



City of
Markham

Parks
Plan

July 2022

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1

INTRODUCTION



1.1 Background

Policy and planning trends throughout Ontario are changing the way that municipalities plan for growth. Markham, like all municipalities in the Greater Golden Horseshoe area, is required to meet growth and density targets established by the Province of Ontario, via the Growth Plan as well as Regional Official Plan policies. This reality is leading to more compact and intensified development patterns, which has impacts on land values, development potential, and parkland planning, among other aspects of urban development.

Markham's in-force Parkland Dedication By-law was first drafted in 1990. The City has changed substantially over the last three decades, as has planning and development in Ontario more generally. Changes to the Planning Act starting in 2016 combined with Markham's population growth targets mean that new approaches to parkland planning are needed.

Markham's transition from a largely suburban to a more urban municipality has drastically changed the design, form and density of the City in a relatively short time frame. These new and denser forms of development require a revised parkland response, one that is more compact, highly designed, incorporates more flexible and less structured space connected to a larger public realm network.

Much of Markham's growth will be focused on its Intensification Areas. These areas will require a particular parkland dedication approach that balances parkland needs with the necessity of meeting the City's growth targets.

The public parks system is not only an essential component in the development of a complete community, the conveyance of parkland, as

articulated under the Planning Act, is also an important instrument that municipalities can use to ensure the size and location of parks will meet the recreational needs of future growth.

Markham has a number of legal mechanisms available to maintain and enhance the parkland system, established through the Planning Act. For the past number of decades, the City's interpretation of those regulations has been based on the desire to generate a public parks system that met the needs of its traditional suburban character that relied on car-based access. While this planning philosophy still exists, it is now being balanced with a more urban approach to planning, particularly in the Intensification Areas and within Markham's newer communities (e.g. the Future Urban Area).

As the City grows and densifies, there is a concern that the current parkland dedication policy regime and its associated implementation procedures will not reflect the changing municipal growth patterns, including new and denser housing types, evolving socio-economic trends, and equitable parkland provision levels.

1.2 Purpose

In the context of Markham’s urban evolution, the City needs to review and potentially reinterpret the policies and procedures that help generate the public parks system in a form appropriate for its changing context and in an appropriate legal and legislative format. The City is therefore required to implement a Parks Plan and revisit its current parkland dedication policies and by-law based on recent changes to the Planning Act brought forward through Bill 197. Furthermore, the City must ensure that they have the necessary tools to implement alternative parkland dedication rates, that the rates appropriately balance the dual needs of park provision and urban development, and that the rates are justifiable, fair and appropriate.

An important purpose of this Parks Plan is to examine the need for parkland in Markham, and to help guide the City’s parkland dedication and acquisition process as it responds to an evolving City and Provincial policy framework. The wording inherent to this Parks Plan is intended to introduce a number of concepts and ideas that are believed to be relevant to an up-to-date and defensible Parkland Dedication By-law. The wording is specifically not absolute or determinative in recognition that this Parks Plan is to provide opportunities for City staff to carry out further research, to apply City of Markham objectives and experiences and to, ultimately, prepare a Parkland Dedication By-law to present to Council that is in the best interests of the City.

Overall, this Parks Plan will assist the City in achieving its goals with respect to the public parkland system and the planned urban structure. Further, it is important to recognize that this Parks Plan needs to:

- Find the right balance between achieving a great Parkland System for the City, and the financial feasibility of new development; and,
- Be cognizant of the inherent differences between the established neighbourhood context, and the in the context of the City’s identified Intensification Areas.

Overall, the City’s new approach to parkland dedication, as it is informed by this Parks Plan, should be guided by the principles of fairness, equity, consistency and transparency. It is also important to recognize that the new Parkland Dedication By-Law must be defensible.



VALUE OF PARKS



2.1 Quality of Place / Quality of Life

The public realm network, and the park spaces that it incorporates, is crucial to the functional attributes of a healthy and desirable urban area. This Chapter first explores how the public realm network contributes to quality of life, individual and social health, and placemaking, and then outlines the economic and environmental value of investing in park spaces and the broader public realm network.

What the research herein broadly indicates is that a diversity of park types, sizes, programming and functions are essential to maximize the potential benefits of a parks and open space network. Many of the studies discussed also identify the importance of access and proximity of park space (ideally within neighbourhood-scale access) to the benefits that are achieved by the use of the parkspace; the nearer people are to parks, the more they will use them and receive the demonstrated benefits.

2.2 Community Health

Physical Health

A large body of recent research has consistently produced findings that correlate access to parks and open spaces with higher levels of physical activity, which can reduce the incidence of certain chronic illnesses associated with a sedentary lifestyle. Kaczynski et al. (2009) surveyed and catalogued physical activity of neighbourhood residents in a mid-sized Ontario city and found that “the number and total area of parks within a 1 km radius of participants’ homes were significant predictors of physical activity that occurred in neighbourhoods and parks.” In his work on *Why America Needs More City Parks and Open Space* (2003), Sherer similarly found that those who have access to parks exercise more, and that “access to places for physical activity

combined with informational outreach produced a 48.4% increase in frequency of physical activity.”

The positive effects on physical activity are reported across all age groups. Roemmich et al. found in 2004 that both young children as well as older youth have increased levels of physical activity when neighbourhoods had access to more parks. Orsega-Smith et al. (2006) reported similar findings for older adults, stating that park-based activities positively influenced moods, stress levels, and overall health of the study participants.

Psychological Health & Development

There is a similarly large and ever-growing catalogue of research connecting positive psychological benefits with access to a quality public realm network. Specifically contact with the natural environment has been shown to improve psychological health alongside physical health (Sherer, 2003).

Positive mental health outcomes are tangibly linked to increased physical activity, which may explain some of the positive psychological benefits of park use. However, it is also true that parks and open spaces are frequently used for passive recreation and relaxation, including walking, reading, meditating and socializing. Carter & Horowitz (2014) recorded interview responses that speak directly to people seeking parks as a form of psychological renewal, including responses such as: “lifts my mood”, “good for the soul”, “makes me happier”, and “escape the noise and busyness.”

Play is a central component to learning and development in small children, connected to muscle strength, coordination, cognition, and

reasoning. As put by Sherer (2003), “exercise has been shown to increase the brain’s capacity for learning”, and as such, creating recreational opportunities for children contributes to both their physical and psychological development.

Residents of all ages engage in both higher intensity and low-impact activities in parks. Given the demonstrated mental and physical health benefits of park use, in its variety of forms and activities, a variety of park types, sizes and designs are required to provide a full spectrum of potential uses and subsequently the full range of benefits provided to individuals.



2.3 Social Outcomes

Healthy, Safe & Complete Communities

Park spaces and the public realm network contribute to healthy and complete communities, and offer an attractive quality of place for residents, businesses and visitors alike. For residents in particular, the social and health benefits of park spaces have been well documented, and are associated with the role parks play in community development, and in creating a sense of community, reducing the incidence of crime, promoting physical activity, supporting psychological and social development, and improving environmental indicators.

In their report released this year, titled *Sparking Change*, Park People (2017a) describe their research, including interviews conducted with various communities and parks practitioners, stating that “by providing an open, accessible venue that promotes social gathering, cultural exchange, and shared storytelling, parks are important in developing a sense of community, safety, and belonging.” The report stresses that the community development and social inclusion benefits are especially true in underserved areas of cities that traditionally receive less investment in parks, the public realm, or transit than other areas.

It is widely suggested that parks and the public realm are among the likeliest places where diverse groups can come together and learn about their community and the other cultures therein in a safe and open place (Galanakis references several examples in his 2013 paper, *Intercultural Public Spaces in Multicultural Toronto*).

Crime Reduction

Both perceived and real sense of safety contributes to a community’s attractiveness and

positive functioning, which can be impacted by the incidence of crime. In this regard Sherer (2003) reports that “access to public parks and recreational facilities has been strongly linked to reductions in crime and in particular to juvenile delinquency” by giving youth a safe environment in which to recreate, interact, and spend time. As such, “research supports the widely held belief that community involvement in neighbourhood parks is correlated with lower levels of crime” (Sherer, 2003). Notably, poorly maintained public spaces are associated with the exact opposite effect – that being an increase in the perceived or real incidence of crime.

2.4 Environmental Health

Ecological Services

Alongside the social and health-related benefits of park spaces, there are important environmental benefits for communities with integrated green and blue infrastructure in the public realm and parks, such as permeable features, trees, shrubs and water features. The ecological benefits of parks and vegetated green spaces are well documented, including, erosion control, air and water pollutant absorption, and reduction of urban heating effects through shading and cooling.

“Parks are not simply green places of respite with grass and trees—they are critical pieces of the social infrastructure of our cities. And we believe they have a role to play in creating more inclusive, equitable places that are shaped by and for the people living there.” - Park People, 2017

A study looking at the dollar value of trees and shrubs in Allan Gardens in Toronto found that the canopy provides ecological services equating to approximately \$95 per tree per year (Millward

& Sabir, 2011). This per tree value varies based on species and age of the trees, however when projected across a city's entire urban forest, the dollar value of healthy trees in parks and green spaces is quickly apparent.

2.5 Economic Value

Assigning economic value to park spaces has historically been anecdotal. More recently, the "multiple perspectives" approach, alongside other research and case studies, confirms the important economic benefits of investing in parks, and begins the move to more quantitative economic evidence.

Perspectives on Economic Value

There has been considerable work done in the United States on measuring the economic value of park spaces in an urban setting. Much of this work has been spearheaded by the California-based Trust for Public Land (TPL). In the 2009 publication by Harnik and Welle, *Measuring the Economic Value of a City Park System*, an approach

was developed that has since been used to assess the value of park space in several US cities, including Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Boston, San Diego and Washington DC.

The approach taken by TPL was to develop a methodology to quantify economic value according to seven distinct perspectives, as follows:

- **Increased property values** – which looks at the extent to which proximity to a park space adds value to the market and assessed value of residential property;
- **Increased tourist expenditure** – which assesses the number of visitors to a community who spend more time and money in the community than they otherwise would have, because they are participating in activities in parks, or simply enjoying being outdoors;
- **Direct use value** – which measures the value that users place upon the availability



Corktown Common, Toronto
Image: Waterfront Toronto

of park spaces (i.e. how much they would be prepared to pay for the opportunity to enjoy parks if they were not freely available);

- **Health value** – which measures the value of the savings in medical costs to individuals and society-at-large, by virtue of the fact that people who use parks (and the broader public realm) are healthier and less likely to incur medical expenses;
- **Community cohesion value** – which measures the value to the community overall of participating in parks-related initiatives (i.e. individuals donating their time and/or money and working together on park-related projects), a concept very similar to what Jane Jacobs had identified as “social capital” in her 1961 work, *The Life and Death of Great American Cities*.
- **Reduced storm water management costs** – which examines the value of park spaces in helping reduce runoff during periods of heavy rainfall, and enabling precipitation to filter and recharge groundwater – the savings to the municipality in terms of fewer gallons of storm water that require treatment can be directly measured; and,
- **Value of reduced air pollution** – which examines the effect of trees and vegetation acting as the “lungs” of the city and removing various toxins from the air, including nitrogen dioxide, sulphur dioxide, carbon monoxide, ozone, and certain particulates. The objective is to assess the extent to which park spaces in a given community have this effect – based upon the ambient air quality of the city – and then measures the value (cost) of removing these materials from the air through technological means, such as scrubbers.



Milne Dam, Markham



Windsor, Ontario



3

PLANNING OVERVIEW



3.1 The Planning Act

The City's parkland system is crucial to the quality of life of Markham's urban and suburban communities. In addition to the numerous benefits of parks described in the previous chapters, parks are a central organizational element of community design, recognizing the need for parks and open spaces in proximity to all residents.

It is a fundamental planning practice that an appropriate and equitable parkland system be planned and developed to provide for the recreational needs of the existing and future residents of the City of Markham. In order to achieve this, the parkland system must include the right amount of space, the right mixture of park types, the right level of quality and design, and the right programming.

Achieving this balance is a complex task given the numerous realities (social, political, economic) that influence the development of urban land and the provision of parks and open spaces within cities. Legislation within the Planning Act provides municipalities with some tools to

acquire parkland through development, much in the same manner as development charges are collected through development to service growth. These tools were historically developed primarily to address lower density subdivision style development and can have broad impacts on the viability of developing higher density, mixed-use projects when the maximum permitted parkland dedication is required by municipalities. The negative financial implication is exacerbated as density is increased.

The issue created by the Planning Act formula is the relationship between land dedication and dwelling units, which does not account for the dramatic range of residents generated by various forms and density of housing. Mitigating measures may include relating parkland dedication rates to the number of people or jobs generated by a given development or reducing the dedication rate from the maximum for higher density developments. These approaches would ensure greater consistency of the parkland per person ratio between urban and suburban forms of development.



Greensborough Town Centre, Markham

Parkland conveyance authority is established in the Planning Act, Section 42, which pertains to parkland conveyances associated with development and redevelopment, and Sections 51.1 and 53, which pertain to parkland requirements as a condition of plan of subdivision approval and consent, respectively.

Bill 73

In late 2016, a number of amendments to the Planning Act were implemented through Bill 73 that impact parkland conveyance policies. These updates are included in the description of the Planning Act policies below:

Land Conveyance - The Planning Act establishes parameters for conveyances for park or other recreational purposes, as follows:

- Not exceeding 2% of land area in the case of commercial or industrial development.
- Not exceeding 5% of land area in the case of all other types of development.
- For residential purposes, the Act permits municipalities to utilize 5% of land area OR an alternative requirement of conveyance based on a maximum rate of 1 hectare for every 300 dwelling units, subject to enabling policies within the approved local Official Plan.

These three conveyance rates are identified as the maximum rate for each development scenario within the Planning Act.

Payment-in-Lieu and Land Valuation - Municipalities may also accept payment-in-lieu of parkland conveyance. This payment can be made in the form cash or other reasonable alternative as the municipality deems appropriate. In either case

the payment must represent the value of the land that would otherwise have been conveyed. The Planning Act policies that establish parameters for payment-in-lieu and land valuation are as follows:

- If the alternative requirement for residential development is used (1 ha/300 units), when the municipality accepts payment-in-lieu of land, a maximum rate of 1 hectare for each 500 units will instead be used.
- All cash accepted as payment-in-lieu must be deposited into a special account and used only for the acquisition of land to be used for park or other recreational purposes, including the erection, improvement or repair of buildings and the acquisition of machinery for park or other public recreational purposes.
- Regarding land development and redevelopment under Section 42, payment is to be determined based on the value of the land as of the day before the issuance of the first building permit.
- Regarding subdivision development and consents under Sections 51.1 and 53, respectively, payment is to be determined based on the value of the land as of the day before the approval of the draft plan of subdivision or provisional consent, as the case may be.

Implementation of Conveyance Policy - Historically, the Planning Act provided some inherent flexibility in the way municipalities implement conveyance policies, primarily by what the Act remained silent on. With recent amendments to the Act, however, municipalities are now required to justify conveyance policies if the alternative

requirement for residential conveyance is implemented. The following are relevant policies and notes regarding implementation:

- The Act does not prescribe which method (or rate up to the maximum) is to be applied in any situation.
- The Act does not indicate if, where, or when the municipality may require less than the maximums identified in either approach.
- The Act now specifies that prior to a municipality implementing Official Plan policies to implement the alternative requirement of conveyance for park for residential development, the municipality must produce a "Parks Plan" that examines the need for parkland in the municipality.
- The Act now also specifies that municipalities must submit, yearly, a financial statement detailing the deposits and expenditures of the special cash-in-lieu fund. This provides additional transparency that municipalities are accounting for and spending these monies appropriately.

Bill 197

In addition to the important changes to the Planning Act enacted through Bill 73, in 2020 the Province enacted Bill 197, which, among other matters, made further amendments to the Planning Act affecting parkland dedication. Bill 197 provides for additional checks and balances on the use of alternative residential parkland standards that the City can apply, in response to judicial interpretations that previously prohibited Parkland Dedication By-law appeals. More specifically, Bill 197 implements the following:

- Parkland rates set out by By-law can be challenged by appeal to the OLT.
- Municipalities must update their Parkland Dedication By-laws by September 18, 2022.

Bill 197 also creates an entirely new regime for the use of Section 37 of the Planning Act, with the focus on achieving defined community benefits through a new Community Benefits Charge By-law which is linked to the value of the property, as well as a number of changes to Development Charges. All of these elements of change to the Planning Act, as well as Development Charges will need to be considered in the context of Markham's approach to defining and achieving a robust and appropriate parkland system.

Bill 109

In April 2022, the Province enacted Bill 109, which, among many other matters, made changes to parkland dedication in order to balance the priority for building new housing in Transit Oriented Communities quickly, while continuing to create more parkland.

For Transit Oriented Community (TOC) developments, parkland dedication would be up to 10% of the land or its value for sites under (5) hectares, and up to 15% of the land or its value for sites over (5) hectares. In addition, encumbered parkland containing easements or underground services such as transit would be included in the total parkland dedication area. No definition of the geographical area of a Transit Oriented Community (TOC) has been provided by the Province and the City is seeking clarity with respect to which areas in Markham are to be identified as Transit Oriented Communities.

3.2 City of Markham Official Plan

The 1987 Official Plan

The 1987 Official Plan is a plan that reflects the point in Markham's ongoing evolution as a mostly suburban community, as well as the Provincial planning legislative requirements and opportunities at that time. Keeping in mind that key elements of this 1987 Official Plan are still in force because replacement sections in the 2014 Official Plan related to the City's public parkland system are under appeal.

The parks system hierarchy also includes specific park provision requirements that total 3.053 hectares per 1000 people, broken down by park type, as follows:

- Neighbourhood Parks - 1.2141 ha/1000 people.
- Community Parks - 0.8094ha/1000 people.
- Town Parks - 1.0118 ha/1000 people.

In section 3.9.4 of the 1987 Official Plan, the City does establish a maximum limit on parkland to be achieved through the provisions of the Planning Act, at 1.2141 hectares per 1000 people, and empowers itself to:

- Utilize a number of approaches to acquire parkland, outside of the Planning Act provisions.
- Utilize the alternative residential dedication rate identified in the Planning Act of 1 hectare per 300 dwelling units.

2014 Official Plan

The parkland policies of Markham's 2014 Official Plan are under appeal and the policies of the

1987 Official Plan remain in force. However, Sections 4.3 and 10.8.2 of the 2014 Official Plan establish the City's intent to establish the policy framework with respect to the City's Parks and Open Space System.

City Parks - Markham's City Parks are actively planned and acquired by the City, either through the use of Planning Act policies or other acquisition means, whose primary function is to serve municipal residents' day-to-day parkland needs. City Parks include a number of sub-types:

- **City-wide Parks:** Larger City Parks that can accommodate a variety of larger recreational activities for the entire City, including swimming pools, day camps and sports tournaments. These parks are typically larger than 12 hectares.

Destination Parks - Destination Parks are large and unique parks that attract local and regional visitors. These parks include conservation areas and lands within Rouge Park that perform important environmental functions. Large Provincial and Federal Parks or trails within the City's Natural Heritage System are important aspects of a larger open space system, however many people face barriers to accessing these spaces for a myriad of individual reasons and the City often has limited capacity to control programming, design and acquisition or additions to these parks. It is due to this reality that only freely accessible public parks that are adequately secured for public use by the City are considered in this exercise and that provision levels are determined within the boundaries of the defined Parkland Service Districts. Destination Parks provide additional use and opportunities that may be absent in City Parks, but they cannot compensate for the parks needs and

functions required by the Planning Act parkland conveyance policies.

Open Space Lands - Open Space Lands that provide benefit to the parks and open space system beyond those provided by City Parks, however the primary function of these lands is environmental protection and natural heritage conservation. These lands are not suitable as parkland dedication under the Planning Act.

Parkland Provision Standard - It is important to note that the parkland required as identified in the 2014 Official Plan is 1.2 hectares per 1,000 residents. In addition, the City also limits themselves, as does the Planning Act, to a maximum of 1 hectare per 300 dwelling units, plus any contribution to the parkland supply from non-residential developments.

3.3 Parkland Dedication Practices

Parkland Dedication By-Law 195-90

Markham's in-force Conveyance of Parkland By-Law (By-Law 195-90) establishes the authority of the City to require parkland through the development, draft plan of subdivision, and consent processes. This By-law was passed in 1990 and amended in 1994, a very different time in the development evolution of Markham.

Markham's Parkland Dedication By-Law will need to be amended to conform with recent proposed changes to the Planning Act. Most importantly, as per Bill 197, the City will not be able to carry forward the alternative rate provisions of By-law 19-90 beyond September 18, 2022.

Area Specific Parkland Policies

Reflecting the increasing complexities of

Markham's urban planning and development activity, the City has utilized alternative or customized approaches to securing parkland, beyond conventional land conveyances or cash-in-lieu agreements, to facilitate development in a number of its key Secondary Plan areas.

Figure 1 shows the location of Markham's Intensification Areas, as well as the boundary of the Future Urban Area. A number of the Intensification Areas have area specific parkland funding and delivery agreements that have been established and defined through Secondary Plans and associated agreements.

Markham Centre Parkland Funding and Delivery Agreement

Markham Centre's Parkland Funding and Delivery Agreement is a prime example of the City implementing a customized agreement to secure parkland within a Secondary Plan area. As of June 2017 this agreement has been terminated, however the Funding and Delivery Agreement was based on a set of Council endorsed principles ("Markham Centre Parkland Principles") which provided, in relatively substantial detail, guidance on the "dedication and delivery of public parks, squares and urban plazas throughout the Markham Centre Secondary Plan area". Some of the key principles, which were updated in 2006, included:

- Utilizing the 1.214 hectares per 1,000 population standard for residential development (using a 2.2 ppu assumption for all unit types), the 2% standard for commercial development and a combined rate for mixed-use development.
- Targeting 60% of the dedication requirement be achieved through land dedication and the

remaining 40% through cash-in-lieu, with the cash-in-lieu component based on land values updated annually through a City-led appraisal and based on an average across the entire Secondary Plan Area.

- Committing to use cash-in-lieu funds for the purchase of parkland, including “improved parkland at an enhanced urban standard” within Markham Centre.
- Requiring that the majority of parkland within Markham Centre be “urban in character and quality”, delivered to a minimum standard of 3 times the City-wide parkland development standard.
- Emphasizing that lands offered for dedication need to demonstrate a “substantial public benefit, as opposed to a private benefit”.
- Opening up the possibility for granting

below grade rights for the development of structured parking facilities beneath parkland, subject to certain considerations/ criteria.

3.4 The Growth Plan

Perhaps the greatest influence on modern urban development patterns in Ontario is the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (Growth Plan). The Growth Plan contributes to creating a more compact and urban built form within the Greater Golden Horseshoe that protects existing natural resources and more efficiently utilizes space with a range of land uses.

The key directives of the Growth Plan prescribe growth and density targets for each upper tier and single tier municipality. Upper tier municipalities then prescribe growth and density targets for lower tier municipalities. Municipalities are required to delineate built-up



Markham Centre, Markham

areas, or intensification areas, where growth is to be directed and forecasted targets are to be achieved.

Overall, the Growth Plan policies indicate that a much denser development form, for both infill and greenfield developments, is required in order to achieve the required forecasted targets. This directly impacts how the City of Markham plans for development and its ability to acquire land or cash for parks. This new reality impacts the remaining supply of land within the municipality for park development and influences the potential size, location and design of new parks.

Markham is also experiencing substantial land value increases, much higher density development and subsequent new residential needs. All signs are pointing to an evolving parkland reality within Markham, one that will require the City and its residents to continue to expand the definition of parkland to include a mixture of large and small spaces that are interconnected and locally unique. This evolving definition will contribute to a total parkland system that is situated in place (whether urban or suburban) and that offers a full range of experiences and uses.

3.5 Integrated Leisure Master Plan

The City of Markham's 2019 Integrated Leisure Master Plan (ILMP) is a Council approved, long-range planning document, that includes specific recommendations for the provision of facilities to the year 2031. The ILMP identifies the current needs, service improvements and future facility provision strategies to ensure the provision of safe, accessible and community-responsive services and facilities that meet diverse needs of residents. The growing trend for healthy lifestyle

has increased demand for access to active recreational space in parks. Combined with the rapid growth occurring and anticipated in the City of Markham, the short and long-range planning for parkland is critical to ensure that recreation facilities can be delivered at a pace that responds to the pace of development.

The 2019 ILMP builds on the 2010 ILMP and was informed by research and analysis of best practices, trends, benchmarks, usage data, public input, demographics and population projections. The ILMP includes a comprehensive needs assessment for parks and recreation facilities and identifies provision targets and recommendations for specific facilities.

The recommendations of the Parks Plan and updates to the Parkland Dedication By-Law will have significant implications on Markham's ability to deliver the park specific facilities identified in the ILMP as the delivery of these facilities depends greatly on the City's ability to acquire sufficient land.



Integrated Leisure Master Plan

3.6 Urban and Suburban Context

Planning and developing parks within urban contexts (Intensification Areas) presents a number of new challenges and potential opportunities in comparison to a more traditional suburban context. Parkland policies, including provision, within subdivision and greenfield developments are well established and generally much easier to design and apply. In comparison, urban parks have higher daily use requiring more ongoing maintenance, they are typically much more highly designed with unique plantings and materials requiring a higher quality of construction and in many cases more short and long term upkeep, land is more expensive and scarcer requiring innovative approaches to acquire suitable and adequate lands in areas of need, and the programmatic elements vary vastly from large open suburban parks. It should be noted that though urban parks are more expensive to design, construct and maintain than their suburban counterparts, the use is substantially higher and potentially more diverse. If urban park costs were assessed from a per person user metric, the comparison to suburban park costs would likely level out (or be tipped in favour of urban parks).

The expectations of public space vary based on the location of these amenities within the city. Residents who choose to live in the Downtown, or a higher density development area, are typically doing so for the exchange in amenity access compared to lower density areas further from urban cores. For example, it would be impractical to expect that downtown residents have direct access to sports fields and large backyards, as well as access to the commercial, transit and lifestyle amenities of the urban core. Similarly it would be impractical to suggest that a resident of a low density suburban subdivision receive the same level of transit service or

commercial and cultural experiences at their door step as in the City core.

The decision to live in Markham Centre (and the denser Intensification Areas such as Langstaff Gateway) is a decision to balance urban amenities with urban impacts. The Official Plan 2014 recognizes Growth Plan and York Region Official Plan policies related to growth and intensification, and these policies are borne out in municipal principles and policies outlining the balance of priorities and realities of more urban living: increased transit service and active transportation options, increased commercial, institutional and cultural activity, but decreased housing size and private amenity space due to intensification. The City's new Parkland Dedication By-law will need to recognize the trade-off required when choosing to live in more highly urban areas.

The Suburban Parkland System

In a typical suburban neighbourhood there is a substantial private space element (backyard/ front yard), along with a park space hierarchy that includes large scale parks that are mostly green and include sports fields. In many cases, the suburban parkland system incorporates school sites, community recreation centres, and natural heritage system connections. For the most part, the suburban park space system is owned, designed and maintained by the public sector. The provision of suburban parkland is relatively straightforward, as they are planned as part of a central feature in the overall subdivision design and land is readily available.

Suburban parkland is characterized as public, big, green and programmed.

Urban Parkland Context

Parkland within Markham's various Intensification Areas (see Figure 1), includes an array of park spaces that can have both green and hard surface design components, and includes crucial connectivity components. The park spaces and broader public realm networks in Intensification Areas are more complex than the suburban parkland system and include primarily public spaces, but can also include public spaces and complimented by private spaces that all work together to form a highly interconnected network. The broader public realm network can be comprised of public parks, such as urban squares, and urban parkettes, that are complemented by a number of private spaces, such as courtyards, midblock connections and other open spaces. Park spaces and the broader public realm network in an urban context:

- Are highly animated by the people who walk from place to place and their interaction with the uses within the adjacent buildings;
- Are more heavily used and more diverse in their component parts and, as such require a higher cost of design and development, as well as an enhanced maintenance protocol;
- Are integrated as part of the pedestrian circulation network within the area; and
- Are flexible to accommodate different users and events, and will respond to the use patterns that may be dramatically different throughout the day, week and/or year.

Urban parkland is characterized as diverse, flexible, small and connected.

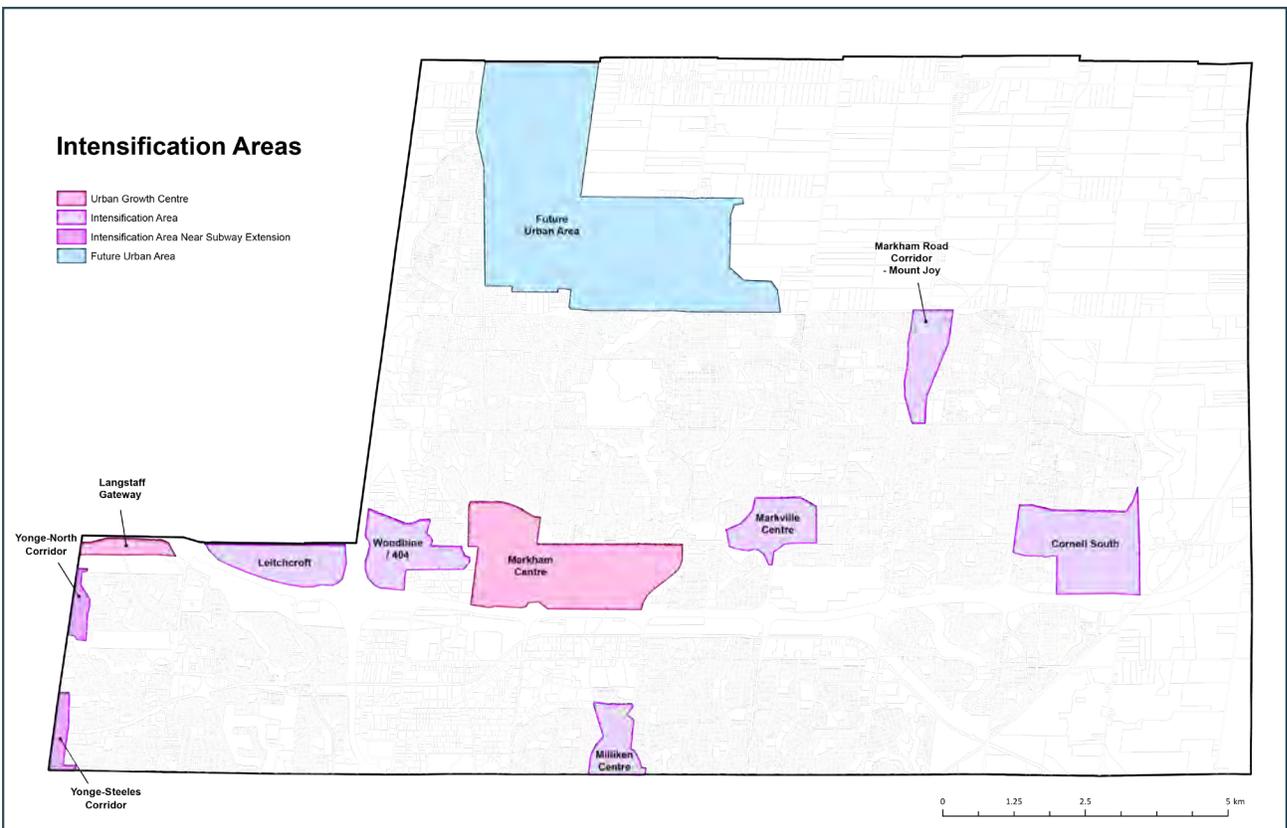


Figure 1: City of Markham Intensification Areas, and Future Urban Area

The acquisition of an urban park is very different from a suburban park. The likelihood of traditional parkland conveyance is reduced due to land scarcity in more highly developed areas, thus land is more expensive requiring additional public resources to compete with the market and purchase land for parks. The sum of these realities results in a new urban context requiring new tools and approaches to achieve parkland goals and a dynamic urban public realm.

The Trade-off

The high density context of the City's Intensification Areas is a fundamental requirement to achieving the critical mass necessary to support the palette of high order amenities, transit investment, housing options and places to work. Inherently, living in a high density environment involves an understanding that there are impacts that are more acute than in a typical suburban neighbourhood. There is more noise because of increased activity on the street. There

is traffic congestion, and parking constraints. Privacy is reduced. Construction is always underway. It is these impacts that are traded off against the urban amenities and opportunities offered by this form of living. One of the important trade-offs between the suburban and urban lifestyles, is the nature, scale and function of the suburban park space system versus the broader urban public realm network, including its associated park spaces.

Just like a suburban dweller is required to travel out of their neighbourhood to acquire or utilize higher order cultural, shopping, health, education and workplace amenities, the urban dweller will be required to go elsewhere within the city to find organized recreational opportunities that require expansive sports fields. This is simply part of the trade-off between lifestyle choices, and the need for additional, larger scale park spaces located elsewhere within the city.



Bayview Reservoir Park, Markham

3.7 An Innovative Policy Approach

Planning for an urban parkland system requires nuanced policies that support the development of a high quality and diverse parkland system. Parkland conveyance policies should enable a variety of solutions for different contexts and locations, with built in flexibility and quality control mechanisms. Beyond parkland conveyance policies, flexibility and quality control considerations are also needed within supporting municipal policies and practices that dictate how parkland is integrated as an element of community design, and how parkland can be used.

Flexibility

There should be enough flexibility in the policy to take into account and respond to context-specific priorities, such as built form and density of area developments, opportunities to provide community-specific facilities or to improve the connectivity of parks beyond the specific development site. Policies should also respond to changes to real estate values over time.

Quality Control

Quality control mechanisms should be built into

parkland conveyance policies and practices. To ensure the maximum public amenity is achieved, parkland conveyance needs to be addressed early on in the development approval process, and the City needs to have significant influence on the shape and location of new urban parks. For example, it is essential that park spaces in major redevelopment areas are centrally located, and not relegated to less desirable, left over spaces. The use of cash-in-lieu funds is another opportunity to maximize the amenity provided by parkland, and it is important that the City combines its financial resources to create meaningful parks in targeted areas.

Community Design

Integrating adjacent land uses can contribute to the success of parks. Parkland use can be optimized by ensuring edges are animated with active urban uses (often commercial uses), by integrating public facilities (such as public buildings, schools, daycare, libraries, etc.) with parkland, and by promoting the joint use of outdoor spaces.



Town Hall Square, Toronto (Strata above parking garage)



Mist Garden, Toronto (POPS above parking garage)



MARKHAM'S CURRENT PARKLAND



4.1 Parkland Supply and Distribution

The provision of parkland in Markham is both a measure of local parkland supply and access. Presently, Markham has approximately 468.05 hectares of parkland. Figure 2 identifies the distribution of parks throughout the City. Broken down by parkland type, existing provision levels are:

- Community Parks: 141.95 hectares;
- Neighbourhood Parks:
 - » Active Parks - 271.31 hectares;
 - » Parkettes - 27.83 hectares;
 - » Urban Squares - 1.26 hectares;
 - » Urban Parkettes - 2.64 hectares; and
 - » Uncategorized - 23.06 hectares.

The City's current population is estimated to be 353,000 people. Therefore, the current parkland provision level in Markham is approximately 1.33 hectares for every 1,000 residents. This indicates that the City's parkland provision is exceeding the Official Plan target of a minimum of 1.2 hectares per 1,000 people.

In order to understand existing park provision, it is equally important to discuss the distribution of parks as it is to discuss the quantity of parks provided. As described earlier, parks within walking distance of residents have a substantial positive impact on community physical and mental health and overall life expectancy. Local park access is especially important for residents who have reduced mobility and those who face

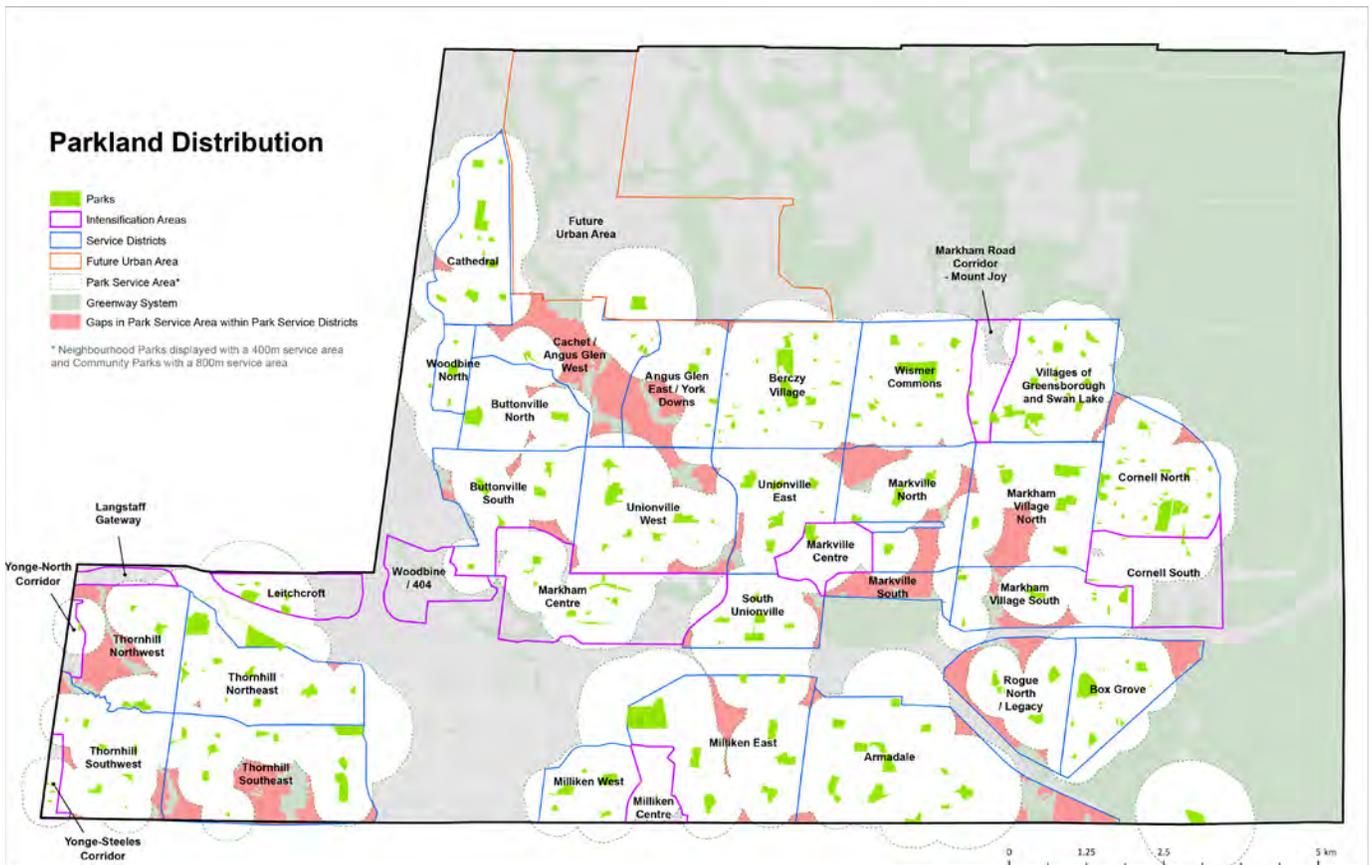


Figure 2: City of Markham // City Park Service Area Coverage

economic and cultural barriers to accessing recreational opportunities.

A typical metric used to determine local accessibility is a 5 to 10 minute walk, or a distance of 400 to 800 metres. Markham's 2014 Official Plan recognizes these distances in policy for park provision. Smaller, more urban focused parks typically are distributed within a 2 minute walk, or about 150 metres. It is established in section 4.3.2.2 of the 2014 Official Plan that Neighbourhood Parks are generally intended to serve users within a 5 minute walk (400 metres), and Community Parks are intended to serve users within a 10 minute walk (800 metres).

To demonstrate the distributional quality of Markham's existing parkland system, a park walking distance radius is shown around each Park identified on Figure 2 that generally corresponds with the individual parks intended user catchment area (either 400 or 800 metres).

The areas identified in tan on Figure 2 generally identify service gaps in Markham's parkland system, and they identify areas within the City that are non-residential employment areas and areas that are identified as Intensification Areas, which are still evolving. Other areas in tan on Figure 2 are covered by the City's substantial Natural Heritage System, which themselves have some limited recreational value that augments Markham's overall parkland system.

Figure 2 indicates that overall, Markham's existing parkland system has good coverage across the established neighbourhoods. There are very few existing residential communities in Markham that are not well served by the City's existing parkland system.

4.2 Parkland Service Districts

Purpose of Parkland Service Districts

Establishing a set of Parkland Service Districts throughout Markham is an important tool for parks planning as they are intended to provide geographic areas for which data can be collected and analyzed to understand local conditions and inform sound policy and decision-making.

To adequately plan a parkland system, a number of factors must be considered and understood, including, the quality and quantity of the existing system, and the demands on the existing system in consideration of both existing and planned future population growth. Establishing baseline metrics of park provision within Markham provides measurements that can be tracked over time to inform policies that address the unique parkland system needs throughout the City.

By assessing current parkland provision levels at both City-wide and neighbourhood levels, a finer-grained level of analysis will enable City staff to consider parks and open space planning through a new lens - district-scale parkland provision combined with an understanding of the anticipated growth over time of the community. In this manner, the future allocation of parkland within the City can be planned to address existing deficiencies in the system and potential deficiencies in future growth areas.

Defining Markham's Parkland Service Districts

In defining Parkland Service Districts for the purposes of this study, the goal was to focus on an array of available mapping and data sources. Development of the Parkland Service Districts was an iterative process that began with simple hand sketches and evolved into manipulating GIS maps to create new layers and boundaries. The data layers and variables that were considered

throughout the process are described in text that follows. Figure 3 shows the Parkland Service District boundaries that have been reviewed and agreed upon by City staff and the project team.

In a general sense, the following provides a description of some of the variables that went into the process of establishing the Parkland Service Districts within Markham:

Markham's Planning Boundaries - The Urban Boundary provides the planning area that is the subject of this study. The Rural Area of Markham is not part of this work.

The Future Urban Area - The Future Urban Area is also delineated as part of this study as it provides a boundary and defines an area that is being planned comprehensively, and includes a parkland system. It will be considered separately in this exercise.

The Natural Heritage System - The Natural Heritage System includes waterways, water bodies, valleys and other geographic features that act as physical barriers to movement. For the exercise of defining Park Service Areas, they are considered edges.

Human-made Barriers - Railways, utility corridors and major transportation facilities are highlighted. These are physical boundaries to safe and convenient non-vehicular movement. These human-made barriers are edges for the purpose of a connected and accessible parkland system.

Non-Residential Areas - Employment Areas are identified. Employment Areas do not contain residential areas and thus for the purpose of understanding park needs of local residents, these areas do not contain pertinent

demographic data for the establishment of the Park Planning Districts. Employment Areas will be removed from the study area.

Intensification Areas - The City's defined Intensification Areas are areas that have been designated as intensification areas and locations to focus higher density urban development. These areas warrant special attention throughout the development of the Park Plan, and therefore will be considered separately from community based Parkland Service Districts. Some level of interpretation of the census data will be required within the defined Intensification Areas because the boundaries of the Intensification Areas do not neatly correspond to census boundaries. Where Intensification Areas overlap with Employment Areas, Intensification Areas will take priority because they represent locations for substantial future population growth.

Political Boundaries - Both Ward Boundaries and site-specific Planning District boundaries are displayed over top of the removed employment Areas and the defined Intensification Areas. These political and functional planning boundaries form the basis for many local jurisdictional decisions in Markham. These lines were considered when determining Parkland Service District boundaries, and wherever possible, crossing of Ward and Park Planning District boundaries was avoided.

Canadian Census Dissemination Areas - A Dissemination Area is as a relatively small and stable geographic area composed of a single or multiple adjacent Dissemination Blocks. These are the smallest census areas for which all census data are published. Dissemination Area boundaries follow the boundaries defined by Census Tracts as well as roads, railways,

waterways, and other local features. A Dissemination Area provides a reasonable level of flexibility to respond to local factors and allow the selection and aggregation of multiple data boundaries. Given that the full suite of census data is published for Dissemination Areas and that Dissemination Areas allow greater flexibility than Census Tracts, they are considered the most suitable census geographic area for this exercise).

However, the configuration of the Dissemination Areas often pose problems in the definition of clean and uniform boundaries. Additionally, the reality of urban development and changes in Markham may not yet be captured by the Dissemination Area boundaries.

26 Parkland Service Districts

There are a total of 26 Parkland Service Districts identified on Figure 3 that are primarily residential communities. In addition there are 10 defined Intensification Areas, also shown on Figure 3. The Parkland Service Districts identified on Figure 3, as well as the defined Intensification Areas, represent the proposed functional Districts that will be used throughout the development of the Parks Plan. As noted, the Future Urban Area will be handled as a separate entity that will be further divided into Parkland Service as the plan for the area is finalized. There are a limited number of parks located outside park service districts as well that contribute to parkland provision on a citywide basis.

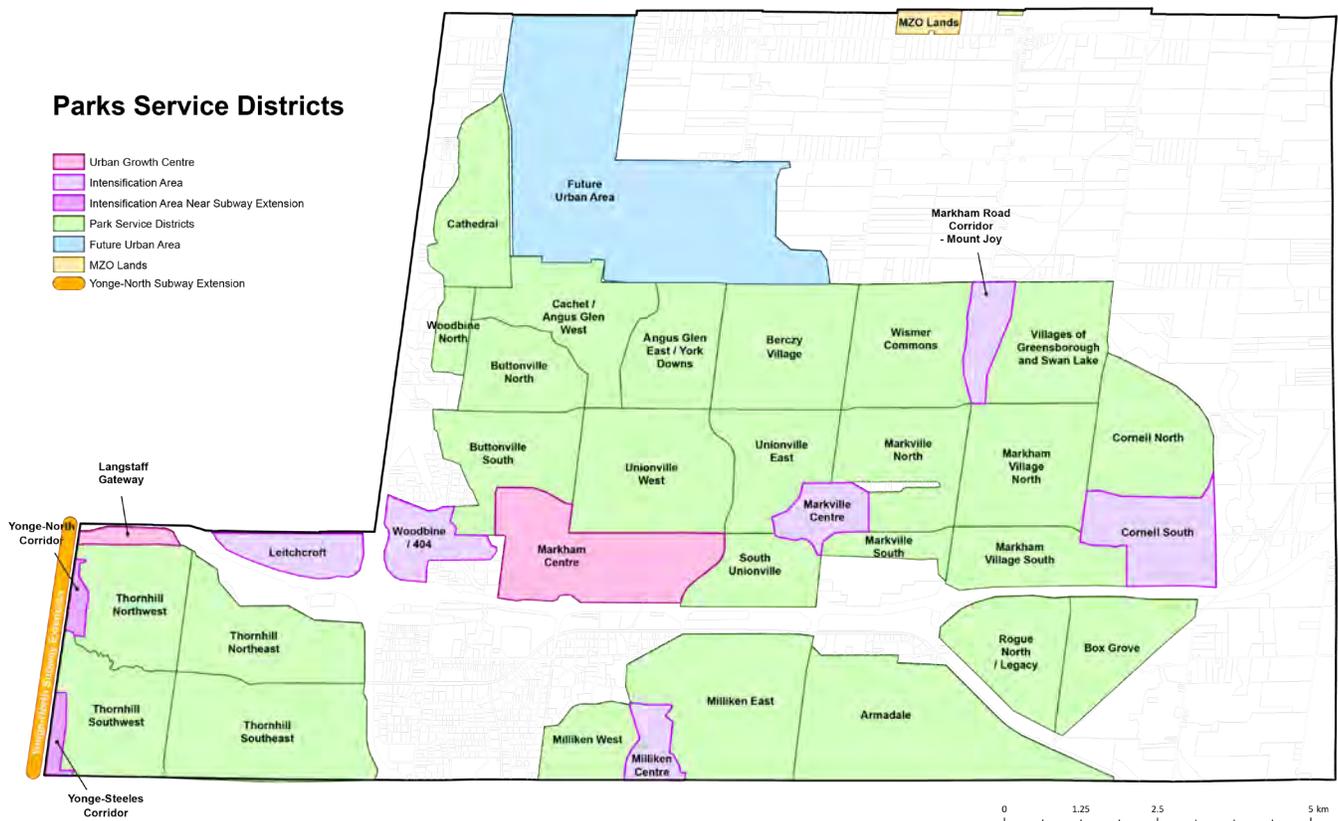


Figure 3: City of Markham Park Service Districts, Intensification Areas, and Future Urban Area

Park Provision Rates

Utilizing the Parkland Service Districts, the Intensification Areas and analyzing those districts with respect to 2021 population and with the amount of parkland within each, a data set emerges that identifies where each of the Parkland Service Districts and Intensification Areas stand with respect to the overall parkland system objective of 1.20 hectares of parkland per 1000 people. Park provision data for each of the Parkland Service Districts and the Intensification Areas is presented in Table 1, including the corresponding park provision rate.

Meeting the Parkland Target

Parkland Service Districts and Intensification Areas will be tracked based on the provision rate categories below:

- Provided with 1.4ha/1000 people or greater than the established City-wide park provision target of 1.20 hectares per 1000 people. Those Parkland Service Districts are considered to be exceeding the City's parkland provision target. Overall, 12 out of 26 of the Parkland

Service Districts and 0 out of 10 of the defined Intensification Areas are identified as exceeding the City's parkland provision target.

- Provided with between 1.0ha/1000 people to 1.4ha/1000 people in relation to City-wide park provision target of 1.20 hectares per 1000 people. Those Park Service Districts and Intensification Areas are considered to generally be within the average range of parkland provision. Overall, 8 out of 26 of the Parkland Service Districts and 1 out of the 10 defined Intensification Areas are identified as being within the average range of parkland provision.
- Provided with 1.0ha/1000 people or less than the established City-wide park provision target of 1.20 hectares per 1000 people. Those Parkland Service Districts are considered to be priority service districts for parkland acquisition. Overall, 6 out of 26 of the Parkland Service Districts and 9 out of 10 of the defined Intensification Areas are identified priority service districts for parkland acquisition.

Parkland Service District	Population (2021)	Park Coverage (Ha)	Average Parkland Provision Rate (per 1000)
Parkland Service District Subtotal	306,742	423.509	1.38
Intensification Area Subtotal	46,086	25.564	0.55
Existing Parkland in Future Urban Area	-	5.087	-
Parkland Outside of Parkland Service Districts and Intensification Areas	-	18.972	-
City-wide Total	352,828	468.05	1.33

Table 1: Summary Table - Existing City Wide Parkland Provision

From the perspective of parkland provision by Parkland Service District and within Intensification Areas, there are a number of observations that are important to consider, including:

- 20 out of 26 of the Parkland Service Districts within Markham generally meet the City's defined parkland target of 1.20 hectares per 1000 people. When considered in the context of the parkland distribution and coverage information in Figure 2, this reinforces the conclusion that the existing distribution and provision of parkland in Markham is generally excellent.
- It is suggested that the Parkland Service Districts with less than 1.0ha/1000 people become priority service districts for parkland acquisition. This consideration is in line with 2014 Official Plan Section 4.3.1.3, which establishes a number of guiding principles in the design and development of parks in the City, including, locating parks to balance community needs, equitably distributing parks, inclusiveness, programming to suit community needs, accessibility, and planning for current and future populations. When locating a new park or considering improvements to existing parks, the park service area coverage map (Figure 2) will also provide guidance with regard to addressing gaps in the current parkland system.
- When considered in the context of Figure 2, most of the Parkland Service Districts considered to be Priority Service Districts for parkland acquisition also have gaps in parkland system coverage. However, these Parkland Service Districts also, for the most part, tend to incorporate, or are adjacent to large Destination Parks and/or the Natural Heritage System.
- All the defined Intensification Areas, except Leitchcroft, are identified as being under served in terms of the provision of parkland. To a large extent, this is a symptom of their status as emerging intensification areas that are not yet fully developed and, as such they do not yet have a mature parkland system established.
- Distribution of Parkland within Parkland Service Districts - Markham's existing parkland system is generally achieving its planned target of 1.20 hectares per 1000 people, but that within the context of the Parkland Service Districts, the provision of parkland is not always evenly distributed. There are a number of factors at play - historic development patterns and the adjacency of the Natural Heritage System are both important factors to be considered.
- Intensification Areas - The defined Intensification Areas will all require unique parkland dedication consideration (or already have unique policies in-place). Much of the parkland in these areas will be generated through parkland dedication rates that are sensitive to the unique needs of these highly urban areas. It is expected that the Intensification Areas may be the areas of the City that will require the highest level of investment, both through development and through public investment, in order to provide adequate parkland as these areas continue to experience high density developments.
- Future Urban Area - The Future Urban Area is expected to accommodate substantial growth over the coming years. It is being comprehensively planned, and that plan includes consideration of the amount and distribution of parks. It is anticipated that the Future Urban Area will include traditional residential communities.



MARKHAM'S FUTURE PARKLAND



5.1 Key Considerations

The following are the key considerations of this Parks Plan for the City of Markham to the year 2031. Some of the considerations may be appropriate for inclusion in the City's new Parkland Dedication By-law, while others may be more appropriately included as future refinements within the Official Plan, or within a park planning study or guideline. The considerations provided are based on research from other jurisdictions, work carried out in previous studies on behalf of the City of Markham, as well as from discussions with City staff.

The key considerations are organized into the following five sub-sections:

1. Parkland System Objectives;
2. A Context Appropriate Parkland System;
3. Designing the Parkland System;
4. Achieving the City's Parkland System Target;
5. Utilizing Cash-In-Lieu of Parkland.

1. Parkland System Objectives

The Official Plan provides a comprehensive overview that describes the City's objectives for the Parkland System. The Official Plan states as an important objective that..."the parks and open space system is an integral component to the liveability of Markham. The system includes parks and open spaces, multi-use trails and pathways, valleylands, vegetation protection zones, and natural heritage features"...and that "it plays an important role in the overall quality of life, health, transportation and social well-being of residents by providing areas for active and passive recreational uses, as well as for the protection of natural and environmentally significant areas and hazard lands." It is important to note that while

the Official Plan identifies the objectives of the overall parks and open space system in Markham, this Parks Plan focuses on the provision and need for City Parks consisting of active, programmable tableland parks, which is a distinct component within the broader parks and open space system.

In addition to the objectives included in the Official Plan and based on research and ongoing conversations with City staff, a number of additional key objectives for this Parks Plan should also be recognized and considered, including:

- Parks have become an urban escape for people amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Parks are a crucial component contributing to the quality of life of residents. Parks are a necessary component of a complete and livable community; and,
- Public sector investment in parks can be leveraged into a private sector investment response. Park system investment is a key stimulus for change, establishing the appropriate environment for redevelopment and revitalization.

Official Plan Policies

The Official Plan also provides a number of more specific policies that are important considerations as the City moves to secure its Parkland System to 2031, in light of substantial population growth. The policies of the Official Plan relevant to this Parks Plan are:

- "To achieve a balanced distribution of parks and open space facilities and activities to meet the diverse recreational and leisure needs of Markham's residents, workers and visitors;
- To plan and implement an interconnected system

of parks and open spaces that, together with the Greenway System, streets, utility corridors, pedestrian and bicycle trails, contributes to the connectivity of Markham's communities, particularly new mixed-use neighbourhoods and intensification areas and placemaking in the public realm;

- To support the implementation of Markham's Integrated Leisure Master Plan by ensuring that the standards for the provision of parkland are met or exceeded and that parkland facilities are sufficient to meet or exceed the needs of projected residential populations; and,
- To design and develop high-quality parks and open spaces that provide for comfortable, safe, accessible, and year-round use and that address objectives related to:
 - » Connectivity of parks and open space;
 - » Location;
 - » Distribution;
 - » Facility Planning;
 - » Inclusiveness;
 - » Sustainability;
 - » Cultural Diversity;
 - » Ecology and the Environment;
 - » Programming;
 - » Design Excellence;
 - » Operational and Maintenance Leadership;
 - » Accessibility; and,
 - » Partnerships."

2. A Context Appropriate Parkland System

The Concept of a "Parkland System"

The City of Markham has developed a Parkland System that includes a range of park types, with a range of specified recreational functions, but

with a recognition that not every park space is required to achieve every recreational function. The whole system is functionally greater than the sum of its individual components. Each of the identified components of the Parkland System plays a crucial role in creating and maintaining the City's high quality of life by providing a range of park types, including:

- Larger scale parks that provide opportunities for active recreation and sports activities; and,
- Smaller scale parks that add interest and opportunities for relaxation, contemplation and other more passive recreational pursuits.

As the Official Plan identifies, it is the comprehensive parklands system, in its entirety that "will provide opportunities for diverse recreational and leisure activities that enhance and enrich the lives of Markham's residents, workers and visitors and promote a healthy lifestyle."

The City's Parkland Hierarchy

The parks and open space classification system articulated in the City's Official Plan includes a range of parks and open spaces including Destination Parks and an array of City Parks that may have a variety of functional attributes ranging from highlighting natural and cultural heritage features and ecological education, to major recreational opportunities and to smaller spaces for passive recreation and quiet reflection. The City's parkland hierarchy includes:

Destination Parks: Destination parks including large and unique parks which attract residents from across Markham and the Region and include Conservation Areas and lands associated with the Rouge Park that are intended to serve broader

regional, provincial, and in some instances, national interests. In general, these parks perform an important environmental function. While Destination Parks provide additional uses and opportunities not typically provided by City Parks, they cannot compensate for the City's park facilities and services that would otherwise be required under the Planning Act as City Parks. Identified Destination Parks are not part of the City's established Parkland System Target of 1.2 hectares/1000 people.

City Parks: City Parks, including parks which may be within Secondary Plans, Precinct Plans or Comprehensive Block Plans, that will be acquired or secured by the City over time using the array planning tools and legal instrument available to the City.

The Park Hierarchy for the Established Residential Communities and the Greenfield Residential Communities

As noted earlier in this Parks Plan, the City of Markham has been extremely successful in achieving a diverse, well designed and well used Parkland System throughout the City's established communities and within greenfield residential communities, and that has continued through the planning and development of the Future Urban Area.

The Official Plan currently articulates a robust Parkland System for the City's established communities and within greenfield residential communities. All of these park spaces are classified as "City Parks" and are therefore included within the City's established Parkland System Target of 1.2 hectares/1000 people. It is expected that the appropriate Parkland System within the new greenfield residential communities will be identified within City-adopted Secondary

Plans, Precinct Plans or Comprehensive Block Plans. The parkland hierarchy for the City's established communities and within greenfield residential communities is as follows:

City-Wide Parks (CWP) | >12 ha

CWP spaces provide programs and facilities for the entire City beyond those found in Community Parks and Neighbourhood Parks and include outdoor swimming pools, day camps, picnic areas, tournament-oriented sports parks with multiple active recreation facilities, and supporting infrastructure such as parking lots, field buildings and stadium seating. CWP spaces may also include special purpose parks that are generally designed to preserve natural heritage features and cultural heritage resources.

Community Park (CP) | >6 ha

CP spaces provide programs and facilities for a number of communities, neighbourhoods and areas. CP spaces support a variety of recreational and athletic interests with amenities and include water play, playgrounds, skateparks, basketball and tennis courts and organized sporting activities for all age groups and supporting infrastructure such as large park pavilions and maintenance facilities.

CP spaces are typically co-located with Community Centres, where possible. CP spaces may accommodate specialized events and amenities that may attract users from across the City. CP spaces are intended to serve park users generally within a 10 minute walking distance.

Neighbourhood Park (NP)

Neighbourhood Parks include parks of various sizes which provide space for active and passive recreational needs of local residents. Neighbourhood Parks are intended to serve park

users generally within a 5 minute walking distance (approximately 400 metres) and are further classified as follows:

Active Parks | 1 to 6 ha.

Active Parks support a balance of active and passive uses, such as playgrounds, skate zones, play courts, unlit sports fields and social gathering spaces. AP spaces may be coordinated with school sites, where possible. AP spaces serve a local neighbourhood located within a 5-minute walk of the NP space.

Parkettes | 0.5 -1.5 ha

Parkette spaces are recommended for instances where an AP space is not necessary, but local-level facilities e.g., playground, waterplay, seating) are required to serve a nearby development. These spaces are not suitable for large features such as sports fields. Parkettes spaces support the social and cultural fabric of the community located within a 2-minute walk of the park space.

The Urban Park Hierarchy for the Intensification Areas

Urban park spaces will play a critical role in providing outdoor space in Markham's Intensification Areas. Urban park spaces have both green and hardscape design components, and all public parks are connected to the public sidewalk system. The Urban Parkland System consists of public spaces, and may be complemented by semi-public spaces. The Urban Parkland System is fundamentally different from its traditional suburban counterpart because it is:

- Animated by the people who walk from place to place and interact with the uses in the adjacent buildings;

- More heavily used and more diverse in their component parts and, as such, require a higher cost of design and development, and an enhanced maintenance protocol;
- Integrated as part of the pedestrian circulation network within an Intensification Area; and,
- Flexible to accommodate different users and events, and will respond to use patterns that may be dramatically different at different times of the day.

The City's Official Plan states that the Urban Park Spaces shall generally meet the following criteria:

- Have frontage on at least one, and preferably more than one, public streets;
- Serve park users within a 2 to 10 minute walk from 80percent of the residents within the defined Intensification Area;
- Not be encumbered by driveways, access lanes, garbage storage areas, utility vaults or other such uses that would take away from the enjoyment or use of the park; and,
- Be recognizable by park users as a public and publicly accessible park space.

It is expected that the City's Urban Parkland System within the Intensification Areas will be identified within City-adopted Secondary Plans, Precinct Plans or Comprehensive Block Plans. All of the following urban park spaces are classified as "City Parks" and are therefore included within the City's established Parkland System Target of 1.2 hectares/1000 people. The parkland hierarchy for the City's Intensification Areas, as identified in the Official Plan is as follows:

Urban Squares | 0.5 to 5 ha

US spaces provide multifunctional flexible space and programming for social gatherings, festivals and civic functions and the recreational needs of a primarily mixed-use neighbourhood. US spaces accommodate special features such as public art that add visual interest and contribute the placemaking.

Urban Parkettes | 0.2 to 0.5 ha

UP provide social spaces animated by their adjacent uses such as cafes and shops generally within a 2 to 5 minute walk (approximately 150 to 400 metres) of residents, visitors and businesses within a mixed use neighbourhood.

In addition to the urban park types noted above, there will be occasions where community parks and neighbourhood parks will be located in Intensification Areas in order to provide some active recreation facilities.

3. Designing the Parkland System

Designing the Parkland System is a crucial City function and requires an understanding of contextual relationship with residents, businesses and built form, as well as a recognition that there are a number of key principles and general design considerations that must be included in all design decisions. The key principles and general design considerations include:

- Convenience and coherence;
- Context, heritage and placemaking;
- Accessibility;
- Safety;
- Comfort; and,
- Sustainability and resilience.

Consideration 1: Adopt a comprehensive set of Design Guidelines to more fully articulate the park hierarchy, and to provide design guidance to the various components of the city-wide parkland system. The Design Guidelines should include a discussion about the general parameters, including scale, the type of park services/facilities and the anticipated user groups for each component of the Park System Hierarchy. Direction for maintenance protocols would also be a useful element of the Park Development Guidelines.

4. Achieving the City's Parkland System Target

Integrated Leisure Master Plan

A high-level land needs assessment of active programmable tableland parkland was completed based on the recreational facility needs recommended in the 2019 ILMP. To accommodate the required facilities recommended in the ILMP, it is estimated that active programmable tableland park must continue to be provided at a minimum rate of 1.2 hectares / 1000 people. This assessment is based on the application of dimensions and grossing factors to account for setbacks, buffers, circulation, drainage and unprogrammed areas.

The City's parkland dedication policies should support the delivery of the park-related recreational facilities identified in the ILMP to support the City's healthy community objectives, growing demand for recreational facilities, and to meet additional needs generated by future population growth.

Consideration 2: Markham should secure enough parkland and cash-in-lieu to ensure 1.2 hectares of parkland per 1000 people continues to be achieved on a City-wide basis.

The City's parkland policies should support the delivery of the park-related recreational facilities identified in the ILMP to support healthy lifestyles, growing demand for recreational facilities and meet additional needs generated by future population growth.

	Population Growth	Split to Neighbourhoods	Split to Intensification Areas
Population Projection (Net in Built-up Area)	90,115 people	26,826 people	34,104 people
Parkland Demand (1.2ha/1,000 people)	108 ha	32.2 ha	40.92 ha
Future Secured Parkland (Subdivision Registered + Site Plan Approved)	29.57 ha	19.77 ha	9.8 ha
Parkland Need (Yet to be Secured)	78.43 ha	12.43 ha	31.12 ha

Table 2: Estimated New Parkland Demand - 2022 to 2031

Parkland Requirements to 2031

The Official Plan indicates that “Markham is committed to ensuring that sufficient and meaningful parks and open spaces are conveyed and/or acquired; developed and/or enhanced; and maintained and/or managed, now and in the future.”

It is understood that the population of Markham is expected to grow by 90,000 people by the year 2031. In accordance with the Parkland System Target of 1.2 hectares/1000 people, there is a need to secure a total of 108 hectares of land to adequately augment the current parkland system within the City of Markham to the year 2031.

It is recognized that the City is currently achieving its city-wide parkland system Target of 1.2 hectares per 1,000 people. In order to continue to achieve that Target, all new population growth should be required to contribute to the achievement of that Target, and, as noted, a total of 108 hectares of new parkland is required to accommodate the estimated 90,000 new residents to 2031. It is also recognized that 29.57 ha of that parkland is already secured, resulting in a net parkland need of 78.43 hectares of additional parkland required to 2031, as identified on Table 2.

Residential Intensification within the defined Intensification Areas

The City of Markham’s Official Plan identifies an urban structure that includes a number of Intensification Areas that are expected to accommodate higher density forms of development through significant residential intensification. In these identified locations, land areas and development sites are limited in size, and land, in general, is both at a premium and significantly more expensive than in any other

locations throughout the City.

In considering the amount of parkland dedication achieved on an individual development site, the context of the “intensification” objectives of the City, the Region and the Province need to be considered. For the very dense and highly urban development anticipated, the approach to parkland dedication needs to be clarified, based on an understanding of what can be considered to be fair and reasonable. Fundamentally, that means finding a balance between the cost of the provision of parkland, as well as the desire to promote good City-building principles.

Consideration 3: When preparing comprehensive plans (City-adopted Secondary Plans, Precinct Plans or Comprehensive Block Plans) for identified Intensification Areas that the planned urban parkland system within a comprehensively planned Intensification Area be:

- Comprised of an array of urban park space elements, with various scales, design characteristics and functional attributes; and,
- Be distributed throughout the Intensification Area, such that a majority of the residents of the Intensification Area are within a maximum of a 5 minute walk (400 metres) from a defined urban park space element.

Consideration 4: When preparing comprehensive plans (City-adopted Secondary Plans, Precinct Plans or Comprehensive Block Plans) for identified Intensification Areas, the City should establish an appropriate parkland provision target to serve local residents.

Consideration 5: When preparing comprehensive plans (City-adopted Secondary Plans, Precinct Plans, or comprehensive Block Plans) the high land costs and population growth within

the Intensification Areas will require that the City acquire some parkland outside of the Intensification Area boundary to makeup for the shortfall of parkland that is unable to be acquired and ensure that sufficient park facilities are still available for residents of the intensification area within an appropriate proximity.

Parkland/Cash-in-lieu of Land Requirements

As previously identified, the City will need to utilize a full array of planning and financial tools to achieve their parkland provision target. One important tool is the use of the Planning Act, which allows the City to require parkland or cash-in-lieu of parkland through the development approval process.

The City of Markham incorporates a full array of development types, and community contexts, and it is important to consider parkland dedication in a way that recognizes those differences. The parkland acquisition strategy and parkland dedication by-law will capture alternative rate provisions based on land use and density. Table 3 provides a summary of parkland/ cash-in-lieu requirements under the Planning Act.

Land Use	Land Conveyance Requirement (Up to)	Cash-in-lieu Requirement (Up to)
Commercial and Industrial Purposes	2% of the land	2% of the value of the land
All Other Uses	5% of the land	5% of the value of the land
Alternative Requirement for Residential Purposes	1 hectare of land per 300 dwelling units	The value of 1 hectare of land per 500 dwelling units

Table 3: Maximum Land Conveyance and Cash-in-lieu, Requirements of the Planning Act

5) Utilizing Cash-In-Lieu of Parkland

The Planning Act permits the City to collect cash-in-lieu of parkland dedication. In many jurisdictions, municipalities will respond to the developer's wishes regarding whether land, or cash-in-lieu of land is provided, on a case-by-case basis. In Markham, the City typically determines whether land, or cash-in-lieu of land, or some combination thereof is appropriate based on the policies of the Official Plan, any applicable Secondary Plan and/or the identified needs of the community.

Consideration 5: The City continue to determine, at its sole discretion, when cash-in-lieu is an acceptable approach, and when a land contribution will be required.

The Planning Act permits the acceptance of cash-in-lieu without limitation on the type of use, the location within the City, or any other contextual circumstance. In that regard, the City does not require any definition of when cash-in-lieu is used, or not. The City can identify the circumstances where cash-in-lieu of parkland dedication may be permitted or required. Important to the conversation about parkland dedication is a commitment by the City to, as a first priority, acquire parkland assets through the development approval process.

Consideration 6: Land dedication always be the first priority, and that cash-in-lieu only be acceptable where no reasonable alternative exists. Cash-in-lieu of land shall only be considered under the following circumstances as determined by the City:

- Where the application of the parkland dedication requirements would render the remaining portion of the development site unsuitable or impractical for development;
- In intensification areas with comprehensive plans that identify an appropriate provision of parkland and where no park locations has been identified on the subject development site.
- Where the amount of parkland dedication generated by the development proposal is insufficient to accommodate a reasonable park space;
- Where existing parkland is available and is deemed sufficient by the City in quantity and quality to accommodate further development in proximity to the proposed development; or,
- Where more suitable parcels of land are available for acquisition for public parkland purposes in other locations within the defined neighbourhood, or anywhere else within the City.

Where an off-site land dedication is proposed to satisfy the cash-in-lieu requirements, it will be at the City's sole direction to decide whether to accept the proposed off-site park.

Ensuring an Equitable Distribution of Park Spaces

As noted, it is a policy of the City's Official Plan "to achieve a balanced distribution of parks and open space facilities and activities to meet the diverse recreational and leisure needs of Markham's residents, workers and visitors."

Park Service Districts - Existing Population

Work carried out in support of this Parks Plan has subdivided Markham into a number of "Park Service Districts" in order to carry out an analysis of current park service levels throughout the City. That work, illustrates that Markham has done well in achieving its Parkland System Target of 1.2 hectares/1,000 people overall.

Priority Park Service Districts

The Parks Plan identifies a threshold for identifying priority Parkland Service Districts based on districts that have provision level less than 1 hectare per 1000 people.

Consideration 7: The underserved Parkland Service Districts should be prioritized for parkland acquisition activity.

All of the identified Park Service Districts are almost fully developed, making it difficult to acquire large sites. As such, smaller scale Neighbourhood Parks, or expansions to existing parks are appropriate objectives for acquisition, unless an opportunity for a large site arises.

APPENDIX A:
REFERENCES

REFERENCES

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