

Building complete communities

New parks enhance sense of community

Parkland dedication fees counter-productive to intensification goals

Ada So watches her new puppy, Mika, rolling around on the ground on a crisp fall afternoon at Canoe Landing Park in downtown Toronto. So and her partner recently moved into a condominium at Concord Adex's development City-Place, bordered by Bathurst Street and Lake Shore Boulevard, and the park has become a daily destination for them. "We love it here. It's super convenient," says So, who runs a small business from home. "The park was one of the reasons we decided to get Mika."

Canoe Landing, created by the developer through a parkland dedication agreement with the city, has proven to be a wonderful amenity, one that has helped in giving this cluster of condominiums a real community feel. For all new developments and re-developments, builders are required to set aside land for parks, up to 5 per cent of the total area of the property being developed. And if extra land is not available — often the case in dense city centres — the developer, and ultimately the new-home buyer, pays cash-in-lieu of that parkland. This parkland fee rate is equivalent to 1 hectare of land for every 300 units in a building.

Parkland levy

Parkland dedication provisions are included in the provincial Planning Act and municipalities collect the land or the fee in lieu of land to fund the acquisition of parkland. However, the provincial provisions date back 40 years and 1981 was the last time any changes were introduced.

Times have changed. The provincial Growth Plan, introduced in 2006, encourage intensification, but the parkland provisions were created with low density development in mind.

Using the same formula for a medium or high density development jeopardizes the feasibility of the project and adds another fee to the cost of buying a new home. In urban centres, land is expensive and there isn't alot to spare so community-builders have to get creative "The excessive parkland dedication formula of 1 hectare for every 300 units is an outdated formula that threatens provincially-planned urban intensification and the construction of new homes that people can afford," says Bryan Tuckey, President and CEO of the Building Industry and Land Development Association (BILD). In some municipalities, parkland fees can add up to \$20,000 to the cost of each home in a high-density development.

"If you drive up the price of a new home by adding all these expenses, exist-

ing homes go up in value too because the new home sets the benchmark for affordability," explains Lyn Townsend, a partner at Toronto law firm WeirFoulds. Townsend, who specializes in planning and development, is the chair of BILD's Parkland Working Group. The group will raise the issue with city officials at upcoming government consultations regarding the update of the Planning Act, which grants municipalities the power to impose parkland fees.

Townsend's team will stress that hefty parkland dedication fees are counter-productive to achieving the goals of the provincial growth plan, which calls for intensification of existing built-up areas. Simply put, high fees discourage high-density development.

"If the government wants to achieve its intensification goals, there has to be something more persuasive [in the Planning Act], so a municipality will say, 'We understand we need to achieve these goals and we're not going to achieve them with parkland [fees] at the maximum,'" Townsend says. "A balance needs to be struck here."

BILD is suggesting municipalities cap their parkland dedications fees at 5 to 10 per cent of the value of the development site or the site's land area as was done in Toronto. There are municipalities handling parkland fees in "a fair manner," Townsend notes. But others, she says, are looking at it as "What is the maximum we can collect?" and operating on that basis.

She is advocating for more accountability and transparency in how parkland fees are imposed; municipalities seeking to increase their levies have to show where the money is going. "There's no requirement under provincial legislation for them to do

The area's new homeowners, like Ada So and John tk, enjoy the 20-acre park, which was paid for as part of their new home through a parkland levy.

that," she says. "So the numbers get picked out of the air."

The way complete communities are planned and built in Ontario has changed since the last time the provincial government reviewed the parkland dedication provisions. "This is why the province is saying we need to sit down and talk," says Townsend. "It wants to examine whether the Planning Act needs to be changed to keep pace with these changing provincial goals."

"We think there needs to be a recognition that land values are escalating and the formula [for parkland fees] is out of touch."



JEREMY KOLM

2 CANOE LANDING PARK

A 20-acre park near Spadina Ave. and Lake Shore Boulevard W., Canoe Landing features two multi-purpose sports fields and numerous walking paths. The park is a result of the new residential development in the area, funded through a parkland levy. Developed by developer by Concord Adex and designed by landscape architects Phillips Farevaag Smallerberg in conjunction with landscape designers The Planning Partnership, public art consultant Karen Mills and author and artist Douglas Coupland. Among the public art installations on exhibit at this urban park are several pieces by Coupland, including a canoe large enough to accommodate visitors, so they can view Lake Ontario over the Gardiner Expressway.

cityplace.ca



3 MOUNT PLEASANT VILLAGE

Mattamy Homes' Mount Pleasant Village — a 629-unit project in Brampton — is a suburban development designed as an "urban village." It features a diverse range of park types and sizes that were added to the community as a result of the parkland dedication provisions allowing for flexible and diverse recreational neighbourhood programs, with everything within a five-minute walk of all the homes in the community. There is also an extensive network of trails and pathways linking the parks and open spaces with the area's natural surroundings. More than 120,000 trees and shrubs will be planted to to entice more birds and wildlife.

mattamyhomes.com/GTA/Communities/Brampton/Mount-Pleasant/

Here are three precious parks that were funded and created as a result of new residential development:



1 ANGUS GLEN WEST VILLAGE

Wide-open spaces and parkland are the focal points at Kylemore Communities' Angus Glen West Village, which won BILD's 2013 award for Places to Grow Community of the Year. Homes at this master-planned community in Markham are close enough to the Angus Glen Golf Club to view the course's fairways and are surrounded by natural spaces. As part of the parkland dedication provisions, the community enjoys numerous walking and biking trails connecting the golf course with the community. The West Village is built on Stollery Creek, a re-established tributary of Bruce Creek.

kylemorecommunities.com/angus-glen

This is the final in an four-part series sponsored by BILD.



WORKING TOGETHER TOWARD A GREATER GTA

Building healthy, complete communities is a team effort. That's why BILD works closely with our partners in government to establish fair and effective policies that affect the land development, home building and professional renovation industry in the GTA. We are always at the table on behalf of the industry and new home buyers.

So why is advocating on your behalf so vital to us?



BECAUSE THE GTA IS OUR HOME TOO

