



**SUBJECT: Park Provisioning Master Plan - progress report**

**TO: Environment, Infrastructure & Community Services Cttee.**

**FROM: Engineering Services Department**

Report Number: ES-05-22

Wards Affected: All

File Numbers: 930-01

Date to Committee: June 9, 2022

Date to Council: June 20, 2022

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**Recommendation:**

Receive and file engineering services department report ES-05-22 regarding the City of Burlington Park Provisioning Master Plan progress report.

**PURPOSE:**

To provide Council with an overview of the status of the Park Provisioning Master Plan and its relationship to legislative context and alignment with other City technical studies. The final Park Provisioning Master Plan will be presented to Council in September 2022. It will provide an assessment of current parkland service levels, guidelines and recommendations on the acquisition of parkland in the short, medium and long-term and decision-making methodology for future parkland acquisition.

**Vision to Focus Alignment:**

- Increase economic prosperity and community responsive city growth
- Improve integrated city mobility
- Support sustainable infrastructure and a resilient environment
- Building more citizen engagement, community health and culture

## **Executive Summary:**

To provide Council with an overview of the status of the Park Provisioning Master Plan and an insight into what to expect as a final deliverable, this Council report ES-05-22 contains a summary of work to date included as Appendix A – Park Provisioning Master Plan Progress Report. This progress report provides a summary of background context and analysis completed to date. Further analysis and refinement will continue and be incorporated into the final document. This progress report includes a summary of the legislative context guiding parkland acquisition within the City of Burlington and outlines existing challenges and opportunities such as parcel fragmentation and changing trends that influence parkland dedication and acquisition.

Parkland service level comparisons across 18 different Canadian municipalities have been included in this report. The municipalities provide a cross section of locations across the Greater Toronto Area, Ontario and Canada.

The parkland supply methodology and service level sections outline different methods to calculate parkland service levels and the components of the proposed parkland dedication methodology. The proposed methodology focuses on parkland walkability, functions to assess the requirement of parkland dedication, and several additional contextual metrics to consider. By testing different methodologies within different contexts, it will be possible to create a unique set of criteria for different geographic areas of Burlington. This progress report also introduces functional analysis assessment as a method to help determine parkland dedication as well as potential recreational needs.

A review of Burlington's parks classification system is included along with preliminary changes to the parks classification system with consideration given to the anticipated growth and redevelopment of the City. New park classification types are proposed to be more reflective of increased urban growth as forecast to 2041.

Overall, this progress report provides a preliminary analysis of current service levels for review. Feedback received will be used to refine a parkland acquisition methodology.

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## **Background and Discussion:**

Parks and open spaces are an important component of community building. As the City focuses its future growth within the urban boundary, providing parkland for a growing population will become increasingly challenging. The impacts of COVID-19 further demonstrate the importance of open space to a community. Improving the City's parks and open space system is part of the City's strategic direction A Healthy and Greener City in the City's Vision 2040 strategic plan.

The City last completed a strategic review of the its parks system in 2009 and it resulted in the completion of the Parks, Recreation and Cultural Assets Master Plan (PRCAMP). A comprehensive refresh of the PRCAMP is planned for 2023. In advance of this, the first phase of work is a Park Provisioning Master Plan (PPMP). The PPMP will guide the acquisition and planning of future parks over the next 20 years in alignment with the Provincial Growth Plan and Halton Region and Burlington Official Plans.

The PRCAMP will be rooted in the recently approved Framework for Community Recreation and the PPMP. Details on the scope of work and timing of this project are presented as Appendix B - Parks, Recreation and Cultural Assets Master Plan Update. This PPMP progress report focuses on land and parkland service levels and less on individual park assets.

### **Strategy/process**

The approach to this study was to begin with understanding the current legislative context and its alignment with other approved plans, bylaws and governance structures including the park dedication tools the City can use to provide future parkland.

What sets this plan apart from previous park planning documents is that it is informed by current data from the City's GIS registry along with shared data from external partners such as Conservation Halton for accurate spatial analysis. This study is unique because it also leverages Teranet solutions to analyze existing park use. As an example, purchased cell phone data has indicated that the top four most accessed parks in Burlington are Spencer Smith Park, Beachway Park, Sherwood Forest Park and Central Park.

### **What are the key initial findings from the Parks Provisioning Master Plan?**

1. Park Provisioning - Calculating the hectares of parkland per 1,000 residents (or as square meters per individual person) is a common measure because it provides a quick, high-level summary of the amount of parkland provided for a particular population across a geographic area, such as a city or planning area. Parkland area amounts per population do not provide an indication of the where parks are located within a city, and whether they are accessible by residents or equitability distributed across a municipality. An emerging best practice is to also measure provision by assessing the distribution and accessibility of parkland to residents. The final plan will provide measures by per 1,000 residents as well as distribution and accessibility.
2. Infrastructure Planning - As population growth in Burlington will be directed to the existing urban areas through intensification and infill development, the downward

pressures on existing parkland service levels will make it difficult to maintain or improve upon the existing park provisioning rates. Failing to keep park provisioning rates in line with the Region's future growth projections will result in increased use, reduced life cycles, and increased maintenance and renewal costs of Burlington's existing parkland infrastructure. The addition of new parkland requires infrastructure to be built that has net capital and operating costs associated with it. There is a need to consider not only the upfront capital costs of the infrastructure needed to support services related to new development, but also of the ongoing operating and maintenance and eventual renewal costs borne by the City, which are substantial and uneven over time.

3. Park Dedication Tools - In addition to the various mechanisms that are currently being utilized to acquire additional parkland for Burlington residents, the City will continue to explore additional opportunities to increase the public park system using methodologies from comparable municipalities throughout Ontario and Canada.
4. Park Access – Potential infrastructure solutions will be explored and recommended where park catchments would be greatly improved. The solutions could include linear park connections, pedestrian and cycling bridges, and sidewalk and pathway connections.
5. Large Sports Fields - Burlington's existing supply of recreational fields serves current demand from residents and compares relatively favourably to neighbouring municipalities. However, it is expected that pressure on the existing recreational field service level will increase with continued expected population growth to 2041, primarily in built-up urban areas, and high anticipated usage from both organized groups and programs, and through increasing informal/unscheduled play. The increased development of Burlington's urban areas may cause difficulties in achieving significant amounts of programmable parkland through on-site parkland dedication, due to the limited size of most parcel boundaries.

### **How does the PPMP align with the City's Parkland Dedication Bylaw?**

Burlington's Official Plan, required by the Planning Act, sets out the City's directions for growth and development, and continues the commitment to building a complete community. The Official Plan includes policy to manage physical change in relation to land use and development, transportation, infrastructure, the natural environment, heritage, parks, and social, economic and environmental sustainability. Specific to parks the Official Plan provides policy objectives and direction regarding the purpose, intent,

dedication, and location of parks within the city. It contains Parkland Dedication policies for the City. Section 42 of the Planning Act requires the City to have a Parkland Dedication Bylaw in order to require parkland dedication as a condition for some types of development or redevelopment in the City. Burlington's Official Plan contemplates an alternative rate for cash-in-lieu (CIL) of land and this is also reflected in the City's current Parkland Dedication Bylaw (57-2005).

In 2020, Bill 197, the COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act came into effect. The changes to the Development Charges Act and the Planning Act came into effect on September 18, 2020. The change to Subsection 42(4.26) of the Planning Act means Burlington's existing park dedication bylaw will expire on September 18, 2022. The City's current Parkland Dedication Bylaw (57-2005) was last amended in 2005. Amendments to Bylaw 57-2005 will be presented to Council this summer. Overall, real estate prices have increased significantly over the past 17 years since this Bylaw was passed. The proposed updates to Bylaw 57-2005 will ensure that standard land values are in conformance with ongoing changes in real estate prices.

### **How does the PPMP relate to the More Homes for Everyone Act (Bill 109)?**

As a first step in implementing the recommendations from the Housing Affordability Task Force, the Provincial government has developed Bill 109, the "More Homes for Everyone Act". This Act received Royal Assent on April 14th, 2022 and will create several changes to how parkland dedication occurs within designated Transit-Oriented Communities (TOC), and requirements for reporting how cash in lieu of parkland funds received are used in relation to a municipality's parks plan on a publicly accessible website.

With regards to parkland dedication on designated TOC, as defined by the Transit-Oriented Communities Act, a tiered alternative parkland dedication rate will be applicable as follows:

- Development sites less than or equal to five hectares: 10% of land dedicated for park or its value for CIL
- Development sites greater than five hectares: 15% of land dedicated for park or its value for CIL

The Provincial government has stated the new alternative dedication rate is intended to produce additional clarity for proposed developments regarding parkland requirements. However, staff analysis has identified that this alternative rate may produce instances where less land is available for parkland in increasingly dense urban areas, creating a potential servicing challenge. City staff have noted that is not immediately clear whether Burlington's MTSA, or other urban growth areas or corridors, would be designated as

TOC by the Province and therefore subject to the above new alternative rate. This will be confirmed as the Act is implemented by the Province.

Significantly, this Act also allows for encumbered parkland (i.e. land that may contain a utility easement, right-of-way, or other land title instrument that may impact development or use) to be counted towards required parkland dedication with a development through ministerial order. In such instances, the Minister of Infrastructure will need to declare opinion that the land in question is capable of being used for park or other public recreational purposes. Concerns have been raised regarding this change by City staff, specifically with regards to potential issues including limited usable area or recreation or park infrastructure, City exposure to liabilities, and the potential need for long-term lease and maintenance agreements on encumbered lands such as Strata parks, (e.g. park on top of an underground garage or utility). There will be more information available in coming weeks and months.

### **How does the PPMP align with Major Transit Station Area (MTSA) planning?**

Burlington is expected to continue to grow over the next 30 years and beyond and the expectation is that the areas surrounding the City's three GO stations, now referred to as Major Transit Station Areas (MTSA), will be a major focus for growth, intensification and redevelopment over the long term. As noted in the Provincial Policy Statement, publicly accessible built and natural settings including parklands are important ways to promote healthy, active communities. In order to achieve complete communities in these MTSA, the City is considering opportunities for urban parks and wider corridors along streets to act as linear parks to provide valuable open space/park space and facilitate connections. Smaller urban parks and narrow linear parks can provide enhanced connections to facilitate safe and more direct pedestrian and active transportation routes to and from the GO stations.

With the review of the current state of each MTSA complete, including the development of a thorough understanding of the recommended preferred precinct plan, the next step is to conduct an analysis to determine the maximum amount of parkland the City can reasonably expect to receive as land at each MTSA through complete build-out to 2051+. Based on the results of this analysis and viewed together with the current parks service level, recommendations will be provided in the final report about park provision priorities and strategies for each MTSA. This will include a review of the proposed park placement within each MTSA (from the recommended preferred precinct plans), types of parks and configurations that should be considered as each MTSA develops, and where further parkland acquisition through alternate means may be required to properly service the forecasted population.

### **How does the PPMP align with the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System?**

The Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System is a collaboration among government agencies, that today collectively protect nearly 2,200 ha of open space and nature sanctuary between Cootes Paradise Marsh, Hamilton Harbour and the Niagara Escarpment, within the cities of Hamilton and Burlington. Since 2007, nine local government and not-for-profit agencies, including the City of Burlington, have been working together with a shared vision to protect and help connect these lands through land securement, stewardship, education and other actions outlined in the EcoPark System 2021-2030 Strategic Plan. Each partner owns and manages their own land that is located within the EcoPark System. The PPMP study includes a high-level assessment of potential opportunities to connect or add to the existing protected EcoPark System areas within Burlington, with priority given to the City's goals to improve trail connectivity and provide parks within the system that also provide active recreation services in addition to natural heritage protection.

### **How does the PPMP align with the Burlington Lands Partnership?**

The Burlington Lands Partnership (BLP) is a multi-dimensional and integrated approach to address municipal strategic land management including acquisition and development. The BLP has a focus on supporting economic growth and direct job creation, supporting "city building" projects and delivering much needed attainable housing. The PPMP will demonstrate the need for future parkland based on park functionalization and provisioning. The role of the BLP partnership (alongside senior leadership and City Council) is supporting the process for future strategic land acquisition that is generally outside the conveyance of land through development planning applications.

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## **Financial Matters:**

### **Total Financial Impact**

Not applicable

### **Source of Funding**

Not applicable

### **Other Resource Impacts**

Not applicable

## **Climate Implications**

Burlington City Council declared a climate emergency in April 2019 in response to concerns about the impact that a changing climate is having on the City and communities around the globe. On April 20, 2020 Council approved a Climate Action Plan which provides a framework to reduce the use of fossil fuels in the community, the main contributor to greenhouse gas emissions, which are causes of climate change.

The Climate Action Plan focuses on the following key areas: low-carbon new buildings, deep energy retrofits for existing buildings, renewable energy, electric mobility and equipment, integrated mobility, waste reduction and industry innovation.

Parks mitigate the urban heat island effect, improve air quality, and absorb carbon from the atmosphere. They support local biodiversity, can act as buffer zones for flooding and are important environmental infrastructure. New urban parks are also important because they provide the foundation of urban forests, which can help Burlington both mitigate carbon emissions and adapt to a changing climate.

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## **Engagement Matters:**

The Park Provisioning Master Plan Progress Report includes results of a technical exercise of data collection and analysis, as well as parkland service level comparisons across 18 different Canadian municipalities. The second phase of this project will include further consultation with stakeholders. The feedback received will be used to refine Burlington's Parkland Classification System and parkland acquisition methodology as part of the development application process.

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## **Conclusion:**

Burlington parks play a vital role in the social, economic, physical and mental well-being of residents. They are critical infrastructure to a healthy City and are recognized as powerful tools for local economies, climate mitigation and the preservation and conservation of plant and wildlife. As Burlington continues to grow, so does the pressure on its existing parks system. The City must improve upon and expand its current parks system to keep in line with the projected growth in order to support the future parks and recreational needs of its residents.

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Respectfully submitted,

Marion Rabeau, OALA, CSLA  
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**Appendices:**

- A. Park Provisioning Master Plan Progress Report
- B. Parks, Recreation and Cultural Assets Master Plan
- C. Park Provisioning Master Plan Progress Report Appendix (Section 9)

**Report Approval:**

All reports are reviewed and/or approved by Department Director, the Chief Financial Officer and the Executive Director of Legal Services & Corporation Counsel.