

Feb. 14, 2024

Toronto City Hall
100 Queen Street West Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

Attention: Amanda Wahl

RE: HX2.1 Toronto Board of Health Strategic Plan 2024-2028

Toronto Public Health has put out a call to Torontonians, asking their advice on how to advance public health via a new **Strategic Plan**.

Eglinton Park Residents' Association (EPRA) represents a small piece of the city, only nine square blocks, tucked between Eglinton Park and the intersection of Yonge and Eglinton (northwest quadrant).

Although our zone is tiny, it is a microcosm of Toronto. We have busy streets, a subway, an almost completed LRT. We have head offices, and tall towers full of workers, condo-dwellers and renters. We have residential streets, mostly single-family but also rentals, and four-storey walk-ups with apartments. We have massive construction and demolition, with its dust and racket. We experience sirens, back-up beepers, medical helicopters, and planes descending on the busiest flight path to Pearson. As for the vehicular traffic, it is oppressive, and often dangerous. At the same time, we play host to falcons and even ravens, and our quieter streets are full of raccoons and squirrels, plus discreet evening skunks, and even the occasional chipmunk. There are rumours of coyotes. Eglinton Park hosts a major indoor rink, and outdoor skating, or tennis and pickle ball, and its fields are in hot demand for baseball and soccer. It also shelters an indigenous garden. Our residents are of almost every social class, from the homeless on up, and come from all corners of the planet.

In sum, a lot of what Toronto is, we are up here. And proud to be that way.

EPRA, discussing your call for advice, reasoned that Public Health has two sides, cure and prevention. About cure, and curative institutions, we have many impressions, and feelings, but no expert advice. About prevention, on the other hand, as observers of the local scene, we have a lot to say. Health is a public resource. A healthy populace is happier, more prosperous, and less burdensome on the medical professions.

What do we need more of, to keep the populace healthy?

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First, we need **safe streets**, so that we can move about free from danger, especially under our own power. That means we must calm our streets, improving their design to deter aggressive driving and enforcing responsible behaviour. Urban design for a walking, cycling city is crucial.

Second, we need **quiet**, for the sake of good sleep, calm minds, and easy communication. That will require assertive city regulation of noise and, again, attention to design features, abundant foliage, and absorbent surfaces, for instance, that calm loud sound.

Third, we need to remedy the **nature deficit**, wherever possible. Science keeps finding that immersion in nature improves concentration and memory, soothes frayed nerves, and alleviates depression. So, Toronto needs to make our natural zones easier to reach and traverse, and it needs to bring more nature into places that have too little of it. In that campaign, it should for instance work to connect the present ravine routes, now full of gaps, on both East Don and West Don, so that hikers and cyclists can go the whole way down to the Lake.

Fourth, we should address the **disappearance of children from sight**. Those of us with long memories remember earlier decades, when children peopled our streets, played their invented games freely in our parks, and interacted with their surroundings. Their general disappearance is very bad for them, for their mental health and developing social and cognitive skills especially, and is sad for other generations. The remedy will be complex: anxious parenting has curtailed older liberties. But we can put our minds to better urban design, which sees not just parks and playgrounds, but also the whole cityscape as deserving to be child-friendly, playful, and interesting. We should look to Denmark, or even just ponder Ikea's tricks, for clever ideas on how to do such things. Note that, between them, the nineteen first years of life cover almost a quarter of the normal life-cycle, and yet our urban planning barely gives them heed.

Fifth, a related thought, we should find creative ways to **bring the old and young together**.

Sixth, in our rush to build more housing, we risk aggravating our growing **heat island**. As the planet heats up ever more dangerously, we will have to make Toronto as green as possible: street trees, mini-parks, green walls, and upstairs foliage will mitigate the worst of it. Heat maps of Toronto have found a full 20-degree Celsius difference between our ravines and our industrial areas, with residential zones somewhere in between. Toronto should also move aggressively to improve its summer reflectivity, its albedo. Black is bad: black asphalt, black roofs on factories. Dark shingles are a problem; we should move to lighter colours. And, for the sake of street trees, we should make our pavements porous to protect the water table. And, again for street trees, and the rivers and the lake, we must over-salt far less.

Seventh: we should bring back the stars and make night dark again. Flying over Toronto, looking down, we see a great sea of lights, illuminating nothing useful by just shining at the sky. Sheer waste of electricity, **light pollution!** So, we need a Dark Sky policy, applied to all our lights.

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Eighth: we need **clean air**. That means, especially, fewer micro-particles, known to be terrible for health. Eventually, electric or hydrogen cars and trucks will help. Toronto should monitor, and police, air pollution.

Ninth: Torontonians need to **feel safe in public spaces**. At present, homelessness is making parks, libraries, and public transit uncomfortable for many. This is not to blame our fellow citizens, our Torontonians experiencing homelessness, who deserve both compassion and respect, and need far better lives. It does mean that their plight afflicts the entire city, and we must address it both for their sakes, and for everyone's.

Tenth: a healthy city requires trust and social solidarity. For those to flourish, we must combat the growing **inequality** that afflicts Toronto. As social scientists have observed, we are moving toward a city of the "missing middle", people whom real estate prices are driving out of town, leaving the rich, well served by transit, well shaded and cooled by big trees, and the poor, in environments less convenient, less shaded, less healthy over all and far too hot.

Eleventh: Social equity requires **racial justice**. Toronto, as North American cities go, is agreeably tolerant, but still imperfect. A quick glance at any full-page spread, in a newspaper for instance, congratulating some elite group of graduates or award-winners, turns up a shortage of racialized Torontonians and a very disturbing absence of Black faces. For its general health, any urban group needs access to our elites. That means, for general public health, we must continue to push hard against residual racial biases and find ways to bring everybody on board.

Twelfth: Good diet feeds good health. Toronto must identify and remedy its **food deserts** and support local gardens and expand its collection of back-yard fruit.

In sum, a healthy city is a happy one. It also relieves the many stresses on our medical system. EPRA wants Toronto to approach public health with holistic vision, energy, and good will.

The EPRA board