

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Overview

As the built environment continues to undergo intensification in urban areas, there is a growing interest to integrate green spaces within the city fabric. The city of Toronto is amongst these urban areas that is facing a rapid pace of intensification as a result of both population and development growth. Taking into consideration this growth, the urban fabric of the city is continuously changing and with this change there is a need to balance the built environment with sufficient, high quality urban green spaces. These spaces are “green assets” for the city and the challenge faced by cities is how to effectively integrate them into the urban fabric as a way to contribute to the overall social, economic, and environmental viability of that city (Wolch et al., 2014). The intent of this report is to analyze existing urban parks in the core of downtown Toronto in conjunction with policies set forth by the city to investigate how planners can better facilitate the integration of these green spaces into the built environment to foster a well-connected urban fabric.

In their entirety, park spaces play a critical role in city development processes. More specifically, they are important contributors for the healthy and sustainable growth of cities. High quality parks, effectively integrated into the built environment, have the ability to provide physical and mental health benefits, economic benefits, as well as environmental benefits. For cities and individuals to fully reap these benefits, careful consideration must be given to both the design and planning policies associated with parks.

## Research Approach

The following study examines the relationship between five park spaces in the downtown core of Toronto and the built environment based on observations and analysis of their integration into the urban fabric. Through the use of a variety of research methods, including a literature review, document analysis, observational analysis and semi-structured interviews, the study focuses on two questions:

1. Does the current configuration and design of the parks reflect the City of Toronto’s policies and plans around urban green spaces?
2. How do the urban design and characteristics of the parks speak to their integration into the city fabric?

## Analysis and Recommendations

Study findings revealed differences in degrees of integration between each of the parks and the surrounding built environments. The parks were assessed for their contextual support, design framework, and social milieu as a means of better understanding their existing conditions and where improvements are required. Analysis of the relevant planning documents, including the City of Toronto Official Plan and the City of Toronto Parks Plan 2013-2017, revealed that policies and guidelines focusing on creating new parks as well as enhancing existing ones are a necessity in the city to ensure balanced growth throughout the city, especially in light of rapid intensification and development. The analysis revealed policies lacked approaches and strategies that could be utilized regularly in practice, which would have the potential to ensure parks are being effectively integrated within the constantly changing urban fabric of the city.

An analysis of the literature, relevant planning documents, observations and interview responses from key informants resulted in a series of recommendations that are aimed at supporting the enhancement and management of better integrated parks in the fabric of Toronto. The recommendations focus on approaches that address parks planning policy improvements, design improvements through secondary plans, as well as audit tools for greater management and maintenances of parks. Based on the study findings, the following recommendations are proposed to the City of Toronto, professional planners, as well as urban designers.

**Recommendation #1:** Integrating parkland acquisition and park development policies within the City of Toronto Official Plan

**Recommendation #2:** Develop a Parks Master Plan for the city of Toronto

**Recommendation #3:** Develop Secondary Plans and/or park specific plans to create “green hearts” in the city to establish a network of connected urban green spaces

**Recommendation #4:** Introduce commerce into parks

**Recommendation #5:** Develop a parks audit tool