



**SUBJECT: Park Provisioning Master Plan final report**

**TO: Community Planning, Regulation & Mobility Cttee.**

**FROM: Engineering Services**

Report Number: ES-02-23

Wards Affected: all

File Numbers: 930-01

Date to Committee: March 28, 2023

Date to Council: April 18, 2023

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**Recommendation:**

Receive and file the Park Provisioning Master Plan, listed as Appendix A in engineering services report ES-02-23, as the framework to guide the planning of future parks in the City of Burlington and satisfy Provincial legislative requirements (as amended by Bill 23) to have a park plan in place prior to passing an update to the Parkland Dedication Bylaw; and

Approve the updated park classification system and authorize the Director of Engineering to report back to Council with an updated inventory of existing parks recategorized within the new classification system; and

Approve the future parkland target service levels identified in Section 2.5 of the Parks Provisioning Master Plan, listed as Appendix A in engineering services report ES-02-23; and

Approve the parkland criteria, listed as Appendix B in engineering services report ES-02-23, as a support document to help guide the development community and staff in deciding which lands to obtain through parkland dedication; and

Direct the Executive Director of Legal Services and Corporation Counsel or designate to develop a proactive strategy to acquire park lands based on service levels set forth in the Park Provisioning Master Plan; and

Approve monitoring the City's parkland service levels and acquisition priorities as part of Multi-Year Community Investment Plan reporting and updates to the Vision to Focus; and

Direct the Director of Community Planning to conduct an exploration of a Community Planning Permit System as a tool to aid in the acquisition of infrastructure, parkland or monetary contribution, in exchange for offering a more streamline and transparent approval process within the Major Transit Station Area (MTSA) specific planning process; and

Direct the Director of Community Planning to begin work with land owners in the MTSA's or any area of the City subject to an area-specific planning process to guide future development and to identify specific City infrastructure needs.

## **PURPOSE:**

To provide Council with 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
- Building more citizen engagement, community health and culture

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## **Executive Summary:**

Nearly a decade and a half ago, the City of Burlington published the 2009 *Parks, Recreation and Cultural Assets Master Plan* (PRCAMP). Since that time, the city's population has expanded by more than 11,000 people and is transitioning from greenfield to infill development. In the next 20 to 30 years, Burlington's population is expected to grow by an additional 50,000 to 70,000 people. With all these changes, it is important to update the PRCAMP. In advance of that, there is an immediate need to complete a related technical study specific to parkland and have it endorsed by Council as a necessary precursor to the passing of any future park dedication by-law. As a result, the *Park Provisioning Master Plan* (PPMP) was developed to analyze and set service level targets for the land base required to keep up with growth and avoid downward pressure on existing parks.

The table below demonstrates the fundamental differences between the two master plans.

| Name  | Summary – Area of Focus                 | Delivery |
|---|---|----------|
| Park Provisioning Master Plan ( <b>PPMP</b> )                       | Land Base (parkland service level)      | 2023- Q1 |
| Parks, Recreation and Cultural Assets Master Plan ( <b>PRCAMP</b> ) | Community Needs<br>Facility/Park Assets | 2024- Q2 |

In recent years, there has been significant change to the Burlington landscape. New types of parks are emerging with the expansion of pedestrian spaces, installation of urban parkettes and new types of trails in urban areas. COVID-19 has demonstrated that parks are seen as multi-benefit landscapes that support mental and physical health through opportunities for active and passive recreation and environmental resiliency. Parkland dedication through subdivision agreements will become more redundant as Burlington shifts from growth in large greenfield areas to redevelopment and intensification of smaller land parcels in existing urban areas. This is compounded by increasing land value and recent changes in legislation that limit the City's ability to receive land through development. The result is a reduction in Burlington's existing parkland service level. It is critical that Burlington shift from the traditional means of park acquisition and move towards a proactive approach to provide quality outdoor space that keeps pace with growth. This study contains several strategic actions to guide the city to meet parkland needs for future generations. This study is meant to be updated on a regular basis by staff to ensure parkland service level targets are achievable and still applicable as the city continues to grow.

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## Background and Discussion:

The Park Provisioning Master Plan has been developed to establish a Council-approved parkland acquisition framework and parkland service level targets to guide land acquisition and planning for future parks over the next 20 to 30-years. The PPMP aligns with the following:

- Halton Region's Regional Official Plan Amendment 49 (ROPA 49)

- Burlington's Growth Analysis Study
- Burlington's Major Transit Station Areas (MTSA) Area Specific Study that uses a 2051 growth horizon for the MTSA's.

The following discussion will provide a high-level summary of findings from the PPMP study, including:

- Provincial Context and Alignment with other key studies/plans,
- Burlington Park Classification System,
- Parkland Service Levels,
- Strategic Actions Summary, and
- Strategy Process.

It will also address the outstanding staff direction (SD-17-18), moved by former Councillor Meed Ward, to direct the Director of City Building to consider setting a minimum parkland standard (ha/1000 population) and walk distance for the Primary Growth Areas (3 Mobility Hubs and the Downtown) during the Area Specific Plans. It is important to note, since that time Mobility Hubs have been changed to Major Transit Station Areas (MTSAs).

### **Provincial Context and Alignment**

The Park Provisioning Master Plan (PPMP) used the best information available at the time of the analysis. This approach comes with the understanding that the information could change and require future review or update. The Region of Halton Municipal Comprehensive Review (MCR) is being implemented in a phased approach. The first phase of the work was implemented through Halton Region's Regional Official Plan Amendment 48 (ROPA 48) and was adopted by Regional Council in July 2021 and approved by the Minister of Municipal Affairs in November 2021. ROPA 48 implements a regional urban structure hierarchy of strategic growth areas and delineates and establishes intensification targets for Urban Growth Centres and MTSA's. The second phase of work was implemented through ROPA 49. It was adopted by Regional Council in June 2022 to implement the results of the Region's Integrated Growth Management Strategy (IGMS), providing direction on how the Halton Region will accommodate population and employment growth to 2041.

When ROPA 49 was approved by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing on November 4, 2022, the Minister made a number of modifications which impact Burlington. Among other things, the modifications add new urban land in Burlington, converts Regional employment area designations and extends the planning horizon to 2051.

Staff are now working to establish a local planning vision for the areas impacted by the Minister's decision on ROPA 49 for consideration by Council in early 2023. This work is necessary to inform a process with the Region and local municipal partners to develop a

clearly defined plan for where and when growth is expected to occur in order to coordinate the delivery of significant and critical infrastructure to support that growth.

While the PPMP references the 2051 population and employment forecasts, it is expected that once the details of this work are confirmed and implemented there will be an opportunity to include any changes in subsequent updates to the PPMP.

At the municipal level, the PPMP is one of many park-related projects that are currently underway. Other associated initiatives include:

- MTSA area specific planning
- PRCAMP update
- Community Benefits Strategy and Development Charges background study
- Integrated Mobility Plan
- Urban Forest Management Plan
- Asset Management Plan.

Alignment of the PPMP with these initiatives and other technical studies is essential to provide a consistent message to Council as well as to industry stakeholders and the public. To ensure alignment across projects, the PPMP included an interdisciplinary working group, utilizing the most current information from the other projects, acknowledged the interconnectivity of other projects and identified challenges that may be faced by the City to achieve its strategic goals and vision.

### **Burlington Parks Classification System**

Burlington has an existing park classification system that is used as a tool to support the planning, development and operation of the park and open space system. Parkland targets will vary in each of the different classifications and when planning for new parkland. The classification requirements will help to determine the appropriate land characteristics required in the acquisition of land and the anticipated operating and capital budget impacts to the city budget.

The PPMP provides an updated park classification system that is more representative of the types of parks that are required to meet the current and future needs of Burlington residents. It has the potential to provide clarity on the role and function of different park assets. The proposed classification system closely aligns with Burlington's existing park classifications, acknowledges the duplication of park types and functions, and addresses park types that generally accompany urban intensification and redevelopment.

The PPMP recommends that the classification system include six types of parks, each providing a function and service to residents to meet their overall recreation and open space needs.

The new park classifications include the following park types:

1. Destination Parks (NEW replacing City Parks)
2. Community Parks
3. Neighbourhood Parks
4. Urban Parks (NEW)
5. Linear Parks & Greenways (NEW)
6. Ecological Parks (NEW)

A reclassification of each existing park will take place following Council approval of the PPMP. The “City Park” and “Special Resource Area” classifications will be retired. Staff will determine which parks are reclassified based on the PPMP’s recommendations for each park type. A summary of the changes is noted in the table below.

|     | <b>Park Type</b>           | <b>Change</b>   | <b>Example</b>   |
|-----|----------------------------|---|--|
| NEW | Destination Park           | Existing City parks that draw many users from beyond city limits will become destination parks.   | Lowville Park<br>Spencer Smith Park  |
|     | Community Park             | Existing City and Community Parks will either become or remain Community Parks  | Orchard Park<br>Nelson Park  |
|     | Neighbourhood Parks        | Existing Parkettes and Windows to the Lake (WTTL) Parks will become Neighbourhood Parks along with existing Neighbourhood Parks                               | Fairfield Parkette<br>Appleby Line WTTL<br>Longmoor Park<br>Palladium Park |
| NEW | Linear Parks and Greenways | These will be parks that function as active transportation corridors. Linear Parks are more are manicured parks vs Greenways that have more natural features. | Elgin Promenade (Linear)<br>Crosstown Trail (Greenway)                     |
| NEW | Ecological Parks           | These will be parks that are primarily a natural area.  | Kerncliff Park   |
| NEW | Urban Parks                | Existing or new parks that are located in high density areas.   | Civic Square   |

## Parkland Service Levels

The purpose of a level of service analysis is to determine how well the existing parkland and open space system is meeting the current needs of residents and to set target service levels or provisioning standards to meet the demand for more parks to accommodate growth. Using population data from the 2021 census, Burlington's current parkland level of service was determined through a combination of catchment analysis, park pressure analysis and park function analysis.

### CATCHMENT ANALYSIS

Identified under focus area four in the 2018-2022 Burlington's Plan - From Vision to Focus, the city aims for homes to be within a five-minute walk of a park. Research has demonstrated that an approximate **five-minute walk** (400m) is a reasonable, accessible distance that most people will walk to a local park before using a different mode of transportation (e.g. car, transit). To support the development of future target parkland service levels, a walking catchment around each park was created. The walking distance catchment was determined using pathways, sidewalks, trails and local roads without sidewalks and measuring the distance to the edge of the park where access can be gained in a reasonable manner (i.e. there are no steep grades, the area is not fenced). This method also factors in barriers to access, such as highways, rail lines, creek channels, or where there are gaps in sidewalks, pathways, or trails. This walking catchment tool is more reflective of a person's access to parkland than calculating the number of people within a park buffer.

### PARK PRESSURE ANALYSIS

The park pressure analysis utilizes the 400m walking catchments and federal census dissemination blocks to calculate the total number of people a park serves within the 400m walking catchment. This method takes into consideration **population density** within the 400m walking catchments providing a measurement of equity between the different catchment areas. This measure produces a square meters of parkland per person number which complements the walking distance measure to provide a more accurate picture of parkland service level. It is important to know if a park is walkable and likely to provide comfortable personal space or if the park may be walkable but is likely to be well used and crowded.

### PARK FUNCTION ANALYSIS

The park function analysis examined the **programable park space** compared to natural areas and the distribution of sports fields and playgrounds across the city. The park function analysis does not consider the asset condition or functionality outside of the

purpose of the infrastructure. The PPMP examined at a broad level the location and number of rectangular sports fields, baseball diamonds and playgrounds.

Using this analysis, target parkland service levels were determined for the city as a whole and for the planning policy areas. Policy area boundaries were used because the city consists of very different planning and community regions that function differently and thus have different parkland service needs. The different policy areas in the city will also experience different growth pressures and therefore it was determined that measuring service levels and creating targets for different urban and rural areas is more equitable and will help the city determine and distinguish parkland priorities.

The following items were considered in the establishment of the parkland targets for the different policy areas:

1. Access to private green space, private yard space
2. Urban typology, i.e. dense urban MTSA or Downtown Urban Centre
3. Population density, existing and anticipated
4. Parkland function
5. Proximity to park access within a 5 min/400m walk

As the city grows and intensifies, it is anticipated that there will be greater use and demand for existing parks, as well as greater challenges in acquiring and developing new parks, particularly in existing urban areas. Accordingly, the citywide target future parks service levels identified in Section 2.5 of the PPMP take these forecasted changes and challenges into account.

Overall, the PPMP recommends a future parkland service target at 2051 of **3 hectares per 1,000 people citywide**. Refer to Tables 25 and 26 of the PPMP (Appendix A). This means that approximately 90 hectares of additional parkland need to be acquired to meet local parkland and citywide recreational needs. A service target of 3 hectares per 1,000 is a slight decrease from the current parkland service rate of 3.65 hectares per 1,000, however this is necessary to keep pace with growth and still maintain one of Burlington's best features; a quality and accessible park system. Burlington is regularly ranked one of the best cities to live and parks are a leading and consistent metric in these evaluations.

### **Strategic Actions Summary**

Bill 23, the More Homes Built Faster Act, 2022 was passed by the Province of Ontario Legislature on Nov. 28, 2022. This Bill is very broad in nature and makes changes to the Planning Act that directly impact both the renewal and delivery of new parks. It will drastically diminish funding towards parkland needs and reduce the amount of parkland dedicated to support growth. With this new legislation in place, developers will be able to identify which areas of their land will be dedicated to the city to satisfy land dedication



requirements. They can propose lands for designation that include stratified parcels, lands encumbered with easements or below-grade infrastructure, and non-fee simple interests such as private owned publicly accessible spaces (POPS). The selected land may or may not meet the service needs of residents. Municipalities may refuse to accept lands proposed, however, developers will have a right of appeal to the Ontario Land Tribunal (OLT).

Bill 23 will impact how the city acquires parkland, but the target provisioning rates will remain the same. The city will have to shift towards a stronger, multi-faceted approach to providing quality parks with less dependency on development as a primary means for acquiring parkland.

The following is a list of tools already in place that the city can leverage.

- Purchase by Halton Region to expand existing City parks (e.g. Beachway Park)
- Off-Site Land Exchange (e.g. Palmer Park)
- Private Donation (e.g. Eileen and John Holland Nature Sanctuary)
- Reciprocal Agreements (e.g. playgrounds on school sites)
- Lease (e.g. Leighland Park)
- Master Park License Agreement (e.g. Centennial Multi-Use Trail)
- Easements (e.g. greenways)
- Management Agreement (e.g. Kerncliff Park)
- License to Occupy Crown Land (e.g. Trail on Federal Land)

### **Strategy/process**

There is still uncertainty around Bill 23 as it relates to parkland. It will take time for the Province to release more detailed regulations and integrate these new requirements into current business processes. Development applications remain active so as a benefit to both the city and the development community, Appendix B of the PPMP puts in place parameters related to what makes land suitable for a park. It also addresses details related to Privately Owned Publicly Accessible Spaces (POPS). In determining when and where parkland should be taken, there are many factors to be considered. They are intentionally not specified within the Parkland Dedication Bylaw to allow decisions to be made based on context rather than a binary requirement in a bylaw.

It is recommended Appendix B presented as Parkland Criteria, be adopted as a support document to help guide the development community and staff in deciding which lands to obtain through parkland dedication, and also through city purchase of lands for parks.

Another tool that may be appropriate in the planning and provisioning of park land is the use of a Community Planning Permit System. A Community Planning Permit System combines zoning, minor variance and site plan applications into one application and approval process instead of two or three separate ones, accelerating the development approval process. In exchange, a municipality may impose conditions related to development standards, parkland, design criteria, and community contributions. The by-law could include but not be limited to the listing the permitted land uses, development standards (e.g. height, density), development or uses of land exempt from requiring a permit, etc. The Community Planning Permit system requires more work upfront to determine and set the vision for the entire municipality or a specific area including an Official Plan Amendment for the area where the Community Planning Permit System would apply and the passing of a Community Planning Permit bylaw. However, the use of this tool may be effective in the MTSA and Urban Centres to create more certainty for both the City and developers. It is recommended that a Community Planning Permit System be explored further in particular with respect to development of the MTSA and Urban Centres.

### **Options Considered**

n/a

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### **Financial Matters:**

The PPMP outlines the parkland acquisition framework and targets for parkland service levels to guide the land acquisition and planning for future parks over the next 20 to 30 years. Council's approval of the PPMP is a necessary precursor to the passing of any future park dedication by-law. The city has committed to updating the existing transitional park dedication by-law upon completion of the PPMP, but as of more recently, to align with the resolutions of Bill 23 amending the Planning Act. As mentioned above, Bill 23 impacts will diminish funding towards existing parkland needs and reduce the amount of parkland monies dedicated to future growth. The Bill 23 amendments, which are already in force with respect to parkland dedication and cash-in-lieu (CIL) of parkland, have significant impacts on the City's ability to accept CIL and/ or conveyance of land. This will erode the dollar per unit caps that were established in the amended parkland by-law in July 2022. Parkland dedication is a significant source of funding towards the parks program and moving forward the City will need to prioritize park needs for inclusion in the capital budget and continue to create financial capacity in order to progress on the objectives of the PPMP.

Staff will be bringing forward the new park dedication by-law for Council approval in Q2-2023. The new park dedication by-law and the endorsed PPMP will inform the City's multi-year community investment plan (MCIP). Staff will report back on the updated MCIP in Q4 2023 to include completed master plans to date (PPMP, Integrated Mobility Plan, Fire Master Plan, Transit Master Plan) and an overview of funding options resulting from BMA Health report, Bill 23 Impact Analysis, new park dedication by-law, Community Benefits Charge (CBC) and Development Charge (DC) updates, etc. The MCIP will provide a preliminary financing strategy to assist in meeting the objectives of the master plans completed to date and will set the stage for financing future master plans.

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## **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 important because they can provide pockets of shade and can help Burlington both mitigate carbon emissions and adapt to a changing climate.

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## **Engagement Matters:**

The development of the PPMP began in early 2022 with an interim report presented to the Environment, Infrastructure & Community Services Committee June 9th, 2022 (report ES-05-22). The draft plan was tabled to allow for public review of the document. As part of the engagement process, a number of stakeholders, including and not limited to the local School Boards, the Region of Halton, Conservation Halton and the Niagara Escarpment Commission presented findings that contributed to recommendations published in this report. The PPMP will become the "Parks Plan" as referenced in the

Planning Act (as amended by Bill 23) and fulfill the legislative requirement to have a park plan in place before an update to the Parkland Dedication Bylaw can be passed. Following Council approval of the PPMP, staff intend to bring the City's Parkland Dedication Bylaw into compliance with the Planning Act (as amended by Bill 23) in Q2 2023.

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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 the natural system. As Burlington continues to grow, so does the pressure on its existing parks system. The types of parks the city is likely to be creating within the urban boundary are small urban and linear/greenways parks. New community and destination parks will be nearly impossible to achieve through development, and thus moving forward, acquiring land for any new large outdoor recreational amenities (e.g. sportsfields) will be very challenging within the urban boundary. The City must improve

upon and expand its current land base for parks 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

Manager Parks Design and Construction, Engineering Services

## **Appendices:**

- A. EICS-02-23 Parks Provisioning Master Plan
- B. EICS-02-23 Parkland Criteria

## **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.