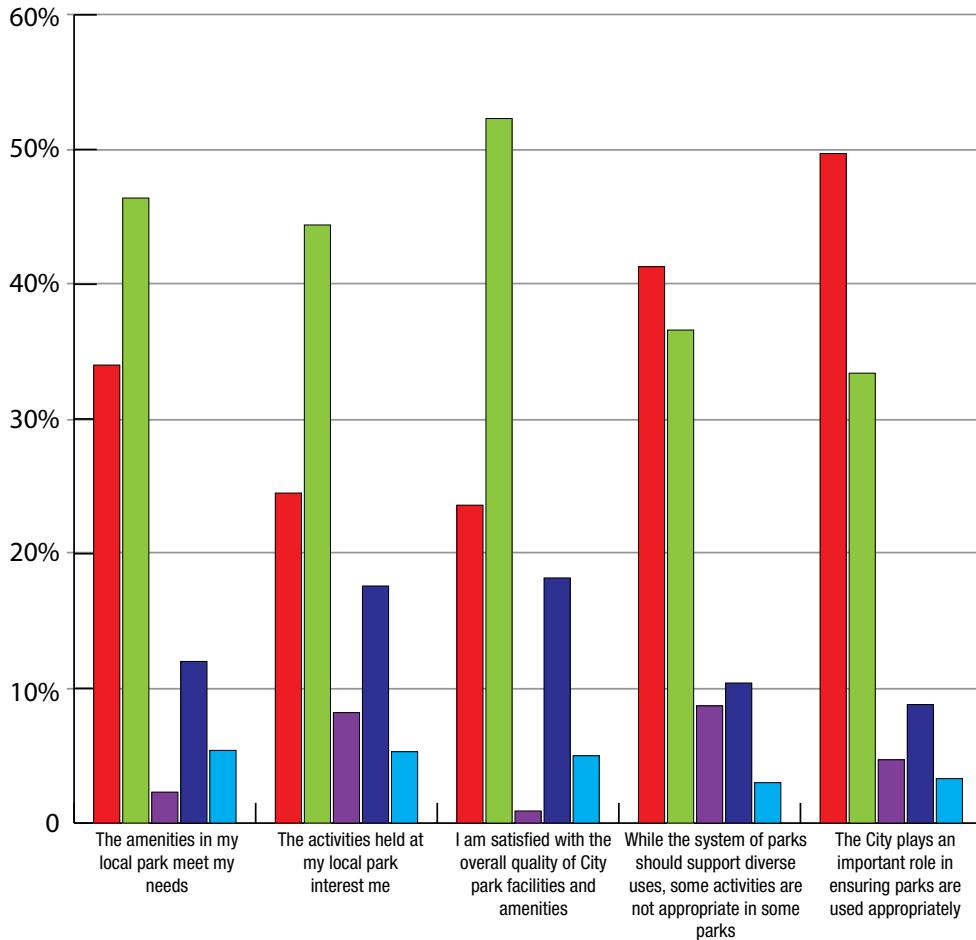


■ Strongly Agree ■ Somewhat Agree ■ Don't Know ■ Somewhat Disagree ■ Strongly Disagree

**Figure 4: Survey responses on Placemaking**

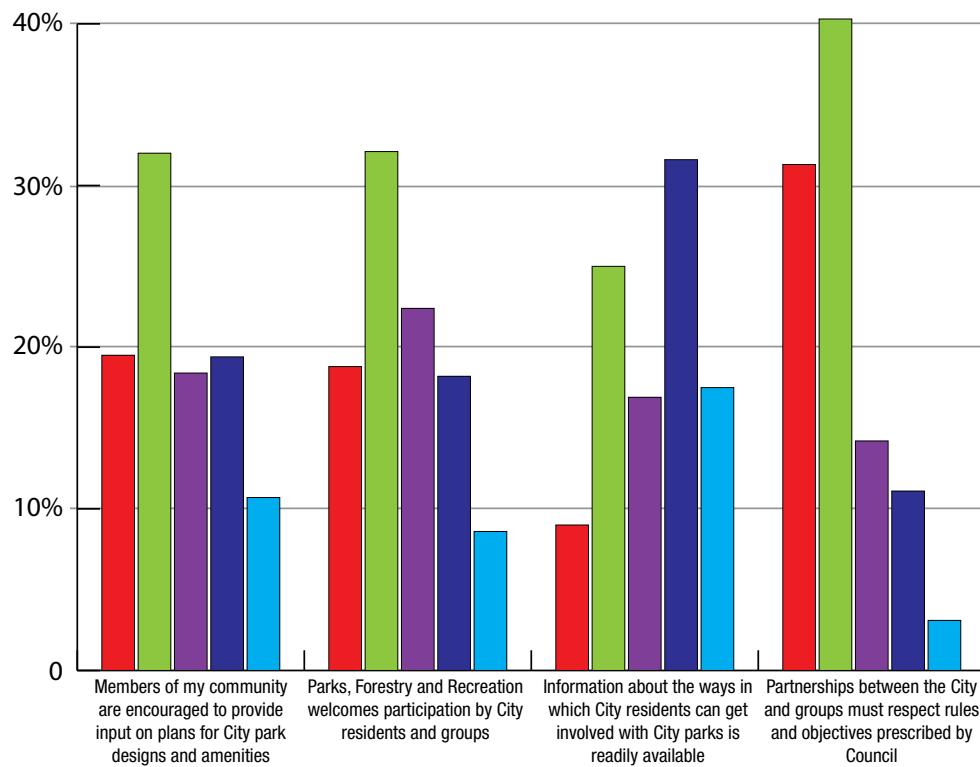


**Figure 5: Survey responses on Supporting a diversity of uses**

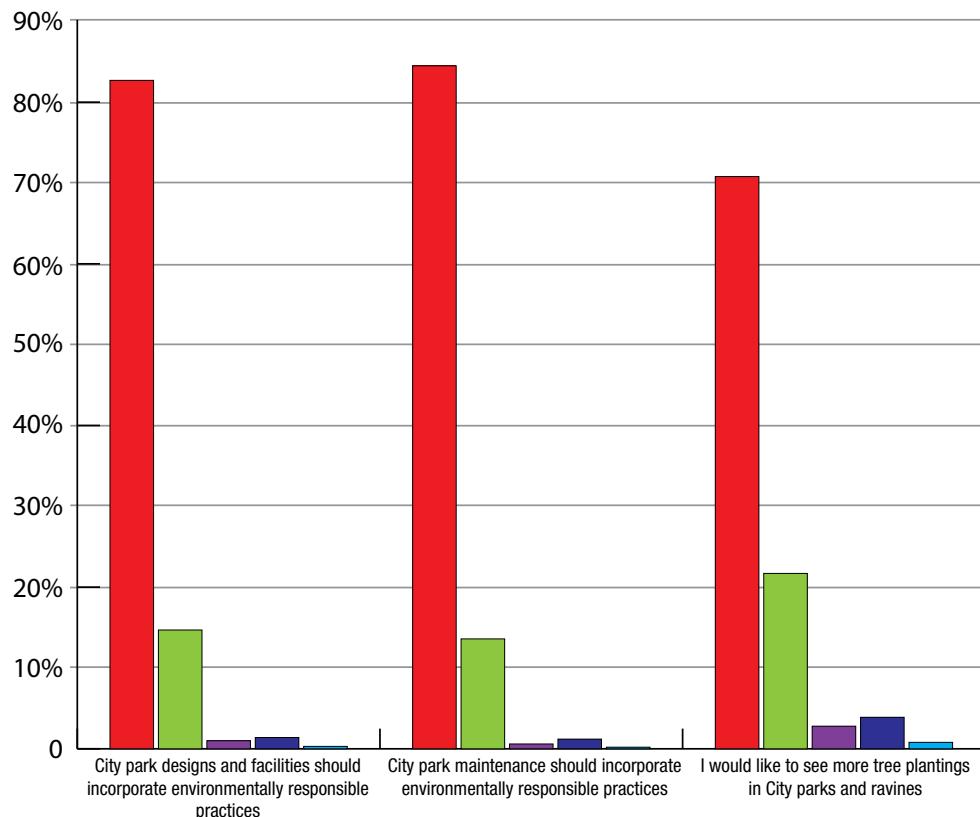


■ Strongly Agree ■ Somewhat Agree ■ Don't Know ■ Somewhat Disagree ■ Strongly Disagree

**Figure 6: Survey responses on Community engagement and partnerships**



**Figure 7: Survey responses on Environmental goals and practices**



# Appendix B:

## Parks Classification System

### Parkette

#### Description

Purpose and function	Primarily serves local residents Mainly used as quiet retreat and for passive recreation Parkettes supplement a neighbourhood's parkland supply, but are not intended to substitute for larger, more programmable Neighbourhood parks
Typical characteristics	Located within walking distance of local residential neighbourhoods Very small in size
Size	Generally less than 0.5 hectares
Park access and connections	Accessed on foot, usually via minor trails and sidewalks No on-site parking or parking lots Connection and access to transit is not a consideration

#### Typical Activities and Events

Informal play where space allows  
Aesthetic enjoyment through public art and feature plantings  
No programmed uses or events

#### Park Design

Amenities and features will support the intended use, and appropriate activities and events for this park type.  
Examples of the typical amenities and features found in this park type could include: lighting (limited use), artwork, horticultural display garden and native garden, patio, playground, general seating, benches and shade structures.

#### Examples

Waterfront District	Jennifer Kateryna Koval'S'Kyj Park	0.15 hectares
Toronto & East York District	Frank Stollery Parkette	0.05 hectares
Etobicoke York District	Twenty-Eighth Street Park	0.14 hectares
North York District	Varna Parkette	0.32 hectares
Scarborough District	Raleigh Parkette	0.13 hectares

# Neighbourhood Park

## Description

Purpose and function	Primarily serves local residents Acts as a focal point of the neighbourhood that brings residents together Used for passive enjoyment and limited amounts of active recreation
Typical characteristics	Located on local or connector streets with good access and visibility to the surrounding neighbourhood, and within reasonable walking distance (e.g. 5 minute walk) Small in size Is in keeping with the residential character of the neighbourhood it serves
Size	Generally no less than 0.5 hectares
Park access and connections	Accessed on foot; sidewalks and safe crossings are important to encourage use of the park Minor trails and pedestrian pathways are available; trails may connect to bikeway and pedestrian network where volume and use does not disrupt the passive character of the park No on-site parking or parking lots Connection and access to transit is not a consideration Can be associated with adjacent elementary level school where open space and play area is shared

## Typical Activities and Events

Passive enjoyment, retreat and informal play

Organized active recreation and special events are generally limited and must respect other park uses, adjacent residences and character of the neighbourhood

Activities and programming respond to local needs

Examples:

- Small scale family and community picnics;
- Small neighbourhood gatherings and performances

## Park Design

Amenities and features will support the intended use, and appropriate activities and events for this park type.

Examples of the typical amenities and features found in this park type could include: bake oven, community garden, gazebo, sports field, (local use) sports court, fieldhouse, wading pool, splash pad, and picnic areas.

## Examples

Waterfront District	Little Norway Park	2.03 hectares
Toronto & East York District	Oriole Park	2.91 hectares
	Ben Nobleman Park	0.56 hectares
Etobicoke York District	Bell Manor Park	0.95 hectares
	Heathercrest Park	2.37 hectares
North York District	Stafford Park	0.99 hectares
	Prince Charles Park	1.19 hectares
Scarborough District	Chester Le Park	1.99 hectares
	Donald Park	1.74 hectares

# Community Park

## Description

Purpose and function	Serves several neighbourhoods Acts as a focal point and gathering space for these neighbourhoods  Provides specialized features, functions and programming and higher level of use and activity compared to Neighbourhood parks  Also provides areas of passive use, typical of a Neighbourhood Park to adjacent residents, especially when a Neighbourhood park is not nearby
Typical characteristics	Located in busier community areas, fronting on collector or arterials streets  Within reasonable walking distance (e.g. 15 minute walk). Medium in size  Neighbourhoods come together to use specialized features and programs
Size	Generally not less than three hectares
Park access and connections	Can be accessed on foot  Trail and bikeway access, where feasible, is provided within the park and connects to other trail routes and bikeway system  May contain some on-site parking but is not typical to this park type.  Some transit access is available  Can be associated with adjacent elementary level school where open space and play area is shared

## Typical Activities and Events

Programmed and non-programmed sports and recreation activities  
Community events and gatherings  
Local passive use  
Examples: Family and community picnics; Local School Sports Day; Food and Craft Markets; Community gatherings; Sports Tournaments

## Park Design

Amenities and features will support the intended use, and appropriate activities and events for this park type.

Examples of the amenities and features found in this park type could include: sports fields, sports courts, trails, outdoor swimming pool, artificial and natural ice rinks, skateboard pad, bleachers, washrooms, allotment gardens and children's garden, and open park areas for picnics, community gatherings or events. Facilities may be lit and programmed for active use and community events if properly screened from adjacent residential areas. Meadows and woodlots may also be featured in these parks.

## Examples

Toronto & East York District	Dufferin Grove Park June Rowlands Park	5.3 hectares 2.65 hectares
Etobicoke York District	Eringate Park Smithfield Park Flagstaff Park	3.85 hectares 4.57 hectares 3.67 hectares
North York District	Hendon Park Leaside Park	3.57 hectares 3.34 hectares
Scarborough District	Highview Park Seven Oaks Park	5.4 hectares 4.34 hectares

## District Park

### Description

Purpose and function	Serves several communities Acts as a recreation hub providing specialized functions and programs Higher level of use and activity compared to Community and Neighbourhood Parks Also provides areas of passive use, typical of a Neighbourhood Park to adjacent residents, especially when a Neighbourhood park is not nearby
Typical characteristics	Located on major streets Large-sized park Has park area and amenities to support large-scale events and gatherings
Size	Generally not less than five hectares
Park access and connections	Accessed by walking, driving and transit On-site parking is typically provided Trail and bikeway access is typically provided within the park and connects to other trail routes and the City's bikeway system

### Typical Activities and Events

Programmed and non-programmed sports and recreation activities  
Community events and gatherings  
Gardening and enjoyment of nature  
Local passive use  
Examples: Family and community picnics; Theatre and performance; School Sports Day; Fundraising walks and runs – staging and gathering; Food and Craft Markets; Community gatherings; Sports Tournaments

### Park Design

Amenities and features will support the intended use, and appropriate activities and events for this park type.

Examples of the specialized amenities and features found in this park type could include: amphitheatre, bandshell, BMX bike area, outdoor ice trails, sports fields, sports courts, stadia, arena, ornamental fountain, trails that connect to the trail system outside the park, concessions, conservatory, greenhouse and open park areas for picnics, community gatherings or events. Facilities may be lit and programmed for active use, and community events if properly screened from adjacent residential areas. Natural environment, habitat, and tree canopy are protected and incorporated as much as possible.

### Examples

Toronto & East York District	Eglinton Park Trinity-Bellwoods Park	9.15 hectares 14.61 hectares
Etobicoke York District	Earlscourt Park Richview Park	12.63 hectares 13.52 hectares
North York District	Amesbury Park Memorial Park	12.12 hectares 5.47 hectares
Scarborough District	Jack Goodlad Park Birchmount Park	5.06 hectares 9.81 hectares

# City Park

## Description

Purpose and function	Serves users from across the city Provides natural environment connections, specialized functions, features and programs, and accommodates higher levels of activity for the entire city Can connect to other City Parks through natural features and trails Acts as a destination for tourists visiting the city Also provides areas of passive use, typical of a Neighbourhood Park to adjacent residents, especially when a Neighbourhood Park is not nearby
Typical characteristics	Located on major streets Large-sized park that can extend across large areas of the city, providing connections and accommodating significant trail systems Can range in size and shape and may connect a series of park blocks or follow land features (e.g. ravines, rivers, waterfront), or the city's built form (e.g. former utility corridors, greenways) Can contain natural heritage or cultural features
Size	Generally not less than 15 hectares
Park access and connections	Accessed by walking, cycling, driving and transit Often have several entries, located near major streets and transit On-site parking is provided Typically connected to major trail and bikeway systems

## Typical Activities and Events

Specialized passive and active recreation activities  
Programmed and non-programmed sports and recreation activities  
Enjoyment and interpretation of park features with cultural, heritage or natural environment significance  
Community events and gatherings as well as local passive use  
Gardening and enjoyment of nature  
Examples: Family and community picnics; Theatre and performance; School Sports Day; Fundraising walks and runs – staging, gathering, routing; Food and Craft Markets; Community gatherings; Sports Tournaments

## Park Design

Amenities and features will support the intended use, and appropriate activities and events for this park type.

Some of the specialized amenities and features found in this park type could include: amphitheatre, animal displays, blue flag beach, ski/snowboard hills, golf course, competitive sports complex, boardwalk, major trails that connect to other trail systems, and significant natural areas that connect to natural system networks.

## Examples

Waterfront District	Woodbine Beach Park Sir Casimir Gzowski Park	15.2 hectares 12.82 hectares
Toronto & East York District	Lower Don Parkland Park Kay Gardner Beltline Greenway	85.7 hectares 7.73 hectares
Etobicoke York District	West Humber Parkland Scarlett Woods Golf Course	222.18 hectares 26.26 hectares
North York District	Derrydowns Park Earl Bales Park	28.14 hectares 74.54 hectares
Scarborough District	Morningside Park Warden Woods Park	214.2 hectares 33.02 hectares

# Endnotes

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- <sup>17</sup> Statistics Canada. (2011). "General social survey – 2010. Overview of the Time Use of Canadians". Cat No. 89-647-X. Ottawa ON: Statistics Canada.
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- <sup>20</sup> Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute and ParticipACTION, (2010) "Parks, Recreation Settings and Physical Activity". The Research File. Issue 07/07 – 10, pages 1-3.
- <sup>21</sup> Butler, GP. Orpana, HM. Wiens, A.J., (July-August, 2007). "By Your Own Two Feet Factors Associated with Active Transportation in Canada", *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, 98 (4): 259-264.
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