



GREEN SPACE ACQUISITION AND STEWARDSHIP IN CANADA'S URBAN MUNICIPALITIES

Results of a Nation-wide Survey



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Evergreen envisions a sustainable society where individuals live in harmony with, and contribute meaningfully to, their local environment. Evergreen will be at the forefront of the movement to create this society by empowering communities, creating innovative resources and transforming educational values.

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Special thanks to: Lewis Tinker, Melissa Watkins, Paul Peterson, Wayne Reeves and Gary Davidson. Special thanks also go to the many individuals in urban municipalities across the country who generously offered time and information for this study.

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1 INTRODUCTION



Since its founding in 1990, Evergreen has grown from a Toronto-based tree-planting program to a national

organization supporting and facilitating urban greening. Through its Common Grounds program, Evergreen works with communities to conserve natural and cultural urban landscapes, restore degraded environments, and protect green space in cities for recreation, education and enjoyment. This work consistently reveals the ecological, cultural, historic and aesthetic importance of green space to local populations. Evergreen's experience supporting numerous community groups in their efforts to protect and care for threatened urban green space across the country suggests that there is a need in urban Canada for green space acquisition and stewardship approaches that:

- (a) *proactively ensure that ecologically or socially valuable areas are identified and protected early in the planning and development process; and*
- (b) *are partnership-based, opening the door to shared responsibility and risk among public, private and non-profit stakeholders in the community.*

Some urban municipalities are already responding to these needs by exploring new ways to protect and steward green space. They are introducing the innovative use of existing land-use planning tools; adopting progressive approaches to community outreach and education; and forging partnerships with community organizations, institutions, corporations and others to ensure that municipal green space needs are met. These

municipalities recognize that urban parkland is not only a vital community asset, but it also serves to define a healthy, vibrant city — one that attracts and retains investment, as well as a variety of social amenities.

What is Environmental Stewardship?

Environmental Stewardship is the care and enhancement of the land for the benefit of the environment, and of future generations. In this report, stewardship principally refers to the maintenance and restoration of habitat, biodiversity and ecosystem health.

Collecting and compiling information about the challenges faced by urban municipalities helps Evergreen and other non-profit organizations identify areas where their support is most needed. In 2002, Evergreen surveyed 24 Canadian urban municipalities to better understand the current context for the protection and stewardship of urban green space in Canada, and to identify innovation in response to key challenges. This report is based on the results of that survey.

Research Methods

In 2001, a questionnaire (see Appendix 1) and request to participate were e-mailed to contacts at the 30 largest Canadian urban municipalities¹. Twenty-four municipalities agreed to participate, and detailed responses were obtained through follow-up telephone interviews. In many cases, respondents consulted colleagues in other departments (e.g., planning and development, parks and recreation and finance) to gather complete information before participating in an

¹ The scope of this research was restricted to lower-tier municipalities. For a list of surveyed municipalities, see Appendix 2.

interview. This material was further augmented, in some cases, with information collected from the respondents' Web sites, planning reports and other municipal documents. In addition, Evergreen undertook follow-up research on several key examples of green space protection and stewardship that had been mentioned by respondents during interviews. This information yielded a number of exemplary case studies, while also helping to inform the survey results and deepen our understanding of the findings.

Research Themes

The questionnaire consisted of 26 questions, organized into four sections:

- *Legislative Framework for Municipal Parkland Dedication*
- *Meeting Community Green Space Needs*
- *Finance and Acquisition*
- *Protection and Stewardship*

The themes of the survey principally addressed green space acquisition or securement tools, strategies and capacity. They also looked at green space stewardship.

Evergreen's experience working with municipalities and communities has demonstrated that parkland acquisition and green space stewardship are closely linked issues, despite the fact that they are often dealt with by separate municipal departments. For example, some municipalities may be reluctant to acquire new parkland due to limited staff or financial resources for maintenance and stewardship over the long term. Innovative stewardship partnerships, where community organizations participate in stewardship activities to support municipal efforts, can thus increase the municipality's

willingness to acquire new parkland. Green space protection and stewardship are therefore treated as linked concepts for the purpose of this report.

'Green Space' and 'Parkland'

The terms green space and parkland are used throughout this report. Green space refers to any municipally-owned natural open space including ravines, nature reserves and hazard lands (such as slopes and flood plains). Parkland refers specifically to land set aside by a municipality that is part of an established public park, whether for active or passive recreation.

Purpose and Structure of the Report

This report provides an overview of the state of Canada's urban green space, with a focus on municipal green space needs, standards and expenditures. It also examines the challenges faced by urban municipalities across the country, identifies areas where support is needed, and considers the role Evergreen and other non-profit groups can play in the protection and stewardship of green space.

The first section of the report outlines the results of Evergreen's nation-wide survey of municipalities, including information about current green space inventories, population ratios, and parks and recreation budgets. A number of key findings are highlighted. To inspire innovation and generate further dialogue on Canada's urban green space, the second section of the report presents case studies of innovative strategies for parkland acquisition and stewardship identified through this research.

2 HISTORICAL OVERVIEW: URBAN PARKLAND IN CANADA



3

With origins in the common, the public square, military training grounds and church plazas, city parks in Canada provide people with places to escape from busy streets, get exercise, and meet with friends and neighbours. Canada's early municipalities recognized the value of open space for public use and enjoyment, and many of the country's most famous parks — including the Halifax Gardens, the Toronto Islands and Vancouver's Stanley Park — were acquired in the 19th century, often by grant or lease from the provincial or federal government. Before the turn of the century, legislation investing municipal authorities with the responsibility of acquiring public parks had been passed in Ontario and Manitoba, and similar legislation was enacted for the cities of Saskatoon and Calgary in 1912 and 1913, respectively (McFarland, 1982).

Park development in Canada's cities proceeded gradually through the years of the First World War, the Depression, and the Second World War, but emerged as a priority through the 1960s and 1970s. What we now recognize as standard municipal administrative structures underwent significant change during that time. For example, the now-common marriage of 'parks and recreation' functions in municipal government is a relatively new phenomenon. These two concerns were generally separate branches before the Second World War (Ellis and Homenuck, 1976).

In 1973, a study on urban open space was conducted for the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association, Health and Welfare Canada and Urban Affairs Canada (Project Planning Associates Ltd., 1973). This study offers a useful snapshot of the state of urban parkland in Canada at a time when park planning and recreational services were becoming completely integrated in municipal structures. During this period, city park development — with an emphasis on active recreation areas — was a relatively high priority for local governments. Some of the key findings from that study indicated that only a small minority of urban communities had open space strategy or planning documents that could guide the acquisition and development of new parkland. Shortage of money and availability of land, as well as a lack of professional and technical expertise, were reported to be the greatest barriers to effective open space planning.

In recent decades, few comprehensive studies of urban open space trends and inventories have been undertaken. Yet these decades have been marked by rapid and significant change in municipal affairs and the approach to parkland issues. The past decade, in particular, has been characterized by an expansion of municipal responsibilities, accompanied by decreases in municipal transfer payments. This is also an era that has seen the emergence of naturalization as an alternative to manicured and mowed city parks, and an emphasis on the stewardship of natural and naturalized

urban landscapes. There has been a gradual shift from the perception of cities as places apart from wild nature, to an idea that nature can and should be nurtured, protected and integrated into our urban landscapes. This phenomenon has risen in tandem with movements such as smart growth, healthy cities and the recognition that Canada is increasingly becoming an urban nation.

Smart Growth and Green Space

The protection of green space – including parks, natural areas and farmland – is a key element of the smart growth movement in North America. Green space protection contributes to the sustainability and livability of a community by improving health, sense of place and ecological functioning.

Over the past several decades, municipal governments have become much better equipped to meet community parkland needs. Supported by green space planning documents, a large body of knowledge about the benefits and value of green space, and sophisticated tools such as Geographic Information Systems, cities are now adopting new approaches to managing and developing their green space inventories. However, fiscal constraints continue to be a key barrier to parkland securement and management in urban Canada. In addition, today's urban municipalities are also dealing with the

challenges of downloaded responsibility, increasing urban populations, and the pressures associated with urban sprawl.

Moreover, the very concept of green space sufficiency is becoming increasingly complex. Public use of urban green space is not only growing with populations, but is also diversifying into a greater variety of recreational needs than ever before. Municipalities must balance the need for passive recreation and healthy natural areas with the social demand for well-designed and programmed city parks. At the same time, public interest in greater involvement in local parks through community stewardship (i.e., ongoing care for the land that may include tree planting, community gardening and monitoring) presents an interesting opportunity for managing public parks while meeting community needs.



3 CURRENT TRENDS AND KEY CHALLENGES: SURVEY RESULTS



Legislative Framework: Parkland Dedication Requirements in Canada

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Survey respondents identified provincial planning legislation and other statutes and policies that address open space acquisition in their municipalities. This enabled us to compare legislation across the country and understand the provincial framework within which each municipality works.

The simplest, and perhaps most obvious, means by which municipalities in Canada can acquire new parkland is through outright purchase, using funds drawn from the property tax base or from ‘cash-in-lieu’, as described below. In addition, municipalities have a broad range of legal and planning tools available to acquire and manage parkland. Among the most commonly used strategies are those that are enabled by provincial or territorial planning legislation, which specifies a maximum allowable percentage of land that a municipality can require a developer to convey (of the total amount to be subdivided) for parkland purposes. This *parkland dedication* is intended to ensure an adequate supply of parkland to accommodate new growth. It is an important tool for the creation of new public green space in urban Canadian municipalities.

In most provinces and territories, municipalities are allowed some flexibility in the application of parkland dedication requirements. This includes:

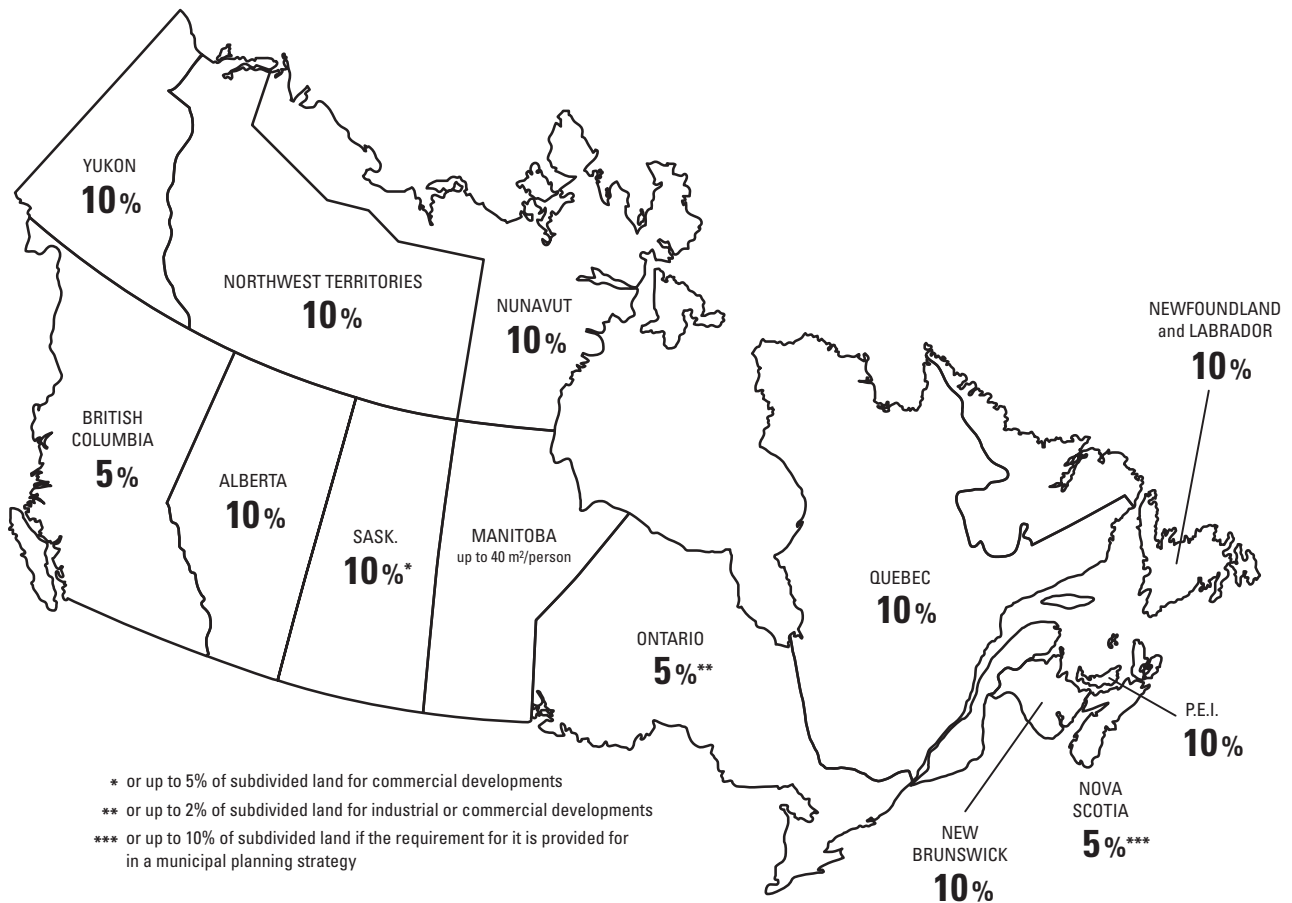
- **Cash-in-lieu:** *Most provincial legislation permits cash payments in lieu of land dedication in cases where dedication is deemed unnecessary or undesirable. Each*

province provides details of how the land value should be determined and what percentage of the value may be required as cash-in-lieu. Some provincial legislation also specifies how these funds may be used. In some cases, for example, the use of cash-in-lieu funds is restricted to the acquisition of future parkland, while other provinces allow municipalities to use cash-in-lieu to finance recreational or other municipal programs.

- **Parkland dedication transfers:** *In some provinces, such as New Brunswick and Saskatchewan, dedicated land can be transferred from one subdivision to another, allowing a developer to provide more land on one site in exchange for providing less on another. The municipality can use this tool to balance its parkland supply between areas with an abundance and those with a deficit.*

Provincial parkland dedication rates in Canada vary from 2 percent to 10 percent, with legislation in all but four provinces allowing municipalities to require a parkland dedication of up to 10 percent of the area to be developed (Figure 1). In Nova Scotia, the standard dedication of 5 percent can be increased to 10 percent if the requirement is provided for in a municipal planning strategy. In Manitoba, parkland dedication is determined at a rate of 40 square meters for every occupant of the subdivision. In British Columbia and Ontario, the dedication can be up to only 5 percent (or 2 percent for industrial and commercial developments in Ontario).

Figure 1: Legislated Parkland Dedication Rates in Canada's Provinces and Territories



In Canada's large, growing cities, parkland dedication is an important means by which municipalities can keep pace with increasing population and development. However, the tool does have limitations. For example, because it is tied to growth, parkland dedication has less value in cities that are intensifying rather than expanding, and it is limited as a means to address parkland deficits in existing neighbourhoods. In addition, the country's most populous provinces, where significant open space has already been lost to development, have relatively low dedication rates.

In cases where municipalities seek to acquire parkland over and above the amount dictated by dedication standards, they often use other land-use planning tools provided for in provincial legislation². One such tool is density bonusing, which allows municipalities to authorize increased height and density of development in exchange for additional parkland dedication or recreational facilities. In municipalities experiencing strong development pressure, where there is a demand from developers for higher density, this tool can be particularly valuable.

² Evergreen's *Provincial Parkland Dedication Requirements in Canada* report provides a detailed summary of parkland dedication rates in Canada, and other planning tools, as set out in provincial and territorial legislation. Copies of this report are available from Evergreen.

Another provision in provincial and territorial legislation that enables municipalities to protect open space through the development process is the control or conveyance of lands deemed unsuitable for development. These include important ecological features such as provincially or regionally significant wetlands, woodlots, ravines and Areas of Natural and Scientific Interest (ANSIs). They can also include hazardous lands such as those prone to flooding or erosion, including flood plains, shorelines and tops and slopes of valley walls. In some cases, these lands are conveyed to the municipality or other public agency outright. In others, development restrictions are placed on the property where the feature is located.

More and more municipalities are creating inventories of such lands, and giving them special designation in their official plans and/or zoning by-laws. In Ontario, conservation authorities were created in 1946 by the provincial *Conservation Authorities Act*. They are charged with conserving, restoring, and managing natural resources on a watershed basis, and are often primarily responsible for environmentally significant or hazardous lands.

Meeting Community Green Space Needs: Inventories and Population

There is no standard method among Canadian municipalities for defining and measuring the total amount of green space in their jurisdiction. This makes the task of identifying trends in urban green space inventories, and making comparisons among municipalities, particularly difficult. For

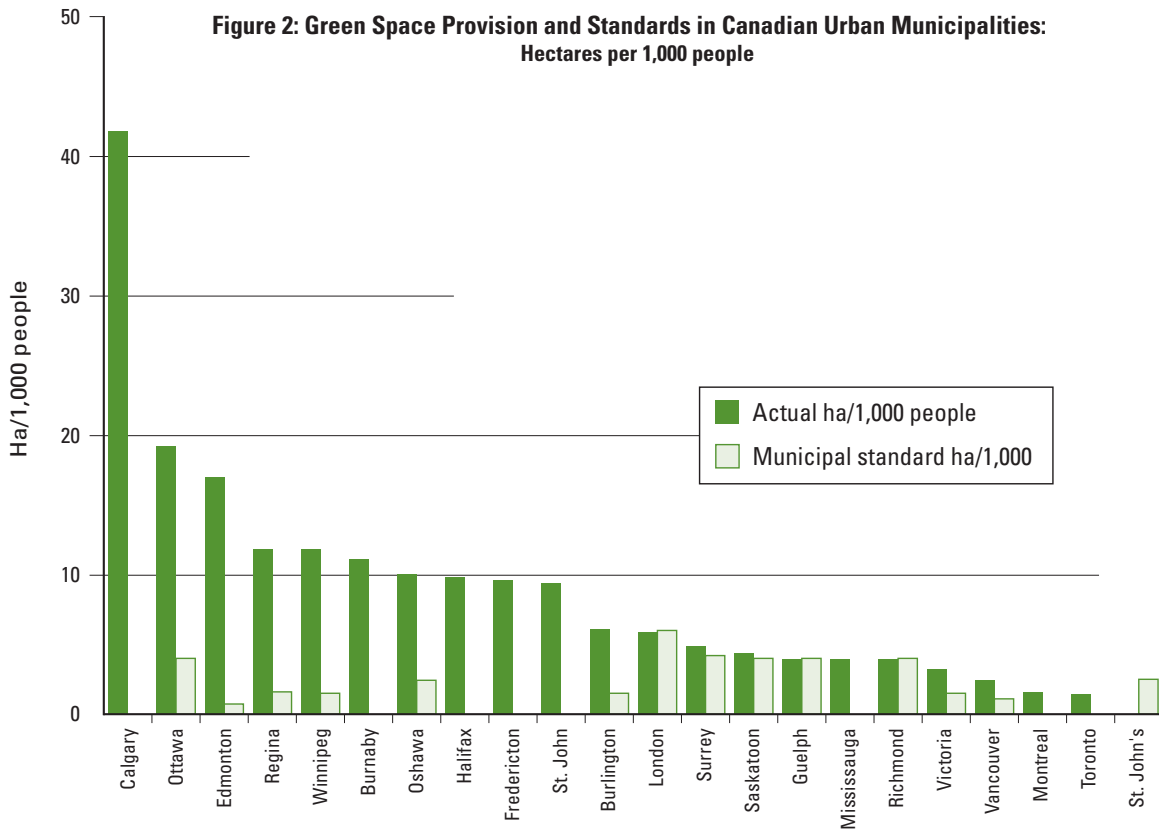
example, in some cases, natural reserves and cemeteries are owned and managed by the municipality; in others, such lands are at least partly under the jurisdiction of agencies such as conservation authorities.

The green space inventories presented in this report only include lands considered by the surveyed cities to be part of their municipal public green space. For example, none of the land owned by the National Capital Commission in Ottawa, the Greater Vancouver Regional District in Vancouver, or university campuses in Halifax is included in total green space calculations.

Total green space inventory figures ranged from Calgary's 37,620 hectares to Victoria's 258 hectares. Green space provision to urban populations was calculated in terms of hectares of green space per 1,000 people. Once outliers were removed³, the average green space provision rate was 9.2 hectares/1,000 people, and the median rate was 6.1 hectares/1,000 people.

As illustrated in Figure 2, mid-sized cities such as Calgary, Regina, Edmonton, Ottawa and Winnipeg were among those with the highest green space to population ratios, while the populous urban areas of Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver were among those with the lowest provision rates. This is consistent with comments received from respondents in large municipalities, who indicated that land availability and high real estate value are key barriers to the creation of new parks.

³ The City of Whitehorse reported 36,000 ha. of municipal green space, serving a population of 19,058. As the resulting provision rate of 189.1 ha. per 1,000 people is so far above that of other municipalities, it was removed from calculations of mean and median.



Green Space Provision Trends

For some respondents, green space provision trends within their municipalities over the past 10 years were impossible to identify because of changing green space definitions and the difficulty of tracking information after amalgamation. However, among those who were able to respond, Calgary, Saskatoon and Whitehorse reported increasing green space provision ratios in past years; St. John's, Vancouver and Richmond indicated that rates had been decreasing; and Burlington, Toronto, Regina, Surrey and Victoria reported constant rates. The most telling information, however, related to expected future trends. While several municipalities — Oshawa, Saskatoon and Toronto — expected rates to be at least

constant in the coming years, none of the respondents predicted an increase in green space provision in the future. In fact, respondents from Vancouver and Richmond reported an expected continuation of the trend towards decreasing green space provision in future years, largely due to the difficulty of providing sufficient new parkland for increasing populations (see Figure 3).

Setting Green Space Standards

In order to measure their effectiveness at meeting community green space needs, many municipalities establish parkland standards, most commonly expressed as a target number of hectares per 1,000 people, either per neighbourhood, or city-wide. Just over half of the respondents indicated that they have

such standards in place, ranging from 0.7 to 6 hectares/1,000 people, with an average of 2.79 hectares/1,000. As shown in Figure 2, virtually all of these cities are meeting or exceeding their goals. An additional three municipalities — Calgary, London and Mississauga — measure green space standards by prescribing a maximum distance to green space from each residential area instead of, or in combination with, the hectares/1,000 people standard.

Standards using a ratio of area to population have been in common use in both the U.S. and Canada since they were proposed by the U.S. National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) in the early part of the 20th century. The standard that was promoted by the NRPA was 10 acres (4.05 hectares)/1,000 people, but the origin of this number is not known, and discussions of its possible inadequacy have been ongoing for at least the past 30 years (Bureau of Municipal Research, 1971).

Several respondents, in fact, commented on the inadequacy of these green space standards to fully address the question of green space need and availability. While green space amount and proximity to residents are important concerns, these traditional standards do not take into account other factors such as:

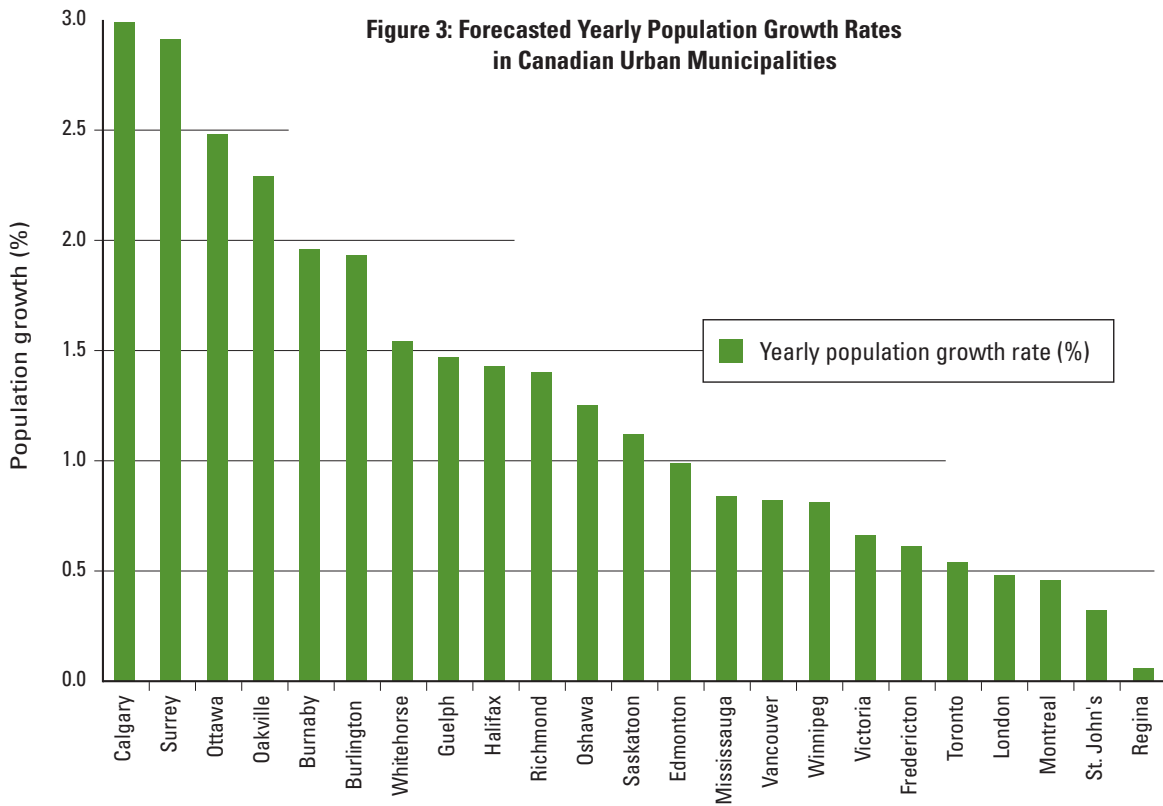
- *quality of landscape design;*
- *ecological health and biodiversity;*
- *appropriateness of design for diverse users and activities;*

- *interpretive and educational programming; and*
- *amount of green space in the surrounding region.*

Although these issues are often addressed in other municipal planning and strategy documents, or on a case-by-case basis for individual parks, they are generally not consolidated into an overarching system by which municipalities can evaluate progress and assess needs.

Parkland Standards in the City of Toronto

Recognizing the limitations of applying traditional numerical parkland standards to a diverse and growing urban centre, the City of Toronto is developing alternative strategies for determining parkland needs. By moving towards more performance-based approaches to parkland needs assessment, the City is able to take into account the specific community needs, land acquisition opportunities, urban form characteristics, and anticipated future development of individual neighbourhoods. Using a contextual decision-making framework, the City aims to establish parkland acquisition and improvement requirements that meet both city-wide and community needs.



Finance and Acquisition of Parkland

The variety of ways municipal parks and recreation budgets are formulated and allocated makes detailed comparison across jurisdictions very difficult. Nonetheless, the figures presented here serve as rough indicators of trends in parkland service delivery across the country (see Figures 4 and 5).

Parks and recreation budgets ranged from Toronto’s 2.8 percent of the total municipal budget, to Mississauga’s 24.5 percent of the total, with an average of 10.8 percent. Per capita parks and recreation figures varied considerably, from \$55 per person in St. John’s to \$399 in Whitehorse. The average per capita parks and recreation budget, once outliers were removed, was \$117⁴.

⁴ Because the City of Whitehorse’s per capita Parks and Recreation budget of \$399 was considered to be an outlier, this figure was omitted from the calculation.

Figure 4: Parks & Recreation Budgets as a Percentage of Total Budgets in Canadian Urban Municipalities

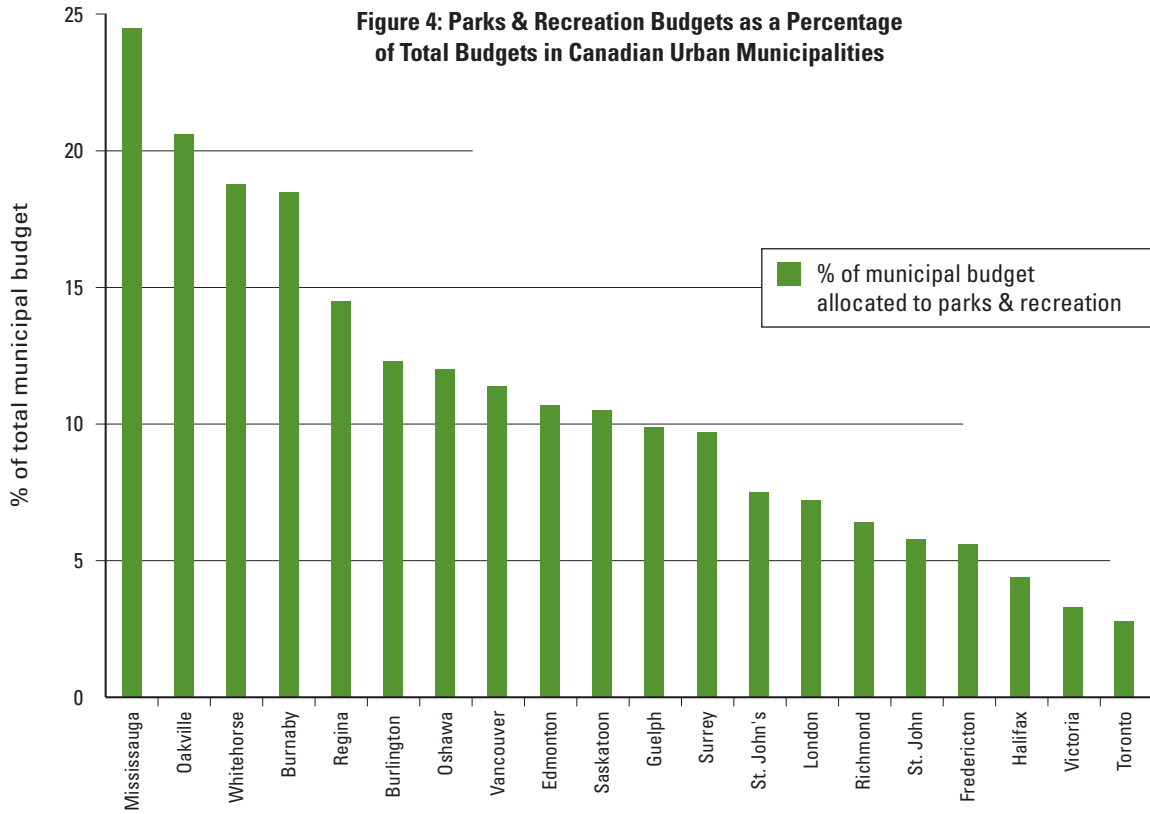
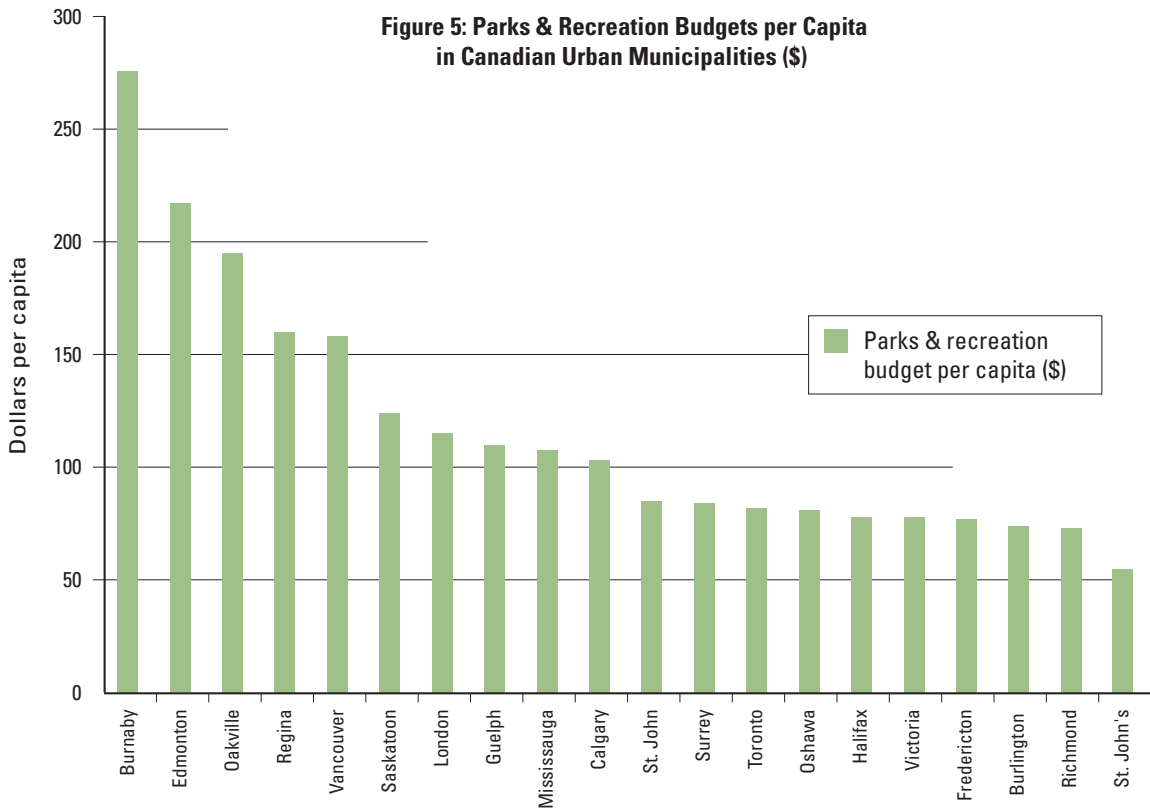


Figure 5: Parks & Recreation Budgets per Capita in Canadian Urban Municipalities (\$)



Key Findings

Variations in the definition of ‘green space’ from municipality to municipality, as well as differences in budget categories and record-keeping, mean that direct and absolute comparisons among cities based solely on the data collected cannot be drawn. This research does, however, provide a snapshot of the state of urban green space in Canada, and the results — informed by follow-up research and case study information — suggest several overarching trends.

■ **More and better urban green space is needed**

Municipalities across the country expressed a need for more and better green space in urban areas, and a need for stronger tools and better support in order to ensure that community green space needs are met. Municipal capacities to meet green space needs vary considerably across the country, both in terms of financial resources and available planning or legal tools. However, even respondents from municipalities that seem to be achieving high green space provision rates expressed a need for more support, improved acquisition tools and new stewardship strategies. Moreover, none of the surveyed municipalities predicted increased green space provision rates in coming years, and several municipalities expected a decline in green space provision as the urban population grows. While most municipalities that have green space standards in place are apparently meeting or exceeding their goals, many respondents commented on the fact

that such standards do not address the complexities of green space sufficiency in growing and diverse cities.

■ **Financial constraints constitute Canadian municipalities’ greatest challenge**

Clearly, there is no single formula for the kind of support that will enable Canadian municipalities to meet their green space goals. Surveyed municipalities reported a broad range of key challenges and areas of need, ranging from concerns about blurred responsibilities after amalgamation to the need for more information on the economic value of parks. The most frequently mentioned areas of need, however, related to the challenge of doing more with less: providing sufficient high quality green space using limited financial resources.

■ **Community involvement presents an opportunity for improved green space protection and stewardship in cities**

Many surveyed municipalities identified a need for new ways to work with communities as a key challenge in their cities. Other frequently-mentioned issues such as vandalism, crowded parks and conflicting public needs also point to the need for meaningful community involvement in urban green space planning, protection and stewardship. Urban citizens are increasingly interested in having a role in the development and enhancement of their communities, and the expertise and enthusiasm they can bring to urban greening projects is, in many cities, a relatively untapped resource.

■ **Intensification is a key challenge in large urban centres**

Cities at varying stages of growth and development face different key challenges. An examination of the green space inventory and standards data sheds light on the challenges faced by some of Canada's largest cities such as Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal, where population growth is outpacing the creation of new parks. In addition to being among Canada's largest urban centres, these cities also face limited access to additional parkland, whether because of high land values and built-up surrounding areas, or because of geographical limits to the city's growth. It is not surprising, then, that — as shown in Figure 2 — these municipalities have relatively low green space provision ratios for their current populations⁵, and have among the lowest parkland standards of the municipalities surveyed. Moreover, both Toronto and Vancouver are in provinces with parkland dedication requirements of only 5 percent. The paradox of this trend is apparent: the cities facing high population and development pressure are at once most in need of better ways to provide green space at the neighbourhood level, and least able to secure the necessary land.

In order to keep pace with growing and intensifying urban populations in large municipalities such as Toronto and Vancouver, there is a need for innovation

in green space securement. Non-traditional strategies may be considered, including enhancing existing green space so that it can accommodate more people and an increased variety of uses. There are also opportunities to create new public green space within the built-up city through brownfield development, the use of vacant lots and the establishment of greenways through ravines and utility corridors.

“As the city densifies, more and more Vancouverites are living in housing units that do not have private open space (i.e., back yards). Many only have a balcony or a small patio. This puts even greater pressure to acquire publicly accessible parks in these densifying neighbourhoods.”

– Michel Desrochers, City of Vancouver parks department (email correspondence)

■ **Mid-sized municipalities have an opportunity for sustainable growth**

Mid-sized suburban municipalities emerged as a distinct group in the survey. With significant expected population growth, relatively high allocation of funds to parks and recreation services, and rapid outward expansion, cities such as Oakville, Burlington, Surrey and Burnaby are dealing less with the challenge of intensification, and increasingly with the difficulty of combating sprawl-type development on

⁵ It should be noted that these relatively low green space provision ratios do not reflect the amount of open space held by the Greater Vancouver Regional District, in Vancouver, nor those held by Toronto and Region Conservation in Toronto.

the urban fringe. These municipalities are now presented with an opportunity to apply farsighted smart growth principles to ensure that future generations have access to the healthy, diverse green spaces that make a city great.

The costs of sprawl are well known. Negative impacts such as the loss of natural areas and productive farmland, air and water pollution, and increased municipal infrastructure costs are apparent in urban centres across North America. Such patterns, however, need not be replicated in Canada's suburban municipalities. These and other growing mid-sized cities are faced with the challenge — and the opportunity — to chart an alternative development path, and to emerge as leaders in Canada's move towards smart growth.

■ ***There is a need for communication and information-sharing***

One of the key findings of the nation-wide survey and consultation was that there is a need across the country for greater communication and information-sharing about the full range of tools and strategies available. While some municipalities are applying innovative strategies for the

securement and stewardship of green space, others lack the tools and know-how to advance innovative green space management practices. Each innovation generates new information, lessons learned and expertise that could be captured and communicated among municipalities. National leadership in this regard can come from organizations such as Evergreen, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, the Canadian Institute of Planners, Go for Green and the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association, to name only a few.



4 GREEN SPACE PROTECTION AND STEWARDSHIP CASE STUDIES



The results of the survey reveal that, across Canada, urban municipalities are rising to budgetary and other challenges

in a variety of creative ways. Whether through partnerships with community organizations, progressive zoning regulations or inter-agency collaboration, some cities are expanding the range of tools and strategies available to parks and planning departments. The case studies presented in this section reflect the range of challenges faced by urban municipalities, and offer examples of the strategies used to deal with them. They demonstrate the potential for success, and offer insight into the benefits and challenges of creative approaches to parkland securement and stewardship. The case studies have been divided into two sub-sections: the first presents examples of innovative green space protection, whether through purchase, zoning, easement or partnership; the second presents case studies of creative approaches to green space stewardship in Canada's cities.

Case Studies in Innovative Green Space Protection

The most frequently cited challenge to green space protection among surveyed municipalities was development pressure, including controlling urban sprawl. Other overarching challenges included budget restrictions and the need for more staff time. In addition, large urban centres are finding that land for new parks is often both scarce and expensive, putting even greater pressure on limited resources, while mid-sized cities are in need of better tools for achieving smart growth objectives as they expand outwards.

The following examples show how cities across the country are meeting the various challenges and pressures associated with land acquisition and securement.

City of Whitehorse: Creating and Financing a New Trail System Through Partnerships

In July 2002, the City of Whitehorse opened the Millennium Trail — 5km of fully accessible trail along the Yukon River. Already, it has become an integral part of the municipal open space system, serving several sectors of the population that otherwise have limited access to natural areas, including elderly and disabled people. According to Douglas Hnatiuk, who managed the project for the City, this multi-year, capital-intensive project would not have happened without a partnership.

While the City of Whitehorse is currently delivering a high level of green space provision to its population of just over 19,000, the municipality is nonetheless experiencing significant population growth and increased pressure on municipal parks budgets. The City's key challenge is to maintain this high standard of provision, while continuing to improve the quality and diversity of parkland available.

In 1999, the converging interests of the City, the Yukon Council on Disability, and the Yukon Energy Corporation, which controls a dam on the Yukon River, led to the initiation of the Millennium Trail project. The shared vision, to be achieved through a three-way partnership, was to create a multi-use, multi-season accessible trail along the banks of

the Yukon River. Each partner contributed expertise, as well as financial and in-kind support to the \$900,000 project. Some of the land on which the trail was built already belonged to the City. The remainder was secured through an easement with Yukon Energy Corporation and a lease agreement with the Territorial government.

Today, the partnership has been expanded to include the local Rotary Club, which will spearhead a fundraising campaign in order to leverage the final \$200,000 needed to complete construction of a pedestrian bridge across the river. After the project's completion, the City will take primary responsibility for the stewardship, signage and maintenance of this new element of Whitehorse's green space system.

Having a range of community stakeholders involved, and key partners from the non-profit and private sectors, lent credibility to the project in the community's eyes.

This partnership, formalized in a memorandum of understanding among the parties, enabled the City to embark on a more ambitious public green space project than it could have managed on its own, and provided access to riverfront land that would otherwise have been outside of the City's jurisdiction. Hnatiuk also points out that the return on the City's investment in this partnership goes beyond the financial. Having a range of community stakeholders involved, and key partners from the non-profit and private

sectors, lent credibility to the project in the community's eyes. The trail has garnered considerable community support and has enabled the City to enhance the quality and diversity of green space available to the public.

City of Guelph:

Partnerships for Access to Green Space

Like the City of Whitehorse, the City of Guelph is looking to lands owned by utility companies and other agencies as a prospective means to expand urban parkland. With a population of over 106,000, Guelph is an expanding mid-sized city within commuting distance to Toronto. Like many other municipalities, Guelph is faced with the challenge of keeping pace with a growing population, while working with limited financial resources.

By partnering with local utility companies, the Grand River Conservation Authority and the Cemetery Commission, the City of Guelph is aiming to gain public access to existing green space in the city. This will effectively add to its complement of downtown parkland, and expand the municipality's urban trail system, without the financial burden of having to purchase the land outright. Details of responsibility for maintenance, taxes and liability insurance will be clearly laid out as part of the partnership agreement.

This approach is not without its challenges. According to Janet Sperling, Parks Planner with the City of Guelph, one of the difficulties has been addressing encroachment issues where newly-accessible green space backs

onto residential lots. The benefits have, however, outweighed these challenges. Similar partnerships with the local school board have already expanded the public open space system in Guelph, and are helping the City to efficiently provide parkland to a population that is both intensifying and expanding. Sperling asserts that partnerships such as these can increase overall public support and belief in the preservation of green space. She offers this advice to other municipalities considering similar strategies: “Investigate and educate yourself on the advantages, disadvantages, opportunities and threats to the green space and the partnership. And remember, partnerships are a good thing: they should be nurtured and recognized.”

**City of Vancouver:
New Waterfront Parks in the City Centre**

In a city where mountains and sea form natural barriers to growth, providing sufficient parkland for a growing and densifying population is a particular challenge. The efficient use of existing parks, and the reclamation of land that may previously have been used for industry, have become necessary strategies for the City of Vancouver parks department.

Over the past 15 years, the City has been in the process of creating eight medium-sized parks along the Vancouver waterfront. By allowing high density levels in new housing developments, the municipality was able to negotiate conveyance of almost 16 hectares of downtown real estate — land that would otherwise have been far too expensive for the City to purchase. Michel Desrochers of the City’s parks department points out that

this is not a new strategy, but an old idea being applied to meet today’s needs. He notes that, “from the 1880s to the 1950s, developers were building single-family houses on previously undeveloped land. The current developers are converting old industrial areas into high-density housing. We’ve been able to get parks out of both types of land development in our city’s history.”

Dedication of green space in exchange for development rights may not be a new idea, but Vancouver’s new waterfront parkland is an example of how this strategy can be used to help meet green space needs in intensifying city centres. Parks department staff negotiated with developers using a target parkland dedication of 1.1 hectare per 1,000 people, a figure that can be traced back to 1921 as a standard goal for urban green space in the city. Through strong advocacy for urban parkland, and the use of a well-established land acquisition tool, the City’s parks department was able to help ensure that residents of the densely populated city centre have access to adequate green space.

**City of Surrey:
Using Zoning Tools to Protect
Green Space in a Growing Municipality**

Creating parkland through the development process is most commonly achieved using statutory parkland dedication. In some cases, however, parkland dedication rates do not meet green space needs. Like many other rapidly-growing mid-sized Canadian municipalities, the City of Surrey is working to balance rapid growth and setting land aside for parks. To help achieve smart growth objectives as the city expands,

the municipality has established proactive zoning and other planning mechanisms that enable it to go beyond the provincially-mandated parkland dedication of 5 percent.

The City of Surrey's Zoning By-law enables gross density zoning and cluster residential zoning to be considered in areas where the City would like to set aside more than 5 percent of the land to be developed. These mechanisms allow the municipality to protect natural features such as watercourses, ravines and woodlots by requiring up to 15 percent (in the case of gross density zoning) or up to 50 percent (in the case of cluster residential zoning) of the land to be transferred to the City in exchange for higher density allowances.

In some areas, gross density zoning is used quite frequently, enabling the City to set aside more land for parks and natural areas, while developers benefit from higher densities and an adjacent green space amenity. "Serious developers in particular can see the benefit of having green areas and parks close to their development project; parks and open space can generally add value to adjacent units," notes Jean Lamontagne, Manager of Planning, Design and Corporate Facilities for the City of Surrey.

Using gross density zoning in the South Surrey peninsula enabled the City to protect woodlands that had formed the boundaries between the old large-lot remnants. The remaining wooded area is now a major linear park feature of that community. The City of Surrey was also one of the first municipalities in British Columbia to make use of recent amendments to the province's

Local Government Act, allowing for a small percentage (about 5 percent) of Development Cost Charges (DCC) to be used for parkland development, while the remainder flows into the City's parkland acquisition budget. For a growing municipality like Surrey, this has meant that lands can be acquired in advance of their anticipated use as public green space. "Surrey is a young and fast-growing municipality," notes Lamontagne. "Strong development has meant a steady stream of park acquisition DCC, which allows the City to acquire the parkland infrastructure that will be developed in future years."

City of Regina: Strengthening Zoning Tools for Smart Growth

With a population of just over 190,000, the City of Regina is expecting modest population growth in coming years and is using existing zoning tools to ensure that green spaces are an integral part of all development as the city expands. In 2002, the municipality undertook an amendment of its zoning by-law, re-writing the buffer and landscape regulations for new developments to make them consistent with a vision for the city's future as a livable, green and economically viable urban municipality.

Key elements of the re-written regulations included requirements for landscaping on traffic islands, larger permeable surface areas for each tree, and more planting of shrubs. By inviting the development community to the review table, and by listening to their concerns, the City was able to garner support for this progressive zoning by-law amendment, which will help mitigate the negative impacts of sprawl-type development.

Rather than holding a traditional open house for developers, the City held a consultation workshop for a broad range of development and land-use stakeholders, including developers, architects, landscape architects, the Chamber of Commerce and others.

Over the course of the workshop, participants learned about the proposed regulations, and offered suggestions and feedback. With this input in mind, City staff proposed a series of changes, relaxing or re-articulating some requirements in order to allow for flexibility, and retaining the original standards in other cases, based on careful consideration of community needs.

Ron Torrens, a key organizer of the workshop, credits a true consultative approach for this success: "It's not a case of 'us and them'," he says. "It's really more of a process." Torrens cites a number of keys to the workshop's success.

- **Round Table Structure:** *Workshop attendees were seated in a closed rectangle rather than in the traditional 'classroom style' of an open house.*
- **Direct Dialogue:** *during the workshop, participants were encouraged to share their ideas and concerns directly, rather than expressing them anonymously through a comment box.*
- **Cost Accounting:** *In recognition of stakeholders' concerns about the 'bottom line' impact of the regulations, staff presented a series of sample project scenarios, including a hotel, a restaurant, a retail grocer and an industrial shop.*

The cost of each project was assessed using the old and the new regulations. Participants were able to see immediately that the new regulations would add only 0.5 to 1 percent in additional capital costs, and that these would likely be offset by the long term savings from reduced maintenance costs and improved vegetation survival rates.

- **Follow Up:** *After the workshop, City staff researched the issues that had been raised, and met with individual parties in order to discuss their concerns more fully. Once consensus was reached, the City sent out a letter to each stakeholder, explaining each issue and how it had been addressed.*

By inviting all stakeholders to the table, the City created an opportunity for open communication before the changes had been made, leveraging support through effective consultation. It also enabled the City to explain the rationale for the changes, and to communicate the implications of the by-law not only for individual development sites in the city, but for the livability and economic sustainability of the community as a whole.

City of Winnipeg:

Conservation Easements and Ecogifts

Facing limited financial resources and constant development pressure, the City of Winnipeg is looking for innovative ways to protect natural areas as the city grows. Cheryl Heming, Winnipeg's City Naturalist, notes that "there are many tracts of ecologically significant natural areas that the City cannot possibly afford to buy, but are worthy of

preservation.” In its search for new and affordable ways to protect land, the City has started to explore the feasibility of acquiring ecogifts and conservation easements on privately-owned properties.

Ecogifts are charitable donations of ecologically sensitive land to conservation agencies and organizations. Under the Federal Ecological Gift Program, donors are provided with income tax benefits beyond those that normally accrue from a charitable donation.

Conservation easements are a standard tool of land trusts in Canada, the U.S., and elsewhere, and are largely used to protect land in rural or remote areas. An easement is a legally binding agreement giving land management and development rights to a conservation entity, such as a land trust or municipality, while the landowner gains tax benefits. Because it is registered against the title to the land, an easement protects land in perpetuity, even when the land changes hands.

Recognizing the potential of ecogifts and conservation easements as proactive tools to protect habitat and natural areas, the City of Winnipeg has attempted to put these strategies into use in recent years. The City is seeking a flagship case that will garner widespread support for the strategy, and could open the doors to the development of a municipal framework or policy on ecogifts and conservation easements.

According to Heming, the greatest challenge is locating a landowner who is interested in

donating an easement or making a gift of land. She suggests that there is a need to raise awareness among prospective donors, tax accountants and City staff about how these tools can be used in an urban setting. Although conservation easements are in relatively wide use in the southern, rural part of the province, conservation easements and ecogifts are as yet untested in the city. Creating a precedent-setting case has proven to be a challenge.

...there is a need to raise awareness among prospective donors, tax accountants and City staff about how these tools can be used in an urban setting.

Adding to the difficulty are the legislative restrictions on ecogifts. According to federal legislation, land must not only be ecologically significant in order to qualify, but also cannot be inventory land (i.e., land that is owned by a developer as stock property). Hemming suggests that, in the case of a woodlot called ‘Bois des Esprits’, which had community and municipal support for protection, this restriction was the principal barrier to having it donated by the developer as an ecogift.

Case Studies in Creative Green Space Stewardship

Budget limitations were the most frequently cited obstacles to effective park stewardship faced by surveyed municipalities, followed by the need for new ways to engage communities and volunteers. Many municipalities also mentioned the linked concerns of parkland

overuse and misuse, and the challenge of satisfying the often conflicting needs for natural green space and active recreational areas such as sports fields. Operating under these constraints, and in challenging economic times, municipalities are often reluctant to assume ownership of new parkland because of the cost of maintaining it. As a result, they may be inclined to accept cash in lieu of land from developers under their parkland dedication requirements, or to forego land acquisition opportunities when they arise. In several Canadian cities, however, municipalities have found innovative ways to tap into the expertise, resources, and energy of the non-profit and charitable sector, as well as local volunteers, and have established partnerships that help to leverage scarce financial resources for green space stewardship.

The examples offered here illustrate the variety of scales, models and goals of such partnerships, ranging from the City of Burnaby's ongoing support of community-based Streamkeepers groups, to the City of Saskatoon's statutory funding of, and collaboration with, the Meewasin Valley Authority.

City of Oshawa:

Partnership for Wetland Stewardship

The City of Oshawa's longstanding partnership with the non-profit Friends of Second Marsh has enabled the restoration of a 131-hectare wetland on a former industrial site along Lake Ontario. In 1984, when the site was to be deeded over to the City of Oshawa from the Federal Department of Transport, the

municipality did not have the capacity to manage it alone. "When the City of Oshawa was to receive the Oshawa Second Marsh, the City had neither the financial resources nor the staff expertise to manage and restore the wetland," recalls Noel Hutchinson, Director of Parks and Facilities Maintenance at the City of Oshawa.

"By drawing in groups that had a vested interest in wetland restoration, we were able to do collectively what no individual agency could do alone."

At the urging of the Friends of Second Marsh, the City formed a multi-stakeholder steering committee to formulate a remedial action plan. With the formation of a three-way partnership among the City of Oshawa, the Friends of Second Marsh, and the Canadian Wildlife Service, phase one of a three-phase management plan was initiated, and the ecological restoration of the marsh began in earnest. This phase of the plan (about \$1.3 million) was funded by the Canadian Wildlife Service, and the Friends of Second Marsh, in cooperation with the City, raised matching funds to establish trails, viewing stations and interpretive signage.

Since that time, the partnership has expanded to include Ducks Unlimited and the Central Lake Ontario Conservation Authority as key players. In addition, numerous other community groups and service clubs, along with school boards and neighbouring landowners, have become involved as sponsors, volunteers, advisors and educators.

Today, this class-one provincially significant wetland is an invaluable passive recreation and educational site serving the entire municipality.

Tapping into the assets and expertise of other organizations was what made this project possible. As Hutchinson notes, “By drawing in groups that had a vested interest in wetland restoration, we were able to do collectively what no individual agency could do alone.” This success has been achieved despite the challenges, which have included communication among partners, coordinating the interests of the public, government and business, and the changing mandates of government over time. The key to overcoming such challenges, and building a strong partnership, says Hutchinson, is “having a shared vision, a solid plan and the willingness and determination to see it through.”

**City of Burnaby:
Working with Streamkeepers Groups**

The City of Burnaby has taken a different approach to working with community stewardship organizations. In 1996/97, the City worked with the Sapperton Fish and Game Club and the British Columbia Institute of Technology to start a number of Burnaby “Streamkeepers” groups. This network of volunteers and volunteer organizations is working to protect and restore aquatic habitats in the Burnaby area through water quality monitoring, streamside plantings and clean-ups, habitat surveys, and fish identification and monitoring. The City’s planning department offers ongoing support

to each of the 10 groups active in the Burnaby area. This support takes the form of:

- *a one-window approach to staff liaison, whereby one staff member is designated as the Streamkeepers’ contact point as an element of the job description;*
- *letters of support for funding;*
- *occasional collaboration on stewardship projects (contributing equipment, design advice, etc.);*
- *partnering on public awareness events such as Environment Week and the annual Rivers Day; and*
- *being responsive to issues raised by the Streamkeepers.*

Kimberly Flick, Long Range Planner for the City of Burnaby’s planning department, has been the staff contact for Streamkeepers

City work crews are now trained about how to work in environmentally sensitive streamside areas in order to minimize the potential environmental impacts.

groups over the past decade. She says that the involvement with Streamkeepers has changed the way the City looks at its urban waterways, enhancing its responsiveness to watershed protection issues, and raising awareness in all departments about the importance of riparian stewardship. For example, City work crews are now trained about how to work in environmentally sensitive streamside areas in order to minimize the potential environmental impacts. The planning department may also

refer developers of large projects to local Streamkeepers groups, who can offer input and advice on environmental components of the project, ecological enhancement elements or potential compensation works (when required by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans).

By working collaboratively with Streamkeepers to enhance urban watershed management, the City benefits from the dedication and expertise of the volunteer groups, and is alerted to stream stewardship issues as they arise. “It’s a win-win situation,” says Flick. “It makes my job that much easier.”

City of Ottawa: Partnerships for Park Stewardship and Management

As a newly amalgamated municipality, the City of Ottawa is struggling with the challenges of managing parks and other protected areas that have now become part of the urban envelope. As part of an effort to stretch parks and recreation budgets, the municipality is working towards developing partnerships with the social service agencies and recreation clubs that lease land in Riverfront Park, a 53-hectare riverfront property that has come under its jurisdiction since amalgamation.

The former City of Kanata and former Region of Ottawa-Carleton’s purchase of the site included a lease-back agreement with the previous landowner, the YMCA-YWCA. Now that Riverfront Park has come under the purview of the City of Ottawa, the municipality is in the process of working with the tenants

on a comprehensive management plan (two community recreation clubs also have use agreements/leases on the property). In response to the need for more cost-effective delivery of park services, the City is also exploring options with the YMCA-YWCA and the property’s other tenants to create a more substantive partnership for the restoration and programming of the site. Initiated by the City, this partnership responds to serious funding constraints. By working with agencies that have a long-standing interest in the site, the City hopes to create a mutually-beneficial partnership, and to expand the services offered at the new park without a significant increase in operating costs.

City of Fredericton: Partnership for Park Creation

By partnering with the Nature Trust of New Brunswick and other allied conservation groups, the City of Fredericton transformed an abandoned and contaminated dumping site into a unique public green space, created to protect the rare *Hyla versicolor*, or grey treefrog.

Called Hyla Park, after the amphibian it protects, this 8.84-hectare area had, since the early 1900s, been used as a quarry site, community dump, stockcar raceway and elm tree disposal pit. In February 1995, local naturalists brought the potential importance of the site to the attention of city council and, in September of that year, the City of Fredericton and the Nature Trust entered into a lease agreement that enabled the creation of Hyla Park Nature Preserve — the country’s first amphibian park.

The lease agreement sets out each party's roles and responsibilities for the site's development and stewardship. The park is included in the City's By-law Respecting Parklands and Recreation Areas, and has become a key site in the municipality's complement of public green space. While the City bears most of the responsibility for park maintenance, the Trust is actively involved in educational programming and ecological monitoring, and is responsible — according to the terms of the lease agreement — for the site's development and administration through its Hyla Park Stewardship Committee. The two parties also work together on some new park development projects such as the building of an educational kiosk in 1998.

"[This] project was received positively at every step of the approval process," says Jane Blakely, Director of Community Services with the City of Fredericton. Because the City had not developed any plans for the site, the proposal to create a park was welcomed, and the Nature Trust's interest provided a catalyst for the development of the site. As Blakely notes, "The Nature Trust gave concerned citizens a mechanism to approach the property owner with a proposal for redevelopment of a property that clearly needed attention." The Trust, and the individuals championing its cause, brought energy, dedication and specialized expertise to the table, while the City staff's experience in park development was applied to the design and planning of the site.

The Hyla Park lease agreement could be considered a best-case scenario for partnership development. "As long as the parties are in agreement with the proposed outcome, and there are no 'agendas' to work around, public/non-profit partnerships are effective and enjoyable," says Blakely.

City of Saskatoon: Meewasin Valley Authority

The South Saskatchewan River is often considered to be the defining natural feature of the City of Saskatoon. Since 1979, the City of Saskatoon, the University of Saskatchewan and the Province of Saskatchewan have worked together to protect and steward the river and its valley by jointly funding the Meewasin Valley Authority (MVA).

Created by an Act of provincial legislature, the MVA was the outcome of citizens' concerns about the possibility of losing public access to the South Saskatchewan River as the city grew. Today, the MVA operates as a non-profit agency with statutory funding from the City, the University and the Province. Its three key mandates are conservation, environmental education and recreation development.

The MVA and the municipality work closely on planning and parkland development on land owned variously by the MVA, the City, the Province or the University. Both the City and the MVA consider the arrangement to be mutually beneficial. Cam Patterson, Landscape Development Coordinator for the City, notes

that the parks branch had not yet developed much in-house natural areas management expertise at the time when the MVA was formed. The MVA has the specialized expertise and the stable budget to take on some projects that may not have been undertaken by the City alone.

The statutory funding provided by the municipality proves to be an excellent investment. For every dollar contributed by the City, the Province contributes two. This, in addition to other funding that the MVA can leverage as a non-profit, is then spent on conservation, environmental education and park stewardship for the benefit of the entire city. On many projects, the MVA

“The more they can get to it, the more they understand it; and the more they understand it, the more they want to protect it.”

works closely with the City on planning, design and implementation, guided by a formal management agreement that outlines roles, responsibilities and cost-sharing arrangements for each party. In general, the MVA is responsible for riverside parks development and building recreational facilities, while the City takes on the stewardship and maintenance of these sites.

As a result of this partnership, and the work that is accomplished through the MVA, the City of Saskatoon has reinforced the river as an integral feature of its urban landscape.

Today, the Meewasin Valley Trail, which covers 25.5 km along the river’s edge, is the most intensely used recreation facility in the city. The MVA has created 16 ecological restoration sites in the river valley, covering hundreds of hectares. Such achievements have generated community interest in the river, and, according to John Gerstmar, Resource Planning Manager for the MVA, it has increased community concern for the environment. “The more they can get to it, the more they understand it; and the more they understand it, the more they want to protect it,” he says.



5 FOCUS ON PARTNERSHIPS



Through this research, and in Evergreen's ongoing work with parks planners, stewardship coordinators, and others working for green space preservation and stewardship in Canada's urban municipalities, partnerships have emerged as a clear and dominant theme. Many municipalities have forged partnerships with community groups, non-profit agencies and corporations, usually in an effort to make scarce parks and recreation dollars go further. By enhancing the role of the public and stakeholder groups, partnership approaches can also achieve a higher level of public support for green space protection.

Such partnerships can take many forms, from occasional support of grassroots stewardship groups, to longstanding formal partnerships with non-profits or other agencies. Examples from across the country show that, when managed well, partnerships have the potential to yield a significant return — in the form of efficiency, community empowerment and green space protection — on the municipality's initial investment of time, energy and funds.

Based on respondents' experiences with partnership approaches, long-term benefits to the City, and to the public, can include:

- *leveraging funds that are available to non-profit organizations, but would not otherwise be accessible to public agencies (e.g., from charitable foundations and corporations, etc.);*
- *tapping into specialized expertise and passionate commitment via community groups and volunteers;*

- *preventing conflict by involving organizations and communities in the land-use and development process at an early stage;*
- *garnering community support for green space protection, and generating goodwill by involving the community, rather than simply responding to concerns; and*
- *catalyzing innovation, introducing diverse perspectives, and flagging new opportunities for green space acquisition or enhancement.*

As inspiring a model as partnerships seem to provide, there is a level of complexity to such approaches that must be acknowledged. David Miller, Planner for the City of Ottawa, notes the importance of understanding this at the outset: "Creative approaches can sound great but get complicated. They do require

"Creative approaches can sound great but get complicated. They do require persistence and some recognition that they still cost money to put together."

persistence and some recognition that they still cost money to put together." For municipalities, the initial investment of financial and human resources can seem onerous. In addition, several respondents noted that partners' priorities, capacities and even mandates can change over time, jeopardizing the partnership and its expected outcomes. Effective planning and partnership management, however, can often mitigate these potential risks.

While conducting this research project, Evergreen learned about a broad range of partnership approaches being tested across the country, and a number of keys to success emerged from that process. Respondents described partnerships on various scales, with a range of types of agencies, and for different purposes. However, there was a common understanding of what it takes to achieve an effective partnership.

1. **Make partnerships a “way of doing business”** — Partnerships can be achieved with greater ease, and are ultimately more successful, when there is a high degree of support for them at every level. This commitment and support may take many forms, including:

- municipal staff in every department who are aware of the benefits of partnerships, and well informed about the process of partnership-making;
- a supportive and informed city council that appreciates the benefits of partnerships;
- a formalized set of guidelines for partnerships, articulating the benefits, challenges and means of forging partnerships for green space;
- a well-established proactive framework for working with partners, such that each new partnership requires less in terms of research and developing memoranda of understanding than when undertaken on an ad hoc basis. The City of Surrey is an example of a municipality that has developed such a framework (see p.28);
- a willingness to dedicate staff time to working with partners throughout the life of the partnership; and

- inclusion of elements in official city policies and documents such as the official plan, zoning, and green space strategies that identify partnerships as a key means by which to achieve greater parkland securement and stewardship. Policy guidelines such as Evergreen’s *Urban Naturalization in Canada: A Policy and Program Guidebook* can contribute to the development of such policy approaches.

2. **Open Communication** — Survey respondents repeatedly cited the importance of open and regular communication among partners regarding expectations, developments along the way, and changing commitments or capacities. Also important is effective communication about the partnership with stakeholder communities and the public.

3. **Clear Roles and Expectations** — As is the case for any business partnership, establishing clear expectations among partners for green space helps to reduce the chance of conflict or miscommunication among parties in the long term. Most frequently, a formal memorandum or letter of understanding is used to specify the agreed-upon rights, responsibilities, assumption of risk and general contribution of each party.



The City of Surrey's Partners in Parks Program

An example of a particularly comprehensive municipal partnership strategy is the City of Surrey's Partners in Parks program. With a population of more than 350,000, the City of Surrey is one of Canada's fastest growing municipalities. Rapid urbanization has put increasing pressure on natural areas and watercourses in this former agricultural community. The parks division's Partners in Parks program has helped to ease that pressure by building on a tradition of volunteerism in the city, and promoting partnerships as a key strategy to help protect and care for the city's parkland. The Partners in Parks, or PIP, program encompasses all relations between the parks division and the public, and provides a framework for building partnerships at all levels, from working with guide and scout groups to collaborating with large non-profits and public agencies. Partnership strategies are further supported by the City's parks, recreation and culture department's Partnership Guidelines document, which clearly articulates the goals, benefits, and key principles of partnerships.

Evergreen is one of the approximately 550 groups or individuals currently participating in the Partners in Parks program. Evergreen's Alyssa Semczyszyn, who works with City of Surrey staff in a partnership for the naturalization of three urban green space sites, says that the City's commitment and receptiveness to collaboration has a significant impact on the work they're doing together. "They really work with us to make sure that the work we're doing is integrated with the City's larger-picture strategy for natural areas, and they value our input and expertise in ecological restoration," she says. "They also offer a high level of detailed implementation, such as installing logs into a steep slope so that volunteers can access the area, and we end up doing better work than we would have been able to do on our own."

The parks division has also benefited from this proactive approach to community involvement and partnerships. Greg Ward, Manager of Urban Forestry and Environmental Programs, notes that this approach provides economic efficiencies for the City, in addition to other benefits. He says that "creating partnerships reduces service delivery costs. However, just as important is that green space stewardship is enhanced by community involvement, and that communities and neighbourhoods are enhanced by people working together."

6 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS



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Innovation and vision are very much in evidence in Canadian urban municipalities. There are numerous examples of dedicated individuals and departments working to create healthy, green cities. Most of the surveyed municipalities had developed green space planning and strategy documents to guide acquisition and stewardship activities, and in many cases specific securement tools such as density bonusing are enabled by elements of the official plan and zoning by-laws. Moreover, the range of planning approaches and creative partnership arrangements being tested across the country is increasingly broad.

Despite these promising trends, urban municipalities in Canada continue to face formidable challenges. Recent trends towards amalgamation, downloading of provincial responsibilities, and the rapid urbanization of Canada's population have put municipalities under considerable pressure. Green space provision is not expected to increase substantially in any of the surveyed municipalities in coming years. Most municipalities identified fiscal constraints as a key challenge to providing adequate green space, and many respondents felt that rapid growth and sprawl-type development were compromising their ability to protect enough green space to meet community needs. There is a clear need to build on current successes, consolidate lessons learned, and to continue to incorporate innovation into municipalities' ways of doing business.

In conclusion, a number of key themes emerge that are relevant both to land securement and to green space stewardship issues. These themes suggest a way forward for Canadian urban municipalities seeking to meet community green space needs now, and in the future.

The Way Forward: Key Recommendations and Support Needs

Explore Partnerships for Green Space

Whether as a means to help secure valuable green space or as a strategy for efficient and community-oriented stewardship, partnerships are emerging as a new way of 'doing business' for urban municipalities in Canada. Case studies from across the country illustrate the potential for partnerships to help stretch scarce parks and recreation budgets, garner community support, and tap into specialized skill sets. There is, however, a need for municipalities to explore more fully the range of possible partnership arrangements and benefits. For example, partnerships with community groups and other non-profit agencies for the stewardship and maintenance of parkland are not uncommon in Canada's cities. However, partnerships are relatively underused as a tool to help acquire or secure access to more parkland. Seeking partnerships with community service organizations, land trusts, utility companies, and public institutions such as universities and school boards can help municipalities secure more parkland, often without the full cost of outright purchase.

In order to promote and facilitate partnership as a key means to achieve more effective green space protection and stewardship in Canada's cities, Evergreen recommends that:

- *lessons learned through partnership approaches across the country be consolidated and communicated; and*
- *successful models for partnership agreements, frameworks and guidelines be documented and promoted.*

Expand the Repertoire of Planning and Legal Tools

Enabled by provincial and territorial legislation, and often strengthened by municipal strategy documents and official plans, green space planning tools offer a powerful means of protecting urban parkland. The key challenge for growing and expanding cities is to explore this 'tool-box' more fully; to creatively apply the tools available in order to develop according to smart growth principles; and to test less traditional strategies such as conservation easements and ecogifts in an urban context. In order to enable the full use of existing tools, there is a need for:

- *raised awareness, both within municipal departments and among other green space stakeholders, about the full range of planning and related tools available, and about the opportunities to apply them in new ways; and*
- *proactive use of planning tools to ensure that green space needs are considered at an early stage in the development process.*

Invest in Urban Parkland

While partnership approaches and the creative use of planning tools can help municipalities stretch limited budgets, they do not eliminate the need for stable parks and recreation funding. Financial constraints were consistently cited by surveyed municipalities as major barriers to both parkland securement and effective stewardship. In the case of large, intensifying cities, many traditional planning tools may be of limited value for green space securement, largely because these tools relate to outward growth and development. In these cases, a stable capital budget becomes crucial to ensuring sufficient parkland. There is, then, a need for advocacy to ensure that senior governments are investing in cities, and providing an assurance of stable, secure green space funding.

Further Research

This research highlights the key challenges that municipalities face as they work to ensure that the more than 80 percent of Canadians who live in cities have access to recreation, nature, open space and trails. Though not comprehensive, this report also brings us a step closer to understanding the context for green space securement and stewardship in Canada's urban municipalities, and identifies areas where further research is needed.

Green Space Definitions and Standards in Canada

Traditional standards such as hectares per 1,000 people and proximity to green space have the advantage of being simple and measurable. However, it seems clear that they do not fully capture the complexities of green space needs in cities that are culturally diverse, rapidly growing, and richly varied in terms of urban form and character. Moreover, in the absence of a commonly-held definition of 'green space' across the country, standards only have meaning in the jurisdiction to which they are applied. Yet the need for commonly-defined green space standards has perhaps never been greater. Not only can they serve as points of comparison over time and from city to city, but they can provide transparency and accountability to the communities whose needs they reflect. There is a need to better understand the role and value of green space standards, how they have been used in the past, and how they could be improved.

Natural Green Space in Canada's Cities

The environmental benefits of natural green space are well documented, and research into health, economic and other benefits is rapidly improving our understanding of the many ways in which nature is essential to cities. Evergreen's report entitled *Ground Work: Investigating the Need for Nature in the City*, for example, documents some of this research on the environmental, social and economic benefits of restoring healthy natural landscapes in the urban environment. There is a need, however, to document the status of natural green space in Canada's cities, and to better

understand the factors that either enable or inhibit the apparent trend towards green space naturalization and urban natural areas protection.

The Role of the Non-Profit Sector

The partnership stories and experiences related in this report attest to the growing importance of non-profit agencies as green space stakeholders in Canada's cities. However, the potential for synergy between the public and non-profit sectors has not yet been fully realized. As the repertoire of partnership arrangements broadens, and as the benefits of such strategies become well known, the trend towards collaboration will no doubt strengthen. In the meantime, there is an opportunity for non-profit and environmental non-government organizations to actively promote their role, and demonstrate their interest, in urban green space protection and stewardship. As shown by case studies from across the country, the non-profit sector is poised to take on that role by:

- *leveraging funds for public green space protection and stewardship, through charitable foundations and corporate philanthropy;*
- *contributing specialized expertise, particularly in fields such as urban ecology, habitat restoration, monitoring, and volunteer management;*
- *mobilizing communities and volunteers for urban greening;*
- *catalyzing innovation and identifying new opportunities for green space protection and enhancement; and*
- *championing natural urban green space as a key policy issue for governments at every level.*

The Nature Trust of New Brunswick's involvement in the creation of Fredericton's Hyla Park illustrates the crucial role played by non-profit groups as advocates for the greening of Canada's cities. In that case, the City of Fredericton's Jane Blakely highlighted this role: "The City could have developed the park on its own, [but] would we have? Then, as now, much of the park budget was driven by new development and the demand for

"...the energy, conviction and sweat equity provided by the group was at least the catalyst, if not the cause, for the development of Hyla Park."

active recreation facilities. We're still pushed to the limit to maintain, renew and gradually expand the inventory of passive [recreation] spaces in the city, so the energy, conviction and sweat equity provided by the group was at least the catalyst, if not the cause, for the development of Hyla Park."

There has never been a greater need for more and better green space in Canada's cities. With a rapidly growing urban population, we face the challenge of ensuring that our cities are sustainable, livable, and prosperous both now and in the future. Instances of proactive policy, innovative land protection strategies

and progressive partnership models from across the country show that Canadian municipalities recognize the crucial role played by urban parkland in achieving this vision. However, if they are to overcome the constraints of tight budgets and competing interests, urban municipalities need access to greater support and better tools for green space protection and stewardship. The contribution of the non-profit and voluntary sector is emerging as a key element of that support — whether through information-sharing, community involvement, advocacy or partnerships. By tapping into the strengths of the non-profit sector, and by making smart growth a priority, Canada's urban municipalities will be better able to plan and care for the green spaces that define our cities, and contribute to our quality of life.



APPENDIX 1: EVERGREEN URBAN MUNICIPAL SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

A. Legislative Framework

1. What provincial statute (and section number) addresses municipal parkland dedication requirements (e.g., Planning Act, Local Government Act, Municipal Act etc.)?
2. Are there other provincial legislation or policies that deal with open space acquisition (e.g. use of development charges)?
3. Is your municipality part of a regional or metropolitan upper-tier municipality?

B. Meeting Community Green Space Needs

4. a) What is the current population of your municipality?
b) What is the population forecast and timeframe specified in your official plan or other planning documents?
c) What is your municipality's employment population (if known)?
5. What is the total area of publicly accessible green space within your municipality? (note: green space includes urban parks, natural park areas and specialty areas such as community gardens. It does not include private golf courses and cemeteries)
 - a) owned and managed by your municipality
 - i) unimproved/natural areas for passive recreation _____ ha
 - ii) active recreation (e.g. soccer fields) _____ ha
 - iii) other (e.g. ravines, utility corridors etc.) _____ ha
 - b) owned and managed by other public agencies, if known (e.g. regional government, conservation authority etc.)
 - i) unimproved/natural areas _____ ha
 - ii) active recreation _____ ha
 - iii) other (e.g. ravines, utility corridors etc.) _____ ha
 - c) owned by institutions, if known (e.g. universities, hospitals etc.) _____ ha
6. How has the ratio of parkland to population in your municipality changed over the past 10 years? How do you think it will change in the future?
7. Do you have standards for measuring green space needs in individual neighbourhoods and/or the municipality as a whole (e.g. park area per 1000 population). If "yes", what are they?
8. Do you maintain an inventory of vacant lots? In general, can these lands be used for greening projects?

C. Finance and Acquisition

9. Do you have a strategy or plan in place for securing additional green spaces or parklands?
If “yes”, can we obtain a copy?
10. Do you have any recent acquisition success stories that you can share with us
(especially those that involved partnerships)?
11. What is your municipality’s total annual budget?
- | | |
|-----------|----------|
| capital | \$ _____ |
| operating | \$ _____ |
12. What is your municipality’s total annual parks and recreation budget?
- | | |
|-----------|----------|
| capital | \$ _____ |
| operating | \$ _____ |
13. What is your municipality’s total annual:
- | | |
|---|----------|
| a) Parkland acquisition budget | \$ _____ |
| b) Capital budget for environmental improvements (e.g. wetland creation) | \$ _____ |
| c) Operating budget | |
| i) park stewardship with an environmental focus
(e.g. tree planting, community gardening) | \$ _____ |
| ii) environmental education and recreational programs
(e.g. nature interpretation, workshops etc.) | \$ _____ |
14. Have expenditures on parkland acquisition (as a percentage of total municipal budget) been increasing or decreasing over the past 10 years?
15. Other than municipal tax revenues, do you draw on funds from other sources to finance parkland acquisition and maintenance (e.g. private foundations, provincial/federal governments, charitable organizations, etc.)?
16. How do you determine when a cash payment should be taken from a developer in lieu of land for park purposes? Do you have formal criteria?
17. Do cash payments provided by developers, in lieu of dedicating land for parkland purposes, go into a separate park fund? Are there restrictions on how these funds can be used?

-
18. Can ecologically sensitive features (such as woodlots, ravines, wetlands, flood hazard lands etc.) be included in your parkland dedication requirements?
 19. Has your municipality used planning tools such as density transfers or bonusing to create additional parkland? If “yes”, please explain
 20. Are there any financial incentives that you use to encourage open space preservation such as property tax relief?

D. Protection and Stewardship

21. What are the biggest challenges to protecting urban green spaces? How have you overcome them?
22. What are the biggest challenges to managing urban green spaces? How have you overcome them?
23. What type of support is most needed in this regard?
24. Do you have a formal program in place to encourage community participation in the enhancement and stewardship of green spaces?
25. Are you involved in any partnerships with local land trusts or community groups in the acquisition, enhancement and stewardship of natural areas? If “yes” what role do these partners play?
26. Do you have any other green space protection programs or initiatives?

APPENDIX 2: MUNICIPALITIES SURVEYED

CITY	PROVINCE	DEPARTMENT/ DIVISION CONTACTED	POP'N (2001)
Burlington	Ontario	Planning Department	150,836
Burnaby	British Columbia	Planning Department	193,954
Calgary	Alberta	Planning and Development Services Department	876,519
Edmonton	Alberta	Community Services Department Planning and Development Department	669,244
Fredericton	New Brunswick	Community Services Department	47,560
Guelph	Ontario	Recreation and Parks Division	106,170
Halifax	Nova Scotia	Parks Planning and Development	350,000
London	Ontario	Department of Planning and Development	338,575
Mississauga	Ontario	Planning and Heritage Department	612,925
Montreal	Quebec	Service des parcs, des jardins et des espaces verts	1,039,534
Oakville	Ontario	Parks Recreation and Culture Department	144,738
Oshawa	Ontario	Parks and Facilities Maintenance Services	146,000
Ottawa	Ontario	Planning, Environment and Infrastructure Policy Development Services	810,000
Regina	Saskatchewan	Project Services Department	190,400
Richmond	British Columbia	Community and Social Planning Department	165,605
Saint John	New Brunswick	Recreation and Parks Department	69,661
Saskatoon	Saskatchewan	Parks Branch	212,600
St John's	Newfoundland and Labrador	Planning Division	176,373
Surrey	British Columbia	Planning, Design and Corporate Facilities	347,800
Toronto	Ontario	Natural Environment and Horticulture Section, Parks and Recreation Department	2,481,000
Vancouver	British Columbia	Parks Department	546,000
Victoria	British Columbia	Parks Division	80,000
Whitehorse	Yukon	Parks and Recreation Department	19,058
Winnipeg	Manitoba	Urban Planning Branch	619,544

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EVERGREEN
COMMON GROUNDS

Bring Nature Back to Your City

Evergreen

Evergreen is a national non-profit environmental organization with a mandate to bring nature to our cities through naturalization projects. Evergreen motivates people to create and sustain healthy, natural outdoor spaces and gives them the practical tools to be successful through its three core programs: Learning Grounds (transforming school grounds), Common Grounds (protecting and preserving public open spaces) and Home Grounds (for the home landscape). We believe that local stewardship creates vibrant neighbourhoods, a healthy natural environment and a sustainable society for all.

Evergreen Common Grounds Program

Evergreen Common Grounds program is a national service that conserves natural and cultural landscapes, restores degraded environments, and protects open spaces for recreation, education and enjoyment in urban, suburban and urbanizing areas. The Common Grounds program works to ensure Canada's urban common grounds grow sustainably and prosper through the 21st century and beyond.

Evergreen gratefully acknowledges project funding for this research from:

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Evergreen is funded by the generous support of individual Canadians, foundations, businesses and various government agencies. Major funding partners include:



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