

2022

**Parkland Strategy
Refresh**

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Executive Summary

As Toronto continues to grow, the parks and open space system that supports existing and future residents, workers, and visitors must also grow. One of the primary ways in which Toronto expands and improves its park network is through the use of parkland dedication, a policy tool that allows municipalities to require developers to contribute a portion of a development site for public parkland or an equivalent payment-in-lieu of land which the City must use for parks and recreation purposes.

In 2020, the Province of Ontario enacted the *COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act, 2020*, which made a number of changes to the *Planning Act*, the legislation which establishes the framework for a municipality's use of parkland dedication. As a result of those changes, the City of Toronto must redevelop its parkland dedication policy framework. City Council, City staff, the public, and stakeholders such as the development industry require accurate and current information to have a robust and informed conversation about the need for parkland in the city and tailor a parkland dedication policy framework to the needs of a growing, prosperous, livable Toronto.

This document comprises a 2022 Refresh of the City Council-adopted 2019 Parkland Strategy, presenting the best available information regarding Toronto's parkland provision. The analysis conducted as part of the Refresh includes the integration of recently-secured and planned parks, a refined approach to measuring walkability, and updated summary statistics and maps.

Introduction

The City of Toronto's Parkland Strategy, adopted by City Council on November 26, 2019, is a 20-year plan that guides long-term planning for new parks, improvements to existing parks, and expansion and connection of the parks and open space system as a network. The Parkland Strategy supports the day to day decision-making and prioritization of investment in parkland across the city and describes a vision for Toronto's parks system informed by four guiding principles:

Expand the parks system by creating new parks to support growth and address gaps to ensure an effective parks system that will support the needs of a livable, diverse city.

Improve the function of existing parks to promote community cohesion, ecological sustainability, and health and wellbeing through active living, access to nature, and the provision of spaces for rest, relaxation, and leisure.

Connect parks and other open spaces, physically and visually, and leverage opportunities to use other open spaces so that people, communities and wildlife have abundant access to parks and open spaces and can seamlessly navigate to and through the parks and open space system.

Include everyone by removing barriers so that parks and other open spaces are inclusive and inviting places that are equitably accessible for people of all ages, cultures, genders, abilities, and incomes.

The Parkland Strategy was developed in two phases. The first phase of the Parkland Strategy focused on developing a new, modernized approach for assessing parkland provision (i.e. locally available parkland per person). This phase informed a number of major City initiatives, including the Downtown and Midtown Parks and Public Realm Plans. The second phase examined parkland need, considered how the City currently plans for parkland and established a decision-making process to prioritize investment in the parks and open space system. City processes such as the review of development applications, prioritization of parkland acquisition opportunities, development of local parks plans, and the implementation of the City's Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan and the Ravine Strategy are all informed by the strategic park planning framework described in the Parkland Strategy.

Parkland Strategy 2022 Refresh

In 2015, the *Planning Act* was modified through Bill 73, the Smart Growth for Our Communities Act, to include a requirement that in order for an Ontario municipality to use an alternative parkland dedication rate, it must first prepare a "parks plan" that examines the need for parkland. The Parkland Strategy was developed in part to satisfy that requirement and to inform an update to the City's alternative parkland dedication rate.

Subsequent changes to the *Planning Act* through Bill 197 in 2020 obligated all Ontario municipalities to re-implement or replace any existing alternative parkland dedication rate by September 18, 2022. If an alternative parkland dedication rate is not passed by that date, any existing alternative parkland dedication rates will expire. In order to inform development of a new alternative parkland dedication rate, the quantitative analysis in the Parkland Strategy needs to be updated with the best available data. It is important that key data such as population growth, development activity, new and future parkland, mobility networks, and other inputs be as up to date as possible in order for City staff, the public, and key partners in city building such as the development industry, to have informed discussions about the current and future parkland needs of the city.

What is parkland dedication?

Section 42 of the *Planning Act* allows municipalities to require that development projects contribute a portion of their development site as public parkland as a condition of development approval. The "base rates" of parkland dedication are 5% of the site area for residential developments and 2% for non-residential developments.

The *Planning Act* allows municipalities to utilize an alternative parkland dedication rate, supported by a "parks plan" and associated Official Plan policies that is more responsive to the parkland needs of different communities. This alternative rate can only apply to residential development and can be no greater than one hectare of land per 300 dwelling units.

A municipality may collect cash-in-lieu of parkland provided that funds are spent strictly on parkland acquisition, parkland development, or the development of recreational facilities like community centres, sports fields, and arenas.

The Parkland Strategy's parkland provision analysis illustrates the amount of parkland available to residents in 2016 per census dissemination block (Figure 8, page 24) and provides an assessment of anticipated population growth and its associated impact on parkland provision (Figure 11, page 28). The Parkland Strategy also identifies parkland priority areas (Figure 18, page 46) informed by the following criteria:

- Parkland provision (less than 12 m² per person in 2033)
- Low park supply (less than 1.5 ha total park space within 500 m in 2016)
- Impact of growth (areas projected to have 5,000+ people/Ha in 2033)
- Low income residents (25%+ of residents are low income in 2016)

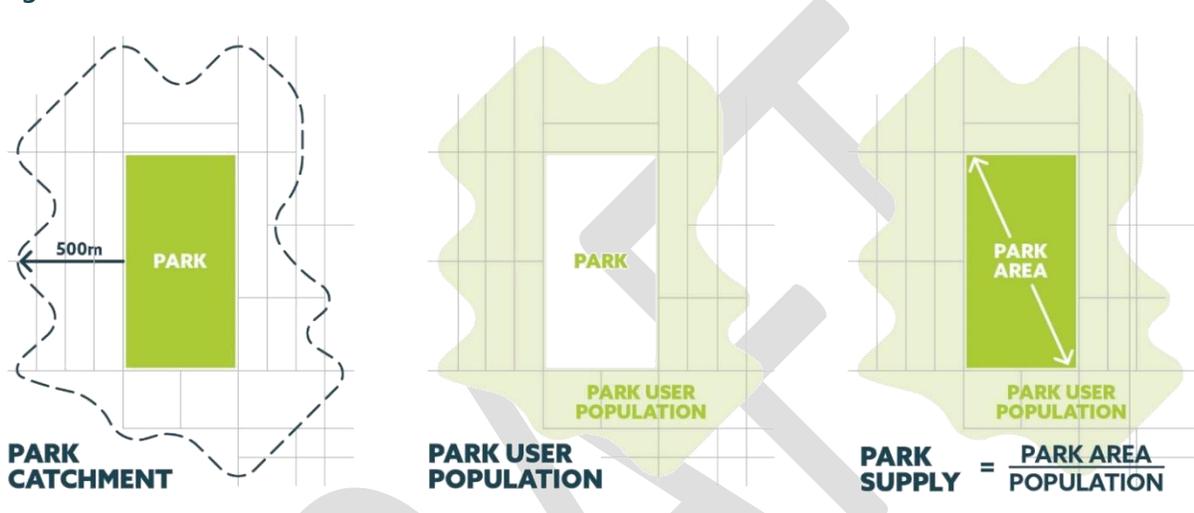
The areas of Toronto where these conditions exist are highlighted as places where the City will focus parks planning and acquisitions including the preparation of more detailed, locally-oriented parks plans which will enable the City to take a strategic approach to parkland acquisitions and improvements. However, the identification of priority areas does not preclude the need to support the parkland needs of the entire city. Growth pressures are felt across the city and are not isolated to one geography. This is especially true for parks, which function most effectively and serve residents most efficiently when they are planned and programmed as an interconnected and interdependent network.

This "refresh" of the Parkland Strategy reaffirms and reinforces the overall vision, guiding principles, core methodology, strategic actions, implementation tools, and prioritization criteria established in the 2019 Parkland Strategy. In addition, the 2022 refresh reproduces the 2019 analysis and mapping using a refined approach where appropriate and updated parkland and growth data. Finally, the 2022 refresh anticipates and will inform the upcoming five-year review of the Parkland Strategy.

Parkland Provision Refinements

The Parkland Strategy's core methodology focuses on determining the amount of parkland available per person within a 500-metre walking distance, recognizing that parkland demand is a function of both access to local parkland and the supply of local parkland. The Park Catchment Tool methodology is described in the 2019 Parkland Strategy and is summarized below:

Figure 1 : PLS Park Catchment Tool



New and Future Parks

As part of the 2022 refresh of the Parkland Strategy, an updated inventory of public parkland opened or secured since the Parkland Strategy was developed has been integrated into the parkland provision analysis. This integration includes over 70 new parks as well as a range of technical mapping corrections reflecting more accurate parkland boundaries, land exchanges, and other changes to the parkland system. Some of these new parks include Clover Hill Park, Ethannonnhawahstihnen' Park, GEC0 Park, an expansion to Grand Avenue Park, and newly secured parks in Midtown on Broadway Avenue and Soudan Avenue.

The 2022 refresh also incorporates future planned park spaces into the evaluation of future parkland need in 2034 and the analysis of growth pressures on the park system. These future parks include large priority projects under construction such as the Port Lands Flood Protection parks system as well as parks that are anticipated to be delivered as part of ongoing reviews of development applications including some that have been secured by way of Council approval but have not yet been formally conveyed to the City. Other future park spaces whose shape and size can be reasonably mapped with a high degree of certainty have also been integrated into the analysis.

Road Data vs Pedestrian Networks

Pedestrian access is a primary input to the Park Catchment Tool's analysis of parkland provision. In developing the 2019 Parkland Strategy, the City's road network (road centreline data) was used, in part, to approximate pedestrian access to parkland. For the 2022 refresh, a new data layer has been used that more accurately reflects the many ways in which pedestrians move through the city and access parkland. Instead of using road centreline data (based on the geographic centre of a street), the City's pedestrian network dataset (PedNet) has been substituted to reflect the paths, off-road access points, and other non-road means of pedestrian travel. The PedNet dataset also incorporates sidewalks and, as such, more accurately reflects the spatial reality of pedestrian mobility as compared to vehicular mobility on streets. A comparison of PedNet (blue) and road centreline (red) datasets is included below in Figure 2.

Figure 2: PedNet and Road Centreline Dataset Comparison



Ravine Mapping Update

As the 2019 Parkland Strategy describes, it is important to consider parkland provision both with and without Toronto's extensive ravine system to better inform parks planning and consider the needs for different types of parks including their programming, functionality, and supply. The parks within Toronto's vast ravine system provide a unique function and experience and are generally more difficult to reach safely because of limited access points due to physical features like steep slopes and natural cover. Ravine parkland is also generally more restricted in its programming and ability to accommodate outdoor recreation facilities and park amenities due to environmental and topographical conditions and other constraints. While some parks located within Toronto's ravines (such as High Park, Earl Bales, and Sunnybrook parks) are accessible by foot, public transit, and car, and include a vast range of amenities and

programming, these amenities are not typically found in ravine parks. Moreover, ravine lands can be considered finite in Toronto and are not equivalent to the park spaces dedicated through development. When conveyed to public ownership through development, ravine lands are conveyed to the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority. Given the distinct nature of ravine parkland, the Parkland Strategy assesses parkland provision both with and without ravines included in the park supply.

In order to distinguish between ravine and non-ravine park spaces, the 2019 Parkland Strategy utilized the area covered by the City's Ravine and Natural Feature Protection By-law as well as the City's Environmentally Significant Area mapping contained in the Official Plan to categorize ravine spaces (Figure 10, page 26). However, this approach does not distinguish parks, such as Eglinton Flats, located in those portions of the ravine system that are programmed or developed with recreational facilities that are more typically found in non-ravine spaces. In an effort to more rigorously evaluate parkland provision, the 2022 refresh incorporates certain portions of the ravine system that contain active recreation facilities. However, in recognition of the sensitivity of Environmentally Significant Areas (ESAs), any lands mapped as such in the Official Plan have continued to be excluded in the calculation of parkland provision excluding ravines. As a result of these mapping changes, the parkland provision analysis excluding ravine lands and ESAs identifies a higher city-wide parkland provision rate than the same analysis in the 2019 Parkland Strategy.

Population Growth and Development Activity

Assessing the impact of population growth and development activity on parkland provision is important to proactively plan and invest in Toronto's parkland system. The 2019 Parkland Strategy utilized development data and population estimates available at the time to project the impact of growth on parkland provision, expressing the impact as percent change from 2016 to 2033 (Figure 11, page 28). The 2022 refresh uses more current development and population estimate data to inform the analysis of projected parkland provision to 2034. As a result of this change, approximately 500,000 net-new residential units were integrated into the future-oriented parkland provision analysis. These net-new units were derived from development pipeline data supplied by City Planning in March 2021 reflecting projects proposed, approved or under construction between January 1, 2016 and December 31, 2020.

Updated Statistics and Maps

The refinements to the 2019 Parkland Strategy's analysis and mapping result in a more current and more nuanced understanding of parkland provision and parkland need in Toronto both in 2021 and as projected to 2034. Although the city-wide average parkland provision analysis does not significantly change as a result of the refinements described earlier, the refinements do result in a more accurate local provision analysis inclusive of non-road pedestrian routes and a contemporary park inventory. The refinements also have the cumulative effect of increasing the city-wide parkland provision level when ravines and ESAs are excluded from the analysis because some components of the ravine system have now been included. Finally, the projected city-wide average parkland provision decline decreases, or in other words the projected decline is less acute, as a result of the integration of future park spaces into the analysis.

A summary of the key statistics provided in the 2019 Parkland Strategy and the 2022 refresh is included below with a reference to the page number where the statistic can be found in the 2019 Parkland Strategy. Updated 2022 maps are provided in the Appendix.

Figure 3: Updated Parkland Provision Summary Statistics

Key Statistic	2019 Parkland Strategy	2022 Refresh
City-wide average parkland provision including ravines (p. 23)	28 m ² / person	28 m ² / person
City-wide average parkland provision including ravines and employment population (p. 23)	18 m ² / person	18 m ² / person
City-wide average parkland provision excluding ravines (p. 25)	8.7 m ² / person	13.3 m ² / person
Projected city-wide average parkland provision decline as a result of growth (p. 27)	-14% by 2033	-10% by 2034

Appendix

Figure 06 – Toronto's Parks and Open Space Network (2021)

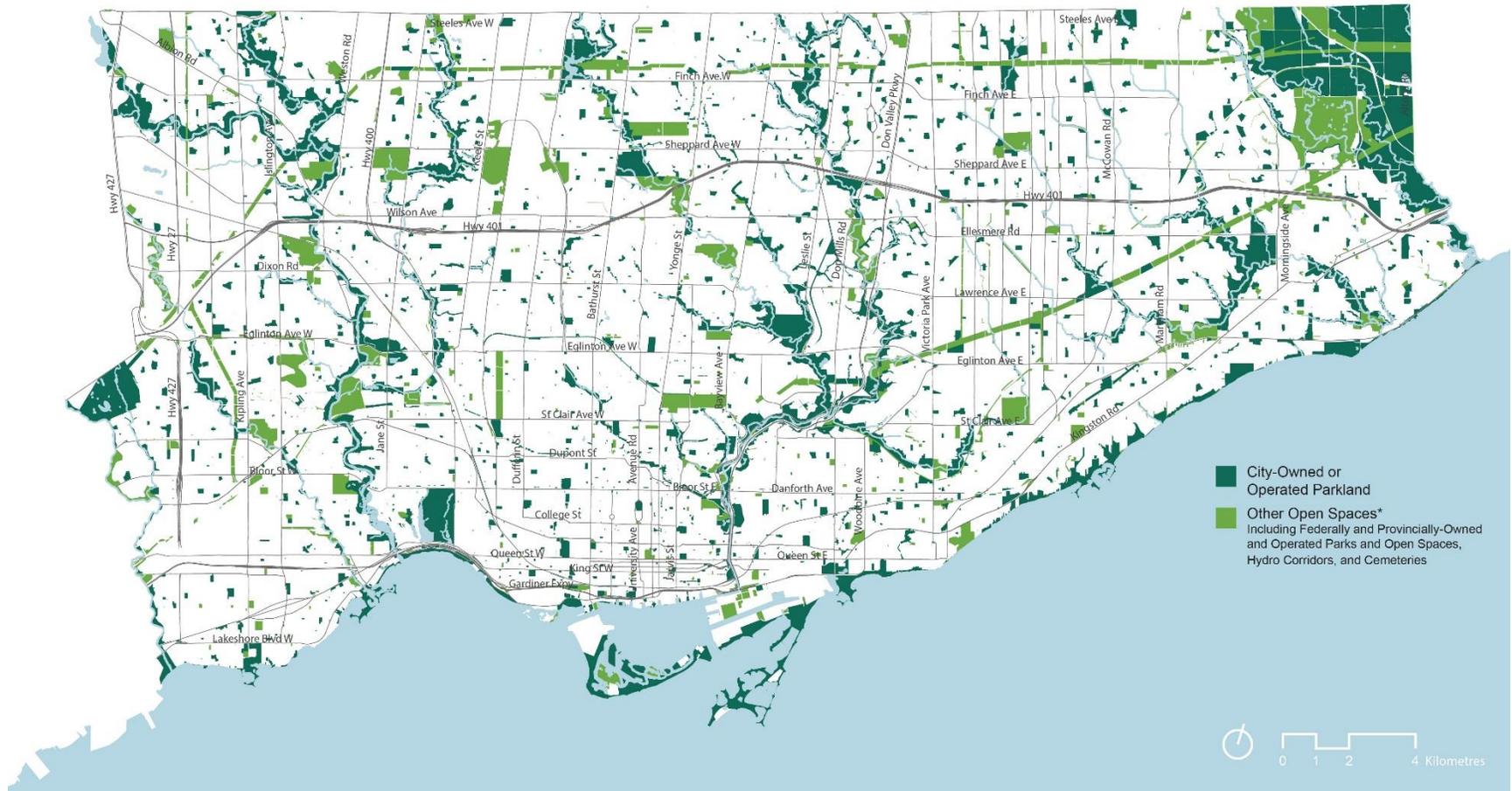


Figure 08 – Toronto Parkland Provision (2021)

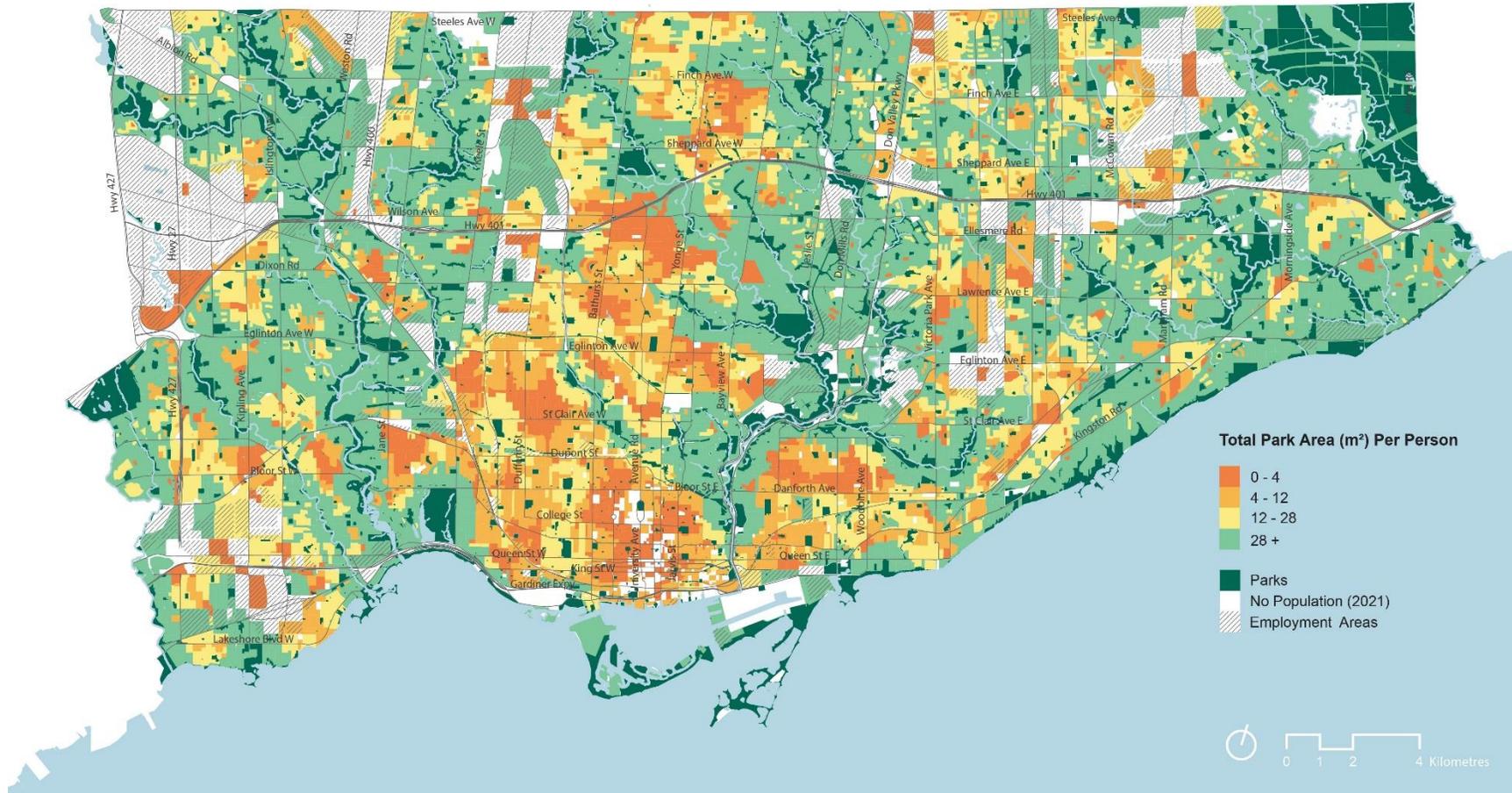


Figure 10 – Parkland Provision with Ravines and Environmentally-Sensitive Areas Removed (2021)



Figure 15 – Park Supply (2021)

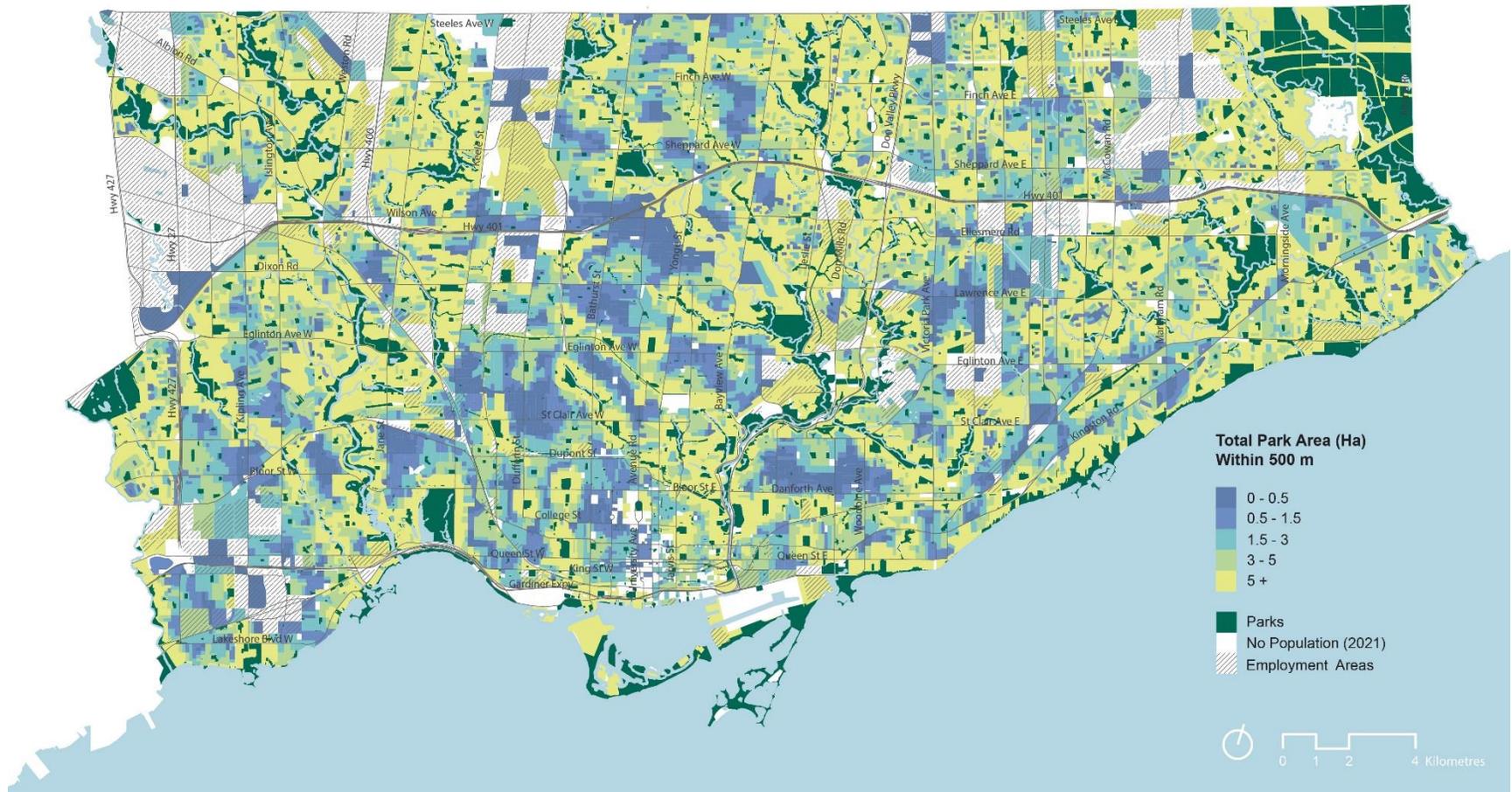


Figure 17 – Walkability Gaps (2021)

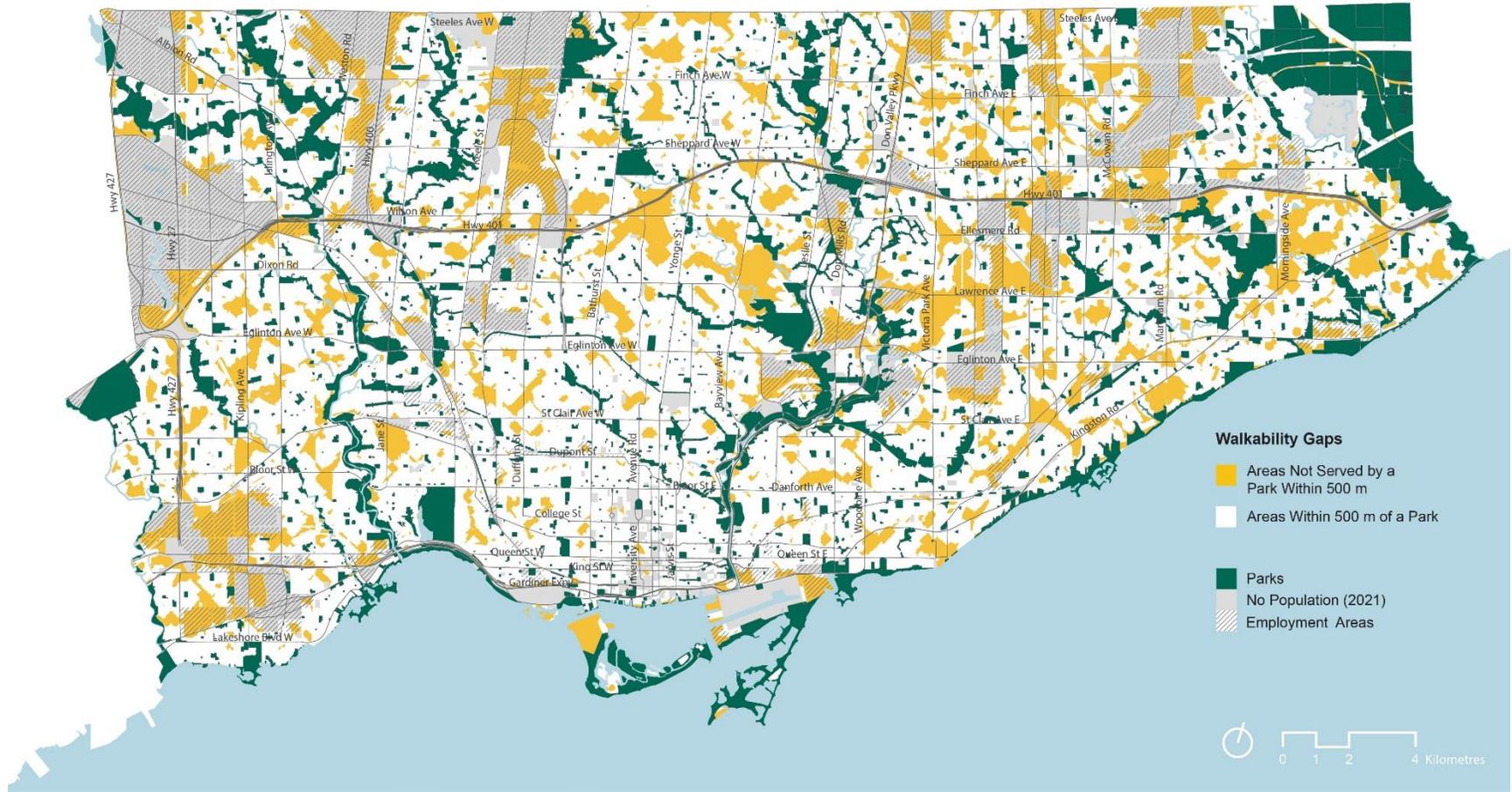


Figure 18 – Parkland Study and Acquisition Priority Map (2021)

