



CITY OF HAMILTON
PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT
Environmental Services Division

TO:	Mayor and Members General Issues Committee
COMMITTEE DATE:	October 4, 2023
SUBJECT/REPORT NO:	Parks Master Plan (PW23064) (City Wide) (Parkland Acquisition Strategy PW Report 18-008, Item 9) (Outstanding Business List Item)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
PREPARED BY:	Johnathan Vandriel (905) 546-2424 Ext. 3662
SUBMITTED BY:	Cynthia Graham Director, Environmental Services Public Works Department
SIGNATURE:	

RECOMMENDATION

- (a) That Appendix "A" attached to Report PW23064 respecting Parks Master Plan (prepared by O2 Planning + Design Inc.) be approved as the basis for the planning of parkland;
- (b) That staff be directed to update the City's Parkland Dedication policies and By-law in accordance with the approved Parks Master Plan;
- (c) That staff be directed to develop parkland acquisition strategies (including funding) for priority focus areas identified as being 'High', 'Very High' or 'Medium' in the Parks Master Plan, and to submit capital and/or operating budget requirements to support the Parks Master Plan to the appropriate budget process(es) for consideration, as required;
- (d) That staff be directed to develop a strategy to communicate priority parkland acquisition focus areas at the neighbourhood level (including parks, planning, funding, and financing), as identified in the Parks Master Plan; and
- (e) That the matter respecting OBL Item E, regarding the Parkland Acquisition Strategy (PW Report 18-008, Item 9) be identified as complete and removed from the Public Works Committee Outstanding Business List.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City of Hamilton has a long history of park provision, and an established and distributed set of parks in place today that meet the needs of many Hamiltonians. However, gaps and deficits exist in parkland provision in specific neighbourhoods and meeting the City's Official Plan park provision targets will require sustained capital investment and subsequent operating resources to operate and maintain new parks.

The term "parkland" herein refers to active municipal lands that have been planned, acquired and designed for public use. They include Hamilton's four park classes: City Wide, Community, Neighbourhood and Parkette. While important to the overall system of lands within the City, this report and study does not address natural and open space lands. Recent Council priority direction includes the prioritization of natural lands acquisition and management, and staff are directed to undertake a similar study related to those land categories.

Provincial legislation including the *Planning Act* and Bill 108, *More Homes, More Choices Act* (2018), require municipalities to create a Parks Master Plan that aligns with a city's strategic plan, projected growth, policies and practices, and ensures a balanced and equitable approach to parkland provision that responds to the needs of individual neighbourhoods and communities.

Using census data and demographic criteria, the Parks Master Plan will guide the planning of new parks and the expansion and improved access to existing parks across Hamilton. It will aid in decision making and help prioritize investment in parkland. The Parks Master Plan offers innovative and collaborative approaches to funding, acquisition and development of new parks – a necessary course of action, particularly in established, dense neighbourhoods where land acquisition or assembly is challenging.

The Parks Master Plan provides a comprehensive long term, spatially explicit framework that assess the current supply, access and classification of Hamilton's parks system to guide management decisions that will help focus provisioning efforts to the communities most in need.

The Parks Master Plan contains 30 recommendations, divided into short, medium- and long-term actions, some of which refer to specific one-time projects or actions and others that provide ongoing guidance. The recommendations will require investments to increase funding for parkland acquisition and maintenance. These investments will be brought forward for Council consideration through future budget processes. This includes changes to the City's approach to maintenance, internal coordination, and external cooperation to capitalize on opportunities to acquire parkland in high priority neighbourhoods. A summary of recommendations is provided in Appendix "A" to Report PW23064 – Parks Master Plan.

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Alternatives for Consideration – See Page 12

FINANCIAL – STAFFING – LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Financial: The Parks Master Plan will assist in the budgeting and scoping of future parkland acquisition. The Master Plan identifies a significant investment in land to achieve parkland provision targets across Hamilton. It includes a summary of total parkland needs, how much can be expected to be provided through dedications derived from development, and what the cost to the City would be to acquire the remaining shortfall.

To assess the financial costs of addressing parkland shortfalls, the amount of parkland to be dedicated to the City must be calculated and then subtracted from current and future parkland needs.

Parkland dedication (including both land and cash-in-lieu), as directed through the policies of the City's Official Plans, will contribute the majority of future parkland requirements, but will not be enough to meet the City's target of 2.1 hectares per 1,000 residents.

205 hectares of parkland are projected to be provided through parkland dedication, while a minimum of 98 hectares will have to be made up through municipal acquisition and other alternatives. This totals 304 hectares of parkland that will be required by 2051 to address the needs of future growth as well as existing deficiencies within priority areas.

The estimated cost of acquiring 98 hectares of parkland between now and 2051 is at least \$242 million, which averages out to \$8.6 million per year (3.5 hectares per year) over the next twenty-eight years. The City has a Parkland Acquisition Reserve (established in 2013) to contribute to these costs. The planned reserve contributions over the next ten years equate to \$28.9 million. The current contributions to the reserve are not enough to sustain the entire parkland deficiency with a remaining shortfall of \$213.1 million.

Staffing: N/A

Legal: N/A

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Provincial legislation including the *Planning Act* and Bill 108, *More Homes, More Choices Act*, require municipalities to create a Parks Master Plan that aligns with a city's strategic plan, projected growth, policies and practices, and ensures a balanced and

equitable approach to parkland provision that responds to the needs of individual neighbourhoods and communities.

In 2018, a motion was brought forward to Public Works Committee, directing staff to complete a Parkland Acquisition Strategy. That acquisition strategy has been completed as part of the overall Parks Master Plan document, in Appendix “A” of Report PW23064.

The City of Hamilton currently lacks a Citywide Parks Master Plan that sets the course for how parkland is acquired and planned. This Parks Master Plan demonstrates the City’s commitment toward a long-term vision for Hamilton’s parks system and establishes community priorities for park development.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND LEGISLATED REQUIREMENTS

Should Council approve Report PW23064, staff will be directed to examine policy changes in the form of City-initiated Official Plan Amendments to the City’s Urban and Rural Official Plans, as well as amendments to the Parkland Dedication By-law to align with the Short Term (<5 years) recommended actions of the Parks Master Plan.

RELEVANT CONSULTATION

The Parks Master Plan has been informed by public and stakeholder input. To ensure this Master Plan reflects the range of community needs, public engagement was wide reaching across multiple platforms, as noted below. Additionally, targeted outreach to specific user groups, local experts, and potential partners complemented the broader public engagement (see lists below) with a depth of expertise to inform plan direction.

Internal Engagement

A Technical Team of City staff guided the development of the Parks Master Plan. They included representatives from groups who were directly involved in the Master Plan process and will be directly impacted by the outcomes of Report PW23064:

- Public Works: Environmental Services (Landscape Architectural Services, Parks and Cemeteries);
- Planning and Economic Development: Planning (Sustainable Communities); Corporate Real Estate Office
- Healthy and Safe Communities: (Recreation); and
- Finance and Corporate Services: (Budgets and Fiscal Policy).

The Technical Team met regularly, and separate meetings were held with individual groups throughout the study.

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Feedback was also gathered from other internal staff (Advisory Team) at various junctures throughout the Parks Master Plan process. These included representatives from groups who are not directly involved in the Master Plan process, but have an interest in the outcomes of Report PW23064:

- Public Works: Environmental Services (Forestry and Horticulture);
- Healthy and Safe Communities: Community Services (Indigenous Relations); and
- Planning and Economic Development: Planning (Heritage and Urban Design – Natural Heritage Planning), Transportation Planning and Parking (Transportation Planning Services, Parking Operations), Tourism and Culture (Placemaking, Public Art and Projects, Tourism and Events), Growth Management, Climate Change Initiatives.

External Engagement

The Parks Master Plan process engaged with the following external groups:

- The Hamilton public (including residents, park user groups, and equity-seeking communities);
- Community organizations (including environmental organizations, community groups and business associations);
- Industry and agencies (including Conservation Authorities, the Niagara Escarpment Commission, the Royal Botanical Gardens, the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board, the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board and development industry associations); and
- Indigenous partners (including the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, Haudenosaunee Development Institute, Six Nations of the Grand River and Huron-Wendat Nation).

Public and targeted engagement took place over the following two (2) phases:

Phase 1 Engagement: Developing a Shared Vision for Hamilton's Parks

- *Purpose:* Understand park use; listen to Hamiltonians' needs / wishes for parks; identify barriers faced in park use.
- *This Informed:* A draft vision, principles, goals and recommendations.
- *Engagement Methods:* City Wide online public survey, advertised through social media, online City web pages, and hard copy advertisements delivered to over 230,000 households across the city (which received nearly 5,000 responses); workshops with workbook discussion guides to external stakeholder groups.

Phase 2 Engagement: Confirming Support for the Vision and Direction for Hamilton's Parks System

- *Purpose:* Review the draft vision and direction; identify desired changes and gaps.
- *This Informed:* A draft Parks Master Plan.
- *Engagement Methods:* City Wide online public survey, advertised through social media and online City web pages (which received nearly 100 responses) and workshops with workbook discussion guides to external groups.

To spread the word about engagement opportunities such as the City Wide web surveys, the project team used signs in parks, mail-outs, print ads, social media posts, and online City web pages (project web page and Engage Hamilton web page). The public could provide feedback through the two (2) online surveys. Stakeholders could also provide feedback through workshops or through workbooks with discussion guides.

The comments and ideas of those who participated in the consultation process are directly reflected in the Parks Master Plan's guiding principles and were a foundational input into the Plan's recommendations.

ANALYSIS AND RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION

Parks are critical elements that define a community's quality of life and contribute to the City's aspiration of "making Hamilton the best place to raise a child and age successfully". They serve as gathering spaces that help strengthen neighbourhoods and create healthy and complete communities. Parks not only provide personal benefits to the individual, but also contribute positively to the health of the environment, economy, and social / public realm.

A Parks Master Plan is an integrated, comprehensive, long term planning document that helps municipalities plan for and deliver parkland. A Parks Master Plan is necessary to assess and define parkland needs and identify how much parkland the City should be providing, including where parkland should be located, and the required tools in place to prioritize investments. It will provide clear direction to staff and Council for future development and enhancement of parkland over the short, medium and long term.

The City has a long history of park provision and an established and distributed set of parks in place today that meet the needs of many Hamiltonians. However, gaps and deficits exist in parks provision in specific areas of the City and meeting the Official Plan's provision targets will require sustained capital investment. Innovative, collaborative approaches to funding, acquisition, and development of new parks are necessary, especially in older, denser neighbourhoods where land acquisition is often challenging.

Recently, park planning has shifted away from a focus on simple per capita measures of park area, to more nuanced assessments of parkland functionality and access. Hamilton's urban fabric varies substantially across the community, and so do the needs and requirements of the varying residential neighbourhoods. Addressing this variability requires an effective Parks Master Plan to create a flexible and adaptive framework for park service delivery. The Parks Master Plan for Hamilton in Appendix "A" of Report PW23064 delivers this requirement.

The Park System

Hamilton has four (4) classes of parks:

- City Wide
- Community
- Neighbourhood
- Parkette

Collectively referred to a 'municipal parkland', these parks provide active and passive opportunities for recreation, gathering, playing, etc. City Wide and Community parks serve large areas of the city and are typically centred around a historical, geographical, unique feature or other community amenities with more intense recreational facilities. Examples of City-wide Parks are Gore Park, Battlefield Park and Sam Lawrence Park. Examples of Community Parks are Heritage Green Park, Billy Sherring Park, Gage Park and Joe Sams Leisure Park. Parkettes are typically small pieces of land and are often provided where no other parkland can be secured, and examples can be found across the City.

The Neighbourhood park class is the most common type of park, and primarily caters to the recreational needs and interests of residents living within its general vicinity and forms the basis for accessible provisioning standards throughout the city.

Hamilton's current provision target for municipal parkland is 2.1 hectares per 1,000 people. This is proportioned among the different park classes as follows (as identified in the City's Official Plan):

- City Wide Parks – 0.7 hectares per 1000 people
- Community Parks – 0.7 hectares per 1000 people
- Neighbourhood Parks – 0.7 hectares per 1000 people
- Parkettes – do not have a provision target and are found throughout the city in response to historical and practical constraints to parkland supply.

The Neighbourhood Park class is the primary focus of this Master Plan, given that it is funded through the Parkland Dedication By-law and forms the basis for Hamilton's parkland provision standards.

Other publicly accessible lands include school sites, natural open space, and other general open spaces such as golf courses. Although these lands provide benefit to the community, they are not considered active municipal parkland, are not acquired nor funded through the same mechanisms, and as such, do not contribute to overall parkland provision rates in this Master Plan.

Analysis

Trends and Best Practices

There are several methods to measuring parkland provision. However, most commonly, municipalities measure it in two ways:

- Park supply (total area of City-owned parkland per 1000 residents); or
- Park distribution and access (amount or presence of a park within a maximum or prescribed distance).

Hamilton currently uses the park supply measurement as a means for calculating parkland provision. In addition to the park supply measurement, this Master Plan uses park distribution and access to account for where parks are located, and whether they are accessible or if they are equitably distributed.

An increasing number of municipalities province-wide and nation-wide are identifying distribution and access targets with the intent that certain classes of parks are accessible to residents within a defined distance.

Partnerships and Opportunities

The City of Hamilton partners with public and private organizations and agencies to provide park services to residents. This Master Plan examines the partnerships that currently exist between the City and its partners and identifies additional opportunities as to how the partnerships could be strengthened to better provide for parkland – using both City-owned land and non-City-owned land.

Hamilton is made up of a wide range of neighbourhood types, each with their own characteristics. This Master Plan identifies the role that each type of neighbourhood plays in the overall parks and open space network and provides different opportunities for leveraging the assets of these areas while planning for parkland in the face of future population growth.

Parkland Provisioning

Catchment Analysis

To identify initially where gaps exist in the park system, a catchment analysis was conducted to assess the relative distribution of municipal parkland across the City. The analysis draws on the walkable network of streets and pathways to define 800m catchment areas around each Neighbourhood Park (roughly 5-10 minute walk). This initial assessment revealed where gaps exist and the areas in which to target a more detailed analysis.

Decision Making Process

The Parks Master Plan provides a decision-making framework to evaluate and prioritize the parkland acquisition process. This framework will help guide the strategic acquisition of parkland across the City. Drawing on the catchment analysis to identify areas lacking sufficient nearby park access, the framework prioritizes where additional parks are needed using a variety of focus factors. This includes desktop-level assessments of structural, social, and demographic focus factors, as well as site-level characteristics and contexts. This framework for parkland acquisition and (re)development provides clarity by identifying priority areas for new parkland acquisition to facilitate fair, transparent, and consistent decision-making.

As parkland acquisition can be a costly and time-consuming process, a strategic approach is necessary to help target areas most in need of additional parkland. To ensure broad support, this process must be evidence-based, data-driven, and priority-focused.

Focusing on the Neighbourhood Park class, the distribution of these parks is assessed with reference to the 2021 census population using an 800m walkable catchment. This highlights areas of the City with good supply of Neighbourhood Parks, and those where parks are not locally accessible.

These existing gaps in Neighbourhood Park access then serve to define the focus areas where the acquisition of new parks is most necessary. Within these focus areas, a variety of focus factors are used to help prioritize where acquisition should occur next. This provides a useful triage to focus attention on the areas of greatest overall need.

Areas lacking walkable access to neighbourhood parkland are prioritized using a variety of overlapping focus factors. Areas with greater overlap take higher priority for acquisition. These focus factors include:

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- Low or No Other Municipal Parkland: Areas with access to less than 7 square metres per person (0.7 hectares / 1000) of any significant municipal parkland (including all Neighbourhood, Community, or City-wide parkland);
- High Density (Existing): Areas with a population density greater than 4000 people per square kilometre;
- High Density (Planned Intensification): Greenfield or redevelopment areas with a planned increase in population greater than 75% of current population by 2051;
- Transit Oriented Development Corridors: Areas nearby to key transportation corridors which will experience targeted redevelopment and densification;
- Low Income: Areas with >25% low-income residents; and
- High Child and Youth Population: Areas with >25% of residents less than 19 years old.

Within these gap areas, focus factors are overlaid, and the total count provides a straightforward assessment of where the greatest need for new parkland exists. From there, each neighbourhood of the City can be scored and classified into 'Very High', 'High', 'Medium', and 'Low' priority classes. The findings show that by overlapping focus factors, many neighbourhoods of lower Hamilton near the downtown are areas of the highest priority for increased parkland supply.

Parkland Acquisition

Once gaps in the existing park system have been identified and prioritized, the City is faced with the challenge of acquiring these new lands for future parkland use. This Master Plan describes existing and potential parkland acquisition tools for the City to achieve its goals of parkland provision.

Currently, Hamilton uses two (2) primary methods to acquire parkland:

- Dedication of land at the time of development by developers (commonly referred to as "parkland dedication"); and
- Purchasing land for future parkland use.

This Master Plan highlights the various tools that the City currently uses under the two methods of parkland acquisition.

As the City focuses on accommodating more population growth in the existing urban area prior to expanding to greenfield areas, it will become more challenging to acquire parkland through the dedication of land. As such, this Master Plan offers new parkland acquisition tools and alternative public realm options that can supplement the City's existing toolkit, while highlighting their application, and what would be needed for the City to implement each new tool. The analysis also lists comparable municipalities where these specific tools are already in place.

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Examples of new acquisition tools include, but are not limited to:

- Shared use agreements and easements;
- Privately Owned Public Spaces (POPS);
- Strata parks (City-owned lands that overlap with shared infrastructure such as parking structures);
- Repurposing of existing non-park municipal lands for parkland; and
- Community benefits charges (whereby a fee is imposed on higher density development to pay for capital improvements not covered by development charges or for parkland in excess of parkland covered under the parkland dedication By-law).

Recommended Actions

This Master Plan provides strategic actions over the short, medium, and long term that can help the City achieve its parkland goals.

Achieving these goals for parkland provision of municipal parks across the City requires improvements to existing funding, acquisition, and maintenance approaches. This includes changes to the City's approach to investment, internal coordination, and external cooperation to capitalize on opportunities to acquire parkland in high priority neighbourhoods.

Some of the recommendations include specific one-time projects or actions and others that provide ongoing guidance.

Impacts to the Master Plan as a Result of Bill 23

The Province of Ontario passed Bill 23, the *More Homes Built Faster Act* in the fall of 2022. It seeks to increase housing supply through a wide-reaching slate of legislative and regulatory changes across Ontario. The Parks Master Plan found in Appendix "A" of Report PW23064 includes an appendix that summarizes the impacts to the Master Plan and its recommendations in light of Bill 23 *More Homes Built Faster Act*. Most relevant to the Master Plan are the changes to the Planning Act that impact how parkland dedication can and is employed to secure the provision of park space or cash-in-lieu for parks improvements and expansion.

ALTERNATIVES FOR CONSIDERATION

An alternative to the recommendations in Report PW23064 is that Council could direct staff to make modifications to the Parks Master Plan and bring a revised Report to Council for consideration. Staff would need specific direction on the areas of revision in order to complete this work. If Council wishes to make refinements to the Master Plan,

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staff can be directed to include an update as part of the 2024 capital budget process for implementation in 2024, once approved, in order to refine those specific areas of concern. This would result in a delay in parkland acquisition in strategic areas of need and increase the costs of those acquisitions and would delay the needed updates to other policy documents such as the parkland dedication By-law, therefore this alternative is not recommended.

Financial: Additional consulting fees would be required for any further revisions to the Parks Master Plan. Depending on the scope of the revision, this order of magnitude could cost an additional \$50,000.00 and would require consideration as part of the 2024 capital budget process.

Staffing: N/A

Legal: Not having this Master Plan in place puts the City in a position of legislative non-compliance, since this is a requirement within the Planning Act.

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

Appendix "A" to Report PW23064 – Parks Master Plan