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**Subject:** Parks Plan and Parkland Dedication By-law Update

**Staff Report No.** DS-028-25

**Department/  
Commission:** Development Services Commission

**Date:** June 18, 2025

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**Recommendation:**

- 1) That Council receive Report No. DS-028-25 for information.

**Report Highlights**

- The Town is undertaking a Parks Plan and Parkland Dedication By-law Update Study to guide the future acquisition of parkland within the Town.
- This Report highlights some of the key recommendations that will be proposed through the Parks Plan and Parkland Dedication By-law, which will be presented to key stakeholders, and is anticipated to be made available to the public for review and comment in Summer 2025.
- The Draft Parks Plan and Parkland Dedication By-law is anticipated to be brought forward to Council in Fall/Winter 2025 for adoption, pending the approval of the Town's New Official Plan.
- The proposed recommendations of the Parks Plan have been determined to help the Town meet its current parks needs. It is anticipated that the Parks Plan and Parkland Dedication By-law will require review again in 3 – 5 years.

**1. Purpose:**

The purpose of this Report is to provide Council with an update on the Parks Plan and Parkland Dedication By-law Update Study, including some of the key draft preliminary recommendations and next steps.

## 2. Background:

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 updated requirements for developers to provide parkland as part of new development within the Town.

The Parks Plan will support decision-making and prioritize the acquisition and investment in parkland across the Town, and will include a needs assessment and review of provision targets for:

- All existing parkland within the Town of Stouffville (differentiating between tableland parkland and natural heritage or hazard lands).
- Town-owned properties that currently serve other uses but could serve as potential candidates for future parkland.
- Future growth areas as identified in the Town's New Official Plan, including MTSA's (Stouffville GO and Old Elm GO Major Transit Station Areas) and other Strategic Growth Areas (Western Approach Mixed Use Area, Downtown Core Area).
- Public open spaces not owned by the Town but used by the public such as school board properties and utility corridor lands.

The Parks Plan will also include an assessment of new park typologies and associated amenities to help meet the proposed updated park provision targets. As a result of proposed changes to the *Planning Act*, through Bill 23, as outlined in [Report No. DS-081-22: Bill 23 – More Homes Built Faster Act, 2022, Analysis and Implications, December 21, 2022](#), the Study will provide recommendations with respect to the potential acquisition and parkland dedication credits related to Privately Owned Publicly Accessible Spaces (POPS) (i.e. parkettes, urban squares), and parks with underground infrastructure or strata parks owned by a third party (i.e. parks over storm water management systems or underground garages). At the time of writing this Report, these changes are not yet in force and effect and are pending the enactment of implementing provincial regulations.

In January 2024, the Town retained a consulting team led by O2 Planning + Design, assisted by Gladki Planning Associates, and Watson & Associates Economists Ltd. to undertake the Study.

The project timeline consists of the following 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. On June 19, 2024, Council received [Report No. DS-031-24](#) for information, which provided an update on the Parks Plan and the key findings from the Phase 1 consultations, which are summarized in the [Phase 1: What We Heard Report](#).

### **Phase 2: Parks Plan Development (Fall 2024)**

- The draft and final Parks Plan will be developed and will be informed and refined by continuing input from the public, Town Council and staff, and key stakeholders. On December 11, 2024, Council received [Report No. DS-061-24](#) for information, which provided an update on the Parks Plan and the key findings from the Phase 2 consultations, which are summarized in the [Phase 2: What We Heard Report](#).

### **Phase 3: Parkland Dedication By-law Update (Fall/Winter 2025)**

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

The project webpage provides further details and background information related to the Study: [www.townofws.ca/parksplan](http://www.townofws.ca/parksplan)

## **3. Analysis:**

The following sections provide an overview of the key draft recommendations which will be proposed through the Parks Plan and Parkland Dedication By-law, and study next steps.

### **3.1 Preliminary Recommendations (Big Moves)**

As outlined in the presentation to Council, the following summarizes the “Big Moves” that will inform the draft Parks Plan and Parkland Dedication By-law. The recommendations are preliminary at this point and may be revised subject to further external legal review and consultation with stakeholders over the summer. Furthermore, these recommendations and underlying supporting rationale will be further articulated in the draft Parks Plan, anticipated to be available in Summer 2025 for review and comment.

#### **The Big Move 1: Update the Park Provision Target**

The Town currently has a comparatively smaller parkland provision rate of 1.65ha per 1,000 persons based on a review of comparable municipalities. While the Town’s Leisure and Community Services Master Plan, identifies a target of 2.0ha per 1,000 persons, this

target is no longer deemed feasible in light of recent changes to provincial legislation and the Town's ability to acquire parkland. It is anticipated the Town will acquire less parkland through development as a result of provincial changes to the Planning Act. As a result, in order to achieve a higher provision, target the Town would need to spend more funds on parkland acquisition in the future.

***Preliminary Recommendation:***

The consulting team has assessed various provision targets and have identified a preliminary recommended provision target of **1.75ha per 1,000 persons** which responds to the need to grow the park system beyond current levels while balancing the financial considerations of acquiring parkland, beyond that which may be permitted by the *Planning Act*. It is also noteworthy, that numerous other municipalities are looking to reduce their parkland provision target, in light of the changes to the *Planning Act*.

**The Big Move 2: Update Park Typologies**

Park typologies are a useful tool in regulating the shape, location, service levels and function of park spaces in the network. The Parks Plan will update the park typologies (i.e., classifications) described in the Leisure and Community Services Master Plan. The updates support the Town in ensuring sufficient, programmable parkland by adjusting size ranges based on functional needs. The updates also add design criteria and simplify ambiguity between previous classifications.

***Preliminary Recommendation:***

The preliminary recommendations are to consolidate and simplify the current park typologies by combining the Community and Neighbourhood Park typology into a single Neighbourhood Park Typology. The Parks Plan will also establish additional guidance and requirements for parks, related to: required road frontage, size and configuration, location and parking requirements, and the types of recreational facilities and amenities that may be accommodated within each park typology. It is also important to note that there is an over abundance of parkettes in the Town, and the Town should seek to acquire larger and more programmable Neighbourhood Parks where appropriate and feasible.

The Parks Plan will also identify a new linear park typology which includes publicly accessible open spaces that are large enough to operate as parkland (minimum of 20m wide), providing opportunities for active transportation, recreation or social encounters in addition to their role as connectors. Linear parks would not include: stormwater easements, hydro corridors, environmental area buffers, and top of bank along stormwater management facilities.

## **The Big Move 2: POPS (Privately-Owned Public Spaces)**

Privately-Owned Public Spaces (POPS) are lands that are privately owned but appear and function as public space. They are publicly accessible via legal agreements between the property owner and the municipality but are privately operated and maintained. POPS can complement the park system by providing additional space for residents to socialize, relax, and enjoy a positive social environment. Where land area is tight, such as higher density urban environments, these spaces have the potential to successfully work as public spaces.

Notwithstanding, the potential drawbacks associated with POPS include:

- They are often limited in their programming potential, particularly when it comes to recreation.
- They do not always feel “public” and instead may feel like a private amenity space that serves an adjacent building.
- They need to be managed through agreements to ensure they remain at a level of service and in operation over the long term.

### ***Preliminary Recommendation:***

The preliminary recommendation is that POPS should only be contemplated for parkland credits within Strategic Growth Areas (i.e., MTSAs, Western Approach / Gateway Mixed Use Area, and the Highway 48 Mixed Use Area), and evaluated on a case-by-case basis, subject to achieving certain criteria, related to: a size and configuration that is cohesive and regularly shaped and achieves the Town’s minimum park typology requirements; the inclusion of active and passive recreational facilities; an approved Site Plan and agreement ensuring continued operation, maintenance, etc.; and that it remains open and accessible to the public.

## **The Big Move 2: Strata Parks and Encumbered Land**

**Strata Parks** are publicly owned parkland located on top of privately-owned buildings or structures, including but not limited to parking garages. **Encumbered land** includes configurations where the municipality owns the parkland as well as major infrastructure underneath such as stormwater tanks.

These park configurations will pose challenges with respect to:

- Flexibility in programming and design
- More frequent lifecycle replacements
- Increased costs
- More complex maintenance agreements

***Preliminary Recommendation:***

The preliminary recommendation is that the Town should not accept Strata Parks or Encumbered land as eligible for parkland dedication credit due to the challenges outlined above. Should Council support this position, another review of the Parks Plan and Parkland Dedication By-law will be undertaken again in 3 – 5 years.

Furthermore, the Town should be striving to achieve a parkland provision target that meets its needs and is more aligned with comparable municipalities. Permitting Strata Parks or Encumbered lands is not helpful towards this goal as it would offset fee simple parkland acquisition that offers programmable flexibility without the complexity and cost constraints. The Town is also not anticipated to receive the same scale of intensification in comparison to other urban centres in Ontario; as such, the need to prioritize space efficiency over public land open supply is less severe.

Notwithstanding, the Town's position on alternative configurations should be reevaluated when the province provides additional guidance on implementing POPS, Strata Parks, and Encumbered land.

**The Big Move 3: The Tools**

The Parks Plan will establish an enhanced set of tools that the Town should use to acquire new parkland, to ensure the greatest benefit to the Town. These include financial, planning and partnering tools, related to parkland dedication and acquisition, the development and revitalization of existing parks, and partnership opportunities to manage, grow, and enhance the park and open space network. The Parks Plan will establish strategic actions, with associated timelines and responsibilities for implementation.

**3.2 Next Steps**

The draft Parks Plan and Parkland Dedication By-law is currently being prepared and is anticipated to be made available in Summer 2025 for review and comment on the project webpage: [www.townofws.ca/parksplan](http://www.townofws.ca/parksplan). The Town has retained an external law firm to undertake a legal review of the By-law. All stakeholders and members of the public that have signed up to receive the project e-newsletter will be notified when the documents are available.

The draft Parks Plan and Parkland Dedication By-law is anticipated to be presented to the Technical Advisory Committee, and Stakeholders (including BILD) in Summer 2025 for review and comment. Further to that, the documents are anticipated to be presented to Council for adoption in Fall/Winter 2025. The timing is contingent upon the approval of the Town's New Official Plan, which is currently with the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing for approval, as the New Official Plan provides policies to enable the Town to implement the alternative parkland dedication rates.

#### **4. Options:**

##### **4.1 Option A (Recommended)**

That Council receive this Staff Report for information.

#### **5. Financial Implications:**

None

#### **6. Broader Intergovernmental Impacts and/or Considerations:**

None

#### **7. Communication:**

The draft Parks Plan and Parkland Dedication By-law is currently being finalized and is anticipated to be made available in the Summer 2025 for review and comment on the project webpage: [www.townofws.ca/parksplan](http://www.townofws.ca/parksplan). The Town will be meeting with interested stakeholders to present the documents and receive feedback. All stakeholders and members of the public that have signed up to receive the project e-newsletter will be notified when the documents are available.

#### **8. Alignment with Strategic Plan:**

1. A Town that Grows  
A Town that grows in support of complete communities
2. A Town that Moves  
Improve the condition and efficiency of the local road network while addressing connectivity and advancing active transportation facilities
3. A Healthy and Greener Town  
Increase Offerings and Opportunities for Active Living

#### **9. Attachments:**

None

## 10. Related Reports:

[December 11, 2024 – Report No. DS-061-24: Parks Plan and Parkland Dedication By-law Update](#)

[June 19, 2024 – Report No. DS-031-24: Parks Plan and Parkland Dedication By-law Update Study](#)

[December 21, 2022 – Report No. DS-081-22: Bill 23 – More Homes Built Faster Act, 2022, Analysis and Implications](#)

[September 21, 2022 – Report No. LCS-010-22: Leisure & Community Services Master Plan Update](#)

[September 7, 2022 – Report No. DS-048-22: Parkland Dedication By-law Update](#)

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**For further information on this report, please contact the Commissioner of Development Services:** Dwayne Tapp, at 905-640-1900 or 1-855-642-8697 ext. 2431 or via email at [dwayne.tapp@townofws.ca](mailto:dwayne.tapp@townofws.ca)