

August 8, 2022

SENT VIA E-MAIL**Reference: Council Meeting August 9, 2022 – Item 9.2 Parks & Open Space Strategy: Parks Plan 2031**

Dear Mayor Rob Burton and Councillors,

On behalf of the [Halton Environmental Network](#) (HEN), thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Parks and Open Space Strategy: Parks Plan 2031 (draft). Founded in 2004, HEN is a non-profit organization which propels climate action and environmental sustainability across Halton.

As indicated in the June 7, 2022 staff report, followed by the August 2, 2022 staff report, the purpose of the Parks Plan is to establish an urban park hierarchy given population growth and to establish alternative parkland dedication rates based on Provincial requirements stemming from Bills 108, 138, and 197 with the intent to update respective by-laws by September 18, 2022. However, HEN offers that the Draft could benefit from a better contextualization and amplification of climate change, as well as the opportunities to include community/edible gardens and support Indigenous communities.

Climate Change

Reference to climate change in the Draft is limited to Section 1.6 on Sustainability and Resilience and Section 3.3 on Urban Park Landscape Elements. This is surprising given the climate change imperative in general and the Town's exemplary work in this area namely the Climate Change Strategy – Implementation Report (October 20, 2015); the Climate Emergency Declaration (June 24, 2019); the Climate Emergency Declaration Progress Report (June 8, 2021); and the Climate Action: Progress and Directions Report (April 19, 2022).

We would like to comment that the Draft does not appear to reference or to integrate the Town's objectives in the aforementioned work. This could be done by either embedding a climate lens/consideration in the planned management of its parks and open space assets and the Town's work, in general, or by addressing it through a climate change framework in addition to the provincial requirements. The Draft also does not build climate literacy for Town staff, the development community, and other stakeholders. Including these reflections would enhance the document's relevancy to the Town's ongoing climate work and policy.

Community/Edible Gardens

The Draft missed the opportunity to include or provide for community gardens, a form of active recreation. In this regard, there is a disconnect with Section 3 of the Draft which discusses the Impact of Parks on Commercial and Residential Property Values and the attributes to describe such. Specifically, this section discusses healthy and complete communities, the benefits of social gathering, overall quality of life, and the economic benefits of reducing the demand and expenditures on health care (Section 3.1). Section 3.2 focuses on the Quality of Place/Quality of Life, and Section 3.3 focuses on the Economic Value of Parks. Notably, Section 3.3 discusses Health Value –



“...which measures the value of the saving 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.”

In the face of climate change, food security has become increasingly more important. It has also been highlighted more recently with the pandemic, supply chain challenges, natural disasters, and geopolitical conflicts. Also, at a time when affordability issues and pressures are manifested in the areas of housing and food security and when inflation further compounds these conditions, there is a tangible option for the Town to use some or parts of its parks and open space assets to improve opportunities for vulnerable residents and the community in general now and into the future. Wait times of four years for the Town’s community gardens indicates a need for the Town to consider and provide for expansion of this resource.

Support for Indigenous Communities – Healing Forests

Across Canada, communities have engaged in initiatives to learn about, share, and reflect upon the tragic history of Canada with our Indigenous Peoples and to take steps towards reconciliation. Through the Parks and Open Space Strategy, there is an opportunity for the Town to complement the actions that it has taken to date (e.g. orange crosswalk and Moccasin Trails) and to further support the work of the New Truth & Reconciliation Initiative, “[Debwewin](#)” – [The Oakville Truth Project](#)”.

The inclusion of a healing forest in Oakville can provide such support and recognition of Indigenous Peoples. A healing forest is a dedicated forest, garden, or green space within urban parks or rural settings which is used as a place for healing, learning, sharing, and reflection and a place to honour residential school survivors, murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls, and children removed from their families and placed in the welfare system. The Town may also consider participating in the [National Healing Forests Initiative](#).

In closing, HEN believes that the relevancy and meaningfulness to the community of the Town’s Parks and Open Space Strategy: Parks Plan 2031 can be improved if it better reflected the Town’s excellent work to date on climate change and includes the recommendations on community/edible gardens and healing forests. We would be happy to assist with the implementation of any of these initiatives.

Thank you for your consideration of our submission, and we welcome any questions or comments. Please feel free to contact me at cindy@haltonenvironment.ca.

Sincerely,



Cindy Toth
Acting Chair, Halton Environmental Network

