Executive Summary

Visitation is used in this report to judge the success of six open spaces in Lindsay Ontario. The premise is that the greater the number of visitors the more successful the space. The open spaces were selected using the following criteria: 1) located in residential area, 2) intended to function as neighbourhood open space, 3) comparable design elements and 4) public agency ownership and management. This report also measures the influence of the following factors on use as identified by William Whyte and Jane Jacobs: enclosure, sittable space, relationship to the street and central focus. Other factors such as location, size and scale, the availability of food and the presence of trees, sunlight and water were also discussed.

The Town of Lindsay official plan was initially used to identify 37 open spaces. The application of the criteria to the 37 open spaces resulted in the selection of eight parks. Two of the 8 open spaces were then eliminated because they were located within 1600m of one another. The Parks and Recreation Master Plan indicates that neighbourhood open spaces have a service radius of 800m therefore volume of use in either space would be affected by their proximity.

Data for this report was collected using the direct observations and interviews from June 1 to September 5, 1998. This period allowed for 10 observation days for weekdays as well as 10 for weekends. Observations were made during the following times: 10:00-10:30, 12:00-12,30, 2:00-2:30, 4:00-4:30 and 7:00-7:30. The types of activities recorded were walking, cycling, sitting, standing, eating, reading, working, playing, socializing, taking photos and rollerblading. Interviews were conducted conducted after the 10:00-10:30 and 4:00-4:30 observation periods for each park on alternating observation days with a maximum of five users per session.

It is clear through the examination of the data collected in this report that open space usage among the six parks varies. It is also clear that a more enclosed park tends to be used less and that the presence of sittable space has little influence on use. The central focus

or play areas of each park however do play an important role, as does the proportion of barrier free access to the spaces. It is important to examine these results more closely in order to develop recommendations concerning park design.

Other than the children's play areas there are no other significant recreational features present in the six parks for individual use. Some spaces have baseball diamonds and basketball courts but these features are used primarily by groups. Open space use may be increased if a wider variety of recreational possibilities were available to individuals.

Activities within most spaces are focused in particular areas of the parks. While making observations some areas of parks were not used at all. This indicates that the spaces are not being used to their fullest potential and that there is room to provide for the recreational needs of other age groups.

Places to sit in the observed parks are inadequate or solely oriented towards the play areas. Most sitting places are in direct sunlight most of the day and far from visual features. Park use may be increased if a wider variety of seating opportunities were provided.

The following recommendations based on the analysis contained in this report are presented for consideration.

1) A greater number of passive recreation areas should be provided within open spaces. Recreational areas have been shown in this study to play an important role in attracting park users however they are all designed for young children and active recreation. Areas intended for passive recreation can be used attract a broader range of people by targeting different interests. Ultimately areas meant for passive recreation may share the same relationship with park use that existing with areas intended for active recreation.

2) Shaded, well-defined sitting spaces should be provided overlooking playgrounds, major facilities, and passive recreation areas. Most existing sitting spaces are in direct sunlight

and face play areas. There is little visual variety within the sight lines of the sitting spaces. The provision of shaded, well defined sitting spaces may increase park use. Although the findings in this report indicate that sitting spaces do not play an important role in attracting park users interviews showed that there was a relationship between shade and sitting spaces. For example people visiting Wilson Park indicated that they did not use the sittable space because it was in direct sunlight. People visiting Northlin Park on the other hand enjoyed sitting in areas shaded from the sun. The proportion of park users observed sitting in each park was virtually identical however this is because most people who were sitting were watching their children play. Very few people were visiting the park just sit and enjoy their surroundings. Areas intended specifically for sitting may act as a focus for passive recreation as described in the previous recommendation.

3) Playground equipment should be suitable for a range of age groups. The data collected at the six Lindsay Parks examined in this study shows that most park users are between the ages of 7-18 and were engaged in play. The provision of equipment suitable for a range of age groups may increase park use. Interviews and observations indicated that most adults visited the six parks because they were watching their children. Very few used the parks for active recreation other than walking. Equipment targeting a variety of age groups may promote other forms of active recreation.

4) Opportunities to improve the relationship to the street of Lindsay parks should be taken. Some parks such as Orchard and St. Patrick have barriers at access points. The elimination of these barriers or the mitigation of their effect may increase open space use.