



Town of Whitchurch–Stouffville
PARKS PLAN

Phase 2: What We Heard Report



November 2024

Table of Contents

- 1 | Introduction** **1**
- 1.1 Project Timeline 2

- 2 | Phase 2: Parks Plan Development** **4**
- 2.1 Stakeholder Engagement 4
- 2.2 Public Engagement 6

- 3 | Engagement Findings** **8**
- 3.1 Stakeholder Engagement Results 8
- 3.2 Public Engagement Results 11

- 4 | Looking Ahead** **14**
- 4.1 Conclusion 14
- 4.2 Next Steps 14

INTRODUCTION

1 | Introduction

Our parks, trails, and open spaces are places for people to interact, develop social ties, and for recreation and exercise. As the Town continues to grow, a Parks Plan is being developed that will guide the development of a well-connected network of parks, trails, and open spaces to support a vibrant and healthy community for all residents and visitors.

A Parkland Dedication By-law Update will complement the Parks Plan by setting requirements for developers to provide parkland as part of new development within the Town.

The Parks Plan will support informed decision-making and prioritize the acquisition and investment in parkland across the Town, including built out communities as well as future growth areas (such as Major Transit Station Areas (MTSAs) and other Strategic Growth Areas). This work includes:

- Recommended provision levels for parkland;
- Tools to acquire and develop further parkland; and
- A revised set of categories and rules for parks (i.e., typologies) to suit new developments and better meet residential expectations.

The Parks Plan and the Parkland Dedication By-law will help position the Town to meet parkland needs over the next 25-30 years.

This report summarizes the feedback received as part of Phase 2 engagement on the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville's Parks Plan and Parkland Dedication By-law Update, and includes input from Town staff, stakeholders and members of the public.

1.1 Project Timeline

The Parks Plan is being undertaken in three phases:

Phase 1: Setting Priorities (Spring 2024)

Goals, priorities, and recommendations for the Parks Plan were developed and informed by input from the public, Town Council and staff, and key stakeholders.

Phase 2: Parks Plan Development (Fall 2024–Winter 2025)

The draft and final Parks Plan will be developed, informed, and refined by continuous input from the public, Town Council and staff, and key stakeholders.

Phase 3: Parkland Dedication By-law Update (Winter 2025)

The Parkland Dedication By-law will be prepared and presented to Council for adoption.



PHASE 1: SETTING PRIORITIES

2 | Phase 2: Parks Plan Development

The Town of Whitchurch–Stouffville engaged with stakeholders and residents to share draft concepts and strategies from the Parks Plan.

The objectives of Phase 2: Parks Plan Development were to:

- Gain feedback from the public and stakeholders on weighing the benefits and drawbacks around increasing, maintaining, and lowering park provision targets.
- Validate the opportunities and tools around parkland acquisition.
- Better understand the needs around different parkland development areas around the Town (e.g., Greenfield, Intensification, and Infill).

2.1 Stakeholder Engagement

A range of stakeholders were engaged to understand their perspectives on parks, trails and open spaces in the Town. A total of 30 stakeholders participated across 3 engagement meetings.

A summary of stakeholder engagement findings is provided in **Section 3.2**.

Town Steering Committee

(8 attendees)

- Thursday, September 26th, 1–2pm
- Virtual on Microsoft Teams

1. Office of the CAO, Legal Division

2. Community Services Department,

» Parks Division

3. Development Services Department

» Policy Planning Division

» Development Planning Division

» Economic Development

4. Whitchurch–Stouffville Public Library

5. Engineering and Public Works

» Development Engineering

Technical Advisory Committee (14 attendees)

- Tuesday, October 15th, 1-2:30pm
- Virtual on Microsoft Teams
 - » BILD GTA
 - » York Region Public Health
 - » York Region Catholic District School Board
 - » Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority
 - » Toronto and Region Conservation Authority
 - » Parks Canada
 - » York Region, Natural Heritage and Forestry

Community Stakeholder Meeting

(4 attendees)

- Thursday, October 17th, 2-4pm
- In-person at 19 on the Park (Lebovic Centre for Arts and Entertainment)
 - » Accessibility Advisory Committee
 - » Stouffville Pickleball Players
 - » Stouffville Baseball Association
 - » Heritage Advisory Committee

2.2 Public Engagement

Information about the Parks Plan and Parkland Dedication Bylaw Update was provided on the Town’s engagement website at www.townofws.ca/parksplan.

A Public Open House took place on Thursday, October 17th, 2024 from 6–8pm at 19 on the Park (Lebovic Centre for Arts and Entertainment), following the Community Stakeholder Meeting, and had approximately 20 attendees. Members of the public were notified of the Public Open House on the project webpage, road signage, through the Town’s social media and On the Road magazine, and project e-newsletter.

Members of the public were invited to review project informational panels, speak with a member of the project team, and add their thoughts and feedback to panels and park system maps. A summary of public engagement findings is provided in **Section 3.2**.



ENGAGEMENT FINDINGS

3 | Engagement Findings

3.1 Stakeholder Engagement

3.1.1 Town Steering Committee

Participants at the Town Steering Committee provided suggestions to support refinements to the Parks Plan. This feedback can be summarized as follows:

Park Provisions: Participants note an openness to refine the park provision target in a way that balances aspiration with feasibility. The participants also suggested additional contextual factors influencing park provisions, such as operational and maintenance costs.

Parkland Acquisition: Participants reiterate the need to guide the best use of dedication and cash-in-lieu within the Parks Plan and Parkland Dedication By-law. The direction will help staff with rationales around decision making. Participants identified that there is a lag in parks built from parkland dedication following the COVID-19 pandemic, where increased costs and service delays resulted in sites not being completed.

Typologies: Participants suggest the exercise on testing typologies by fitting programming and functional needs (e.g., play fields) was valuable. Part of this value was in being able to communicate typology sizing and the different functions of parks within the network.

Amenities: Participants identified the need to balance active and passive amenities in Town-owned parks, and specifically that indoor recreation facilities should not take up a large portion of newly acquired park space. While co-location is beneficial, the priority should be adding dedicated parkland rather than indoor recreation facilities that do not contribute to reaching parkland targets and can be acquired through other means (i.e., development charges).

Value to Residents: Participants identified a need to define quality-of-life aspects of parks and open space, as well as a need to engage further with school board about curriculum needs for sports fields and other curriculum amenities that require parkland (e.g., football, track and field, pickleball, etc.).

3.1.2 Technical Advisory Committee

Participants of the Technical Advisory Committee identified additional considerations around collaboration as well as more information on what parallel work other organizations are currently undertaking. The major topics of the discussion included:

School sites as opportunities for collaboration: Participants representing the Catholic School Board noted there has been good progress regarding joint-use agreements in nearby municipalities. They note these agreements could be a helpful tool in potentially enhancing community value of these spaces in the future.

Conservation Authorities as land partners: The Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority identified recent work in developing a Natural Heritage System & Restoration Strategy, which guides acquisition opportunities. There was discussion that the Town and Conservation Authorities should coordinate (or at least inform one another) on where there focus on acquisition priorities are within the Town.

3.1.3 Community Stakeholder Meeting

A total of ten comments were received on sticky notes during the community stakeholder meeting. Participants' comments were primarily centred around the perspective of the group or organization they represent (e.g., heritage, accessibility, sport, etc.).

The following four themes were identified through participant comments:

Connectivity and Wayfinding: Participants identified desired new trail connections along the western and northern borders of the Community of Stouffville, which would improve the overall connectivity of the park and trail system by addressing existing gaps. Some participants highlighted the need for enhanced wayfinding, emphasizing the importance of better signage at trail entrances and along the trails themselves. There was also a call for signage to be placed between trails, particularly in areas where gaps exist in the network, to help guide users more effectively.

Some participants expressed uncertainty about the extent of park spaces available in the Town and suggested that an online park system inventory map would help improve access by raising resident awareness of the parks and their locations.

Park Types: Participants showed interest in off-leash dog parks and nature-based play areas, with additional support for introducing eco-parks as a new park type.

Accessibility: Participants emphasized the importance of paved trails and accessible entrances to make parks and trails easier for all users to navigate. One participant noted that the trail along the Community of Stouffville's northern border is currently inaccessible for wheelchairs and motorized chairs.

Indigenous History: One participant proposed incorporating Indigenous heritage into the park system through park naming, wayfinding, storytelling, and appropriate plantings. They made specific reference to local artifacts and longhouse indications found near John Baptiste Lane, and that this type of heritage could be marked and identified in parks, where appropriate.

3.2 Public Engagement Results

Open house participants were interested in learning more about the components of the Parks Plan. The project team shared the primary principles of the Parks Plan with open house participants. These principles (expand, connect, preserve, enhance) were used as a framework for engagement. Participant feedback is summarized below according to these four principles, plus additional comments that fall outside of the principles.

A total of 29 comments were received on sticky notes during the open house. Several participants had in-depth conversations with members of the project team.

Expand: Participants expressed that the Town should prioritize the expansion of the park system, with mention of expansion in the Vandorf and Musselman's Lake areas.

Concerns were raised about overcrowding in current parks, which impacts accessibility, traffic and parking. Participants feel there is a need for more parks, like parkettes with playgrounds, in areas that are experiencing growth and development to reduce pressure on existing parks in Town.

Connect: Participants would like to see improved trail connectivity throughout the Town to improve their access to new and existing parks. They also emphasized the need for clear signage and markers throughout the trail system.

Specific suggestions for improved connections include:

- A trail from 10th Line to Bethesda Sports Fields; and
- A connection between Harry Bowes Public School and Bethesda Sports Fields.

Preserve: Participants highlighted the need to preserve existing parks and natural areas, and that this element should be prioritized while the Town experiences growth and development.

Enhance: Where expansion (development of new parks) is not possible, participants understand the value of enhancing existing park assets to improve user experience and capacity. Participants suggested various improvements for the Town's existing parks, including enhanced lighting, converting dedicated sports courts to multi-use courts, adding more pickleball courts, and installing bike racks, shade structures, and picnic areas. One participant suggested that there could be a review process (i.e., every few years) to evaluate whether a park needs repairs, new features and amenities, and to respond to challenges, which would be beneficial to ensure the park continues to meet community needs.

Several participants emphasized the need for accessibility in both current and future parks, with accessible parking identified as a priority for some.

Additional Themes

Park Types: Participants generally favoured larger parks over small parks, such as parkettes. One participant highlighted the need for play spaces for children and families in new developments, emphasizing the continued importance of parkettes. However, they support the view that the Town requires more medium and large parks to meet community needs.

Participants are interested in park typologies presented by the Project Team that would offer amenities and facilities that support a range of recreational opportunities and activities for children, as well as adults.

Acquisition: One participant noted a preference for obtaining parkland through parkland dedication rather than cash-in-lieu contributions.

LOOKING AHEAD

4 | Looking Ahead

4.1 Conclusion

The second phase of engagement on the Parks Plan and Parkland Dedication By-law Update confirmed that residents who use the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville's park system are passionate about seeing the system expanded, connected, preserved and enhanced in the future. Many participants advocated for their park use preferences and interests (e.g., pickleball, baseball, accessibility) and wish to see park spaces that can accommodate more Stouffville residents.

Feedback received will guide the Town in developing the Parks Plan and Parkland Dedication By-law Update that supports existing park uses and preserves natural areas, while accommodating emerging recreational needs as the population continues to grow.

4.2 Next Steps

The final Parks Plan will be shaped and refined by feedback from Phase 2 of community engagement, incorporating input from the public, Town Council, staff, and key stakeholders as outlined in this report.

Phase 3, scheduled for Winter 2025, will focus on preparing the draft Parks Plan and updating the Parkland Dedication By-law, which will then be prepared and presented to Council for adoption.

