

# Toward a Healthy, Active Future: Toronto Parks & Recreation Strategic Plan

*A Draft for Review and Comment*

May 2004



**ReActivate TO!**  
*Parks & Recreation Review*

 **TORONTO** Parks & Recreation

## Contents

1. Your Ideas Are Important / 3
  2. A Strategic Plan for Toronto Parks & Recreation / 4
    - Project Mandate and Context / 4
    - The Planning Process So Far / 5
  3. A Vision for Toronto – A Vision and Mission for Parks & Recreation / 7
  4. Guiding Principles / 8
  5. The Three Foundations / 10
  6. Strategic Goals and Directions / 13
    - Environmental Stewardship / 13
    - Lifelong Active Living / 16
    - Child and Youth Development / 18
  7. Implementing the Plan / 21
    - Organizational Development / 21
    - Measures and Targets / 23
- Appendix A – Serving You, Serving Our City: A Profile of Parks & Recreation / 24
- Appendix B – A Backgrounder on the Three Foundations / 29

## 1. Your Ideas Are Important

Parks & Recreation needs your help in order to provide the residents of Toronto with the services they want and need, both now and in the future. We need to know if we're providing the right services and delivering those services in a manner that reflects community expectations within the financial limits set by City Council. That's why we embarked on ReActivate TO! – the Parks & Recreation Review.

This spring, we'll be holding staff and public forums, conducting surveys and talking to lots of people to find out what's important to them – and to you. We'll then take what we've heard from you and the rest of the community and report to Council through the Economic Development and Parks Committee in early July.

The report will indicate to Council the key findings of the input received as it relates to the Parks & Recreation Draft Strategic Plan, service priorities/service levels, and organizational design principles. Reports and other information about ReActivate TO! will be posted on-line at [www.toronto.ca/parks](http://www.toronto.ca/parks).

We are hoping to ReActivate TO!

- ▶ ReActivate our parks!
- ▶ ReActivate our facilities and meeting places
- ▶ ReActivate our programs!
- ▶ ReActivate you!

All advice is welcome. We look forward to your comments on how to make Toronto Parks & Recreation's services better for everyone.

Joe Halstead  
Commissioner  
Economic Development, Culture & Tourism

Brenda Librecz  
Acting General Manager  
Parks & Recreation

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### Have Your Say!

To allow time for staff to make revisions to the draft plan prior to the July meeting, please share your thoughts with us by **June 11, 2004** using any of the following means:

- By **e-mail**: [stratplan@toronto.ca](mailto:stratplan@toronto.ca)
- By **regular mail**: Parks & Recreation Strategic Plan, 100 Queen St. West, 8<sup>th</sup> Floor, East Tower, Toronto ON M5H 2N2
- By **fax**: (416) 392-0050
- At a series of **community meetings** to be held in May and early June.

Details about the meetings will be posted at [www.toronto.ca/parks](http://www.toronto.ca/parks), in community centres and public libraries, and in community newspapers.

## **2. A Strategic Plan for Toronto Parks & Recreation**

Parks & Recreation is a key contributor to the quality of life in Toronto's neighbourhoods and communities. When your child learns to swim, when your street tree gets pruned, when you host a festival in your local park, when you take a ferry to Toronto Island – wherever you go, there we are.

But where should Parks & Recreation go in the future? What are the big ideas that should influence the programs, services, parks and facilities provided by Parks & Recreation?

These questions are at the heart of the Parks & Recreation Strategic Plan.

All residents of the City of Toronto have a stake in the future of Parks & Recreation. That's why we want your feedback on the ideas laid out in the following pages.

The Strategic Plan is built upon three foundations:

- environmental stewardship
- lifelong active living
- child and youth development.

These foundations are our priorities. If we strengthen each foundation over the coming years, Parks & Recreation will have done its part to ensure that Toronto's quality of life has been maintained and enhanced. We will be seen as an innovator and a leader – as we make Toronto a great place to live, work and visit; as we build personal health and strong communities; and as we help shape the citizens of tomorrow.

For an overview of how Parks & Recreation currently serves the people of Toronto, see Appendix A.

### **Project Mandate and Context**

In 2001, Toronto City Council asked the Commissioner of Economic Development, Culture and Tourism to undertake a strategic planning exercise to accomplish the following goals:

- develop a five-year plan to address the Parks & Recreation Division's major strategic issues
- engage all levels of staff and a broad spectrum of the community and stakeholders in the identification of issues and the achievement of strategic goals within the plan
- ensure that the Division's strategic plan is aligned with the City's strategic plan framework.

The Parks & Recreation Strategic Plan is set within several contexts. Various social, demographic and environmental trends and forces external to the City Corporation impact on Council and the Parks & Recreation Division. These trends and forces – including matters like immigration, the changing age structure of the population, climate change, and policy decisions

made in Ottawa and at Queen's Park – are joined by needs and demands articulated by the local community.

Internally, City Council and the Corporation's departments have responded to these trends, forces, needs and demands by developing a wide range of plans, strategies and policies. Parks & Recreation's strategic plan reflects and builds on this work, which includes Council's Strategic Plan, the Social Development Strategy, the Environmental Plan, the Economic Development Strategy, the Official Plan and the Culture Plan.

Joining these broad statements of policy have been more specific directions on issues like pesticide use and waste diversion. The ongoing work of City task forces and committees addressing children and youth, seniors, access and equity, and community safety has also been influential.

The Parks & Recreation Strategic Plan is now a core element of ReActivateTO! – the Parks & Recreation Review, launched early in 2004.

## **The Planning Process So Far**

Strategic plans emphasize core values and are based on a vision. They also typically include a statement of mission, an assessment of challenges, and an outline of strategic goals and directions that begin to realize the vision. Some contain detailed actions to implement each strategic direction.

To date, the strategic planning process for Toronto Parks & Recreation has been organized around two phases:

- defining a vision and mission for the Division, and setting out the Division's key areas of focus (2001-02)
- proposing a set of operating principles and strategic goals and directions linked to the key areas of focus (2003).

Considerable feedback was obtained from the community on the 2003 discussion paper, *Goals and Directions for Toronto Parks & Recreation*. The leading messages we heard – and which are addressed here in the Draft Strategic Plan – were:

- the draft goals and directions for the three foundations are generally headed in the right direction
- seniors need to be featured in the plan
- the role of the community needs clarification on several fronts:
  - acknowledgement of volunteers and advisory councils
  - contribution to the service delivery system – who should be responsible for what
  - what constitutes community development
  - better understanding of community needs
  - enhanced community involvement in planning and management

- partnerships need greater emphasis, above all a better working relationship with the school boards; some concern exists about private-sector involvement
- program user fees are seen as a major barrier to achieving the outcomes for child and youth development and lifelong active living
- more affordable, accessible community space is needed, and resources (including program opportunities) need to be distributed more equitably
- taking better care of existing parks, facilities, programs and services – “the basics” – cannot be overlooked
- enhanced customer service will come about through improved staff training and better promotion of Parks & Recreation’s resources
- while the physical activity agenda is supported, the social and creative benefits of recreation should be recognized
- the theme of inclusiveness could be developed further:
  - integration of disabled and other participants
  - culturally appropriate programming
- the role of parents in achieving child and youth development merits discussion
- geography matters – highlight communities with high needs
- terminology in the discussion paper is often unclear; definitions or clearer language is required.

The community also provided many useful ideas for implementing the plan and improving the Division’s programs and services. These ideas will be reviewed by staff during the business planning phase of the ReActivate TO! process.

### **3. A Vision for Toronto – A Vision and Mission for Parks & Recreation**

Toronto City Council outlined its vision for Toronto in Council's 2002 Strategic Plan:

*Toronto is a caring and friendly city.*

We have opportunities to sustain and enrich our lives and reach our highest potential. Our diversity is valued and celebrated and our communities are a source of pride. We are actively involved in the social, cultural and political life of the city.

*Toronto is a clean, green and sustainable city.*

We integrate environmental stewardship into our daily activities. We maintain and improve the health of the environment for present and future generations.

*Toronto is a dynamic city.*

As the nation's leading economic engine, we are a centre of innovation and growth with a strong international presence. Our dynamic city is well positioned to succeed in the world economy.

*Toronto invests in quality of life.*

We invest in quality of life – socially, economically, culturally and environmentally – to make Toronto a desirable place to live, prosper and visit.

The proposed vision and mission statements for the Parks & Recreation Division support Council's vision for Toronto.

*Parks & Recreation Vision:*

Toronto will be known as the "City within a Park" – a rich fabric of parks, trees, ravines and open spaces that connect our communities and neighbourhoods and link them to a vibrant lakefront. All Torontonians will enjoy healthy lifestyles, have a deep sense of community and take pride in their liveable city, thanks in large part to the programs, services and facilities provided by Parks & Recreation with the community's support.

*Parks & Recreation Mission:*

The mission of Toronto Parks & Recreation is to ensure that a wide range of leisure and recreational opportunities are available, accessible, responsive and welcoming to Toronto's diverse communities. The Division does this by providing high-quality recreational programs and by fostering community development; by caring for the City's recreation facilities and parks so that they are clean, safe and beautiful; and by helping sustain a healthy urban forest.

## 4. Guiding Principles

Parks and Recreation's three foundations cannot and will not be pursued in isolation from one another. A healthy community requires a healthy environment; true social development rests upon positive environmental values. We will be mindful of this interdependence as we deliver programs and services and manage Toronto's parks, recreation facilities and trees.

At the same time, all of our work will be guided by a common set of principles. These are:

- 1) *Be as inclusive as possible.* Our programs and services will be accessible to those who cannot afford to pay, be barrier and hate free, accommodate special needs, promote gender equity and include activities that value and incorporate diversity in age, culture, race, ethnicity, language and sexual orientation.
- 2) *Provide satisfying, positive experiences.* Torontonians should expect that their contact with our programs, services, parks, facilities and staff will be gratifying and pleasurable. Staff will take pride in their high-calibre work being admired and appreciated.
- 3) *Practice community development and build community capacity.* We will recognize the strengths of Toronto's communities and assist them in meeting their leisure and recreation needs. We will enable communities to form partnerships, create their own solutions and achieve greater self-sufficiency.
- 4) *Ensure prompt, clear and open communication.* We will use a variety of means to provide information to Torontonians and obtain and respond to feedback in a timely manner. We will promote better understanding and greater use of our programs, services, parks, and facilities.
- 5) *Maintain what we have, while reaching out in new directions.* With help from the community, we will strive to keep our parks and facilities clean, safe, beautiful and inviting. We will also develop new programs and physical assets and attract new participants and users.
- 6) *Acknowledge staff as a vital resource.* Our recruitment, training, development, evaluation and recognition initiatives will enhance staff's capacity to achieve our goals and directions. Training and development will be an important means of improving customer service.
- 7) *Foster volunteerism.* Volunteers are a valuable human resource. We will value the active involvement of community members in our service delivery and the governance of our facilities. We will value the input and support of our community advisory councils and adopt-a-park partners.
- 8) *Revitalize and forge new partnerships.* To accomplish our goals, we will work creatively with community groups, businesses, elected officials, union locals, school boards, other public agencies, non-governmental organizations and professional associations.

- 9) *Secure the necessary resources.* To deliver on our priorities, we will maximize and optimize available funding. We will foster entrepreneurial thinking, save money through creative approaches, and seek additional revenues to support and enhance programs and services.
- 10) *Pursue sustainability.* Our actions will integrate environmental, social, economic and fiscal perspectives. Our outlook will be long-term, with an eye on both present and future generations.
- 11) *Emphasize effectiveness and impact.* We will set and accomplish objectives, work with high standards, and foster innovation in the field. As we measure progress, we will give increasing emphasis to those aspects of performance that truly matter: outcomes; customer service quality; and community impact.
- 12) *Ensure optimum risk management.* We will keep our parks, facilities and trees in a state of good repair, and offer programs that are safe and welcoming.
- 13) *Lead in the field of municipal parks and recreation.* We will investigate and implement new ways of working to become more effective and efficient, and share our experiences with others. The City of Toronto will be seen as a model for other communities.

## **5. The Three Foundations**

Environmental stewardship, lifelong active living and child and youth development are the foundations of the Parks & Recreation Strategic Plan.

For all three foundations, the Parks and Recreation Division will *initiate, educate and advocate*. We will do our part to make Toronto a city that is caring and friendly, clean and green, a safe place with a high quality of life.

The Division will focus its resources on these areas over the next few years. The three foundations cannot and will not be strengthened in isolation from one another. We will be mindful of this interdependence as we deliver programs and services and manage our parks, facilities and trees.

### **Environmental Stewardship**

For Toronto Parks & Recreation, environmental stewardship means maintaining and improving the health of the environment for the benefit of present and future generations and for nature itself. “Environment” includes: air, water, land and related natural resources (e.g., plants and energy); built and landscaped facilities (e.g., community centres and sports fields); cultural heritage resources (e.g., historic buildings and archaeological features); and the relationships between these elements.

Toronto Parks & Recreation will protect, preserve and enhance Toronto’s environment through the diligent care and maintenance of the City’s parks, green spaces, trees and recreation facilities. This green agenda includes good property management as well as activities with a more direct ecological focus. It also means having the right infrastructure in place to support lifelong active living and child and youth development.

### **Lifelong Active Living**

Achieving a state of mental, physical and social well-being through health-promoting activities has been a goal of Toronto Parks & Recreation for more than a century. Originally targeted at disadvantaged children and youth, this approach now takes in all ages – from preschoolers to older adults – and serves the entire community.

Toronto Parks & Recreation will focus on the physical and social dimensions of health and wellness. The Division will place greater emphasis on physical activity to promote personal health and social interaction through the lifecycle.

## **Child and Youth Development**

Toronto Parks & Recreation will provide children and youth with positive experiences which enable them to be healthy, responsible, creative, productive, environmentally aware and active in community life.

The Division will promote child and youth development by building a base of leisure skills and interests, by providing fun, positive and healthy choices, and by shaping constructive values of mutual respect and inclusion.

Toronto City Council defines a “child” as a person up to 12 years of age and a “youth” as a person between 13 and 24 years of age.

For more detail on what motivated Parks & Recreation to choose these three themes as the foundations of the Strategic Plan, see Appendix B.

Linkages between the three foundations and Parks & Recreation’s current programs and services are outlined in the following table.

**Parks & Recreation Programs and Services and the Three Foundations**  
(all figures are 2003 annual)

<b>Environmental Stewardship</b>	<b>Lifelong Active Living</b>	<b>Child and Youth Development</b>
<p><b>Parks Operations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1,500 named parks</li> <li>• 7,365 hectares of parkland</li> <li>• 340,000 users daily</li> <li>• 19% residents use parks 5 days/week</li> <li>• grounds &amp; buildings inspections and maintenance, e.g. washrooms, field houses</li> <li>• equipment inspection and maintenance, e.g. tennis courts, wading pools, benches, fountains, playgrounds, picnic tables, park signs, gazebos, patios, park roads &amp; paths</li> <li>• snow removal</li> <li>• 51 outdoor artificial ice surfaces maintained</li> <li>• Toronto Islands and beaches maintenance</li> </ul> <p><b>Forestry Operations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• tree canopy covers 18% of City</li> <li>• 500,000 street trees</li> <li>• 2.5 million trees in ravines, parks, forests</li> <li>• 7,500 street trees planted</li> <li>• 30,000 trees planted through Tree Advocacy Program</li> <li>• 50,000 trees pruned</li> <li>• 30,000 waterings</li> <li>• tree preservation through by-law enforcement</li> <li>• forest health care &amp; ravine management</li> <li>• educational materials</li> </ul> <p><b>Leisure, Sports &amp; Play Infrastructure</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 140 community centres maintained</li> <li>• 839 sports fields, e.g. ball diamonds, soccer fields, cricket pitches</li> <li>• 756 tennis sites</li> <li>• 833 playgrounds</li> </ul> <p><b>Gardens, Greenhouses &amp; Conservatories</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 8 greenhouses</li> <li>• 1.2 million plants for parks, boulevards, facilities</li> <li>• displays, educational programs</li> <li>• community and allotment gardens maintenance</li> </ul>	<p><b>Fitness &amp; Wellness</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 35,600 registrants</li> <li>• 3,200 fitness classes</li> <li>• fitness support &amp; instruction</li> <li>• health clubs, passports and memberships</li> </ul> <p><b>Seniors' Programming</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 18,472 registrants</li> <li>• 1,135 older-adult programs</li> <li>• drop-in convenience</li> </ul> <p><b>Golf Courses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 full-service courses</li> <li>• accessible, urban</li> <li>• 215,000 rounds</li> <li>• instruction &amp; clinics</li> <li>• pro shops</li> <li>• advance tee times</li> <li>• equipment rental</li> </ul> <p><b>Marine Services</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 ferry boats to Toronto Island Park and Island residents</li> <li>• 1.1 million passengers</li> <li>• provincially mandated service</li> </ul> <p><b>Special Events</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3,000 events</li> <li>• delivery through corporate and private partners</li> <li>• event development assistance to community</li> </ul> <p><b>Grants</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• \$1.2 million in recreation grants awarded to 151 community organizations</li> </ul> <p><b>Note:</b> <i>The programs and services outlined in this chart are not exclusive to the foundation under which they are listed. Most can be attributed to two or three categories.</i></p>	<p><b>Camps</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 75,000 campers</li> <li>• 240 programs</li> <li>• March break</li> <li>• summer</li> <li>• sports, arts</li> <li>• environment</li> <li>• leadership skills</li> </ul> <p><b>Sports</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 52,300 participants</li> <li>• 3,350 programs</li> <li>• 4 stadiums</li> <li>• 1 track &amp; field centre</li> </ul> <p><b>Arts</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 31,000 participants</li> <li>• 70% child and youth registrants</li> <li>• visual and performing arts, e.g. drawing, painting, dance</li> </ul> <p><b>Aquatics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 129,300 registrants</li> <li>• 132 indoor &amp; outdoor pools</li> <li>• 29,100 courses</li> <li>• learn-to-swim</li> <li>• leisure swim</li> <li>• specialized courses, e.g. syncro, diving, competitive</li> </ul> <p><b>Skating</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 21,000 registrants</li> <li>• 60 ice surfaces</li> <li>• learn-to-skate</li> <li>• leisure skate</li> </ul> <p><b>Skiing &amp; Snowboarding</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 ski &amp; snowboard centres</li> <li>• instruction</li> <li>• leisure skiing &amp; snowboarding</li> </ul> <p><b>General Interest &amp; Clubs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• drop-in / social</li> <li>• after-school / homework</li> </ul> <p><b>Youth Employment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• thousands of youth get their first job with Parks &amp; Recreation, as one of 10,000 part-time employment opportunities</li> </ul>

## **6. Strategic Goals and Directions**

As indicated in the following sections of this plan, the City of Toronto and the Parks & Recreation Division face many challenges and opportunities. To be effective in its response, Parks & Recreation needs to be focused in what it sets out to do.

Parks & Recreation will pursue the following strategic goals and directions to improve environmental stewardship, lifelong active living, and child and youth development in the programs, services, parks, and facilities for which the Division is responsible.

Goals set out where we want to go; directions indicate how we can get there. Specific actions that implement these goals and directions will be developed over time. The framework for implementation is described in Section 7.

### **Environmental Stewardship**

#### **Parks & Recreation's Perspective**

Environmental stewardship is a priority for Toronto Parks & Recreation because:

- with responsibility for over 7,400 hectares of land, Parks & Recreation is the single-largest property manager in Toronto; it is also custodian of most of the city's natural areas and many of its trees
- clean air, soil and water and abundant parks, trees, recreation facilities and open spaces underlie personal health and well-being, strong communities and a competitive economy
- appreciation and respect for green spaces and natural areas, along with participation in stewardship activities, helps promote child and youth development and lifelong active living
- Toronto's population is forecast to grow by over 500,000 by 2031, putting stress on existing parks, recreation facilities, trees and green spaces
- among Canadian cities, Toronto has one of the lowest rates of park space (hectares per 1,000 people)
- Toronto's recreation infrastructure is aging, requiring either improved upkeep or replacement
- Existing facilities need to be kept in a state of good repair - Parks & Recreation has an annual maintenance deficit of \$103 Million
- Toronto's urban forest is threatened by many factors, and many neighbourhoods have trees that are either old or the are all the same age
- many of Toronto's plant communities in natural areas are threatened by overuse, invasive exotic plants and animals, and a general decline in ecosystem health
- air quality in Toronto is poor and the number of smog alert days has risen dramatically
- aquatic habitats and fish communities in Toronto are highly impacted and are in poor to fair condition.

Toronto Parks & Recreation will protect, preserve and enhance the health of Toronto's environment through the diligent care and maintenance of the Division's green spaces, forests

and built environments and by providing leadership in the community through advocacy, education and example.

To provide focus, the Division will emphasize nine dimensions of environmental stewardship, all aiming to achieve healthier vegetation, air, land, and water in Toronto:

- 1) *Preserve and protect* what is healthy and what is natural (e.g., self-sustaining fish and wildlife populations, natural habitats, ecological integrity).
- 2) *Prevent* degradation of air, land and water (e.g., through “green fleet” initiatives, waste diversion and litter reduction programs, integrated plant health care).
- 3) *Extend* the useful life of facilities and equipment (e.g., through preventative maintenance programs).
- 4) *Reduce* Toronto’s ecological footprint – the land required to sustain human activities, provide the materials and energy needed to survive, and assimilate wastes produced (e.g., waste diversion, reducing unnecessary water use, conserving energy, facilitating the production of local food by residents).
- 5) *Restore* degraded habitats and green spaces (e.g., controlling invasive species, undertaking naturalization and restoration projects).
- 6) *Create* opportunities for the development of natural areas within city parks.
- 7) *Foster* contact with nature, awareness of and respect for the environment, active stewardship by the community
- 8) *Integrate* environmental considerations into Parks & Recreation decision-making, beginning with senior management.
- 9) *Motivate* action by others (e.g., using education and outreach, lead by example to develop an aware, engaged and committed citizenry; forge stronger partnerships with other departments, agencies and organizations).

## **Goals and Directions**

1. Ensure that a variety and sufficient level of recreation facilities and parks exist to serve Toronto residents and maintain the city’s liveability and ecological integrity:
  - a) Understand current and future demands and needs, including the need for affordable, accessible community space
  - b) Define provision levels and requirements in order to address service inequities
  - c) Ensure that adequate land use planning tools and funding sources are available for land acquisition and capital development
  - d) Design flexibility into facilities to accommodate changing needs over the long term
  - e) Maintain and extend the life and usefulness of existing facilities

- f) Ensure optimum risk management maintenance for facilities, parks and trees
  - g) Make better use of existing space by programming and permitting to capacity
  - h) Value the preservation and maintenance of existing parkland and natural areas as much as new acquisitions
  - i) Better integrate parks, trails and gardens with adjacent streets and neighbourhoods
  - j) Use gardening to beautify the city, improve the environment, and facilitate food production by residents
  - k) Work with other service providers to share resources, including space for recreational and cultural programming.
2. Manage parks, facilities and equipment in ways that consume fewer natural resources and minimize negative impact on the environment:
    - a) Define environmental standards for Parks & Recreation and ensure that all staff have the resources to achieve them
    - b) Improve the resource management skills of the Parks & Recreation Division
    - c) Emphasize waste diversion and litter reduction in parks and facilities
    - d) Enhance the practice of integrated plant health care
    - e) Protect cultural heritage landscapes and archaeological resources in the park system.
  3. Ensure an adequate growing environment exists to support a healthy urban forest in Toronto, and expand the city's forest canopy cover:
    - a) Protect and provide soil, space, permeable landscape and water for trees
    - b) Value tree protection and maintenance as much as tree planting
    - c) Promote the urban forest as a shared responsibility – taking in trees in parks and ravines, along streets, and on private property, and involving many public agencies and private landowners.
  4. Act as a key steward of Toronto's natural heritage system:
    - a) Protect, restore, and enhance Toronto's natural areas and biodiversity through a mix of programs, operating practices, and regulatory approaches
    - b) Develop parks, trails and facilities in ways that minimize negative impact on natural features and functions
    - c) Promote awareness of the value of Toronto's natural heritage
    - d) Ensure that recreational activities on parkland are compatible with natural heritage objectives.
  5. Develop community awareness of conservation and ecological values:
    - a) Provide more hands-on environmental education opportunities
    - b) Incorporate an environmental component into recreation programs, especially for children and youth
    - c) Use stewardship as a way of bringing people together, creating community through participation.

6. Demonstrate leadership while working in partnership with others in environmental stewardship:
  - a) Promote parks and natural areas as a shared responsibility, and develop community partnerships to achieve shared environmental goals
  - b) Strengthen working arrangements with other City departments, schools, public agencies, and non-governmental organizations
  - c) Define how the work of Parks & Recreation relates to other environmental initiatives in the City and the Greater Toronto Bioregion.

## **Lifelong Active Living**

### **Parks & Recreation's Perspective**

Lifelong active living is a priority for Toronto Parks & Recreation because:

- the City has a complex and challenging demographic profile to address if social development is to be achieved: a high proportion of socially vulnerable groups, growing diversity, high mobility, an aging population, income polarization, and concentrations of risk and social vulnerability
- nearly 60% of Torontonians aged 12 and older are physically inactive
- besides increasing costs for Canada's health care system, physical inactivity contributes to nearly one-quarter of deaths from major chronic diseases, and most Canadian adults are insufficiently active for optimal health benefits
- physical inactivity levels increase with age, and sedentary children are likely to become sedentary adults
- individuals and families living in poverty are more apt to not be physically fit – yet 30% of Toronto families with children live below the Low Income Cut Off, and poverty is high amongst seniors, women, and single-parent families.

### **Goals and Directions**

1. Provide a wide range of quality leisure and recreational opportunities to allow all Torontonians to lead rich, well-rounded, and active lives:
  - a) Provide opportunities that stimulate and appeal to the diverse backgrounds and interests of Toronto residents
  - b) Increase the range and number of opportunities in parks, gardens and natural areas
  - c) Increase the number and range of family-oriented and intergenerational opportunities provided by Parks & Recreation
  - d) Provide more opportunities for residents to participate in activities that are widely accessible across all ages, abilities, cultures and income levels
  - e) Clarify Toronto Parks & Recreation's multiple roles as a direct provider of service, as a funder, as a space and facility manager, as a community capacity builder, and as a leader and advocate
  - f) Ensure all service providers in Parks & Recreation facilities provide high-quality recreation programming.

2. Ensure that programs and services reflect diverse community needs:
  - a) Understand Parks & Recreation's customers better, and respond better to their varying needs and desires
  - b) Develop community profiles and undertake community needs assessments on a regular basis
  - c) Involve the community in infrastructure and service planning and in service delivery
  - d) Develop culturally relevant recreation programs
  - e) Work with other City departments to ensure community improvement plans address parks and recreation issues.
  
3. Promote and provide equitable access to parks, facilities, programs and services by Toronto's diverse populations, including those with disabilities:
  - a) Ensure that all Toronto residents have access to basic services, especially instruction in fundamental skills
  - b) Develop a system of fee support that is based primarily on socio-economic need
  - c) Promote Parks & Recreation's subsidy programs better
  - d) Identify and address real and perceived barriers to participation
  - e) Work with high-needs communities when setting geographic priorities for program and service development
  - f) Promote and maximize existing program opportunities
  - g) Ensure that programs reflect local demographic profiles and are culturally appropriate
  - h) Ensure that program participants reflect the diversity of the local community
  - i) Promote cross-cultural participation and understanding through recreational programming
  - j) Strive to make all parks and recreation facilities physically accessible
  - k) Expand staff's awareness and understanding of participants with disabilities
  - l) Increase the ability of staff to integrate participants with disabilities in recreation programs.
  
4. Increase the emphasis on physical activity in Parks & Recreation programs and services:
  - a) Challenge the prevalence of inactivity and obesity in Torontonians through the promotion of all types of physical activity
  - b) Incorporate an active component in all recreation programs
  - c) Help maintain continuous enjoyment of physical activity throughout the life cycle, from pre-schoolers to seniors
  - d) Ensure that physical activity in Parks & Recreation programs is inclusive
  - e) Encourage the use of parks and outdoor facilities in all seasons
  - f) Explore innovative approaches to getting the people of Toronto active and keeping them fit.
  
5. Respond to issues specific to Toronto's growing seniors' population:
  - a) Reduce barriers to access, including physical facilities, space allocation, cultural diversity, financial and location/transportation
  - b) Ensure service delivery is relevant and appropriate to seniors' abilities and needs through program development, improved customer service and use of partnerships
  - c) Ensure that communication and dialogue with seniors is timely, effective and appropriately delivered and received – keep seniors well-informed and aware of programs and services available to them, and provide opportunities to give input into the development and delivery of these programs and services
  - d) Build an effective staff and volunteer resource base that supports seniors' programs and services.

6. Work with partners to achieve lifelong active living for all residents of Toronto:
  - a) Define how Toronto Parks & Recreation fits into the broader service delivery system for leisure and recreation services in Toronto
  - b) Support complementary leisure and recreation services provided by other City departments and community organizations
  - c) Provide linkages to the larger sport system in Toronto for those who want to pursue a higher level of sport development
  - d) Promote the benefits of parks, natural areas, and recreation.

## **Child and Youth Development**

### **Parks & Recreation's Perspective**

Child and youth development is a priority for Toronto Parks & Recreation because:

- many children and youth are not active enough for optimal growth and development
- prevalence of overweight and obesity, and related health problems, has increased dramatically
- healthy, active lifestyles developed at a young age are more likely to be maintained through a person's entire life
- many teens are unhappy, citing concerns such as not enough time, boredom, meaning/purpose of life, loneliness, weight and inferiority; in Toronto, feelings of devaluation and disengagement also exist among youth
- poverty among Toronto's children and youth is high, and certain groups of children – especially those who are economically disadvantaged – have reduced rates of participation in sports and the arts
- providing quality recreation to children on social assistance is a more cost-effective form of support than other social services
- concern is widespread about youth anti-social and self-destructive behaviour
- many urban children have limited access to and experience with the natural world.

Toronto Parks & Recreation will promote child and youth development by building lifelong leisure skills and interests, providing fun, positive and healthy choices, and shaping constructive values of mutual respect and inclusion.

The Division will demonstrate leadership in providing opportunities that support healthy child and youth development. The following approaches will guide our work:

- 1) A *holistic approach* to recreation is needed to support the development of healthy children and youth. Children and youth need to experience positive, high-quality opportunities for growth and leadership in the physical, cultural and experiential spheres of their lives.
- 2) Parks & Recreation will focus on a *positive impact approach*. We will promote positive role models, provide opportunities for decision making, and begin to measure and monitor service outcomes.

- 3) To help expand the services available to children and youth and avoid duplicating effort, Parks & Recreation will use a *community-based partnership approach*. Working jointly with community organizations and other City departments and levels of government will maximise available resources for child and youth development.

## Goals and Directions

1. Encourage more physical activity among Toronto's children and youth through a wide variety of means:
  - a) Incorporate indoor and outdoor physical activity into all recreation programs on a daily basis
  - b) Create places where children and youth feel safe and comfortable, both physically and psychologically
  - c) Offer more opportunities to develop skills in basic physical movement
  - d) Offer more opportunities to develop skills in sport and active forms of creative expression
  - e) Define participant success as "personal best" rather than the traditional "win/lose," and offer more non-competitive programs
  - f) Ensure that appropriate indoor and outdoor facilities are available to support physical movement
  - g) Increase the number of outdoor opportunities for physical activity.
2. Expand recreational services for children and youth living in poverty:
  - a) Promote and enhance subsidy programs for disadvantaged children and youth
  - b) Match the number of subsidy spaces in any given program to the percentage of children and youth living in poverty in the local community
  - c) Reduce barriers to participation by addressing support needs of users, including transportation, food, childcare, program supplies and equipment
  - d) Develop standards for the provision of no-charge and low-cost programs offered by Parks & Recreation
  - e) Encourage permit holders to provide program subsidies to children and youth living in poverty.
3. Involve youth in the development and assessment of programs and facilities:
  - a) Increase the number of recreation centres offering programs developed for youth by youth
  - b) Increase the amount of space within indoor and outdoor facilities dedicated to youth
  - c) Use or develop space where youth feel safe and comfortable
  - d) Increase the number of youth who help plan and govern our facilities.
4. Offer a larger number and a greater variety of programs that address play, creative expression and skill development:
  - a) Ensure that every recreation centre's programs include opportunities for children and youth
  - b) Ensure that every recreation centre's programs include play, creative expression and skill development components
  - c) Offer programming in fun, inspiring, playful and unique spaces and settings, both in- and out-of-doors
  - d) Promote experience in teamwork and non-competitive recreation
  - e) Increase the proportion of resources directed to youth
  - f) Build on partnerships with other service providers in the City government.

5. Improve youth leadership skills and employment prospects:
  - a) Increase the number of youth leadership development programs
  - b) Promote a “program participant to paid employee” continuum to youth
  - c) Increase the number of youth hired locally to work in parks and community centres
  - d) Develop life and employment skills through volunteerism and community service obligations
  - e) Link youth with employment opportunities offered by other City departments and community organizations
  
6. Increase community capacity by working with community organizations to deliver adequate and equitable recreation programs for children and youth:
  - a) Maintain or build partnerships with agencies, school boards and community organizations that serve children and youth
  - b) Support community agencies through the provision of appropriate resources
  - c) Increase the number of joint funding proposals
  - d) Provide staff with skills in community development and outreach.

## **7. Implementing the Strategic Plan**

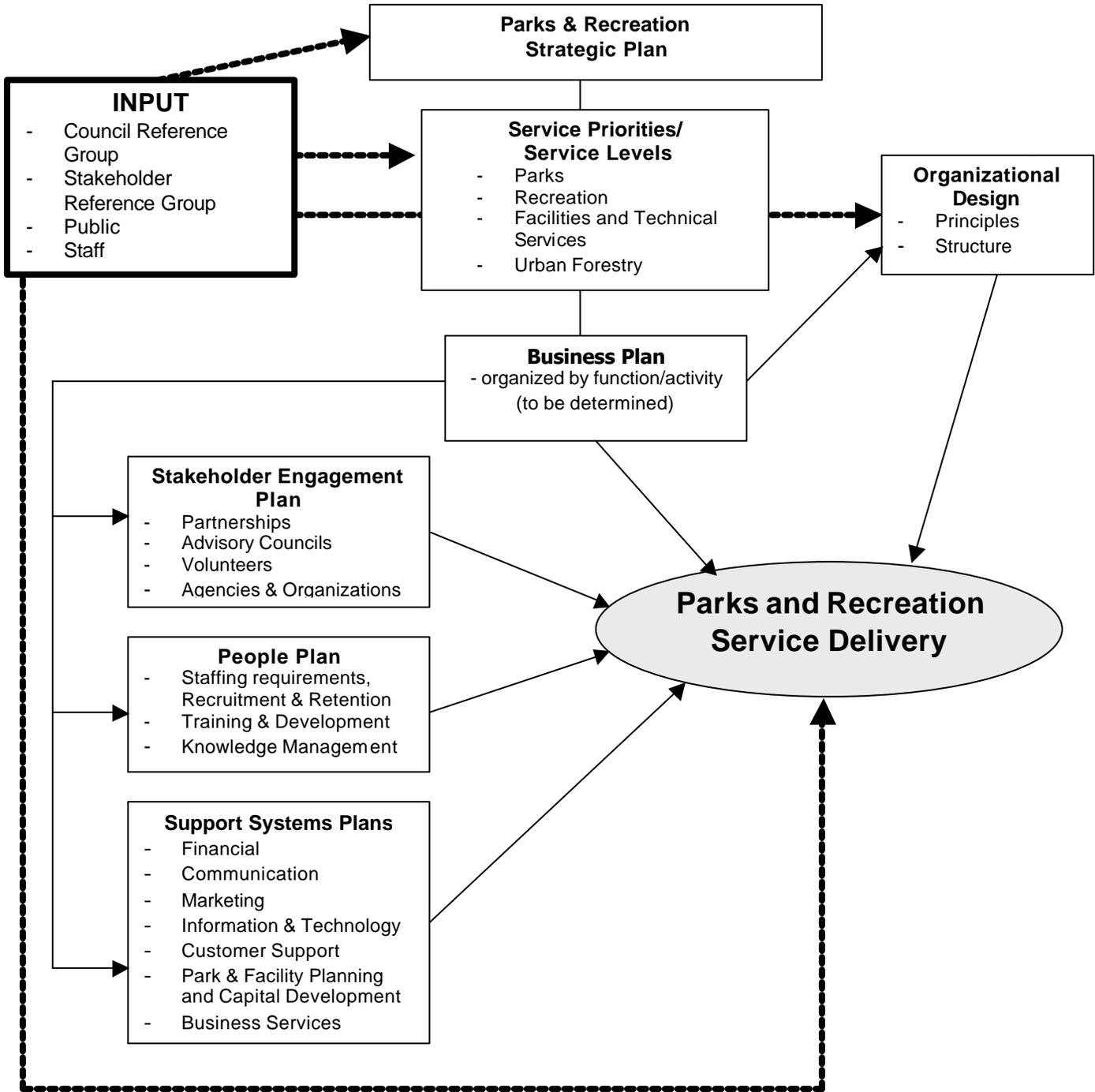
The Parks & Recreation Strategic Plan is a guidance document – a blueprint for shaping the way the Division delivers its programs and services through 2010. Site- and service-specific recommendations are not included here. Many options exist for taking action on the goals and directions outlined in the plan. Some actions may occur on City-wide basis; others will be tailored to local circumstances. Specific actions will be mapped out in coming years through individual program strategies, service plans and other initiatives.

### **Organizational Development**

The overall framework for implementing the Strategic Plan is a work in progress. In 2004, the Parks & Recreation Division embarked on ReActivate TO! – the Parks & Recreation Review. This organizational development process arose from a need to manage expectations and resources more effectively and to ensure clarity of purpose for all staff and partners engaged in service delivery.

As illustrated in the following chart, completion of ReActivateTO! later in 2004 will shape the implementation process and future service delivery by Parks & Recreation. Key products of this process include:

- Parks & Recreation Strategic Plan
- statement of service priorities and service levels
- organizational design principles and organizational structure
- three-year business plan
- people plan
- stakeholder engagement plan
- financial management and information systems and other support plans.



## Measures and Targets

A number of measures and targets for 2010 are proposed below. These will allow the Division to track progress at a high level and better position Parks & Recreation in relation to the three foundations of the Strategic Plan. The proposed measures are intended to be meaningful, limited in number and associated with data that is readily available. They will help Council, staff and the community assess the contribution of Parks & Recreation to the quality of life in Toronto's neighbourhoods and communities.

Strategic Plan Foundations	Sample Measures and Targets		
	Measure	Current Status	2010 Target
<p><i>Environmental Stewardship:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parks &amp; Recreation makes Toronto a green, clean, safe and beautiful city</li> </ul>	% users very satisfied with park visits	45%	60%
	# hectares of parkland per 10,000 residents	29.7 ha / 10,000 residents	30 ha / 10,000 residents
	% users very satisfied with facility quality	38% (community centres)	55% (community centres)
	# street trees per kilometre of road	80 trees / km road	120 trees / km road
	tree maintenance service response time in months	service response varies from 3 to 18 months City-wide	service response under 6 months, within a 10% "timeframe variance" City-wide
<p><i>Lifelong Active Living:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parks &amp; Recreation advances physical activity and social interaction through high-quality programs for residents of all ages</li> </ul>	% City's total population in registered programs (individual participants)	6.4%	8%
	% City's seniors' population in registered programs (individual participants)	2.3%	10%
<p><i>Child and Youth Development:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parks &amp; Recreation helps all children make positive, healthy choices during their leisure time</li> <li>Parks &amp; Recreation gives youth positive options for building life skills and being involved in their City</li> </ul>	% City's children in registered programs (individual participants)	28%	35%
	% City's youth in registered programs (individual participants)	4%	15%
	# leadership opportunities provided	2,223 registrations / yr	2,600 registrations / yr
	# part-time job opportunities	10,000 / yr	maintain or increase slightly

## **Appendix A - Serving You, Serving Our City: A Profile of Parks & Recreation**

Parks & Recreation programs and services are delivered to Toronto residents in many different ways. Besides the services provided directly by Parks & Recreation, there is a strong network of service providers and community/sport organizations who deliver service using City infrastructure.

The City provides direct service through:

- registered programs – including swimming and skating lessons and camp programs
- drop-in experiences – open skate, open swim and drop-in programs in recreation centres
- “at your leisure” opportunities – park visits and trail use at your own time and pace
- customer response – answering calls for assistance for matters like tree inspection or pruning of boulevard trees.

Parks & Recreation’s partners offer additional service through:

- community and sport organizations – more than 3,000 groups permitting Parks & Recreation facilities, sports fields and parks, providing service to more than 2.5 million participants each year
- volunteering – over 200,000 people assist in the delivery of Parks & Recreation services, including naturalization activities, adopting gardens, and organizing special events
- partnerships – the Association of Community Centres and Arena Boards of Management operate City-owned recreation facilities through agreements with the City. The City provides funding in either operating and/or capital dollars to assist these boards. The City also provides an annual grant program to assist volunteer groups who provide services to the community.

## Service Snapshots

### Parks & Forestry

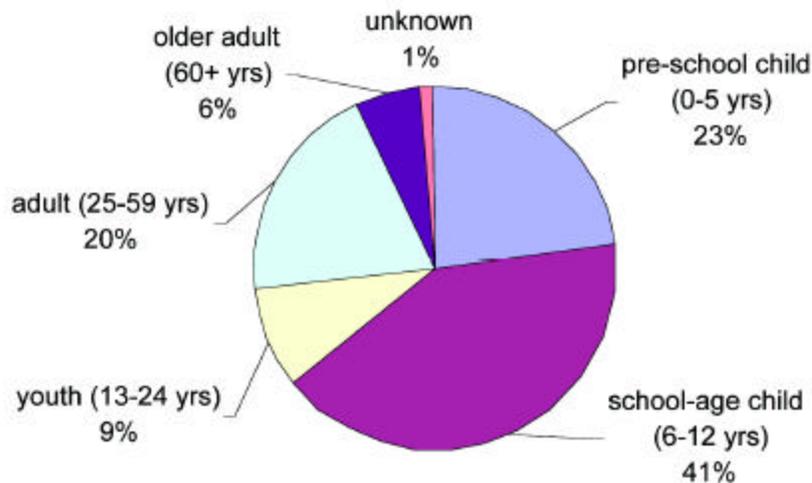
# of Hectares Maintained	7,365
# of Named Parks	1,470
# of Street Trees Planted	7,500
# of Calls for Forestry Service	91,037
# of Floral Beds	1,130

### Recreation

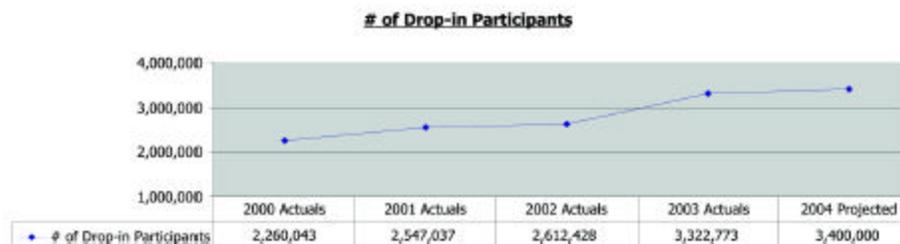
Total Registrations	458,356
# of Unique Registered Users	158,566
# of Programs Offered	53,022
Drop-In Program Attendance (Public Swim, public skate, drop-in Youth, Drop-in Senior etc.)	3,322,773

Source: City of Toronto, Parks & Recreation

## Registered Program Participants by Age (158,566 unique clients in 2003)

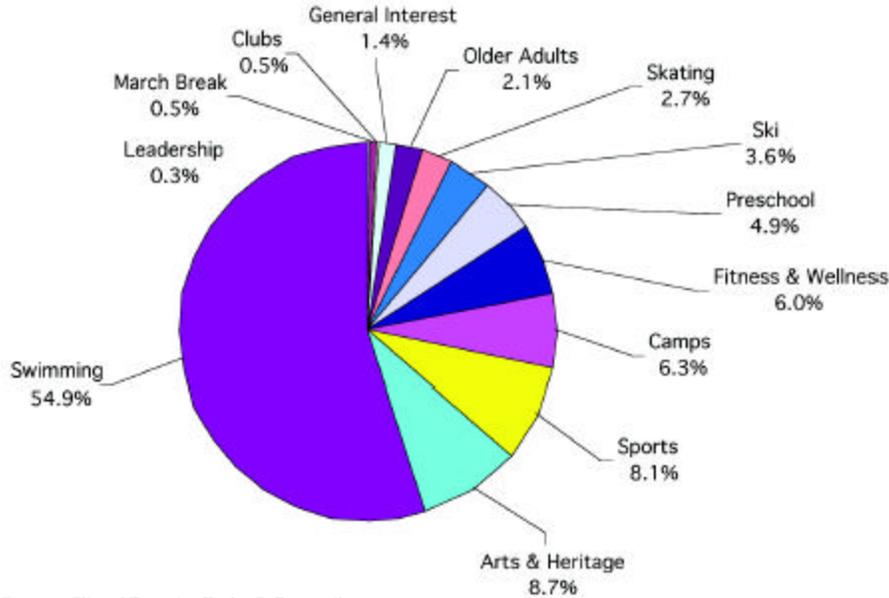


Source: City of Toronto, Parks & Recreation



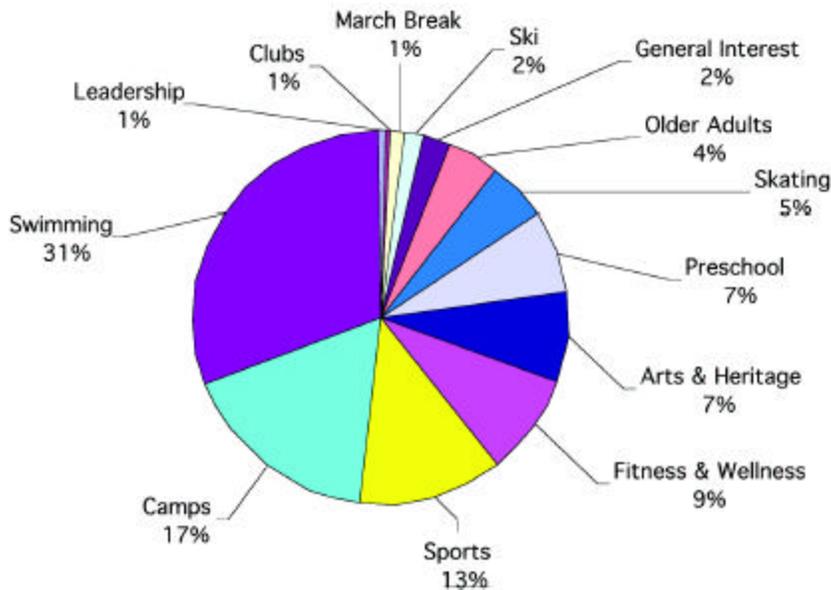
Source: City of Toronto, Parks & Recreation

## Recreation Courses by Program Category (53,022 courses in 2003)



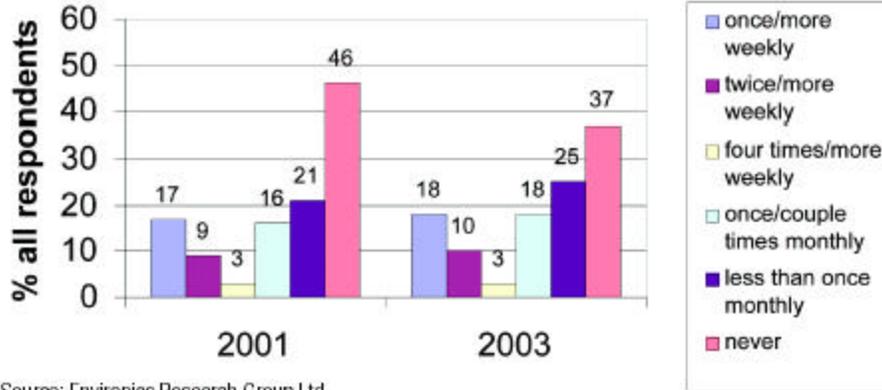
Source: City of Toronto, Parks & Recreation

## Recreation Registration by Program Category (2003)



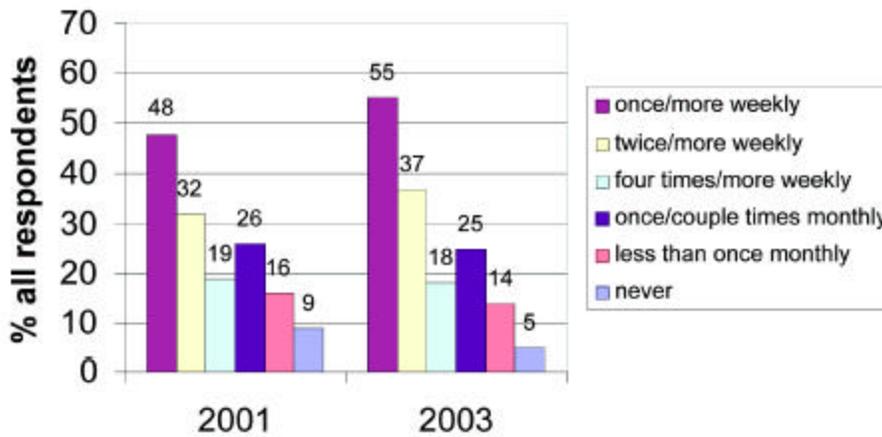
Source: City of Toronto, Parks & Recreation

## Community Centre Visits Over Past Year (2001 and 2003)



Source: EnviroNics Research Group Ltd.

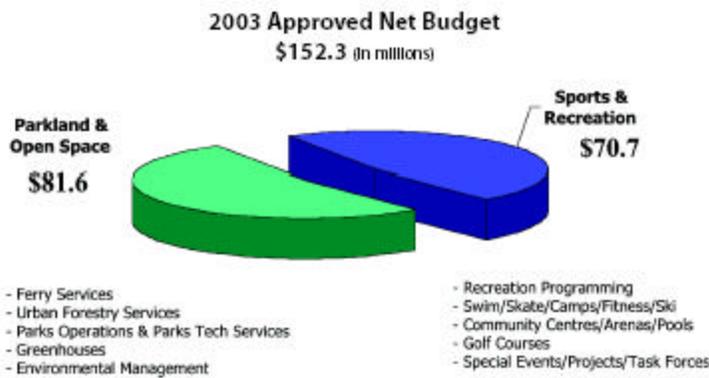
## Park Visits Over Past Year (2001 and 2003)



Source: EnviroNics Research Group Ltd.

## Operating Budget for Parks & Recreation

The cost to provide the programs, services and infrastructure listed on page XX is outlined in the following charts. The workforce includes recreationists, arborists, gardeners, general labourers, parks handyworkers, custodians, clerks, planners, marine and stationary engineers, refrigeration technicians, plumbers, electricians, animal attendants, heavy equipment operators, arena/pool operators, supervisors and more.



### 2003 Parks & Recreation Division Approved Budget

Gross Expenditures	\$222.1
Revenue	\$ 69.8
<b>Net Budget</b>	<b>\$152.3</b>

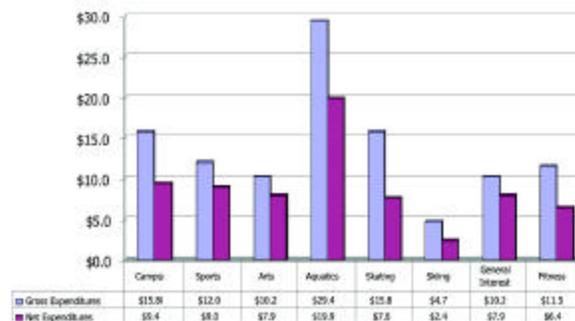


### 2003 Parks & Recreation Division Net Cost Per Capita

Parks & Recreation	\$60.92
Parks Maintenance	\$24.28
Forestry	\$5.84
Sports & Recreation	\$28.28

Notes: Calculations are based on 2001 Census Population and 2003 Approved Budget figures.

### 2003 Approved Budget Sports & Recreation (in millions)



## **Appendix B – A Backgrounder on the Three Foundations**

Using an evidence-based approach, this appendix elaborates on why environmental stewardship, lifelong active living, and child and youth development were chosen as the foundations of the Parks & Recreation Strategic Plan.

### **The Importance of Environmental Stewardship**

With responsibility for over 7,400 hectares of green space, Parks & Recreation is the single largest custodian of land in the City of Toronto. Parks & Recreation also has stewardship over 3 million trees, 839 sports fields, 140 community recreation centres, and about 670 other recreational facilities, including pools, golf courses, ski centres, greenhouses and ferries.

The size and scope of this portfolio means that the Division can have a substantial impact on the health of Toronto's environment. This impact can be either positive or negative – by either relieving or contributing to the stresses that affect the City's vegetation, air, land, water and associated resources.

Stewardship is not just about achieving ecological health – it also means pursuing sustainability in our built environments through good property management. This includes maintaining and extending the life and usefulness of existing recreation facilities and parks, and in the process meeting community needs while minimizing operating costs.

Some facts and figures bearing on Toronto:

#### *Vegetation:*

- There are about 8,595 hectares of natural habitat in the City of Toronto, covering some 13.5 percent of the total city area. Toronto maintains a good coverage of terrestrial natural habitat for an urban area, primarily as a result of the extensive valley land network. Maintaining and improving these conditions will require continued protection and restoration efforts.<sup>1</sup>
- Our parks and natural areas are now home to many exotic species (40%) which alter the balance within terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems.<sup>2</sup> Approximately 240 vegetation communities have been identified within Toronto, many of which are threatened by invasive exotic plants and an overall decline in ecosystem health.<sup>3</sup>
- More than 8 in 10 Ontario urban residents think the presence of trees in their local community is very important. Almost 6 in 10 say that the presence of healthy trees in their city or town has a major impact on their personal health. Almost 9 in 10 think trees are very important in helping improve air quality. About 6 in 10 think trees are very important in

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<sup>1</sup> City of Toronto and Toronto & Region Conservation Authority, *City of Toronto Natural Heritage Study: Final Report, December 2001* (Toronto, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> Toronto Environmental Task Force, *Clean, Green and Healthy: A Plan for an Environmentally Sustainable Toronto [Environmental Plan]* (Toronto, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> *City of Toronto Natural Heritage Study*.

helping water quality, reducing the effects of climate change and helping with energy conservation by moderating building temperatures.<sup>4</sup>

- Toronto's urban forest includes about 7 million trees, but it is threatened by a decline in the number of species and the fact that many of the trees are the same age.<sup>5</sup>
- Toronto's urban forest stored an estimated 900,555 Mg of carbon, sequestered 36,601 Mg/yr of carbon, caused 13,921 Mg of carbon to be avoided, and resulted in energy reductions of 53,838 GJ in 1998. Trees also removed a total of 997 Mg of pollution from the atmosphere for a total associated value of \$8,565,000.<sup>6</sup>

#### *Land:*

- in its "Healthy Cities Project," the *National Post* viewed green space as a salient measure of community health. At 3.19 hectares per 1,000 people, Toronto has one of the lowest rates of park space among Canadian cities, ranking 10<sup>th</sup> on the *Post*'s survey of 13 municipalities.<sup>7</sup>
- Council has approved full cost recovery for the waste that is collected and/or transferred and disposed from the City's Departments, Agencies, Boards, and Commissions and Departments, which create a major financial incentive for waste diversion.<sup>8</sup>
- public health concerns about the links between cancer and pesticides prompted Council to adopt a Pesticide Reduction Policy for City parks and green space in 1998 and a Pesticide By-law for all property in Toronto in 2003.
- in the past, climate change occurred so slowly that wild plants and animals had time to adjust. Today, shifts in temperature, seasons, and weather are happening so fast that wildlife has little chance to adapt. Instincts developed over thousands of years are becoming useless. Key habitat elements are declining or disappearing, causing major stresses on wildlife.<sup>9</sup>
- other factors contributing to species declines are habitat degradation through climatic changes, increasing levels of toxic chemicals and pollutants as well as introductions of non-native plants and animals.<sup>10</sup>
- citizens across Canada are undertaking wildlife habitat projects to provide food, water, shelter, and space for species threatened by climate change. They are choosing projects that enhance the natural ability of forests and wetlands to absorb greenhouse gases and maintain a healthy climate; that help isolated species meet their needs by improving connectivity between fragmented habitats; and that buffer the impacts of climate change on terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Environics Research Group, *Attitudes of Urban Residents toward Urban Forests and Woodland Issues* (Toronto, 2001).

<sup>5</sup> "Urban Forest's Ancient Trees Under Threat, Academic Says," *The Globe and Mail* (October 15, 2002).

<sup>6</sup> W.A. Kenney and Associates, *The Role of Urban Forests in Greenhouse Gas Reduction* (N.p., 2001).

<sup>7</sup> "The Intangibles that Define a Community," *National Post* (October 17, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> Toronto Solid Waste Management Services, *The ABCs (and Ds) of Recycling* (Toronto, 2002).

<sup>9</sup> Canadian Wildlife Federation, available at <[http://www.cwf-fcf.org/pages/wildprograms/wildprogramsnewweb\\_e.asp?section=6&language=e#2](http://www.cwf-fcf.org/pages/wildprograms/wildprogramsnewweb_e.asp?section=6&language=e#2)>.

<sup>10</sup> Canadian Wildlife Federation.

<sup>11</sup> Canadian Wildlife Federation.

### *Built Environment:*

- Toronto's recreation infrastructure is aging, requiring either improved upkeep or replacement: 83% of the major facilities are over 20 years old, and 27% are more than 50 years old.<sup>12</sup>
- the asset/insured value of all Parks & Recreation facilities is about \$6 billion. Using industry standards, the City should be spending about \$120.3 million annually (about 2% of asset/insured value) on state of good repair in its capital budget. The 2002 request for new state of good repairs was \$17.6 million, leaving an annual maintenance deficit of \$103 million.

### *Air:*

- air quality issues are seen as the greatest environmental concern faced by Toronto residents.<sup>13</sup>
- 2002 was the hottest year on record in Toronto with temperatures over 30° C for 40 days. The average is 15 days.<sup>14</sup>
- in 2002, Toronto experienced a record 28 smog alert days in 2002, eight more than were recorded in 2001. The number of smog alert days has been rising since 1979.<sup>15</sup>
- health experts estimate that air pollution causes 1,000 premature deaths in Toronto each year and hospitalizes another 5,500.<sup>16</sup>
- Toronto hospitals spend over \$150 million per year to treat the victims of air pollution and air pollution costs the Toronto economy at least \$128 million in lost productivity.<sup>17</sup>
- the Ontario Medical Association calculates that the direct health and economic costs from pollution-related illness is about \$1 billion per year in Ontario.<sup>18</sup>
- Toronto's Corporate Smog Alert Response Plan, adopted by Council in 1998, has resulted in the short-term reduction or suspension of Parks & Recreation activities that contribute to poor air quality on smog alert days.

### *Water:*

- Impaired water quality and contaminated sediments have reduced the availability and quality of aquatic habitat. Even where natural areas are protected, degradation can take place from surrounding land uses and inappropriate human use.<sup>19</sup> The aquatic habitats and fish communities within the City of Toronto are highly impacted and are considered to be in poor to fair condition.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Data in this section is from the Policy & Development Division of the City of Toronto's Economic Development, Culture & Tourism Department.

<sup>13</sup> Environics Research Group, *Public Opinion and the Environment: A Summary of Major Trends in the Toronto Region* (Toronto, 1998).

<sup>14</sup> "Life in the City Hot and Steamy," *Toronto Star* (September 21, 2002).

<sup>15</sup> Toronto Environmental Alliance (TEA), *Toronto Smog Report Card 2002*, (Toronto, 2002).

<sup>16</sup> Toronto Public Health, *Toronto's Air: Let's Make It Healthy* (Toronto, 2000).

<sup>17</sup> TEA, *Toronto Smog Report Card 2002*.

<sup>18</sup> OCAA, *Response to Articles*.

<sup>19</sup> Toronto Environmental Task Force, *Environmental Plan*.

<sup>20</sup> *City of Toronto Natural Heritage Study*.

- Data collected in Toronto since the mid 1980s has shown that waterfront areas close to uncontrolled discharges of stormwater and combined sewer overflows have consistently degraded water quality. This results in beach postings and the loss of recreational opportunities at the City's 14 beaches. In 2001, Toronto's beaches were posted as unsafe for 46% of the summer season.<sup>21</sup>

## **The Benefits of Taking Action on Environmental Stewardship**

- A healthy natural environment is a public good. The benefits that flow from protecting the environment cannot be appropriated by any person or persons for their own private benefit.
- The aesthetic value of the natural environment contributes to a sense of well-being, particularly among highly urbanized populations.
- Forests play a vital role in maintaining natural environmental systems, thus contributing to environmental sustainability. By collecting carbon and other pollutants, forests help to maintain climatic conditions and reduce greenhouse gases.
- Forests have a significant role in maintaining watershed systems and retaining water within forest soils to protect the forest and remain active during drought.
- A survey of "personal responses to nature contacts" indicated very positive feelings about being in nearby-nature areas; 85% found this relaxing (restful, soothing), 76% found it enjoyable; 40% found it a chance to "escape worries"; 32% indicated it gave them time to think and let thoughts wander.
- A healthy natural environment contributes strongly to neighbourhood satisfaction levels.
- Through outdoor education and recreation programs, the public has a greater appreciation and understanding of the value of the natural environment.
- Green space is highly valued in communities and hence, draws in investment and promotes prosperity.
- People can walk, jog, relax, play, do nature appreciation, picnic, socialize and exercise in healthy and inspirational settings.
- Outdoor education/recreation programming is the best available method for fostering environmental sensitivity.
- Outdoor education teaches people to enjoy nature and enlarge their lives, both cognitively and affectively. Environmental education programs show an increase in knowledge of the environment, an increase in levels of social interaction, a decrease in socially inappropriate behaviours and an increase in learning life-long outdoor leisure skills.
- Outdoor programs provide a range of benefits, feelings of accomplishment, developing a connection to nature, making friends, improving skills, overcoming natural obstacles and testing limits, and becoming aware of, and appreciating the natural and cultural resources of the outdoors.
- Students who are bored in the classroom can be stimulated to learn through outdoor experiences. By observing wildlife (for example), they can be motivated to learn more about biology and ecology.

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<sup>21</sup> Data from Toronto Public Health.

- Through outdoor education, we can increase the public knowledge of making wiser choices in the use of our natural resources. Through increasing public awareness and appreciation, we can save our natural environment for the future, so that everyone benefits.
- Use of geologically or environmentally sensitive areas for open space or recreation purposes can reduce potential property damage costs and loss of life.
- Riverside parks, streams, wetlands and natural areas can replace a good deal of expensive infrastructure to handle drainage, water supply and water quality.

## **Lifelong Active Living: The Importance of Physical Activity**

Toronto Parks & Recreation has extensive infrastructure and program resources to promote physical activity. The Division also has a century-long legacy of involvement in this field. But *emphasizing* physical activity requires consideration of various challenges facing Toronto as well as the benefits to be gained through this emphasis.

### *Personal Health:*

Physical inactivity is a major contributor to increased adult morbidity and mortality from chronic disease. Current levels of inactivity are now a major concern for North American health practitioners. The previous section documented the issue in regards to children and youth – the essential “front end” of a lifelong approach to health and wellness. Some additional facts and figures bearing on Toronto:

- physical inactivity contributes to up to 23% of all deaths from major chronic diseases.
- 57% of Canadian adults aged 18 and older are considered insufficiently active for optimal health benefits.<sup>22</sup>
- more women (67%) than men (54%) are physically inactive.
- physical inactivity levels increase with age. Activity levels begin declining from childhood.
- sedentary children are likely to become sedentary adults.
- only 33% of Torontonians aged 12 and older are moderately active; 56% are physically inactive.<sup>23</sup>
- 30% of families with children in Toronto are living below the low-income cut off. Lower-income Canadians tend to be less active than higher-income Canadians.<sup>24</sup>

### *Social Development:*

Securing an improved quality of life in Toronto – achieved by strengthening social cohesion, ensuring access to services and opportunities, and shaping a healthy and safe urban environment through investment in social infrastructure – is a complex task. Fundamental shifts in public policy, such as funding realignment and downloading by Ottawa and Queen’s Park, have frayed the city’s social infrastructure. Toronto’s demographic make-up compounds these challenges:

<sup>22</sup> CFLRI, 2001 *Physical Activity Monitor*.

<sup>23</sup> Statistics Canada, “Canadian Community Health Survey, 2000/01.” Available at <[www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/020508/d020508a.htm](http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/020508/d020508a.htm)>.

<sup>24</sup> Canadian Institute for Health Information, *Improving the Health of Canadians* (Ottawa, 2004).

- *fifth largest city in North America:* Toronto is home to 2.481 million people (2001).<sup>25</sup>
- *small but steady population growth:* about a 4% growth rate (1996-2001), low relative to the GTA Regions.
- *significantly higher proportion of vulnerable groups:* Toronto has 80% of GTA recent immigrants; 78% of GTA youth living on their own; 75% of GTA households receiving social assistance; 66% of GTA poor children; 69% of GTA seniors living alone; and 62% of GTA lone-parent families.
- *growing diversity:* as one of the world's most ethnoculturally diverse cities, Toronto receives almost 25% of all immigrants to Canada. In 2001, 49% of the City's population was foreign-born and nearly 43% were members of a visible minority. Since 1980, Asia has replaced Europe as the top source of new arrivals.
- *high mobility:* a steady arrival of migrants (60,000-80,000 immigrant landings per year), and a steady flow out of the City to the GTA Regions, resulting in a nearly 6% turnover in population each year.
- *an aging population:* over the last three decades, growth in the seniors' population (65 years+) has far outstripped growth in the total Toronto population (98% vs. 19% change, 1971-2001). Though the total number of seniors is smaller than the child, youth and adult age groups, adults aged 60 and older are expected to increase by 12% by 2011, when this group will constitute 17.8% of the total population.<sup>26</sup>
- *changing households and families:* two-parent families are 81% of all Toronto families, but 1991-96 saw large increases in lone parent families (23%) and separated (21%) and divorced (20%) individuals; average household size has declined since the 1960s.
- *concentrations of risk/social vulnerability:* based on social indicators analysis, the City Planning Division has identified priority areas across Toronto for children, youth, seniors, and immigrants; the central corridor and southwest sections of the City show far less indication of social vulnerability. The number of higher poverty neighbourhoods has risen from 66 in 1991 to 120 in 2001, and has been especially pronounced in the former Scarborough, North York, Etobicoke, York and East York.<sup>27</sup>
- *income polarisation:* the GTA's poorest and wealthiest people live in Toronto; the City had 69% of the GTA's lower income households in 1996.
- *increasing poverty:* the rate of poverty among Toronto's families has risen substantially over the last two decades, with almost one in every five families in 2001 living in poverty.<sup>28</sup> The incidence of poverty is rising in families headed by persons aged 25-34, seniors, women and single-parent families in particular, and renters.
- *rising homelessness:* most are still single men over 30, but youth and families with children are now the fastest-growing groups in the homeless and at-risk populations.

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<sup>25</sup> Unless otherwise credited, the findings in this section are drawn from Statistics Canada, 1996 and 2001 Censuses; City of Toronto, *Community Consultation on Social Development, Background Paper 3: Demographic Trends* (Toronto, 2000).

<sup>26</sup> City of Toronto, *Rebuilding Respect: A Progress Report for Seniors* (Toronto, 2002); projections from Urban Development Services (November 2002), based on the 2001 Census.

<sup>27</sup> Toronto Urban Planning & Development Services, *Social Indicators and Priority Areas* (Toronto, 1999); United Way of Toronto and the Canadian Council on Social Development, *Poverty by Postal Code: The Geography of Neighbourhood Poverty, 1981-2001* (Toronto, 2004).

<sup>28</sup> United Way of Toronto and the Canadian Council on Social Development, *Poverty by Postal Code*.

## The Benefits of Taking Action on Lifelong Active Living

### *Personal Health:*

One of the major benefits of physical activity is that it helps people improve their physical fitness. Fitness is a state of well-being that allows people to carry out everyday functions with ease and reduces their risks for health problems.

Virtually all individuals can benefit from regular physical activity, whether they participate in vigorous exercise or some type of moderate health-enhancing activity. But capturing the full benefits of physical activity requires a lifelong commitment to active living. Even among frail and very old adults, mobility and functioning can be improved through physical activity.<sup>29</sup>

It is clear that the health benefits of physical activity are not limited to adults. Because behaviours that increase the risk of cardiovascular disease begin early in life, it is essential that prevention begins in early childhood.<sup>30</sup> According to the U.S. Surgeon General,<sup>31</sup> regular participation in physical activity during childhood and adolescence:

- helps build and maintain healthy bones, muscles and joints.
- helps control weight, build lean muscle and reduce fat.
- prevents or delays the development of high blood pressure and helps reduce blood pressure in some adolescents with hypertension.
- reduces feelings of depression and anxiety.

Through its effects on mental health, physical activity may also help increase students' capacity for learning.

These benefits are echoed and augmented in *Canada's Physical Activity Guide to Healthy Active Living*:<sup>32</sup>

- better health.
- improved fitness.
- better posture and balance.
- better self-esteem.
- weight control.
- stronger muscles and bones.
- feeling more energetic.
- relaxation and reduced stress.
- continued independent living in later life.

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<sup>29</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Physical Activity Fundamental to Preventing Disease* (Washington, 2002).

<sup>30</sup> Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada, *The Changing Face of Heart Disease and Stroke in Canada* (Ottawa, 1999).

<sup>31</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Physical Activity and Health: A Report of the Surgeon General* (Atlanta, 1996).

<sup>32</sup> Health Canada, *Canada's Physical Activity Guide to Healthy Active Living* (Ottawa, 1998).

### *Social Development:*

The Division has responded to demographic challenges and trends in many ways. Recent examples include providing recreation programs for at-risk children and youth, accommodating disabled participants, addressing homelessness in parks, and tackling gender inequities in physical activity and sport. These initiatives are heir to the Division's recreational mission established in the early 1900s, which emphasized social welfare objectives over physical activity.<sup>33</sup>

Pursuing a renewed social development agenda within the Division should generate a number of benefits:<sup>34</sup>

- contribute to balanced human development, helping Torontonians reach for their potential, including developing various skills in children and youth; providing an opportunity for adults to develop their full and holistic potential; and providing opportunities for life-long learning.
- contribute to quality of life, by building self-esteem and positive self-image; enhancing life satisfaction levels; enhancing perceived quality of life for individuals, families and communities; and nurturing growth, acquisition of life skills, and independent living for those with a disability.
- reduce self-destructive and anti-social behaviour, including reduced crime, racism, isolation, loneliness and alienation.
- build strong families and healthy communities, by maintaining family connections through shared leisure interests; providing safe, developmental opportunities for the latch-key child; building social skills and stimulating participation in community life; producing leaders who serve their communities in many ways; providing the catalysts that build strong, self-sufficient communities; and building pride in a community.

## **The Importance of Child and Youth Development**

The Division's recent work have been influenced by the Children and Youth Action Committee (CYAC) and the Children and Youth Advocate, appointed by Council in 1998 to serve as the focal point of the City's efforts to improve the health and well-being of its children and youth.

CYAC and the Advocate encouraged Council to adopt the Toronto Children's Charter in 1999. The Charter sets out fundamental values that Parks & Recreation is expected to embody in its programs and services, including:

- all Toronto children shall be entitled to a standard of living adequate to ensure healthy physical, intellectual, emotional, and social development, well-being, and a good quality of life.
- all Toronto children shall be entitled to participate in recreational and leisure activities, in the form of play, creative expression, and skill development opportunities.

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<sup>33</sup>Wayne Reeves, *Playing by the Rules: Organized Children's Leisure in Toronto, 1897-1934* (Toronto: Market Gallery of the City of Toronto Archives, 1998).

<sup>34</sup>Adapted from Canadian Parks and Recreation Association, *The Benefits Catalogue* (Ottawa, 1997).

- all Toronto children have the right to be served by governments which acknowledge their responsibility to improve the health and well-being of children and work co-operatively to ensure adequate and equitable funding for children's programs.
- the foregoing rights shall apply to all Toronto children without discrimination according to race, colour, sex, sexual orientation, ability/disability, ethnic origin, language, region, property or class, religion, or any other distinction. This may entail the use of affirmative action or equity programs in order to redress situations of special individual, community or regional disadvantage.

The work of CYAC, the Advocate, and the Division is also set against a wider backdrop of issues facing children and youth. Some Canadian facts and figures bearing on Toronto:

- three out of five children and youth aged 5-17 are not active enough for optimal growth and development. Activity levels decline from childhood to the teen years. For children aged 5-12, 44% of girls and 53% of boys are considered active enough while 30% of adolescent boys are considered sufficiently active enough for optimal health benefits.<sup>35</sup>
- between 1981 and 1996, prevalence of overweight increased from 15% to 29% for boys and 15% to 24% for girls.<sup>36</sup>
- between 1981 and 1996, prevalence of obesity increased from 5% to 13.5% for boys and 5% to 12% for girls. Obese children are at increased risk for type 2 diabetes mellitus, hypertension and other diseases and disorders.
- girls are less active than boys. Adolescents aged 13-17 spend an average of almost 14 hours per week on physical activity. While teenage boys devote about 17 hours a week to physical activities, teenage girls devote less than 12 hours.<sup>37</sup>
- after declining in the 1970s and '80s, cigarette smoking rates among youth aged 15-19 increased to 27% in 1994.
- teenage sexual activity has remained almost the same as it was in the 1980s. About 6 in 10 males and 5 in 10 females acknowledge that they have had sex. Sexually transmitted diseases among teens have decreased since 1990, but pregnancy rates have increased.<sup>38</sup>
- in 1997, suicide was the second leading cause of death among males aged 10-14 (15.9%) and males and females aged 15-19 years (25.1% and 16.3%). The leading cause for children and youth was unintentional injuries. For the entire population, the three top causes of death were diseases of the circulatory system, cancer, and respiratory diseases.<sup>39</sup>
- in 1996-97, some adolescents reported low levels of self-esteem, sense of mastery, and sense of coherence when compared to other age groups. Depression was most common among youth aged 18-19, with young women aged 15-19 the most likely of any sex-age group to exhibit signs of depression (9%).<sup>40</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute (CFLRI), *2000 Physical Activity Monitor* (Ottawa, 2001).

<sup>36</sup> This and the following finding are from Mark S. Tremblay and J. Douglas Willms, "Secular trends in the body mass index of Canadian children," *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, 163 (2000): 1429-33.

<sup>37</sup> CFLRI, *2000 Physical Activity Monitor*.

<sup>38</sup> Reginald W. Bibby, *Canada's Teens: Today, Yesterday and Tomorrow* (Toronto: Stoddart, 2001); Canadian Council on Social Development, *The Progress of Canada's Children* (Ottawa, 1998).

<sup>39</sup> Health Canada data, available at <[www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hpb/lcdc/publicat/pcd97/mrt\\_f\\_e.html](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hpb/lcdc/publicat/pcd97/mrt_f_e.html)>.

<sup>40</sup> Health Canada, *Toward a Healthy Future: Second Report on the Health of Canadians* (Ottawa, 1999).

- most teens have a positive self-image, self-confidence and a generally healthy personal mental outlook, though still many are unhappy (10-30%). Not enough time, boredom, meaning/purpose of life, loneliness, weight and inferiority are among the concerns of youth.<sup>41</sup>
- volunteering declined from 33% to 29% among youth aged 15-24 during 1997-2000, though those who volunteered gave more hours. Youth are more likely to volunteer to improve their job opportunities, to explore their own strengths, and because their friends volunteered. More youth volunteer with education and research (23% of events and 19% of hours) and social services organizations (20 and 22%) than arts/culture and recreation (20 and 18%).<sup>42</sup>
- certain groups of children – especially those who are economically disadvantaged – have reduced rates of participation in sports and the arts.<sup>43</sup>
- while the poverty rate for children declined from 37% to 30% between 1996-2001, this rate is still more than two times as high as the rest of the GTA and there are still 128,755 children aged 0-14 years living below the low-income cutoff.<sup>44</sup>
- although overall youth crime in Toronto has decreased considerably from levels in the early 1990s, the youth charge rate for violent crime remains 40% higher than in 1991 and youth gang activity is on the rise. Safety remains a significant concern for the majority of youth. Youth crime primarily affects other youth.<sup>45</sup>
- rising levels of childhood obesity have been linked to a nationwide failure to adopt mandatory physical education in Canada's schools, despite widespread support for such action.<sup>46</sup>
- changes to the education funding formula in Ontario and permit policies in Toronto have undermined affordable community access space in schools. The potential closure of school pools, or their transfer to the City of Toronto, remains on the horizon.<sup>47</sup>

## The Benefits of Taking Action on Child and Youth Development

A number of positive outcomes can result from using recreation programs to promote child and youth development.

Impacts on physical health are the best documented of all recreational benefits. Regular participation in physical activity during childhood and adolescence:<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Bibby, *Canada's Teens*.

<sup>42</sup> Statistics Canada, *Caring Canadians, Involved Canadians: Highlights from the 2000 National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating* (Ottawa, 2001).

<sup>43</sup> David R. Offord, Ellen Lipman and Eric K. Duku, "Which Children Don't Participate in Sports, the Arts, and Community Programs?" Paper presented at *Investing in Children: A National Research Conference* (Ottawa: Human Resources and Development Canada, 1998).

<sup>44</sup> City of Toronto, *Toronto Report Card on Children, Vol. 5, Update 2003* (Toronto, 2003).

<sup>45</sup> City of Toronto, *Toronto Youth Profile 2003* (Toronto, 2003); City of Toronto, *Speak Up: Toronto Youth Talk About Safety in Their Community* (Toronto, 2002).

<sup>46</sup> Coalition for Active Living, *Six-Point Plan for Action* (Ottawa, 2001).

<sup>47</sup> Toronto Children and Youth Advocate, *Annual Report 2002* (Toronto, 2002).

<sup>48</sup> The findings in this section are from U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Physical Activity and Health: A Report of the Surgeon General* (Atlanta, 1996).

- helps build and maintain healthy bones, muscles and joints.
- helps control weight, build lean muscle and reduce fat.
- prevents or delays the development of high blood pressure and helps reduce blood pressure in some adolescents with hypertension.
- reduces feelings of depression and anxiety.

There is also growing evidence of psychosocial benefits, including:

- better time management, increased self-esteem and self-worth, and the opportunity to identify with respected coaches and supervisors.<sup>49</sup>
- competence in sports helping protect children against the occurrence of emotional and behavioural problems where children are at risk for these conditions.
- a strong correlation between youth staying in school and their participation in extracurricular activities.
- a strong relationship between participation in organized recreational activities and propensity to participate in unpaid school activities, fund raising, and community work.<sup>50</sup>
- more positive relationships with one's peers and friends, a greater likelihood of performing better in school, increased future educational expectations, decreased participation in negative behaviours such as drinking and smoking, and lower levels of television watching.
- development of life and leadership skills by participating in team and sport activities.
- fosters awareness of the larger community and cross cultural understanding.
- enables children and youth with psychological disorders to achieve the same level of social, physical and academic competencies as their non-disordered peers.<sup>51</sup>
- play experiences influence neurological development and help determine whether the child grows up to be intelligent, articulate and confident, or not.<sup>52</sup>
- develops positive attitudes towards the importance of recreation and leisure in contributing to healthy, active lifestyles.

Economic benefits have also been demonstrated. By providing recreation services to children of sole-support mothers receiving social assistance, recreation pays for itself through reduced use of social and health services (such as probation, child psychiatry and other physician specialties, child psychology and social work). The provision of recreational services also resulted in a 10% greater exit from social assistance compared to parents of children who did not receive this service, and produced other good outcomes for the mother.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> This and next two findings are from Offord et al., "Which Children Don't Participate in Sports, the Arts, and Community Programs?"

<sup>50</sup> This and the next finding are from Canadian Policy Research Networks and Canadian Council on Social Development, *Four Hypotheses about the Public Policy Significance of Youth Recreation: Lessons from a Literature Review and a Data Analysis on "Learning through Recreation"* (Ottawa, 2001).

<sup>51</sup> Gina Browne et al., *When the Bough Breaks: Provider-Initiated Comprehensive Care is More Effective and Less Expensive for Sole-Support Parents on Social Assistance* (Hamilton: McMaster University, 2000).

<sup>52</sup> S. Begley, "Your Child's Brain," *Newsweek* (February 19, 1996).

<sup>53</sup> Browne et al., *When the Bough Breaks*.

Given such important beneficial effects, it is vital that children and youth have access to quality recreation. Through its programs, services and facilities, Parks & Recreation can play a leading role in removing barriers to equal participation that are based on income, gender and other factors.