

COMMENTS AND SUBMISSION: TOWN OF OAKVILLE PARKS PLAN

WANDA CRICHTON, JULY 14TH, 2022

The Town of Oakville has an opportunity to create greater equity in the Parks services that all residents receive. Council is constrained by an ill-advised & out-dated Town Master Plan. **The misguided super-sized, over-dense Strategic Growth Areas, (SGAs) are already creating, many social problems, which will only increase.** (traffic & air pollution, lack of parking, grossly insufficient local schools, limited access to parks & recreation, etc.) **This is evidenced by some of the mis-guided proposals in the Parks Plan and proposed By Law meant to deal with this.**

It is astonishing that a 200 page report about Parks, makes little or no mention of the Climate Emergency, nor how its Recommendations will mitigate this in any way. There is no mention of how the Recommendations make this “Livable” for all residents.

The following points must be considered in the Parks Plan:

1. **The Town is creating 2 classes of citizens...**those that will have reasonably close access to most types of Park and recreational activities, and those who will not. The **“have nots”** will live in or immediately adjacent to the SGA’s. **This is fundamentally wrong and inequitable.** **All tax payers pay at the same rate, yet report recommends entrenching certain types of parks for certain areas only, including a lack of sufficient green space for the SGAs.**

The document indicates that **there will be insufficient Active Park plans in the Strategic Growth areas. (SGAs).** **Yet, these are the very areas that will need them the most,** with highest population, which will definitely include families who have no other options. **This just demonstrates poor & inequitable planning.**

2. **(Pages 28 to 31 of Recommendations).** Basically it proposes that: SGA’s generally not be provided with Community Parks, Neighbourhood Parks or Parkettes that would have basic expected amenities like: playground areas for children, benches, grass, trees, etc. Those are recommended for existing communities only.
 - It recommends only small & concrete spaces, to support the largest density of population. Sliver parks (6 feet wide concrete), pocket parks ??? ,Community Link (basically paved walkways) for SGA’S. **All concrete. How this can qualify as adequate recreational space, in any way green, for thousands of residents that will include families? This is wrong.**
 - While I agree that not all parks would contain all amenities, it is clearly wrong to suggest that SGA’S should be completely deprived of even remotely accessible basic green space that is critical for people’s well-being. It may be reasonable that we all may travel a bit further for large fields like baseball, **but basic access to a simple playground area, some trees, grass and a bench without concrete & in close proximity to where you live, should be universal across Town.**

The Alleged justification for this 2-tier system is insulting as follows:

3. **The idea of 2 classes of citizens is justified by the suggestion that people “choose” a more urban life style; therefore they won’t mind the absence of green space and basic park**

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amenities like a bench with grass & trees or a basic playground set where they live. **This is not entirely the case.**

While that may be the case for some, **the choice is more likely driven by actual necessity.** Costs of housing are astronomical. Due to this, the actual populations housed in the SGA's will be greater, as people will have no choice but to double up in smaller units. This is already happening. There will be more people who will need parks, not fewer, in these areas. Past trends do not reflect current realities. I submit the population estimates for these areas are low.

4. **There is a complete absence of affordable housing in Oakville, a failure of this Council and its predecessors to try & address in part through development applications. This creates the need to ensure adequate Community Park space in the areas with the most reasonable (although there currently are none) housing costs.** A 2 bedroom condo in a tower still under construction at Trafalgar & Dundas, is for sale today for 980,000 (297 Oak Park). There is no play area for children, no open green space, and a walk to the nearest park requires crossing roads and parking lots. Is this Livable?

Community parks will be needed in all SGA's as many families will have no alternative but to try & live there. To propose they have no close green space in proximity is frankly, unacceptable.

Developers promote their condo towers by touting green parks and trails, not concrete pads. They **fail to disclose** that much of this won't be readily accessible in many of their new or proposed developments, nor will schools, or that it is a 10 minute drive to Waterfront Parks or Downtown amenities is a fallacy.

Many residents in existing long-term neighbourhoods did not "choose" to live adjacent to an SGA, as currently proposed with this extreme level of density. Their property values and degradation of neighbourhood due to increased traffic, pressure of overuse & crowding of existing park & recreational facilities, etc. are severely negatively impacted. Other areas are left totally unscathed.

What is needed?

The By-law confirming that all SGA's be provided a basic minimum Community Park of sufficient size to support the population density in close proximity. This may be supplemented by the other types of smaller concrete spaces, but should not replace the sorely- needed green space entirely.

This should not require walking almost 1 km away (800 metres as the report proposes) . Location should avoid the necessity of crossing one of the major Regional arterial roads where possible.

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5. **If equitable access to park and recreational facilities will not exist, then the property owners in those SGAs and immediately adjacent affected areas should pay a lower tax rate, or get a tax credit to acknowledge this.. They do not have, and never will, have reasonably equitable access to basic Town Park services and amenities, based on this proposal.**

6. **Cash in lieu should be the exception, not the rule. The By-law should state this and should further direct, that the cash in lieu taken from SGAs be directly returned to park and recreation services within the boundaries of the SGA's, or immediately adjacent to the SGA's. This should be clearly and transparently tracked.**

The funds are coming from the SGA's and should not be re-directed to other areas of Town that are not experiencing the same degree of intensification, & are already well-served. This is totally unfair, and does not serve the needs of the residents of the SGAs.

7. **Decisions on Cash in Lieu vs Parkland, or some combination, should only be made by elected Council representatives, with direct public input on large scale projects. This should not be delegated, nor there any exceptions, particularly for large-scale developments.**

The report suggests that these decisions be made by Director of Planning, Director Parks and Town Solicitor. This is totally undemocratic, and leaves no accountability or transparency for the public. There is too much "closed door" decision-making surrounding developments already. **This a function that Council should not delegate, nor should they be allowed to do so.**

8. **Where a decision is made for Cash in Lieu, there should be full rationale publicly provided, and also a specific designation in the By law that those funds will be spent to support park and recreational facilities for the affected SGAs. The funds should be spent to benefit the communities from which they are taken.**

9. **There should be no exemptions awarded to reduce the requirement for provision of parkland as defined in the By Law.**

The developers do not require exemptions. They will obtain all the exemptions they want from the OLT. OLT provides consistent rulings that generally do not comply with By Laws or support Plans derived by elected Municipal Councils on significant matters. They simply grant developers free reign.

Major Developers have no need for any exemptions, particularly in the large scale developments underway, or being considered. The Mattamys, Great Gulf, Mintos, etc. do not require exemptions, nor are they financially strapped. While their costs are certainly rising, they have made out like bandits in past years, and prices have reflected that. They can certainly afford to have a more reasonable profit margin during these economic times, as evidenced by the financial reports on their company websites.

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10. REPORT IGNORES THE MAJOR ISSUES RELATED TO CLIMATE EMERGENCY

This report virtually ignores and in some respects counter-acts totally the Climate Emergency Declaration. Please consider the following:

11. No Mitigation of Climate Change Emergency by minimum Mandated Green Park Space in SGA's

Large swaths of land, which currently absorb run-off , provide a home for birds & other wildlife are being swallowed up by concrete developments in the SGA's, with no or minimal green space. This increases flood risks , water management issues,(and numerous other social issues). Trees are all routinely removed.

Yet in the very areas that have the most concrete, it is proposed that concrete areas be considered parks (vs greenspace) e.g. a pathway 8 to 12 feet wide (how an extension of a sidewalk is considered a park begs logic), concrete squares, etc.

You are creating heat islands in these SGAs so proposing concrete parks as the only component of parkland within (400 to 800 plus metres of a dwelling), is inconsistent with impacts of climate change, what is needed by residents, and the broader community.

This is totally contrary to the health of residents in communities I have delegated previously on the dangers of just creating high rise concrete jungles.

12. Increased Driving to Parks , Traffic inconsistent with stated Purpose of SGAs & Climate Emergency

Following this proposed rationale, you are expecting people to drive themselves, and their children, to access Parks of all types, in other areas of Town. This is completely inconsistent with the premise that these SGA's would be self-contained walkable communities, close to all services and amenities, where cars would not necessarily be needed. This was Council's justification for this level of intensity. It is wrong and misplaced, and this parks situation is evidence of that.

You are **creating more traffic & pollution within the Town**, by expecting these residents to access basic park services in other areas of Town, & where parking is limited already. **You are basically requiring them to own a car, & drive to access basic park amenities, (Community Park), (and most Active Park amenities), that should be reasonably available to them closer to where they live. It is also inconsistent with the Climate Emergency declaration of the Town. Public transit won't be a viable alternative to getting to these various parks.**

You can't rely on school lands to provide some of this....as many are not even built, and children will be bussed away from the SGA's for years. Many won't ever live near their schools.

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What is needed? Some level of Active Parkland needs to be designated in the By-law for all areas, including SGAs, as well as green space. While Active may be lower in SGAs than other areas, it still needs to be there in some portion. This is only equitable in trying to mitigate the 2-tier system proposed.

13. **The Bylaw should at the very least require total climate change mitigation strategies in the design of any nature of land, parks or open spaces in the SGA's, and for that matter across the entire Town. Concrete pavement should not cover most or all of these surfaces.**
14. **A minimum tree canopy in all park types needs to be identified in the By Law, & these need to be maximized in SGA's.** The report identifies the role trees take in reducing air pollution and mitigating heat islands. **More trees are needed in the SGA's due to their density, not less, as is proposed by the so-called concrete "parks": Pathways, walkways, etc. A paved sidewalk does not constitute a park, nor does it have a large tree to cool, clean the air, & help absorb run off.**
15. **The Town should take immediate steps to secure & designate some existing Town-owned lands for parkland, particularly in open areas that remain in the SGAs. That is a cost-free way of starting the Land Bank proposed where most needed.**
16. **Parks should be Public, Period.**
The concept of POPS, or Strata, etc. as qualifying toward Parklands is misguided. There is no control, and who notifies the public of access rights, **and who enforces that compliance occurs?**
Will a list of available POPS be available to the public on Town website?
Who will bear costs of repair, future replacement, standards, equipment, that is enforceable?
What happens in Condo developments with inadequate Condo reserve funds, potential bankruptcy controlled by private boards?
17. **Park Design**
The By law should mandate meaningful public consultation on the type and design of parks within their areas, both for existing neighbourhoods and SGA's.
18. **Revisit the Master Plan - Make Better Use of Existing Parks without Requiring Long Travel from Residences**
By also allowing reasonable "missing middle", infill, development in all Wards and areas of Town, this would make more equitable use of existing land, & parkland for new residents. The Province has no rules prohibiting that.

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The decision made to limit sprawl in Halton should have consequences for everyone. Re-look at Master Plan, including Parks is needed. **All citizens in all areas of Oakville and Halton need to bear some of the intensification. That would also make better use of all existing parkland, & mitigate the cost of future acquisition.**

It was recommended this Parks Plan be reviewed at minimum every 5 years. Why has this not been applied to the Town Master Plan, which clearly has major faults that are evidenced by this important issue of Parks?

Why has this not been done for areas like the Uptown Core, which has an out-dated plan with out-dated assumptions about use of transit, traffic, and actual population that can be safely sustained ecologically in the area?

Take steps now while you can, to ensure a more equitable quality of life for all residents, and all who pay residential taxes, when it comes to parks. To do anything less, is absconding your fiduciary responsibility to treat all citizens as equitably as possible.

Wanda Crichton