

Special Planning and Development Council
Meeting
September 12, 2022

Comments Received Regarding Item 3.1-

Parks Plan 2031 and Draft Plan Dedication By-law 2022-108

September 9, 2022

To: Town of Oakville Planning & Development Council

**Re: Parks Plan 2031 and Plan Dedication By-law – JCRA Feedback for September 12, 2022,
Planning & Development Council Meeting**

Dear Members of Council:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Draft 2031 Parks Plan and the Plan's Park Dedication By-law. JCRA residents are fortunate to have easy access to parks and green spaces throughout our neighbourhoods. Our parks and green spaces are a key element in Oakville's liveability.

We want to ensure the same access to parks and other green spaces are available to future Oakville residents as the Town moves forward with development to accommodate the provincially mandated intensification in Oakville's designated Strategic Growth Areas (SGA's).

1. Green Space is essential for the health of all residents. To that end, land acquisition for local green space should be a top priority to ensure equal and fair geographic distribution of green parkland across the town, including in designated Strategic Growth Areas (SGAs)

Established neighbourhoods in Oakville have ample, well-used parks of all sizes within short walking distance of residents. Such green spaces should not be viewed as frills or extras. Nor should they be replaced with sliver parks, pocket parks, connectors and promenades, all of which are concrete. As such, they should not be included in the calculations for Parks Space, and should instead be classified in a separate category, "Streetscapes".

2. We are witnessing a global environmental crisis unfolding. Every action taken in our city, by developers and planners, should reflect our concerns. Oakville has in the past been a proponent of less concrete and asphalt, regulating driveway widths, promoting proper rainwater diversion, and encouraging flood mitigation strategies where possible. Those guiding principles should be embedded in recommendations for green space in SGAs.

3. The Draft Parkland Dedication Policy of providing 7.5 to 12% parkland in SGAs “where opportunities exist” provides an “out” for developers. If they build more condos per hectare, ergo the target for parkland will not be possible to attain, as opportunities will certainly not exist. The current backwards planning favours developers, who plan their building opportunities first, and squeeze in sliver parks and pocket parks as an afterthought.

We feel that green spaces should be designated first in overall planning for SGAs, not added as an afterthought if there is any space left for them. To avoid this happening, the Town should consider buying land in advance of considering Site Plan Applications in order that Green Space is ensured at the outset. The Finance Department reports indicate there are funds available in our Cash-In-Lieu Reserve Fund.

4. Per the feedback comments received from the development community on the draft Parkland report, it appears they are proposing the target 2.2ha per 1000 residents is not needed given Oakville has achieved a level of 2.7ha per 1000 residents. Their proposal is a target of only 1.4ha for future development. This method of calculation will create “Two Oakvilles” – one with more than adequate green space, and one with woefully less, mostly not within walking distance.

We suggest that you consider a parkland target specific to Strategic Growth Areas that ensures green space will be included in these new areas so future residents are not disadvantaged by the current amount of park space across the Town.

5. Specific to Midtown, after viewing the maps included in the Draft report, the only main park space on the east side of Trafalgar appears to be the existing ballpark on Cornwall next to the rail tracks. How will it be connected to the rest of Midtown north of the railway line. Will there be a pedestrian/bike bridge over tracks? If there isn't a pedestrian connection it won't be accessible or form part of midtown.

How much open parkland is at this park beyond the ball diamond, parking lot and skateboard park? If it only offers active recreation activity, how will it serve as a parks space for residents who are not participating in sports?

This Cornwall park should not be included in the parkland calculation for midtown, and should not figure into the developers' parkland requirements for Midtown because it would reduce the amount of parkland the developers will be required to provide in Midtown, and it is unlikely to be easily accessible to most Midtown residents

6. POPS (Publicly Owned Spaces) and Strata parks (those built on top of other entities, like Town Square) are recommended to be included in the calculation of parkland dedication in the Draft Report.

It is our view that these types of spaces should **not** be included in those calculations, as they may not be permanent solutions, they may not be accessible to all residents and there are potential legal issues around maintenance and future development.

7. There is a recommendation in the Draft Report that Residents' Associations help in the planning, design and maintenance of parks and green spaces. We are concerned this has been included in the Parks 2023 draft plan.

Residents Associations are dedicated volunteers who are also taxpayers. There is a limit to what can and should be asked of them.

Potential issues include inequity of parks maintenance by untrained residents, degradation of existing parks by lack of maintenance, and an unfair set of expectations of volunteers belonging to Residents' Associations.

8. The recommendation in the report is that the Directors of Planning and Parks & Open Space would have the responsibility for negotiating the parkland dedication and/or payment in lieu agreements and determining the location and configuration of the parkland to be conveyed.

This would mean there would not be any input from Council, or any regular, ongoing public participation in the types of parks being created and their locations, to ensure these decisions are in the best interests of residents.

Additionally, these senior administrators are potentially exposed to undue pressure from development proponents whose sole focus is increasing density to increase profits.

An opportunity for public input could be achieved with a by-law that permits Council to vote to bring an approval decision to them – similar to what currently exists for Site Plan Applications to be approved by Council.

As well, a parkland acquisition plan should be created to guide decision making and to ensure that green space is prioritized in the Strategic Growth Areas.

9. In addition to acquisition of land for green park spaces, we like and support the suggestions made by the Coronation Park RA to increase green space:
 - a. Create partnerships with educational and other institutions to expand available open spaces resources for community use
 - b. Leverage rail transit and hydro-corridors as opportunities to create new park areas and improve connection and access to others

- c. Use the Town's majority position in Oakville Enterprises/Oakville Hydro to determine what additional real estate holdings currently exist that can be transitioned into green space.
- d. Do the same for Oakville's bank of real estate assets, including which land could be included in a park land acquisitions strategy
- e. Improve and integrate street design and other town-owned land adjacent to parks or recreation areas to enlarge the feeling of park space

Regards,

Elizabeth Chalmers
President, Joshua Creek Residents Association

Terri Ball
Director, Joshua Creek Residents Association

cc

Mr. Gabe Charles, Director of Planning
Mr. Chris Mark, Director Parks and Open Space

From: Anita Mackey
Sent: September 2, 2022 11:47 AM
To: _Members of Council
Subject: Draft Parks Plan

Hello Mayor Burton and Members of Council . I am writing in connection with the draft Parks Plan – present to 2031 which is coming before council. I understand that may be delayed now until Sept 12.

First, I want to say that this is a very comprehensive and well structured plan overall. However, there are a few important areas where it needs changes and strengthening. I would like to share those concerns and comments in this note.

1. I would like to see it much more clearly stated that areas under development with mandates for the greatest intensification like Mid Town Oakville and other Strategic Growth Areas, should be prioritizing green space acquisition over cash in lieu. More guidelines and use cases should be developed.
2. The following circumstances of Mid Town area make achieving the priority goal in 1 above very difficult with the current guidance in the draft plan without resorting to cash in lieu and therefore requires some additional tools and prioritizing by the Town : (i) the very small total area of this to be very dense population (only 43 hectares is available);

(ii) multiple owners and therefore multiple developers with varying sizes of plots for development ; (iii) development happening in different time horizons; (iv) small plots being developed that could not individually realistically donate the required land. Therefore, the Town should be prioritizing now the use of existing funds from cash in lieu on hand or other funds on hand, to acquire land now that it could assemble to create the possibility of a more useful, beautiful, accessible true park space. This land will be expensive now, but there really isn't any other realistic way to accumulate a large enough plot. Given the proposed density, the people moving into this area deserve real outdoor space that they do not have to drive to , that is in close proximity to where they live.

3. Oversight of cash in lieu decisions should not be completely delegated to Town staff, but should come back to Council.
4. "Other Urban Parks" such as "Connecting Links", "Pocket Parks" "Sliver Parks" should not be counted as Parks and should not be given credit even at a reduced rate. These kinds of structure do have a place but should be incentivized elsewhere in the planning/development process. Therefore, Recommendation #6 should be rejected.
5. The Town should now, as part of the Park Plan, create and present "Use Cases" to see how the recommendations could work in certain fact patterns like the Mid Town and other Strategic Growth Areas. That would help to see how any residual discretion by the Town would be applied and put guidelines and some expectations on that.
6. I do love the idea of a large park being set aside in North Oakville, and as land is less developed and will be cheaper there now, it will be a bit easier to achieve. However , this goal should not take priority over the more immediate needs for Park Land in the Strategic Growth Areas like Mid Town , which is becoming urgent now.
7. The private sector should be encouraged to help in the acquisition vision. Conservancies, trusts, donations could be encouraged. The Community Foundations could be approached as an example . It needs a vision and a concrete plan to inspire and rally around.

Thank you for your consideration. Yours truly,

Anita Mackey



September 8, 2022

SENT VIA E-MAIL

To: Gabe Charles, Director of Planning
Chris Mark, Director Parks and Open Space
Mayor Rob Burton, Regional and Town Councillors

REFERENCE: DRAFT PARKS PLAN – 2031

The Chartwell-Maple Grove Residents Association (CMGRA) appreciates the opportunity to submit comments on the [Draft Parks Plan – 2031](#) (hereafter referred to as Parks Plan), past related meetings, and online documents. CMGRA is located in southeast Oakville where we are fortunate to enjoy the benefits of an urban forest and a town where parks and green space (hereafter referred to as green space) play an important role in making this a truly “Livable Oakville” that residents choose to call home. By green space, we refer to **green and not gray space**.

We recognize that population and employment growth is inevitable in our town as it is in municipalities across the Province; however, it is **HOW** we choose to grow that will be critical in shaping the Oakville of tomorrow. We argue that local, accessible, and useable (of sufficient area to provide space for recreation and enjoyment) green space is fundamental to creating long-term sustainable communities and the resilience necessary in the future, particularly in Strategic Growth Areas (SGAs) and for the town as a whole. **WHY?** Green space offers multiple benefits that are well documented in Section 3 of the Parks Plan.

- a. Contributes to the physical and mental well-being of residents.
- b. Offers the opportunity for residents to experience a sense of social cohesiveness and community.
- c. Contributes to safer communities.
- d. Provides environmental benefits.
- e. Offers important economic benefits to the municipality, residents, and businesses.

These benefits are supported by the findings in a recent Canadian study in which the authors conclude that “to build long-term community resilience, public policies should pay attention not only to housing adequacy, but also to residential stability and the quality of life that homes and neighbourhoods provide.”¹

Although the Parks Plan touches upon the environmental benefits of green space, we would like to emphasize the significant role that natural spaces play in the face of climate change. The importance

¹Zhu, Y., D. V. Mahdavi, M. Holden. “More housing supply isn’t a cure-all for the housing crisis.” *The Conversation*. 30 Aug. 2022.

of taking climate action by building resilient communities cannot be overstated. This was recognized in 2019 when Oakville declared a climate emergency and subsequently engaged in initiatives which were documented this past spring in their [Climate Action: Progress and Directions Report](#). The benefits of green space can include the reduction of urban island heat, flooding, and heat-related illnesses and deaths as a result of extreme heat waves. At the same time, “Poorly planned cities themselves contribute to climate change. As Canadian cities move to tackle the housing shortage, they should take care not to worsen climate change and its impacts.”²

We would also like to reinforce the importance that green space is playing and has played during the recent pandemic which is also recognized in the Parks Plan. “Parks are considered to be a lifeline for people in the community. (...) Parks are a crucial component of contributing to the quality of life of residents. Parks are a necessary component of a complete and livable community” (p. 25). With projections that there will be pandemics in the future, it is even more critical to ensure that quality natural spaces are made readily accessible to all residents to provide essential stress relief in such events.

As Town Council prepares to make important decisions on the future of green space in Oakville, we would like to offer four principles for their consideration. Some comments refer to Ward 3, but we emphatically believe that these principles should apply to all communities in our town.

Principle #1 - Growth should pay for growth

We realize that development and community benefit charges do not cover the total cost of growth; however, we strongly encourage the Town to maximize the fees collected from development to ensure that both current and new residents enjoy the critical benefits offered by green space, particularly in Strategic Growth Areas (SGAs) such as Midtown Oakville.

We urge the Town to use charges collected to acquire land for green space based on local community needs, even though we realize that the cost of land is more expensive in SGAs and represent a challenge in accommodating it to the same degree as in other areas of Oakville. The concept of an eco-park on the periphery of our town is certainly attractive and one that could be beneficial; however, the first priority of any fund allocation should be to develop complete and healthy communities in high density areas. We also recommend that land dedication be the first consideration rather than the cash-in-lieu option and recognize that again, this will be a difficult proposition in SGA's.

There has been much discussion around the parkland standard in the SGAs. Recommendation 20 in the Parks Plan states that it should be “a minimum of 7.5%, with the objective of up to 12%, where opportunities exist” (42). Since it will be impossible to achieve 2.2 ha/1000 people in the SGAs, we would encourage a target of 12% of the net area in these high density areas noting that 12% has been adopted by the City of Mississauga.

² Drescher, M., D. Parker, & R. Rooney. “Residential green spaces protect growing cities against climate change.” *The Conversation*, 5 Sept. 2022.

Principle #2 – There should be Fair Geographic Representation of green space across Oakville

There has been the contention that there is a trade-off of options between living in an urban context, that is the SGAs, versus traditional communities. We understand that the amount and types of green space in high density areas will not be the same as that in traditional communities; however, this should not preclude residents living in SGAs from experiencing access to quality green space within a walking distance of no more than ten minutes. Little or no green space will not produce inclusive and equitable communities and will not promote complete, healthy, and safe places to live.

We appreciate the Town's adoption of this principle of fair geographic representation with respect to community centres. While in our own backyard, the Oakville Trafalgar Community Centre was opened two years ago and, more recently, Town Council approved the development of Sixteen Mile Community Centre in north Oakville.

One of the factors that makes Oakville unique is its green space. If this is completely absent in SGAs, this will result in intolerable overcrowding in natural green spaces in nearby communities. With the expectation that Midtown will become the largest SGA in Oakville and serve as the gateway to the town, it is impossible to imagine this community, with little or no significant green space, as being any part of Livable Oakville.

Principle #3 – Green space needs to be Inclusive, Equitable, and Accessible.

We believe that it is critical for the Town to provide well-supplied green space to promote inclusive and equitable communities, particularly in the SGAs. As stated in the Parks Plan, “the idea of diverse and inclusive Growth Area is that they can accommodate the broadest range of people, without regard to cultural or socio-economic status, or life style choice, all living and working in proximity” (Appendix II). This reinforces the [Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan](#) adopted by the Town in 2021.

During the pandemic, the importance of access to green space was highlighted in Oakville with the high number of people who visited its parks. In response to the consequences of this increased activity, Town Council in 2021 approved measures such as higher fines on local roads near popular parks. What Oakville experienced was similar to the findings of the National Collaborating Centre for Environmental Health (2022) study which examined the use of parks and green spaces in Canada during the early months of the pandemic and the positive role that they played on health. The authors found that there was an increase in park usage. It is important to note, however, that their research also revealed regional differences in park usage with the pandemic illustrating inequities in accessing and the safe use of green space and reinforcing pre-existing social injustices. The authors argue that “urban green spaces represent critical public infrastructure” (13) and, based on a national survey in 2020, park usage will increase over the long-term. We contend that green space should not be seen as a luxury and, as Oakville plans for the future, we must ensure that all residents have equitable and safe access to this important component of a healthy and complete community.

To reinforce this point, we also strongly support a bylaw in which it is stated that green space in SGAs be located within not more than a ten minute walking distance. If not easily accessed without the use of private or public transport, it is neither useful nor beneficial to the health and social wellbeing of a

community.

Principle #4 – Stakeholder engagement is necessary in such a decision-making process that impacts all communities

In the Parks Plan, it is recommended that Town staff be delegated with the responsibility of negotiating parkland dedication and/or payment in-lieu (Recommendation #50) and notes that it is the municipalities surveyed who determine the location and configuration of land required to be conveyed (Appendix IX). We strongly recommend that town council and the public be active participants in these decisions. This process will be more inclusive, more transparent and contribute to ensuring that green spaces meet local community needs and keep Oakville LIVABLE.

In conclusion, we support accessible and well-supplied green space in local communities across our town. Without some natural green space in SGAs, it is difficult to imagine who will be attracted to renting or buying in Midtown Oakville, for example, on 43 hectares of developable land with a minimum of 20,000 residents and employees surrounded by major highways and streets, concrete towers, rail lines, hydro corridors, small public spaces, and creekside lands. The picture becomes even more problematic with a potential of 50,000 at build out. We encourage the Town to make every effort to invest in green space, particularly in high density areas, for a sustainable future that welcomes people from all walks of life to a Livable Oakville and continues to offer them a place to call home through all of the phases of their life.

We thank you for the opportunity to provide our comments.

Sincerely,

David Bird
Acting President