

PARK PLANNING IN ETHNIC MINORITY NEIGHBOURHOODS: TORONTO'S
PRIORITY AREAS

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the park planning and design process in ethnic minority neighbourhoods, such as Toronto's 13 Priority Areas. Through the selection of two case study Priority Areas (Jane-Finch and Malvern), an extensive literature review, interviews and youth focus groups, issues in park planning in the Toronto context are identified. Qualitative data collection highlights concerns regarding standardized parks that do not meet the needs of their diverse clientele, inadequate facilities and lack of public participation in park planning. Recommendations for park planning for ethnic minority neighbourhoods include approaching park planning as a process rather than a service, conducting park user surveys, improving access to information, and community mobilization, among others.

An article on park planning in ethnic minority neighbourhoods, used the key words: park; planning; ethnicity; Toronto Priority Areas.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As part of the larger community infrastructure, parks provide spaces for healthy lifestyles, social interaction, and help to make cities livable by improving the overall quality of life. In cities such as the City of Toronto, the presence of ethnically diverse populations can make park planning a complex process. In particular, it can be challenging to plan park space in neighbourhoods such as the 13 Priority Areas, where there is a high concentration of immigrants, visible minorities, low-income families, and a growing number of children and seniors. The City of Toronto must approach the issue of park planning in a way that recognizes and responds to the needs of such a multicultural city and encourages people from all walks of life to utilize the City's parks. This paper explores how parks can be better planned to meet the needs of ethnic communities, such as Toronto's Priority Areas.

Methodology for the project is comprised of interviews with planners and community organizations, as well as focus groups that were conducted with students. The primary research was enhanced through an extensive review of existing literature on parks, ethnic communities and Toronto's Priority Areas. Literature relevant to the topic of parks planning for ethnic communities is broken down in the literature review into the larger themes of the history of parks, benefits of parks, and differences between the preferences of park users. Instead of focusing on the park preference of (or within) different ethnic groups, this paper is concerned with improving park planning for ethnic communities as a whole.

To determine how park planning can be improved for ethnic minority communities in the City of Toronto context, a review of relevant policies, direction and reports that guide park planning is undertaken. Two case study areas, Jane-Finch and Malvern were selected from the Priority Areas to focus research. Both

neighbourhoods can be considered “ethnic minority areas”, as well over 50% of the population in both identify themselves as visible minorities.

Concerns were raised about the standardization of current park design in Toronto, which has resulted in parks being unable to meet the needs of their users. Community representatives also raised issues about accessibility to green space and information. Finally, there is a general consensus among park planners and community groups that there should be an increase in public participation in the park planning process. Communities should not be left with a park as a service or product, but engaged in participatory park planning as a means of capacity building. The formation of a multi-disciplinary park steering committee is recommended along with community workshops, charrettes, and other forms of participation.

During focus groups in the Jane-Finch area, youth raised issues about lack of facilities. In Malvern, the opening of the Nike Sports Complex in 2006 has provided youth with a place to play but has not been well maintained. As prominent park users that often feel unwanted in park space, the focus groups illustrated that youth must be used as resources in park planning.

A well-planned park will take into account how the park will be programmed. In Toronto, the silo-ization of park planning and programming must be addressed. Further, strategies such as Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design, User Need Surveys, and improved methods of park management are recommended. Finally, the park planning and improvement process in Toronto is very much a reaction to community mobilization and accordingly, communities must come together if they want to see improvements made to their parks.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Public places form an essential part of the urban landscape. As a part of the larger community infrastructure, these spaces contribute to strengthening community solidarity, social networks, and overall quality of life (Strong Neighbourhoods Task Force, 2005a). Parks in particular can promote healthy lifestyles and social interaction. These benefits can be reaped through favourable physical and social settings, as well as through facilities and programming (Gobster, 2002). The planning of favourable physical and social settings, as well as satisfactory facilities and programming, however, can prove to be a challenge in ethnically diverse communities. What some users consider an excellent park may completely exclude the needs of another group. Emerging studies from the park design field have revealed that conventional parks are not meeting the needs of diverse users (Loukaitou-Sideris, 1995; Floyd, 2001; Ho et al., 2005). This is an issue that is of concern in a city such as the City of Toronto, whose parks serve an ethnically diverse clientele. In particular, it can be challenging to plan park space in neighbourhoods such as the 13 Priority Areas in Toronto, where there is a high concentration of immigrants, visible minorities, low-income families, and a growing number of children and seniors (City of Toronto, 2008a).

Problem/Issue

The Toronto Official Plan recognizes the importance of parks, stating that Toronto's green spaces help to make the City healthy and livable by improving the quality of life and social-well-being. It emphasizes that the parks should be safe, accessible and serve individual as well as community needs (City of

Toronto, 2007). The Official Plan Land Use Designation Map designates parks and zoning by-laws zone these areas as parks/open space. Although designating and zoning areas as parks is absolutely crucial, planners must also take into account park users and park programming when planning parks. Further, permitted uses in parks must accommodate the needs of ethnically diverse users.

The overall purpose of the proposed research paper will be to explore how parks can be planned to meet the needs of ethnic communities, such as Toronto's Priority Areas. Specific objectives include the following:

- To select 2 case studies that are representative of the 13 Priority Areas to focus the research;
- To understand key issues, barriers and processes in planning parks for ethnically diverse communities through literature review, data collection and interviews;
- To examine existing or proposed park plans for select Priority Areas;
- To explore best practices of parks planning for diverse communities through literature review and interviews; and
- To analyze the gathered data to make recommendations for maximizing the potential of parks in the case study areas and Toronto's Priority Areas in general.

The City of Toronto must approach the issue of park planning in a way that recognizes and responds to the needs of such a multicultural city. As there is no existing research on park planning for ethnic communities in the City of Toronto

context, this paper examines how parks can be better planned to meet the needs of ethnic minority neighbourhoods, such as Toronto's Priority Areas.

Chapter 2: Methodology

Complementary data collection methods were used for the purpose of the research project. Data was collected through both primary and secondary research collection methods. Interviews with planners and community organizations were carried out, and focus groups were conducted with students. The primary research was enhanced with an extensive review of existing literature on parks, ethnic communities and Toronto's Priority Areas. Two case studies (Jane-Finch and Malvern) were then selected from the 13 Priority Areas to focus the research.

Literature Review

The review of existing literature forms one cornerstone of the project, and the primary research forms another cornerstone. Peer-reviewed scholarly journal articles, reports, books, magazine articles, City of Toronto documents, and some websites were utilized to gather information on parks planning for Toronto's Priority Areas. Articles that addressed parks planning in diverse neighbourhoods were examined, along with resources that spoke specifically about the City of Toronto. Accordingly, the literature review provides historical context and connects the research at hand to the larger body of knowledge on the topic (Neuman, 2006). Many of the academic resources come from the urban and regional planning discipline, although some tackle the topic from a leisure and recreation or psychology perspective. Relevant sources were obtained through an extensive and wide-ranging search of electronic indexes and databases, such as

ProQuest, Scholars Portal Search, Sage Journals and GoogleScholar. Books obtained through the Ryerson University Library and Toronto Urban Affairs Library were also utilized, though to a lesser extent, as many were outdated. The literature review provided the researcher with strong background knowledge of the issues at hand, which was necessary in order to proceed with the primary research component of the project.

Qualitative Interviews

In-person and phone qualitative interviews were conducted with three municipal parks and recreation planners for the City of Toronto, two university professors, as well as with six representatives from various community groups from the two neighbourhoods. Interviewees represented groups such as Evergreen, Jane-Finch.com, Malvern Youth Cabinet, Black Creek Community Health Centre and the Action for Neighbourhood Change (ANC), among others. In addition to the interviews, information was also gathered from a special Parks and Environment Panel run by the City of Toronto in March of 2010.

The researcher was provided with contacts for municipal planners, who then in turn referred them to the appropriate parks and recreation planners. For community associations, an Internet search was conducted to obtain e-mail addresses for intended interviewees. If no e-mail address was found for the intended interviewees, the general e-mail address provided on the website was used. The recruitment process for setting up qualitative interviews consisted of making initial contact, providing an overview of the research project, and gauging the interest of the potential participant. If there was interest expressed, further

information on the project and consent forms were e-mailed. Interviews were then arranged, and were roughly 30 minutes in length each.

The interviewing of parks and recreation planners and representatives from community groups was necessary to gain a deeper understanding of the existing state of neighbourhood parks, any on-going or planned future initiatives and barriers to park improvements, among many other issues. Unlike much of the secondary information found through a review of literature, this qualitative data is up-to-date and directly addresses the research topic. Furthermore, interviewing the representatives from community groups provided invaluable insight on the neighbourhoods and local resident opinions on parks. Additional benefits of qualitative interviewing method include the flexibility of the interview design, which allowed for a more continuous, in-depth discussion of the research issue (Babbie, 2001).

Focus Groups

Focus groups were held with students in each of the two case study neighbourhoods. In the Jane-Finch neighbourhood, the focus group was conducted with a class at Brookview Middle School. Located in the heart of the community, the school is situated at the intersection of Jane Street and Driftwood Avenue and prides itself on its diversity (Toronto District School Board, 2009). In Malvern, it was conducted through a community group in the neighbourhood. Youth of the same ages participated in both focus groups.

In order to set up focus groups, several schools in each neighbourhood were contacted. It was decided that the groups would be conducted in a

classroom at a middle school in both the Jane-Finch and Malvern areas. An Internet search was carried out to compile telephone numbers and e-mail addresses for the schools. All middle schools in the neighbourhoods were contacted, and selection was based on which schools responded first. Once the contact at the school (usually the Vice-Principal) expressed that a teacher was interested in hosting the focus group during class time, they were e-mailed information on the nature of the project, as well as the consent and assent forms. Unfortunately, a focus group could not be conducted in a Malvern school due to lack of responsiveness from schools in the neighbourhood.

The focus group was identified as a research collection method because it allows for a guided discussion with a group of children at one time. Focus groups are advantageous because they provide opinions/attitude of a certain group, facilitate the collection of up-to-the-minute data, are flexible in design, can produce quick results and are not costly. A group setting can also bring about different dynamics or varying perspectives on the topic (Babbie, 2001). Holding the focus group in a school setting is beneficial because the teacher will be present to assist in the moderation, which might have been otherwise difficult in a setting with youth.

Together, conducting the interviews, focus groups and literature review established a strong foundation on the topic, which allowed for the provision of recommendations to improve the planning of parks to meet the needs of ethnic minority communities, such as Toronto's Priority Areas.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

Literature relevant to the topic of parks planning for ethnic communities can be broken down in the larger themes of the history of parks, benefits of parks, and differences between the preferences of park users. Theoretical frameworks have also been offered on varying park preferences of different user groups. While there is literature available that pertains to planning parks for ethnically diverse communities, very little of it looks specifically at the Canadian context.

Terminology

Before this paper begins to explore how to improve parks planning for ethnically diverse communities, it is necessary to operationalize the terms that are central to the research. There are inconsistencies as to how terms such as 'park', 'ethnicity', 'visible minority' and 'immigrant' are defined across scholarly literature and policies.

In the context of Toronto, parks are organized based on categories that were established in the Parkland Acquisition Strategic Directions report that was endorsed by Council in early 2002. Local parkland serves the communities that are within walking-distance for the most part. Local parkland can be further broken down into parkettes, which are smaller parks that offer seating and/or passive recreation opportunities, and local parks that have a wide range of passive and active recreation amenities for the neighbourhood. City-wide parkland, on the other hand, serves residents from across the entire City of Toronto. It includes larger district parks that draw users from outside the local area as well as the local community and city parks, which offer unique or specialized recreation amenities and attracts users from across the City (City of

Toronto, 2007). All four of these types of parks will be considered in this paper, although the case studies will focus on local parks.

The terms 'ethnicity', 'visible minority', 'immigrant' and 'newcomer' have varying definitions depending on the source, although most definitions have common characteristics. All definitions of ethnicity, for example, generally involve some notion that the term is socially constructed, biologically self-perpetuating, describes a group that shares cultural values and identifies itself as a category separate from other categories (Li et al., 2007). Since this paper will make use of Canadian census information retrieved from Statistics Canada to examine data on ethnicity, visible minorities and immigrants, it is logical that the Statistics Canada definitions are utilized. Statistics Canada describes ethnicity as a multidimensional concept that is based on race, origin, ancestry, identity, language and religion, or even more "subtle" elements such as culture, customs, beliefs and practices. As a dynamic variable, it changes over time and new ethnic identities can be formed. Ethnicity is measured by origin, ancestry, race and identity (Statistics Canada, 2010). This paper also makes reference to "ethnic minority areas", which is used as a term to describe areas in which ethnic minorities make up a majority of the total population.

Similarly, Statistics Canada uses the Employment Equity Act definition of 'visible minority' to refer to a person who is "non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour". Aboriginal people are not considered visible minorities (Statistics Canada, 2010). An immigrant is someone who moved to Canada for the purpose of settlement, and has been granted permission by immigration authorities to

permanently reside in Canada. The term usually refers to people who were born outside of Canada, and is a life-long attribute. As such, immigrants are usually distinguished between newcomers and those who have resided in Canada for a longer period (Statistics Canada, 2010).

History of Parks Planning/Design

In a classic study about urban parks, sociologist Galen Cranz (1982) separates the history of urban parks in the United States into four models: the Pleasure Ground (1850-1900), the Reform Park (1900-1930), the Recreation Facility (1930-1965), and the Open Space System (1965-?), each of which responded to emerging social issues. Expansive parks, such as those designed by Frederick Law Olmstead embodied the Pleasure Ground model. They provided relief from the hectic city life, promoting public health and social reform. They were designed in a pastoral style to simulate nature, but were not nearly as wild and offered both passive and active recreation. Renowned landscape architect Fredrick Law Olmsted stated that parks ought to, “inspire communal feelings among all urban classes, muting resentments over disparities of wealth and fashion” (Taylor, 1999). However, because they were located at the edges of cities, these parks were not accessible to the working class and became playgrounds for the elite (Cranz, 1982). In Reform Parks, planners attempted to use the park to reform cities through the assimilation of new immigrants. The parks were much smaller, subject to symmetrical site planning, did not simulate nature and featured a field house that acted as a poor man’s clubhouse. With the appointment of Robert Moses as the Commissioner of the New York City Parks

Department, the Recreational Facility era took off. These parks had no social goals beyond serving physical development through the service of active recreational facilities, such as stadiums, basketball and tennis courts, and benefitted mostly suburban areas. Emerging around the mid-1960s, the Open Space model took a very different approach by regarding all open space as valuable for recreation. These varied parks were based on a more artistic, participatory sense, and paid much more attention to programming (Cranz, 1982). Cranz recently proposed a fifth model that began to surface around the 1990s, the Sustainable Park model, which responds to ecological issues. The Sustainable Park treats park areas as part of the larger urban system and features native plant species, permeable surfaces, ecological restoration and green infrastructure (Cranz & Boland, 2004). Recently, Byrne and Wolch (2009) also addressed the history of parks as spaces of social control, where ethnic, racial or class tensions are played out. Although the history of parks planning in the City of Toronto is not a direct reflection of this system, there are connections that can be made within the Toronto context.

Toronto's first parks were unnatural green spaces where settlers planted trees and shrubs reminiscent of their home nations. By the beginning of the 19th century, the acquisition of parkland was common where there was prominent development occurring, such as along the Humber and in Rosedale. By 1908, the Board of Education for the City had established five supervised playgrounds (City of Toronto, 2004). This ushered in an era of recreational parks. After the creation of the Parks Department, the City quickly set up skating rinks, hockey rinks, slides

and toboggan runs across Toronto. At this time, the municipal government was not interested in preserving Toronto's natural landscape, a prime example being the destruction of Eastern Canada's largest wetland in Ashbridges Bay (City of Toronto, 2004). With the creation of Metropolitan Toronto in 1953 and Hurricane Hazel in 1954, however, the conservation movement gained momentum (De Sousa, 2003). Simultaneously, Toronto was facing a major wave of new immigrants. As the needs of park users have evolved over time, parks planning and design has remained relatively unchanged in the City of Toronto.

Importance of Parks

In the late 19th century, advocates of urban parks argued that parks were needed in order to provide citizens with scenic, restful places that offered relief from the city and motivated moral values (Cooke, 2007). Even in the 1850s, urban parks were recognized as being more than just aesthetically pleasing, but places where people from different walks of life could come to interact. Since this time, it has been accepted that parks offer social, ecological, health and quality of life value as well. For many urban residents, parks are places where they are able to interact with nature and receive "natural relief" from the hustle and bustle of urban living (Thompson, 2002). Chris Walker (2004) proposed that in addition to these "traditional" benefits, there is an emerging "new view" of parks as important assets that can help to achieve greater urban policy goals, such as creating job opportunities, youth development, public health and community building. He writes that parks can unite people of different races or income groups and build social capital, especially through working on projects together and building partnerships with other groups (Walker, 2004). When parks are approached as

“salad bowls” instead of “melting pots”, they can begin to bridge the needs of different users.

Not only are parks beneficial for the general public, psychologists, anthropologists, geographers and urban planners alike have argued they can have positive impacts on youth development (Hart, 1978; Loukaitous-Sideris & Stieglitz, 2002; Turner, 2004). As early as the 1970s, researchers understood that parks provide children and youth with places to play, interact with nature, explore, socialize, and burn off energy (Hart, 1978; Burgess et al., 1988). In low-income neighbourhoods, children may not have access to nature otherwise, and cannot afford to play in private facilities that are far from their homes (Loukaitou-Sideris & Stieglitz, 2002). Through the introduction of innovative programming, parks can build assets such as self-esteem, leadership, creativity, and empowerment in youth. This in turn, contributes to positive physical, intellectual, psychological/emotional and social youth development (Turner, 2004). In recent years, however, there has been a tendency towards “hardening” public space and planning in a way that restricts some of the actions of youth. This includes the standardization of parks and favouring activities that require supervision, such as little leagues (Wooley & Johns, 2001). This can be a barrier to achieving the full potential of parks for youth. Offering the right programs, engaging youth and allowing them to take the lead on managing programs, are ways to encourage youth to make use of parks and reap their benefits (City of Toronto, 2004).

Parks and Ethnic Communities

Research on racial/ethnic minority groups and recreation/leisure patterns began to emerge around the 1960s, and knowledge on the topic has grown and

evolved since then (Floyd, 1998). Early research focused on select ethnic groups and their leisure patterns. Hutchison (1987) examined African American, White and Hispanic populations in Chicago and found major differences between the leisure preferences of the groups. Hispanic people, for example, were more engaged in stationary activities than their White or African American counterparts. In a separate study based on Detroit residents, West (1989) found that while African-American people used city parks more, Caucasians were more likely to utilize regional parks. Aware that ethnic groups are not homogenous entities, Woodard (1988) examined leisure preferences between African-American people who were raised in the urban north of the United States compared to those in the rural south. In Canada, very little research is available, but Malpass (1973) did contribute greatly when he/she explored the recreation participation needs of European immigrants new to the country.

To explain the existence of variations in preferences and under-participation of minority groups in parks, scholars have utilized two explanations: the marginality and ethnicity hypotheses (Washburne, 1978). The marginality hypothesis holds that under-representation occurs due to low-socioeconomic status, lack of access and discrimination. The ethnicity hypothesis explains that differences in park usage are actually a result of sub-cultural differences in leisure (Washburne, 1978). In the classic studies of Washburne (1978) and Stamps and Stamps (1985), it was found that race was more important than class with regards to leisure preferences. Floyd et al. questioned this, however, when they found that Black and White populations of the middle-class have similar preferences,

but that this was not the case between those in the lower socio-economic classes (Floyd et al., 1994). A number of researchers have come forward since to test whether ethnicity is a variable that has a strong relationship with park preferences, and many have found that it is (Payne et al., 2002; Sasidharan, 2004; Ho et al., 2005)

Over the last two decades, a number of scholars have continued to contribute to the pool of knowledge on differences between the park preferences of ethnic groups (Loukaitou-Sideris, 1995; Floyd, 2001; Gobster, 2002; Payne et al., 2002; Morris, 2003; Sasidharan et al., 2004; Ho et al., 2005). A majority of this research has taken place in the United States, but some is also based on findings from the United Kingdom. Payne et al. (2002) found that African Americans prefer parklands that serve some recreational purpose, while Anglo-whites are more likely to use parks individually and appreciate their natural environment. Literature has also expanded to include other ethnic groups. Four case studies of parks in ethnically diverse neighbourhoods in Los Angeles were studied by Loukaitou-Sideris (1995) to determine similarities and differences between park users. She found that similar park preferences in ethnic groups as earlier studies, but also that the Chinese population was underrepresented because they are not familiar with parks as recreational spaces, but landscaped gardens. Sasidharan et al. (2005), examined Hispanic, Chinese, Japanese and Korean urban populations in addition to African American and White groups. Of note in this study was the finding that Hispanic and Korean groups prefer information to be available about the parks in their languages, and that they believe it is important that there are

people of their own ethnicity in the park and staff who understood their customs. Generally, there has been a consensus among scholars the needs of park users vary based on ethnicity.

More recently, literature has emerged that looks at the greater picture of planning parks in ethnically diverse neighbourhoods and direction on how to best accommodate these park users. While some offer more general strategies such as universal park design, others are much more detailed. Ensuring accessibility, increasing safety (or feelings of safety), enhancing awareness, reaching out to local populations, undergoing sensitivity training and hiring of diverse staff are some ways in which to improve parks for ethnic groups (Gobster, 2002; Lanfer & Taylor, 2006). Rishbeth (2001) goes beyond this, and explains that landscapes have a symbolic dimension and can be interpreted differently by ethnic minority groups. They must be designed in an inclusive manner, by including visual cues of different cultures, places for large groups to socialize, facilities for sports and activities that are common among users, dog-free areas, cafes, signage and visitor centres (Rishbeth, 2001). Almost all researchers that provide direction for improving parks for ethnically diverse communities make note of the differences between neighbourhoods and point out that each community should plan based on local context.

In her book entitled *Cosmopolis II: Mongrel Cities in the 21st Century*, Sandercock (2003) argues in favour of the 'multicultural model', which asserts that "multicultural citizenship appears to be the most viable solution to the problem of defining membership of a nation-state in an increasing mobile world,"

and that policies and social services must respond to the needs of newcomers. Further, Sandercock introduces the notion of urban/local citizenship, whereby different groups create expressions of their identity through spaces such as places of worship, commercial activity, and recreational facilities. Claims to public space and attempting to influence the built form to reflect the cultural diversity are encouraged (Sandercock, 2003). Improving public spaces is one way in which to encourage community organizations within different ethnic groups, but also promote cross-cultural events and social interaction.

It is along these lines that this research paper picks up. Instead of focusing on the park preference of (or within) different ethnic groups, the paper will be concerned with improving park planning for ethnic communities as a whole. There has not been any literature that has looked at ethnic communities within the City of Toronto, and especially within the 13 Priority Areas. This field of research is relatively new, and as such, this paper fills a gap in existing literature.

Chapter 4: The City of Toronto

In order to determine how park planning can be improved for ethnic minority communities in the City of Toronto context, a review of relevant local policies and governance is necessary. This section examines the City of Toronto Official Plan, Our Common Grounds strategic park plan, the forthcoming City-wide Parks Plan and Recreation Service Plan, in addition to the Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division. It concludes by providing a brief snapshot of Toronto's ethnic communities and what their existence means for parks in the City.

Park Policies, Plans and Literature

The City of Toronto has various policies, direction and reports that direct and guide park planning throughout the City, and a park plan is currently being developed. There is also primarily one division at the City of Toronto, the Parks, Forestry and Recreation (PF&R) Division that is responsible for the city-owned parks. The parks planning process is for the most part carried out by this Division.

The City of Toronto's Official Plan is a planning policy document that outlines a vision for the physical growth and development of the City. The Official Plan, which was adopted by City Council in 2002, will direct and shape Toronto's growth over the next 25 to 30 years (City of Toronto, 2007). Toronto's Official Plan makes several references to the importance of parks throughout the document. It stresses that parks contribute to a high-quality public realm, creating healthy neighbourhoods and a better City overall. Policies outlined for parks include universal accessibility, street frontage and visibility and shared usage (City of Toronto, 2007).

Of significance is Policy 4 of Section 3.2.3 in the Official Plan, which states that:

All development will be subject to the dedication of 5 per cent of lands for parks purposes for residential development and 2 per cent for all other uses unless the alternative parkland dedication rate applies (City of Toronto, 2007).

Alternative parkland dedication rates and substitutions are also determined in the Plan. In addition to the policies in the Official Plan, there is a Land Use Designation Map that designates “Parks and Open Space” and City Parkland Maps. The City Parkland Map that illustrates Local Parkland Provisions (Map 8B-Appendix A) is especially of interest because it depicts relative per capita park provision levels (hectares of parkland per 1,000 people) across the City (City of Toronto, 2007). Although there are no Secondary Plans specifically for the case study areas, there is one for the York University neighbourhood that is adjacent to Jane-Finch and the Morningside Heights neighbourhood adjacent to Malvern (City of Toronto, 2007).

In recent years, the City of Toronto has also published a strategic plan to provide direction for park space in Toronto. In July 2004, the City’s Parks and Recreation Division released the plan, entitled *Our Common Grounds* and it was approved by City Council. The plan outlined a vision for Toronto to be known as the “City within a Park”, and is based on the pillars of environmental stewardship, child and youth development and the encouragement of physical activity among all residents of Toronto. The document stresses the need for our parks to represent the City’s cultural diversity and bring together people from different backgrounds. *Our Common Grounds* made 53 different recommendations that together formed an Action Plan for the City’s parks (City of Toronto, 2004).

The City has been moving ahead to take action on some of the suggestions made in *Our Common Grounds*. Recommendation #14, for example, was a recommendation to prepare a Parks Master Plan to guide the improvement of the City's parks and trails. Staff took action in 2006 to create a Parks Renaissance Strategy. On February 4, 2010, the Parks and Environment Committee recommended that City Council approve a City-wide multi-year Parks Plan, which will be based on the Parks Renaissance Strategy. The Parks Plan is to be guided by the principles of: parks and trails as city infrastructure, equitable access for all residents, nature in the city, place making, supporting a diversity of uses, community engagement and partnerships, and environmental goals and practices (City of Toronto, 2009a).

Similarly, in August 2009, City Council approved the development of a City-wide, multi-year Recreation Service Plan. Also a result of *Our Common Grounds*, the Recreation Service Plan will promote equitable access, quality, inclusion and capacity building. Such a plan is absolutely necessary, as parks not only need to be physically planned to meet the needs of different users, but they have to be programmed to meet these needs as well. Creating strong recreation programs and services can be major drivers in fostering social inclusion and cohesion (City of Toronto, 2009b). It is expected that the City of Toronto's Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division will submit the Recreation Service Plan to Council in early 2010.

Governance

The City of Toronto's Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division is the department in the municipal government that is responsible for overseeing the

1,473 city-owned parks in Toronto and implementing many of the aforementioned policies and recommendations (City of Toronto, 2010a). The Division has a mission to allow people of diverse communities “full and equitable access to high caliber, locally responsible recreational programs, efficiently operated facilities and safe, clean beautiful parks...” (City of Toronto, 2010a). The Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division is further organized into branches and geographic districts.

Toronto’s Ethnic Communities

The City of Toronto is considered to be one of the most multicultural in the world, with people from a diversity of races, religions and lifestyles calling the City home. Over 140 languages and dialects are spoken in the City of 2.48 million, and more than 30% of residents speak a home language that is not English or French. Half of Toronto’s population was born outside of Canada and 21% of residents have arrived within the last ten years (City of Toronto, 2010b). In the 2006 Canadian Census, 47% percent of Toronto’s population identified themselves as members of a visible minority, and more than 200 distinct ethnic origins were reported (City of Toronto, 2010b). It can be argued that it is this diversity that makes Toronto truly unique, as it is said to be home to almost all of the world’s cultural groups (City of Toronto, 2009a).

When people come from such diverse backgrounds, it is inevitable that there will be differences in the needs of local residents. Within the Canadian-born population, there has been a correlation established between greater income and higher rates of participation in recreation and sport. In immigrants, however, even those who are well educated are 50% less active than average Canadians. When

there are 60,000 to 80,000 people immigrating to Toronto each year, and some may not have access to recreation and leisure facilities aside from local parks, this alarming statistic raises many questions (City of Toronto, 2004).

The City of Toronto in its park policies, plans, processes, operation and governance must approach the issue of park planning in a way that recognizes and responds to the needs of such a multicultural city, and encourages people from all walks of life to utilize the City's parks.

Chapter 5: Toronto's Priority Areas

In 2005, the City of Toronto collaborated with the United Way of Greater Toronto to form the Strong Neighbourhoods Task Force. Supported by the Government of Canada and Ontario, the Task Force identified 13 Priority Areas in Toronto, which are neighbourhoods with extensive poverty and that are lacking social and community services (Hulchanski, 2007). The neighbourhoods are: Jamestown, Jane-Finch, Weston-Mount Dennis, Lawrence Heights, Westminster-Branson, Crescent Town, Flemingdon Park-Victoria Village, Steeles-L'Amoureux, Dorset Park, Eglinton East-Kennedy Park, Scarborough Village, Kingston-Galloway and Malvern (Appendix B). Some of the neighbourhoods have been clustered with adjacent areas.

All 13 of the Priority Areas in are located in the "inner suburbs" and were the focus of a Social Planning Council report that was published in 1979 (Hulchanski, 2007). The work of the Strong Neighbourhoods Task Force built upon the Toronto City Summit Alliance 2003 action plan entitled *Enough Talk*, as well as United Way's *Poverty by Postal Code: The Geography of Neighbourhood Poverty* report, released in 2004 (Strong Neighbourhoods Task Force, 2005b). Many were also identified as at-risk neighbourhoods through the Community Safety Plan, which was adopted by the City of Toronto in 2004 (City of Toronto, 2005). In 2005, the Strong Neighbourhoods Task Force argued that the 13 selected neighbourhoods should be targeted for investment and are struggling with a lack of community services and social infrastructure, poverty and underemployment, the settlement of new immigrants, and higher incidences of youth violence, among other issues (Matthews, 2008).

To determine which neighbourhoods compromised the 13 Priority Areas, the Task Force implemented a methodology that was based on the City's 140 social planning neighbourhoods and included a supply-demand analysis of proximity of community infrastructure to socio-economic need, a focus on areas with inadequate service but high level of need, the application of eleven different social needs indicators (such as household income, literacy and low birth weight), the identification of neighbourhoods with high service needs and high risk factors, and the integration of youth gun violence data and existing infrastructure in the City's development priorities (Matthews, 2008).

In June 2005, the findings of the Strong Neighbourhoods Task Force were released in the form of a report entitled *Strong Neighbourhoods: A Call to Action*. This was followed closely by a document that outlined the Task Force's recommendations in October of 2005 (City of Toronto, 2005). Since this time, the City of Toronto has established the Interdivisional Committee on Integrated Responses for Priority Neighbourhoods, developed monitoring tools, and encouraged intergovernmental and local partners (City of Toronto, 2005). The City has taken a place-based approach to strengthening the 13 Priority Areas by forming Neighbourhood Action Teams in each of the neighbourhoods with representatives from all relevant City departments. The Neighbourhood Action Teams help to coordinate services in the community, identify local priorities, challenges and opportunities, and work towards building community capacity at the local level (Matthews, 2008). Over time, the Neighbourhood Action Teams evolved into Neighbourhood Action Partnerships that involve representatives from

different areas of service delivery, including police, school boards, Toronto Community Housing Corporation, community agencies and local residents (Matthews, 2008). Along with the Interdivision Committee, this collaborative approach has been taken with the goal of providing more integrated service delivery, leveraging resources and supporting community-based decision making (Matthews, 2008).

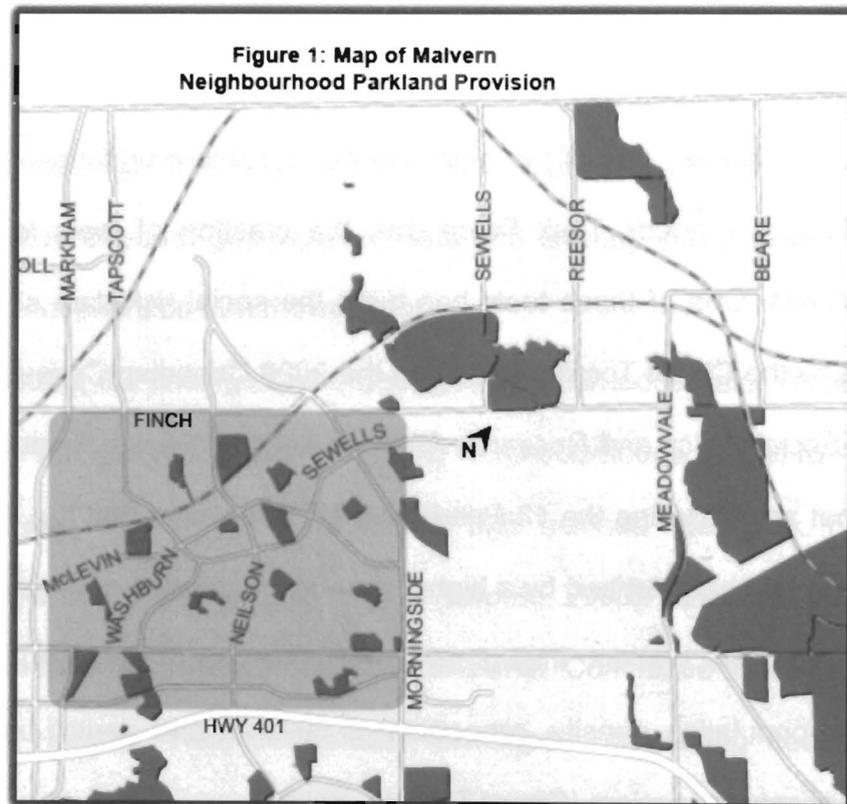
As mentioned, one of the most significant recommendations made by the Strong Neighbourhoods Task Force was the creation of tools to monitor the Priority Areas. One of these tools has been the social risk data sheet that was released by the City of Toronto based on the 2006 Canadian Census. The City of Toronto Social Policy and Research Analysis Section “backgrounder” highlighted trends that are occurring in the 13 Priority Areas. It revealed that the Priority Areas continue to be characterized by a higher than average rates of at-risk populations (visible minorities, recent immigrants and lone-parent families), low-income residents, population density, proportion of children and youth, unemployment and growth rate for seniors (City of Toronto, 2008a).

Case Studies

Malvern

Malvern is a neighbourhood located in northeastern Toronto, in the former municipality of Scarborough. Based on the City of Toronto Neighbourhood Profiles, the community is bounded by Provincial Highway 401 to the south, Finch Avenue to the north, Markham Road to the west and Morningside Avenue to the east (City of Toronto, 2008b). The population of the neighbourhood in 2006 was

44, 324, which reside over a geographic area of almost 9 kilometres squared. The population density was 5,013 persons per kilometer squared, just below the median density of 5,049 and mean of 5,914 persons per kilometer squared for all 13 Priority Areas (Statistics Canada, 2006).



Source: City of Toronto (Toronto Official Plan), 2007

The history of Malvern can be traced back until 1856. For over one hundred years, Malvern thrived as a farming community. In the late 1950s, the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation led the expropriation of many of the farms in Malvern to develop a “model community” of affordable housing. The residents moved into the modern day Malvern community in 1972 (Toronto Neighbourhoods, 1999). Over the years, Malvern has established a reputation as

an area prone to violence. In 2004, a police investigation led to the arrests of almost 70 people, many of which belonged to the Malvern Crew gang (Welsh & Pron, 2004). In the same year, the City of Toronto attempted to combat the violence in Malvern and seven other designated at-risk priority areas through the adoption and implementation of a Community Safety Plan (CSP). This neighbourhood-strengthening initiative was further built upon in 2005, when Malvern was identified as one of Toronto's 13 Priority Areas (City of Toronto, 2005).

Malvern is home to people of different ethnic backgrounds, many of whom are newcomers to the country. Both visible minorities and immigrants are considered "at-risk" populations in Toronto (City of Toronto, 2008a). The most dominant ethnic groups in the community are East Indians, followed by Sri Lankan and Jamaican populations (City of Toronto, 2008b). The 2006 Census reveals that 86.6% of the population in the neighbourhood identifies itself as a visible minority. This figure is characteristic of Priority Areas, which average a visible minority rate of around 65%, but is much higher than the rest of Toronto (City of Toronto, 2008a). Of the total population, almost 50% immigrated to Canada after 2000 (City of Toronto, 2008b). Similar to many of the other Priority Areas, Malvern can be considered an "ethnic minority area".

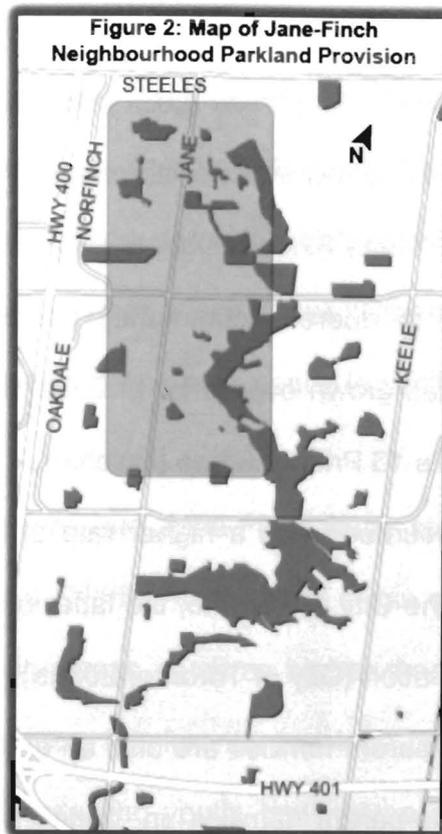
Not only is Malvern an ethnic minority area, but it is said to have the highest concentration of youth in Canada, with children and youth comprising 37% of the total neighbourhood population (Youth Force, 2005; City of Toronto, 2008b). With such a high rate of newcomers, visible minorities and children, it is

important for adequate park space be provided for residents. As understanding of social structures increases, it has become clear that parks and open spaces play an important role in building social networks, encouraging recreation, increasing health and self-esteem, and even lowering crime rates (Strong Neighbourhoods Task Force, 2005a).

Malvern is an interesting case study because it exemplifies all of the characteristics of the Priority Areas in Toronto, and can thus be considered a solid case study selection. The neighbourhood has a smaller area of open space relative to the other Priority Areas (0.6 kilometres squared). While the nearby Rouge Park offers a large natural conservation area, most of the parks also function as school playgrounds. The two largest parks within the community are Nielson Park and McLevin Community Park.

Jane-Finch

The Jane-Finch neighbourhood is located in northwest Toronto, in the former municipality of North York. Neighbourhood boundaries are not consistent across resources, but are generally Shoreham Drive to the north, Grandravine Drive to the south, Driftwood Avenue to the east and Highway 400 to the west (City of Toronto, 2008b). In 2006, the population was 80,150, which was a 6% decrease from the 2001 population. The area is geographically larger than Malvern and spans 21 kilometres squared. The population density is 3,817 persons per kilometer squared, which is lower than many other Priority Areas but this is likely due to its large area (Statistics Canada, 2006). Jane-Finch is often broken down into six smaller sub-neighbourhoods by local residents. Sub-neighbourhoods includes areas such as York Woods and Tobermory.



Source: City of Toronto (Toronto Official Plan), 2007

Prior to World War II, the Jane-Finch area was comprised of scattered single-family homes and farms that were inhabited by mostly Italian immigrants. In the 1960s, it was decided that the site would be home to the wave of newcomers who were arriving in Toronto's from around the world (CBC, 2006). Large private high-rise apartments and public housing buildings were developed by the Ontario Housing Corporation to house thousands of low-income residents. From 1961 to 1971, the population skyrocketed from 1,300 to 33,000 residents. As tens of thousands of high-need residents moved in, Jane-Finch lacked the social service infrastructure, such as settlement, employment, language, sufficient

space in schools and community centres needed to support them (CBC, 2006). As the neighbourhood began to change and racial tensions escalated, Jane-Finch established a reputation as a low-income community that was plagued by violence and gang activity. Jane-Finch residents began to establish grassroots movements in the 1970s to address community needs and the number of community organizations has grown over time. In 2005, the neighbourhood was identified as one of Toronto's 13 Priority Areas (Hulchanski, 2007).

To date, the neighbourhood has a higher rate of immigrants and visible minorities than the rest of the City of Toronto, the latter of which make up 70.6% of the neighbourhood population (City of Toronto, 2008b). Along with newcomers and visible minorities, lone-parent families are also an at-risk population. Of note is the percentage of lone-parent families in Jane-Finch, which is 28.2%, compared to the Priority Area mean of 24.5% and the City of Toronto average at 20.3% (City of Toronto, 2008b). Other risk factors include a high percentage of low-income families, rental houses, unemployment and people without high school and university education relative to the rest of Toronto (City of Toronto, 2008b). Similar to the case of Malvern and other Priority Areas, children and youth are a significant demographic in Jane-Finch, making up almost 30% of its total population (City of Toronto, 2008b).

The Jane-Finch neighbourhood is home to a vibrant community, but there remains a stigma attached to the area. Community leaders such as Paul Nguyen, the founder of jane-finch.com and organizations such as the Black Creek Community Health Centre have emerged to promote unity and health care, and to

fight the “social isolation” in the neighbourhood (DeSantis, 2008). It is because of issues of safety, health and planning that Jane-Finch provides an interesting case study on improving parks in Toronto’s Priority Areas. Jane-Finch has 3.8 kilometres squared of open space, some of which comes in the form of parks and most of which is wooded, such as Black Creek (City of Toronto, 2008b). When the wooded areas are excluded, the park space is similar to that offered in other Priority Areas.

Together, the Malvern and Jane-Finch case studies can be considered representative of Toronto’s Priority Areas. Both areas exhibit characteristics that are common of the Priority Areas, such as higher than average rates of at-risk populations (visible minorities, immigrants and lone-parent families), population density, proportion of children and youth, low-income rates, unemployment and growth rate for seniors. The importance of adequate and multi-functional park space that meets the needs of its users is paramount for the development of children, to provide a space for newcomers to interact with others, and for the overall well being of the neighbourhood.

Chapter 6: Findings

The research resulted in several findings on the topic of how to improve park planning in ethnic minority areas, such as Toronto's 13 Priority Areas. Findings outlined in this section reflect the information received from primary data collection, as well as through an extensive literature review.

Issues in Case Study Areas

As one interviewee stated, "Just because a park is big enough to accommodate a tennis court, that doesn't mean you put a tennis court there. The community may not want a tennis court" (Professor 1). Park planners in the City of Toronto must plan for multiple publics, which can be a very complicated task in ethnic minority areas. It has been well established through literature that people of ethnic different backgrounds often have different park preferences. Similar to parks across North America, parks in Toronto have been standardized in design, maintenance, and facilities over the years, which cater mostly to white Anglo-Saxon populations (Park Planner 1). Some scholars have attributed this to park designers and planners who treat parks as historical legacies and are hesitant to change them based on evolving local needs, while others write that park planners are just following a well-known prescription of park design by including aspects of greenery, athletic and play facilities and picnic areas (Burgess, 1988; Karasov and Waryan 1993; Loukaitou-Sideris, 1995). In the City of Toronto, planners seem to recognize and be willing to make changes to park design, but face funding problems (Park Planners 1, 2, 3). Park planners have cited an overabundance of baseball fields and tennis courts, and have stated that there are not nearly enough facilities to accommodate sports such as cricket, field

hockey and soccer in ethnic minority neighbourhoods, such as the 13 Priority Areas (Park Planner 2).

In the Malvern neighbourhood, there are a number of ice rinks and baseball diamonds that service the area, but community representatives explain that the users are groups from outside the neighbourhood (Community Representative 1). However, there is a hesitation to convert existing green space and recreational facilities into cricket pitches, as local councilors would like to add to the stock of recreational facilities (Courtice, 2010). Community groups focused on promoting the advancement of cricket and soccer facilities in parks have even formed working groups in Malvern. The Malvern cricket club in collaboration with the Canadian Cricket Academy, for example, advocates for greater funding and places to play the sport in the area (Courtice, 2010).

In both case studies, accessibility and access to information were major issues that were raised by community representatives. Both Jane-Finch and Malvern have nearby natural conservation areas (Black Creek and the Rouge Park, respectively) that are not heavily utilized by ethnic minority populations. A representative from the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority pointed out that Rouge Park is North America's largest "urban wilderness park" (Community Representative 3). Although much of the literature states that these passive environments are preferred more by Anglo-Saxons, in both case studies, representatives cite a lack of information available to the general public as a major constraint in accessing these green spaces. In Rouge Valley, physically accessing the park without a vehicle is also a barrier. A community representative

pointed out that a map of the park has to be downloaded off the Internet, and navigation is difficult without it (Community Representative 1). The representative from the Toronto and Region Conservative Authority recognized this, stating that the park lacks a gateway (Community Representative 3). This notion is supportive of Washburne's (1978) marginality hypothesis that states that the underrepresentation of ethnic minority groups in certain park settings occurs due to low-socioeconomic status, lack of access and discrimination.

Along the lines of access to information, in the Jane-Finch neighbourhood, there have been incidents of confrontation with police in local parks over loitering, large family events, and general issues with police and young people. Access to information, communication, and a lack of understanding about park usage by ethnic communities were among the top concerns of Jane-Finch community representatives (and residents) in the neighbourhood (Community Representative 2). Several interviewees have suggested that area residents are simply not sure of what is and is not acceptable activity in the park. One community representative recalled picnicking in a local park with her large family, and being confronted by police for noise purposes (Community Representative 2).

Safety is not a major concern that has been expressed thus far in Malvern, but has been a major issue in Jane-Finch. One community representative explained some interesting ways in which the neighbourhood has been addressing safety (Community Representative 2). She explained that the neighbourhood did not heighten policing and add cameras, but that fencing was replaced with landscaping to define property lines, and more welcoming lighting

was used instead of flood lighting, and convinced Toronto Community Housing to clean-up their properties (Community Representative 4).

Based on interviews with park planners, it is clear that park planning in the City is very connected with development. Aside from the money received to keep the parks in a “state of good repair”, it is “Section 37” density bonusing benefits and development funds that pay for park enhancements. One planner estimated that 70% of the capital budget goes towards maintaining a state of good repair, and the rest goes to fulfilling a backlog of requests for arenas and facilities (Park Planner 1). At present, there is no process beyond a needs assessment that allows PF& R to address the park needs of a neighbourhood. The needs assessments must be ordered, and this is usually done when there is development occurring in the neighbourhood (Park Planner 1). As such, major park changes and consultation usually only occur when a park is being redeveloped in a major revitalization project (such as in Regent Park) or if there is funding available (Park Planner 1, 2, 3).

There is a general consensus among park planners and community representatives that there should be a higher level of public participation in the park planning process. All interviewees and the City of Toronto park reports have stated that residents need to be more involved in the decisions that impact their parks. In some cases of park improvements, there is a landscape architect hired and there is no formal public consultation process, as local park staff is aware of needs for the park (Planner 2). Park planners have acknowledged that change in parks often comes when it is driven from the community and is a reactive

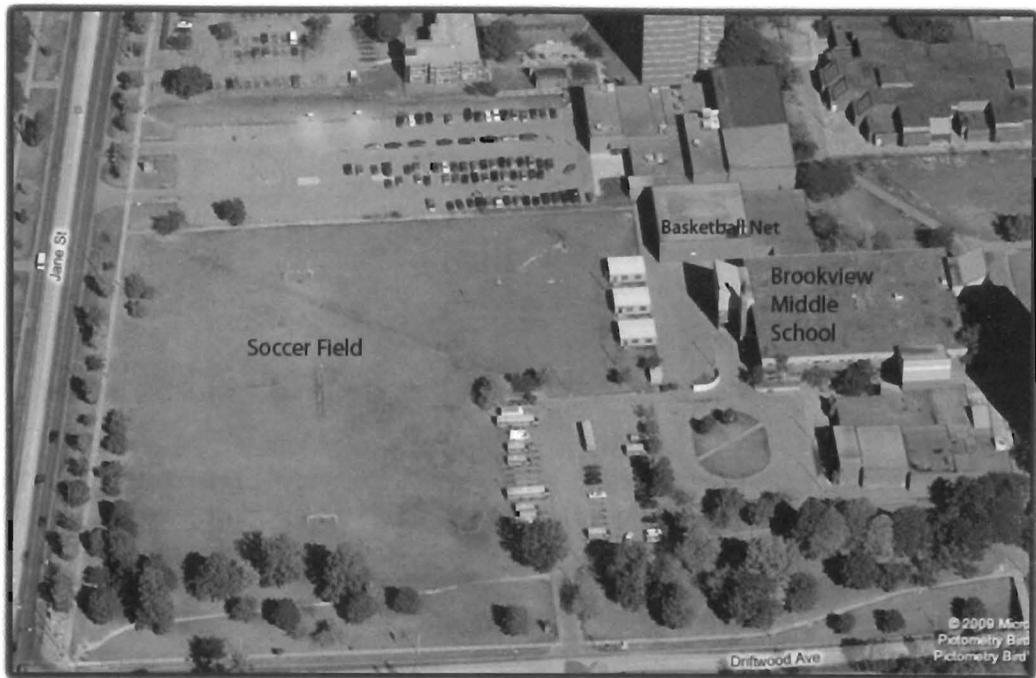
process, but many communities are not mobilized enough to do this. This is especially a concern in areas where this is a high concentration of low-income residents that may not have free time to dedicate and newcomers that may face language or cultural barriers.

Youth Preferences

A focus group was held at Brookview Middle School in the Jane-Finch neighbourhood, and another was conducted through a community youth organization in Malvern. Both focus groups contained youth of the same ages (11-12 years old). Findings from discussions with the Malvern Youth Cabinet are also included in this section.

At the focus group at Brookview, youth were broken up into groups of four to six students and were asked about their local park. Since there is a large field at the school (see Figure 3), but no formal play structure or recreational amenities, students were asked to describe what they like about their park, what they would like to change, and give an example of a park that they enjoyed. If time permitted, some even sketched what they would like their ideal park to look like. Students were broken up into groups of four to six.

Figure 3: Bird's Eye Photo of Brookview Middle School



Source: Bing Maps

In their answers, the youth revealed that they enjoy “hanging out” and playing a game called “grounders”, which is similar to tag but involves one person being “it” who plays with their eyes closed. For the most part, however, students complained that their park was boring and that they rarely spend time in it or in the parks in the neighbourhood. They highlighted that they wanted more recreational facilities, such as tennis courts, a track, a basketball court, a hockey rink and an improved soccer field.

Figures 4-5: Brookview Middle School Field



Four students also pointed out that their favourite park in the neighbourhood is Hullmar Park, which has a baseball diamond, play area, open field, many benches and tennis courts. They stated that Hullmar Park is well kept and clean. In an informal conversation with one group of students, they explained that they do not always feel welcome in Hullmar Park and that they do not go there often as it is in a “different area” of the community.

Figure 6: Hullmar Park Bird’s Eye Photo



Source: Bing Maps

Figures 7-8: Hullmar Park

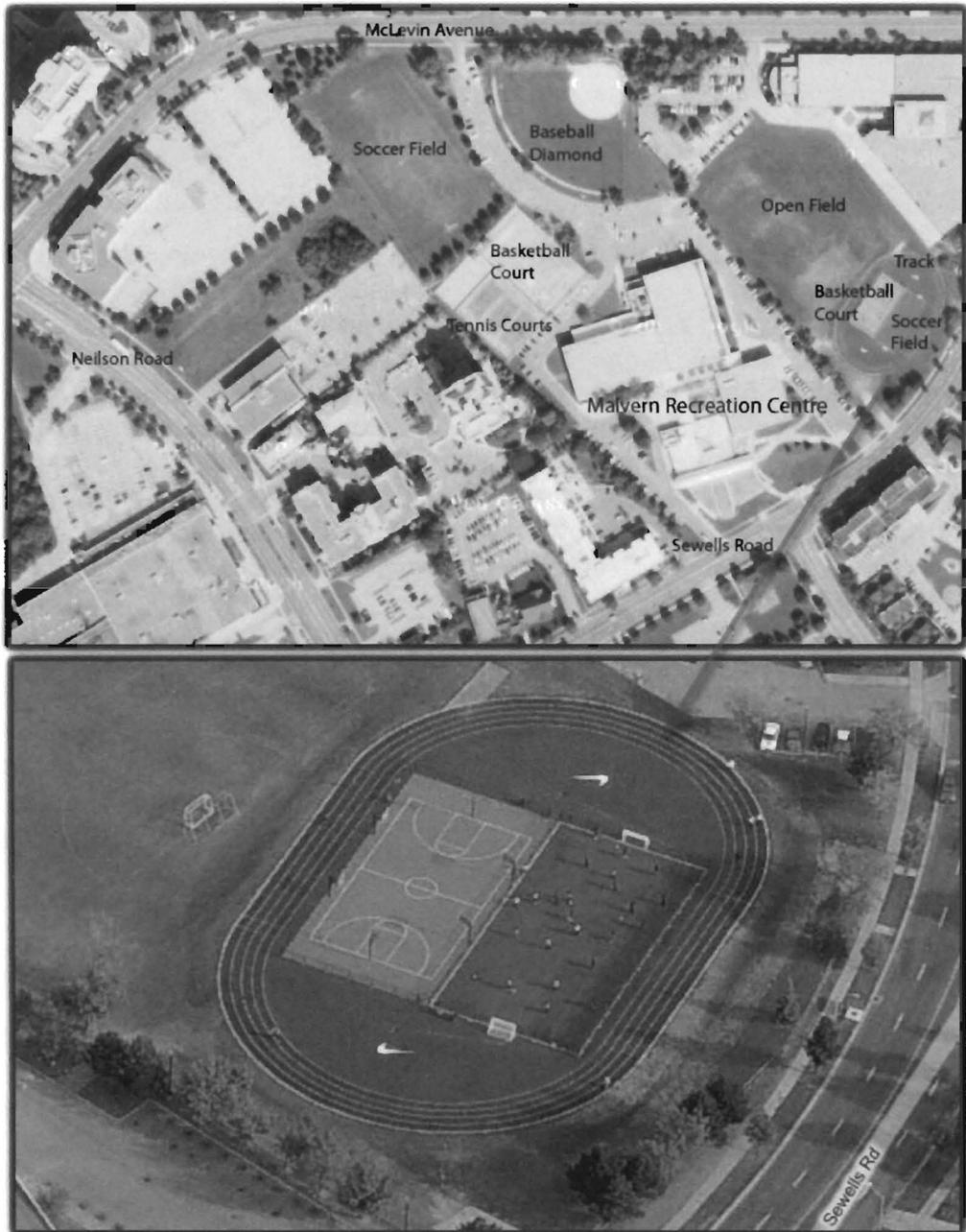


Of interest is that school staff also believed that the youth should be provided with as many recreational facilities as possible, and not limited because of their varying ethnic backgrounds. One can be quoted as saying that, “There is no reason that Canada’s next best tennis player or hockey star should not be from this neighbourhood. By only offering these children certain facilities, their opportunities are being limited”.

In Malvern, a focus group was conducted through a local community organization. Again, the participants were divided into groups of four to discuss their local parks. The youth in this focus group revealed that they really enjoyed the new Nike Malvern Sports Complex that opened in 2006, but that the parks in the neighbourhood (including the Nike Sports Complex) are not well maintained. The youth explained that even when though weather was very nice in April, the basketball rims were not yet up in the Sports Complex. One participant provided an example of cigarette butts being left behind when people smoked in the park, and a site visit revealed garbage strewn around the Complex. Of note is that the

Malvern Youth Cabinet organized a “clean-up” of the park, which was witnessed during a site visit.

Figures 9-10: Bird’s Eye Photo of Malvern Recreation Centre



Source: Google Maps and Bing Maps

Figure 11: Malvern Nike Sports Complex



Youth also raised concerns about the separation of different age groups in the park, citing certain parks as having good “kid areas”. Aside from the Nike Sports Complex and Neilson Park, youth said their park options were limited to school parks. A number of the youth also stated that they would enjoy facilities to play cricket. Some were involved in local cricket clubs and stated that there was nowhere to play. Finally, the youth raised the issue of access to play equipment, stating, “We could use the park facilities more if there was equipment like tennis racquets that we could borrow”.

Youth who participated in both of the focus groups were familiar with the parks in the area and eager to see improvements made. Their requests were reasonable and revealed that this demographic can be a valuable resource in the park planning process.

Chapter 7: Recommendations

Based on the data analysis and findings, recommendations were established for park planners, in addition to community organizations and residents. Recommendations include approaching park planning as a process of community capacity building as opposed to a service, youth engagement, integrating park programming and planning, enhancing park management, conducting use need surveys and increasing community mobilization.

Park Planning as a Process

In a special Parks and Environment Panel held by the City of Toronto, one panelist asserted that the park planning process is much more important than the plan itself. The panelist continued on to say that communities should not be left with a park as a product, but engaged in park planning as a process instead. In this sense, it was recognized by all interviewees that the City needs to move towards a much more participatory process of park planning, that goes beyond the current level of consultation.

When approaching park planning as a transformative participatory process, it can be used as a tool to enhance community capacity and the overall social capital of the City. According to a panelist at the Park and Environment Panel, the environment is a result of people's lived realities, and by allowing residents to lead the process they are empowered to become their own architects. The panelist explained that residents across all backgrounds can build a sense of belonging to their land and translate their own stories into the physical environment. They can make use of the skills of the community and tap into foreign credentials that may or may not be recognized in this City. This can

legitimize their collective knowledge and result in partnerships being built within and between communities. When developing the Action for Neighbourhood Change Committees for Toronto's Priority Areas, the City of Toronto emphasized the significance of community building (Matthews, 2008). As such, PF&R should begin to act as more of a facilitator than a service provider, and use the community as a genuine partner in the park planning process.

The City of Toronto must fully embrace the notion of capacity building that it has been promoting since the establishment of the Priority Areas and begin to implement it in the park-planning context. Several recommendations along these lines can be made, including formulation of a multi-disciplinary parks steering committee to allow local residents to voice their thoughts, as well as community workshops and/or charrettes that are focused on truly allowing the community the power to affect park plans.

Youth Engagement

As prominent park users that often feel unwanted in park space, youth must be used a resource in park planning. It was clear from the focus groups that youth have important (and fairly reasonable) opinions on what they would like to see in their parks, and these should not be ignored. The City of Toronto has recognized the need to involve youth, as can be seen through the release of its *Involve Youth: Guide to Meaningful Youth Engagement*. In the guide, it is stated that involving youth contributes to fostering active civic engagement, builds a sense of social responsibility, and can strengthen capacities such as leadership (City of Toronto, 2006).

A prime example of youth engagement in Toronto was the coming together

of youth in the Dorset Park neighbourhood in 2008 to create a space where they would feel safe and gather with their friends. The result was the youth-developed McGregor Park Diverse Sports Pad that was opened in the Dorset Park Priority Area in 2009. The sports pad now consists of basketball courts, space for handball, gathering areas and a stage (United Way, 2009). Although the initiative was planned and designed by youth, it received support from a partnership between the United Way Toronto, Youth Challenge Fund, the City of Toronto and the Dorset Park Youth Advisory Council (United Way, 2009).

Integration of Park Planning and Programming

The creation of a separate City-wide parks plan and recreation service plan in some ways embodies the silo-ization of park planning and programming in the City of Toronto. Although both directives come from the Parks, Forestry and Recreation, they come from different branches within that department and went to the Council almost a year apart. As illustrated in the literature review, parks that were planned without taking into serious consideration who its users were and how they would use park space often do not meet the needs of the communities that they serve. A well-planned park will take into account how the park will be programmed in the present, as well as in the future.

For the most part in Toronto parks, interviewed planners have stated that park spaces are set and the only way to change a facility such as a tennis court is through a sports field conversation (Park Planner 1, 2). The idea of “loose-fit” or flexible space that will be flexible enough to meet the needs of future users has garnered some discussion over recent years. As opposed to more structured,

formal park space, some that some degree of less designed, more organic space that can evolve over time is essential (Thompson, 2002). It is in these spaces where children can explore and a community garden can pop up. In the case of Malvern, the importance of this loose-fit space has been illustrated through the use of vacant industrial lands for cricket games (Courtice, 2010). The needs of those who would like to play cricket have not yet been formally accommodated through park space, but instead through unused lands.

As mentioned, it was discovered in the interviews conducted in the Jane-Finch community that effort has already been made to reduce crime through design (Community Representative 4). Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (also known as CPTED) is based on the notion that proper design and effective use of the built environment can lead to a reduction in the incidence and fear of crime and improve the quality of life. Fundamental CPTED strategies revolve around good physical planning and design principles, and include: natural surveillance, natural access control, territorial reinforcement and maintenance. It is recommended that planners continue to further implement CPTED strategies such as activity support, increasing street lighting, creating a continuous and well-maintained streetscape to communicate that the space is cared for, and displaying security system signage at access points to increase feelings of safety and ownership (CPTED, 2002).

User Needs Surveys

As it currently stands, the PF&R staff does not have any method of assessing user needs, apart from a formal needs assessment (Park Planner 1, 3). Especially when approaching parks from the perspective of parks as a service, it is clear that park management needs to better understand the needs of its users. Even if funding is not available to change the parks physically, surveying can help address programming needs. Data on what park users actually use (or value) in the park can be very helpful, as can data on park users do not like (Walker, 2004). Surveying methods can include counting, observation, closed-ended survey questions, open-ended interview questions, and focus groups (Walker, 2004). In the larger picture, carrying out use needs surveys could provide communities with jobs and information about area trends.

Park Management

Park management plays an important role in creating a welcoming (or non-welcoming) park environment. Primary and secondary data collection both make it clear that hiring diverse staff can go a long way in making local residents feel more comfortable with spending time at parks (Gobster, 2002). Of particular interest is an idea that was proposed by a community representative at Jane-Finch. The interviewee mentioned that there has been a growing group of Tamil youth who have taken up skateboarding recently. It was explained that at a community meeting, there was a suggestion to create a skateboarding area for these youth, and to hire a skateboarding “mentor” that monitored the area (Community Representative 2). This way, the park would be used by those interested in skateboarding and would be more animated in general. Animating

and re-claiming a space in this way can be a much more successful strategy than formal policing with regards to improving safety (City of Toronto, 2005). A community representative and resident of Malvern stated that this is what happened in Kingston-Galloway, where parks have been recently programmed with festivals and markets.

A panelist at the Park and Environment Panel also pointed out that in New York City, the gateways to each park are equipped with signs that indicate the name of a park steward and their contact information. This could be very useful in the City of Toronto parks, as users would be able to phone a steward that keeps an eye on the condition of the park.

Community Gardens

Community gardens were mentioned on several occasions in interviews with planners, professors, and community representatives, as well as in existing literature. Community gardens can provide many benefits to those who are engaged, including growing fresh produce, improving the neighbourhood, and creating a connection between people of different ages and backgrounds (Hanna & Oh, 2000). Groups in Malvern are actively pursuing community gardening because of its many advantageous features. In Jane-Finch, the situation is quite interesting, because there are existing community gardens in the University Presbyterian Church and through the Green Coalition. Community representative mentioned that despite the difficulty in accessing fresh produce in the neighbourhood, that there are challenges with running the community gardens. For one, it is not easy to keep a program running after it loses its novelty. This is

especially true in an area where people work long hours and may not have time or energy to dedicate to gardening at the end of the day. It has also been brought to the representative's attention, however, that some residents were not interested because they felt that community gardening was not a progressive concept (Community Representative 5). For those who immigrated to Canada from more rural areas, they may feel as if they are "going backwards in time". Community gardens can still be very successful in Jane-Finch in the future, especially if youth get involved and create momentum for the projects. In Montreal, there is a strong community gardening culture emerging that the City of Montreal is actively supporting. There are mixed gardens that are run by people of all walks of life, in addition to gardens being run by seniors, and those led by youth (Beavis et al., 2009). However, this is a prime example how a "one-size-fits-all" solution to park planning does not work and that local context must be considered.

Community Mobilization

It is undeniable that change also has to come from within the communities. If there is no push to improve parks, the process will not move along. PF& R planners have stated that the park planning and improvement process in Toronto is very much a reaction to community mobilization (Park Planner 1, 2, 3). Both Action for Neighbourhood Change groups for the case study areas have noted that residents have some idea of beautification and/or parks enhancements high on their lists of priorities. Within Jane-Finch, some areas have strong mobilization, and have been facilitating change in the community through existing groups such as tenant boards (Community Representative 3). In Malvern, building

partnerships has created a strong foundation, with various partnerships forming between community groups and organizations such as FoodShare, Live Green Toronto, Friends of the Rouge, the youth job centre and the University of Toronto Scarborough (Community Representative 1). Further, the Action for Neighbourhood Change Committee sends out regular emails about meetings regarding community gardens, cricket games and events.

An example of change being implemented within another one of Toronto's Priority Areas is in Jamestown-Rexdale, who utilized its \$200,000 earmarked funding for sports facilities and raised another \$76,000 within the community for a new cricket pitch (Alcoba, 2010). In this case, the community had the strong support of the local councilor, which one park planner says can be an important component of promoting park improvements. In another Toronto neighbourhood, Thorncliffe Park, a women's committee emerged 1998 that is dedicated to working together to improve parks in their area. Last year, the ethnically diverse committee approach PF & R to make a case for the improvement of R.V Burgess Park. Improvements include good seating arrangements and new infrastructure such as playgrounds, paved pathways, gardens, multilingual signs and an amphitheatre with programs for children and youth (Ali, 2009).

The recommendations in this chapter are based on the findings of the research. They reflect the need for a more participatory, integrated park planning process, as well as the need for greater resident participation in park improvements.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

The research methods selected for the purpose of the project were the most logical to gather the required data, but also presented some limitations. Since no recruitment could begin without the approval of the Ryerson Ethics Board, it was difficult to obtain consent to conduct focus groups within the neighbourhood schools. It is important to note that there was a decreased level of flexibility for the interviews and focus groups because questions were submitted to and approved by the Ryerson Ethics Board in advance. It is recommended that further research be carried out in this area, with a continued emphasis on children and youth. Given the sensitivity surrounding the use of youth opinions, the appropriate amount of time should be allocated in order to ensure that this population is actively engaged.

In terms of research design, it must be noted that this paper focused on youth preferences, and as such, discusses parks as recreational spaces to a great extent. Issues such as public art, events in the park and the needs of other groups were not dominant due to the focus on youth. As it is believed that some of the youth are Canadian-born or can assimilate quite quickly, it must be noted that their differentiated preferences might not be as pronounced as those of their parents or grandparents. Even more so, it was difficult to find contacts for seniors groups representing ethnic communities, as many do not have organizations that represent them. Regardless, these groups will have a great impact on health expenditures over the coming years. As a growing demographic, this group warrants much attention in future research.

Park planning for ethnically diverse areas has proven to be a challenge in cities across North America. In the City of Toronto, planning and design of parks has not evolved over the years, as its users have. This is especially the case in ethnic minority communities, such as Toronto's Priority Areas. When planned well, parks can play an integral role in improving the overall well being of the neighbourhood. Based on a review of literature and interviews with planners, professors and community representatives, issues in planning for case study areas were determined. The largest finding and most reoccurring theme in the study was the need to approach the planning of parks as an important process for community building, and not simply a service that is provided by the City of Toronto. Changing the park planning culture, engaging youth, collecting data through user surveys, integrating park planning and programming, and increasing mobilization were outlined as recommendations for the Priority Areas. The research presented has only begun to explore the concept of participatory parks planning in ethnic minority areas. It is highly recommended that in moving forward, questions such as what level of participation is adequate and how to set up the participation process be explored. It is without question, however, that the City of Toronto must move towards a much more participatory park planning process that will ultimately result in unique parks that are reflective of the City's enormously diverse population.

Chapter 9: Bibliography

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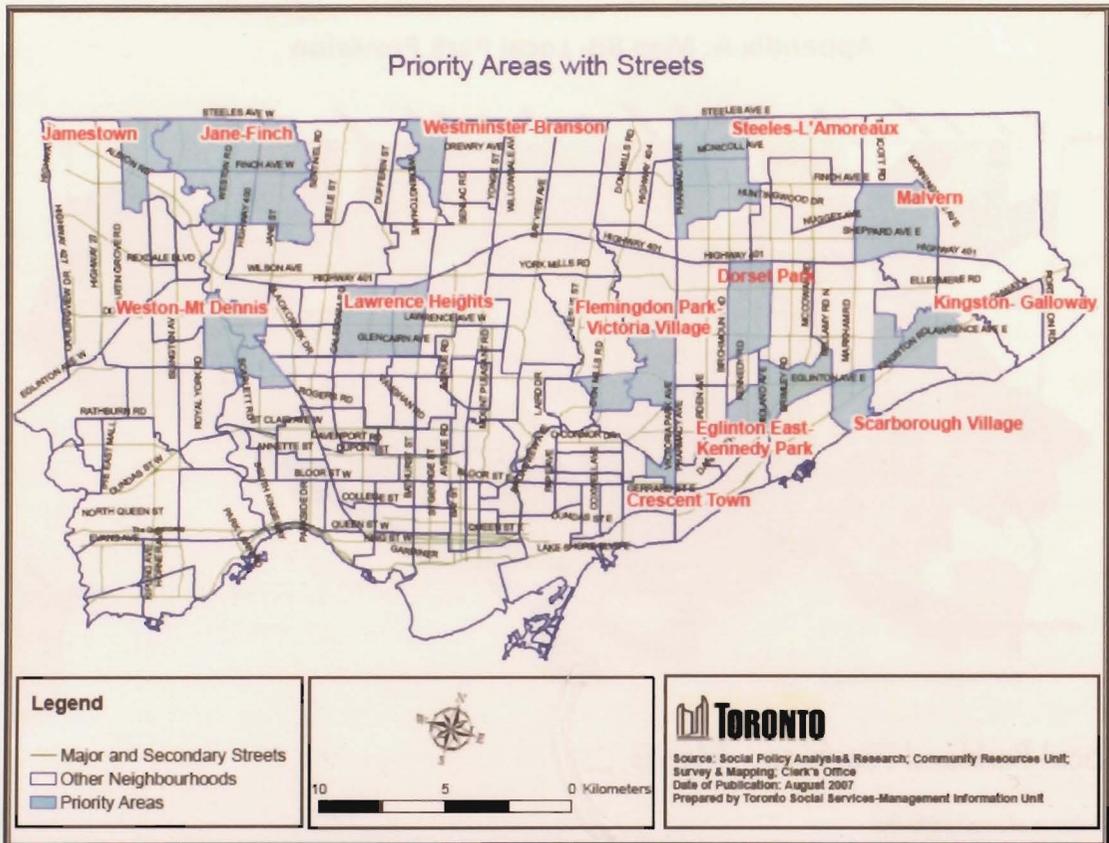
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Appendix B: Priority Areas Map



Source: http://www.torontopay.ca/img/pn_map.jpg

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