

Executive Summary

Public parks provide places for residents to experience nature, socialize with friends and neighbours and relax. They also play an important role in “facilitating physical activities” (Cohen, 2007, p. 509). Public parks and outdoor facilities should be carefully designed and planned in a way that consider visitors’ needs and abilities to create a more enjoyable and fulfilling recreation experience for everyone (Parks Canada, 1994). This report provides an analysis and makes recommendations for improvement to the accessibility and physical features of Shannon and Headway parks in Rideau Heights, Kingston, Ontario. The purpose of this report is to evaluate the degree of quality and accessibility of existing amenities and facilities of these two parks and also to identify what important physical features are absent in the study area. To achieve this goal, this report addresses the following research questions:

- What design and planning strategies will improve accessibility to the park, within the parks, and between the parks, for people of all ages and abilities?
- What design and planning strategies will improve physical features (facilities and amenities) within the parks in order to improve active living and physical beauty?

To address the research questions, three qualitative research methods were employed. In the first place, a review of relevant literature and parks accessibility guidelines was conducted in order to develop an appropriate parks assessment toolkit to evaluate for accessibility and physical features. Second, based on the created parks’ amenities and accessibility checklist, direct observation of the study area was carried out to obtain information regarding the existence and the degree of quality and accessibility standards of amenities and facilities in and around the parks (please refer to Table 4.1 for the summary of findings). The analysis indicates that many of the existing physical features (e.g. seating areas, sports’ fields, pathways, etc.) in Shannon and Headway Parks are not in good quality and do not meet accessibility standards. Moreover, these two parks do not have some necessary amenities and facilities (e.g. drinking fountains) that should be present in any public park. Based on the findings of the analysis, the following recommendations are offered to the City of Kingston, Parks Development, North Kingston Community Health Centre and Community Response to Neighbourhood Concerns (CRNC).

- Improving Parks’ Trails

- Providing Green Links, Green Active Centre at the Neighbourhood
- Improving Existing Parks' Amenities and Providing Adequate Accessible Amenities
- Redesign Parks' Entrances and Provide Accessible Pedestrian Routes to the Main Entrances
- Improving Parks' Signage and Information
- Improving Parks' Safety and Security
- Providing a Beautiful and Attractive Natural Rest Stop

Finally, based on analysis and recommendations developed in the previous steps, three face-to-face interviews were conducted. Interviews were conducted to gather more information regarding highlighted issues that the park users will face in terms of accessibility and physical features. In the first place, the researcher's findings and recommendations were presented to interviewees to get input into the research study and also to identify any other issues that had not been considered in preliminary findings with respect to accessibility, facilities, and amenities. The second theme of the interview was about identifying potential barriers and challenges in terms of implementing the author's recommendations. Lastly, further discussion was conducted to find out whether any other parks planning issues related to accessibility and physical features should be considered (please see appendix B for Interviews' Sample Questions). It was identified that accessibility issues and accessibility standards are priorities for future plans and new designs. According to Facility Accessibility Design Standards (City of Kingston, 2009), all new facilities and amenities that are owned, leased, or operated by the City of Kingston and that are designed for public uses will have to be compatible with accessibility standards and guidelines. Therefore, it is important for planners to create public spaces with amenities and facilities which are accessible for all people of different ages and abilities. Above all, local parks should be considered as important assets in each neighbourhood and should be carefully planned and designed to help to increase social interaction and physical activities in the community.