

Creating a lasting legacy of community green spaces across Canada.



About the TD GreenSights Report

In recognition of Canada's 150th year, TD invested in the revitalization of over 150 parks and green spaces to get them ready to bring people together. Our green spaces are where we meet, talk and play – and find common ground. Through the TD Common Ground Project, TD sought to create a legacy of green spaces that Canadians could enjoy for years to come.

Through the TD Common Ground Project we also sought to gain insight into how we can better shape community green spaces of the future. First, TD commissioned a national poll of more than 1,500 Canadians, the TD GreenSights Survey, conducted by Environics Research. Next, we engaged a select group of thought leaders in the field, hosting the TD Common Ground Think Tank, where experts shared insights about green spaces and key factors that need to be considered in order to create build healthy, vibrant and inclusive spaces for future generations of Canadian communities.

The TD Common Ground Think Tank was hosted by TD Bank Group, and participants included Karen Clarke-Whistler, Chief Environment Officer; Andrea Barrack, Vice-President, Community Relations and Corporate Citizenship, TD Bank Group; Adam Bienenstock, Founder and Principal Designer for Bienenstock Natural Playgrounds; Marc Cadotte, Professor at the University of Toronto Scarborough Campus and Executive Editor of the Journal of Applied Ecology; Anne Charlton, Parks Director, City of Calgary and volunteer Agency Director with the World Urban Parks organization; Robert Hammond, Co-Founder and Executive Director of Friends of the High Line; Dave Harvey, Founder and Executive Director of Park People; Mary-Margaret McMahon, Chair, Parks and Environment Committee and Toronto City Councillor for Ward 32 Beaches-East York; and David Thomas, designer and member of Peguis First Nation. The event was moderated by Jane Farrow, community Public Consultation and Engagement expert.



Community green spaces are an integral part of the Canadian identity. They're where we come together to meet, talk and play. They're where people find connections, relaxation – where we share common ground. Canadians use community green spaces in different ways and have varied perspectives on how they should evolve for the future. This report sheds light on how Canada's community green spaces are being used today, and how Canadians see them being used tomorrow.

“As the pace of life around us intensifies, Canadians value outdoor spaces in their communities where they can find common ground,” says Karen Clarke-Whistler, Chief Environment Officer, TD Bank Group. “We are proud to continue addressing this need by revitalizing community green spaces, and ensuring that they're functional, modern and inclusive.”

The Lasting Legacy of Community Green Spaces

Community green spaces are an integral part of the Canadian identity. Green spaces are where communities come together to meet, talk and play – it's where people find common ground and connect. In Canada's 150th year, TD is proud to continue to invest and create a lasting legacy for Canadians by revitalizing over 150 community green spaces across the country through the TD Common Ground project. As part of this commitment, TD has released the GreenSights Report, which outlines key insights from recent TD research, including the fact that 95 per cent of Canadians agree that access to community green space will be important to their quality of life in the future. The Report also outlines how Canadians are currently using community green spaces. Here's what we learned.



6/10 (59%) Canadians say their children spend less time outdoors than when they were their age

94% agree (regardless of age) that natural sustainable playground equipment would be important for their local community green space



The Top 3 Reasons Canadians Use Green Spaces Are Linked To Escapism

Relaxing on my own: 43%

Males are more likely to be alone in green spaces (47% compared to 39% of women)



Relaxing with friends and family: 41%

Millennials ranked this as the highest with 47%, compared to 39% of the other age groups



Connecting with nature: 42%

Senior citizens aged 70+ more likely to use community green spaces for this reason at 50%, followed by Canadians aged 51-69 at 46%, with millennials least likely at 35%



24% of Canadians use community green spaces most frequently for group and individual fitness/sports activities



3/4 (77%) say the community green space closest to their home could be better

97% of respondents (regardless of age and gender) agree that more public picnic and eating areas would be important for their community green space



13% of Canadians use community green spaces most frequently to spend time with their pet



26% of Canadians use the picnic/eating areas in community green spaces most frequently

For decades (over 25 years) TD has been committed to revitalizing and enriching green spaces across the country. The over 150 community green space revitalization taking place across the country through the TD Common Ground project will not only mark the celebration of this milestone year for Canada but also create a lasting legacy for Canadians to come together in for years to come. To learn more visit commongroundproject.td.com.

A relatively new phenomenon occurring across North America underlines the growing importance of green spaces. People are returning to the urban core of cities. Increasingly people – including millennials and older generations who are downsizing – are “re-urbanizing” downtowns and breathing new life into the urban core.

“For the past 50 years, there was the worry that people were leaving the cities, that the urban core was being hollowed out,” says Robert Hammond, co-founder and Executive Director of Friends of the High Line, which operates the world-renowned park system that re-imagined an unused railway line above New York’s West Side. “Now we have to face the new challenge of ‘over-success.’ So many people now want to come to cities and there are not a lot of places to build green space.”

How Canadians Are Using Community Green Spaces

Urban Escapes

There is a magic about green spaces; extraordinary things occur that often don’t happen elsewhere. By freely congregating and sharing space, people connect on human levels that we don’t find in other public spaces. It’s a full sensory experience from the smells of trees and barbecues to the sounds of babbling water and chirping birds to the sights of children playing together and adults meditating among nature. For many, community green spaces are an escape.

As part of the TD GreenSights Survey, Canadians were asked what they like to do most in their community green space. The top-three activities listed by Canadians can all be linked to escapism. The top answer, “relaxing on my own,” was selected by 43 per cent of respondents, while 42 per cent chose “connecting with nature” and 41 per cent opt for “relaxing with family and friends”.

Generationally, Canadians over the age of 51 reported being more likely to use community green spaces to connect with nature.

We go to green spaces to meet, talk, play, connect, relax and feel at ease. But Canadians’ perceptions of green spaces are evolving:

“Parks are more than just parks today. Green, open space has to do double, triple, and even quadruple duty. They have to be “the traditional park”, but they’re also cultural institutions, botanical gardens and providers of social services. It’s a new definition of parks,” says Robert Hammond.

“The old thinking was that we went to green spaces to connect with nature or take your dog for a walk,” says Andrea Barrack, Vice-President, Community Relations and Corporate Citizenship at TD Bank Group. “Today parks are really punching above their weight in terms of the goals they’re able to achieve, like improving community safety, enhancing a sense of belonging and reducing isolation. People are now seeing these benefits coming from parks.”

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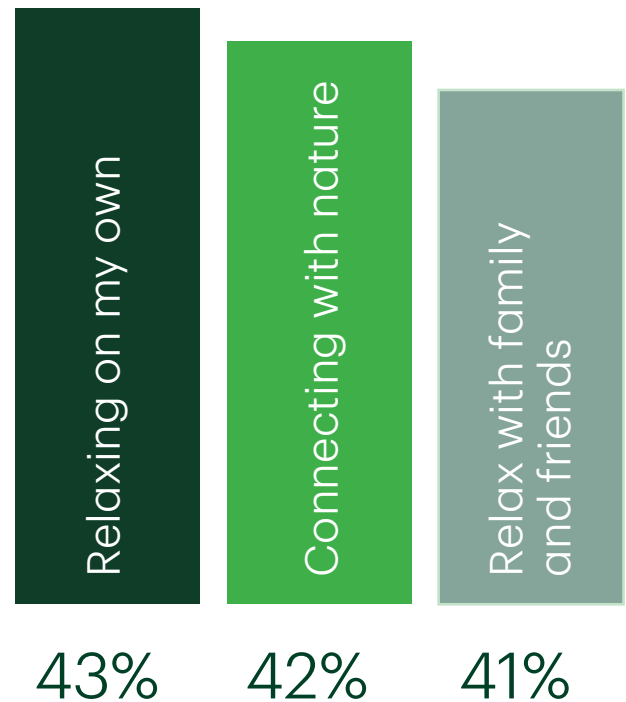
Andrea Barrack, Vice-President, Community Relations and Corporate Citizenship at TD Bank Group.

A Meeting Place

Whether escaping to their community green space, going for a picnic or participating in outdoor fitness groups, Canadians are making a point to spend time in their local green space. TD's research shows that six-in-ten Canadians (60 per cent) visit their community green space once a week or more.

For many, it's the sharing of space that acts as the catalyst to the magic that unfolds in green spaces.

"There's always a shared element," says Dave Harvey, Founder and Executive Director of Park People, an independent charity that helps build stronger communities by improving urban green spaces. "What I'm doing in the park relates to somebody else. You can play frisbee over there, I can sit over here and someone else can have a picnic over there. It forces us to interact."



An Important Factor In Choosing Where You Live

Many factors are considered when choosing a neighbourhood within which to live. But where does green space fall within those considerations? The survey asked Canadians to rank the importance of a number of factors to consult when selecting a neighbourhood.

Canadians place a high priority on proximity to community green space when selecting a neighbourhood, ranking it the third-most important factor (at 18 per cent) after "proximity to good schools," (23 per cent) and "easy access to public transit" (19 per cent), and above "walkable neighbourhood," (15 per cent), "nearby amenities" (14 per cent) and "safety/low crime" (11 per cent).





Kids Spaces

“Kids create, imagine and collaborate in green spaces” says Marc Cadotte, a University of Toronto professor of Urban Forest Conservation and Biology. “We tend to think of parks as playgrounds with artificial play structures but we should think more of the creative and enjoyment for children in having more natural elements: climbing trees; picking up logs looking for insects; wading through brush.”

But, are children outside and with nature enough? Six-in-ten Canadians (59 per cent) say their children spend less time outdoors than they did at their age. Certain provinces ranked above the national average, with more respondents agreeing that their children spend less time outdoors, including Atlantic Canadians (74 per cent), Albertans (68 per cent) and British Columbians (63 per cent).

Adam Bienenstock, an award-winning designer of playgrounds, says there are scientific reasons for kids to be out in nature more. “Living in urban centres, it’s a question of what’s missing – and right now, what’s missing is a full sensory experience. What’s missing from many people’s health and immune systems is all of those positive microbes, all of those bacteria, all those microbiota that make up their immune system. And you don’t get that unless you touch a biodiverse environment before you’re eight years old. We’re missing that in our cities. We forgot that and didn’t design for it.”

Just one-in-five Canadians (21 per cent) say their kids spend more time outdoors than they did – but this is not the case in every urban centre. Torontonians are more likely to say kids spend more time outside than they did (32 per cent), followed by Montreal residents (31 per cent).

Green Spaces As “Living Rooms”

Nearly half (47 per cent) of millennials ranked “relaxing with friends and family” as the top reason they’re using green spaces.

“Parks have become the hang-out destination for millennials,” Dave Harvey says. “I have noticed changes over the last decade, supported by this recent TD research. Millennials are driving the changes, but we’re seeing others change too. (The park) is just a place you want to be.”

Robert Hammond agrees that millennials are leading a cultural shift: “Millennials no longer want to go to a “box”

dedicated solely to art, or food, or theatre. They want a shared experience. Many are flocking to open spaces to fulfill that, and galleries, theatres and restaurants are following suit with outdoor art exhibitions, movies, events and restaurant kiosks.”



The Future Of Canada's Community Green Spaces

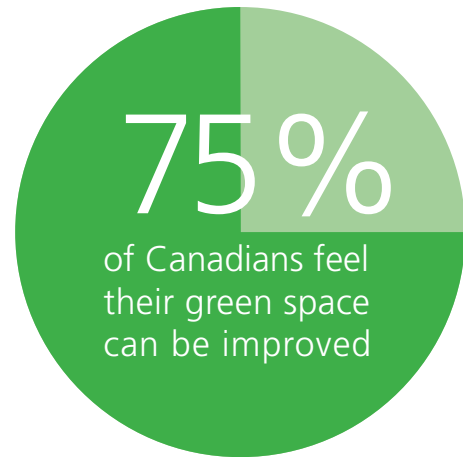
Highly-Valued, But There's Room For Improvement

The vast majority of Canadians – 95 per cent – agree that access to community green space will be important to their quality of life in the future; however, three-quarters (75 per cent) feel that their local green space could be improved.

When asked how the community green space closest to their home could be improved, the most commonly-cited enhancements were more public picnic areas, natural playgrounds and solar lighting, which may be attributed to Canadians' increased interest in sustainable buildings and infrastructure.

Toronto councillor Mary-Margaret McMahon, Chair of the city's Parks and Environment Committee, says municipalities must move with the times and she cites several examples of this; such as Winter Stations, an international art competition for temporary installations on the lifeguard stands in the Beach. "Everyone loves it. They've been a great success each winter when you wouldn't expect people to go to the beach."

Other changes include programs designed for New Canadians and new facilities for young Canadians, with features such as skateboard ramps and zip lines. Pilot programs are a great option for testing and refining programs for targeted community groups.



"By ensuring that green spaces are designed with sustainability in mind, we can enjoy them now, and preserve them for future generations."

Anne Charlton, PARKS DIRECTOR, CITY OF CALGARY

Mixed Perspectives On Technology

While Canadians see the potential to improve their community green spaces, they have varied perspectives around the role of technology in these spaces.

The survey asked Canadians to evaluate how important they consider certain innovations or enhancements within green spaces. While more than three-quarters (76 per cent) of Canadians agree that public picnic and eating areas are important, just 39 per cent say that they'd consider Wi-Fi to be important, while one-third (33 per cent) feel it is unimportant.

When asked the same about electronic device-charging stations, more than four-in-ten (44 per cent) feel that this enhancement is not important.

Generationally, parents with children are more likely to think Wi-Fi and charging stations are important: 47 per cent of those with kids say Wi-Fi is important, compared to 37 per cent without, while 36 per cent indicate charging stations are important, compared to 26 per cent without kids.

Panel experts agree there are times and places for technology in green spaces with some areas suited for it, while other green spaces are more suited for contemplative meditation and escapism. Technology may be intrusive in these places. Regardless, the panel says, there doesn't appear to be a huge desire for electronic connectivity in green spaces.

Seeing The Long-Term Benefits Of Sustainability

Designing environmentally sustainable community green spaces is important to Canadians, no matter what the price tag. Regardless of age, 94 per cent agree that natural sustainable playground equipment would be important for their local community green space.

Adam Bienenstock Agrees That Sustainability Should Be Top-Of-Mind.

“If we’re going to have a sustainable planet, we have to have sustainable green space that commits people to nature,” he says. “That gateway experience that connects us to our land and people has got to be in touch with nature – and when and where children play is the easiest spot that we can do this. If we rethink our playgrounds and make them natural, then we hit an entire generation that grows up as stewards of the land.”

Inclusivity Is A Priority

As the urbanization of Canada continues and cities densify, green space becomes scarcer and more valuable. As the demographics of Canada change, so do the programs and uses for green spaces. This results in a need to consider a broader range of groups when developing and enhancing these spaces.

When designing community green spaces for the future, many Canadians agree that multiple perspectives should be taken into consideration. This includes families with young children (cited by 70 per cent of respondents), seniors (57 per cent) and people with disabilities (53 per cent).

At a generational level, millennials are the most inclusive age group. This generation agrees that it’s important to consider New Canadians (15 per cent) and Indigenous people (12 per cent) – compared to an average of 9 per cent and 5 per cent, respectively, by other age groups.

“Community green spaces are rare places in the world where human barriers drop,” says Adam Bienenstock. “The idea that we’re all separate is something we learn as we get older. It’s not something children understand. In the best green spaces, I see these things drift away in adults.”

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David Thomas, a designer heading Assiniboine Park’s emerging Indigenous People’s Garden project in Winnipeg, says this promotion of inclusivity is a big part of the green-space magic and he routinely witnesses cultures coming together, but rarely clashing. “At Assiniboine Park you just see this flow of different people originally from all over the world. Everyone is a welcomed guest.”

Anne Charlton, Parks Director with the City of Calgary and a volunteer director with the World Urban Parks Organization, says green space is an important element in the reconciliation process that Canadians and Indigenous peoples are entering into. “Parks are that natural space that has been here forever. They resonate with Indigenous people as well as with Canadians who’ve lived here for five generations, two generations or are new to the country.

“Our ability to talk the common language based on nature will be helpful to allow conversations that are meaningful as we work through reconciliation. It will then help us to have the right toolkit to talk about new Canadians and how we bring nature to those who are just landing in Canada,” Charlton says.

Thomas agrees about linking green spaces with the reconciliation process. “When Indigenous people are represented in parks and green spaces it triggers something in the Indigenous community where we acknowledge that we are from this land and that our stories are valid,” he says.

Similar to the survey results, the panel agrees that any discussion about the future of green spaces must put inclusivity high on the agenda, not only when designing, building and renovating parks, but also when developing programs for green spaces.

Willing To Make Sacrifices

With limited areas for green spaces, many Canadians recognize that communities may need to make trade-offs in order to ensure the preservation of green space.

Of those surveyed, 40 per cent agreed that preserving green spaces should come at the expense of commercial development, followed by housing development (24 per cent) and parking (20 per cent). While the majority of Canadians feel that community green spaces require preservation, just 4 per cent of Canadians feel that green space does not need to be preserved.

“It’s not so much a case of sacrificing, it’s more a case of setting priorities,” says Dave Harvey. “We need to make sure green space is seen as a core part of our infrastructure for cities; the physical infrastructure, but, more importantly, the social infrastructure.”

40%
agree preserving green spaces
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commercial development

Finding The Funding

More than one-third (36 per cent) of Canadians believe green space enhancements should be funded by partnerships between government and private enterprise. But 48 per cent still think it’s the sole responsibility of government, while an overwhelming 80 per cent believe government must hold the leading role to fund our public green spaces.

“Corporations have an important role to play,” says Adam Bienenstock. “Most of the projects I’ve been involved in during the last several years have had some sort of corporate affiliation. That doesn’t mean their logo is front and centre. It just means they’re recognizing they are part of the community, their employees don’t just work there but live there, too.”

It’s not just about building or revitalizing open green spaces, but in the ongoing operation of parks, says Dave Harvey of Park People: “We’re really asking a lot more from parks. There’s a great opportunity for corporations to participate in building the social and programming elements around parks.”

The key challenge is that as programs improve and usage changes, cash-strapped municipalities simply don’t have enough money.

“As we’ve seen an evolution in the ways parks are used,” Dave Harvey says, “we’re seeing some evolution from parks departments on being open to working with corporations in different ways. Parks are being used in so many different new ways and governments have not been able to keep up with the public’s demands for new uses and programs. The TD Common Ground Project is an example of how corporate funding can augment government funding to revitalize green spaces and help create places for communities to come together.”

Final Word

Beyond providing recreation, escapism, cultural events and other benefits, it's easy to overlook the concealed assistance community green spaces give urban life.

"The magic of green space is the simultaneous benefits that we derive living in cities," says Professor Marc Cadotte. "Green spaces also provide fundamental services that improve the well-being and environment within cities; things like climate regulation, storm water management, supporting pollinators, sequestering carbon dioxide are all benefits we derive from parks and often don't think about them in this way. Even when urban green spaces are not being used, we're still deriving benefits from them. The simple existence of urban green spaces means we live a better, healthier life."

TD has been committed to revitalizing green spaces across the country for decades. This includes support for more than 25,000 environmental projects and planting 300,000 trees. The TD Common Ground Project is the next step in this commitment, taking a systems approach to community green spaces that includes consideration of the environmental, economic and social benefits.

The TD GreenSights Report signals that Canadians see their community green spaces not only as essential to their lives now, but vital to quality of life in the future.

As Canada continues to evolve and grow, we can come together to invest in and help invigorate our community green spaces, in order to create a legacy of green space where we can come together and find common ground.

Research Methodology

About the TD GreenSights Survey: Environics Research conducted a quantitative online survey of 1,501 Canadian adults. The fieldwork was completed using an online methodology between July 18 and July 26, 2017. As online surveys are not considered random probability samples, no margin of error was assigned.

Think Tank Participants



Karen Clarke-Whistler

Chief Environment Officer, TD Bank Group

Karen has been the Chief Environment Officer of TD Bank Group since 2008. In this role, Karen is responsible for developing TD's environmental strategy, which has enabled it to differentiate itself by embedding an environmental perspective throughout the bank's business operations. Under Karen's leadership TD became the first North American-based bank to be carbon-neutral.



Andrea Barrack

Vice-President, Community Relations and Corporate Citizenship, TD Bank Group

Andrea Barrack is the Vice-President, Community Relations and Corporate Citizenship at TD Bank Group. In this role she is the lead champion for Corporate Social Responsibility across the enterprise, ensuring the development of a best-in-class integrated strategy that is aligned to business objectives while creating positive social, economic and environmental impacts in the community.



Adam Bienenstock

Founder and Principal Designer for Bienenstock Natural Playgrounds

Adam is an award-winning consultant for design, construction, policy, risk and regulatory process for connecting children to nature in our cities. His partners and clients include Parks Canada, ParticipACTION, Right to Play, CBC and The Canadian Wildlife Federation. Adam is a global leader in advocacy and the development of natural play spaces. His vision of sustainability focuses on establishing meaningful connections between the next generation and the natural world.



Robert Hammond

Co-Founder and Executive Director of Friends of the High Line

Robert is the co-founder and executive director of Friends of the High Line, a non-profit that maintains and operates the High Line in New York City. His areas of focus cover a wide range of topics, including helping underserved communities.



David Thomas

Designer and part of Peguis First Nation

David works in architectural design and, along with his daughter, will head a project called the Indigenous People's Garden at Assiniboine Park. He believes that Indigenous design should be present in urban settings and that it should not feel foreign for someone to experience it. His area of focus is on Indigenous green spaces in urban areas.

Think Tank Participants



Anne Charlton

Parks Director for The City of Calgary and volunteer Agency Director with the World Urban Parks organization

Anne is the Parks Director for The City of Calgary and also holds a voluntary position as Agency Director with the World Urban Parks organization. She is an advocate for excellence in management and sustainability. She can speak to urban park issues, trends and connecting communities. Anne holds a Bachelor's Degree in Recreation Administration in Recreational Planning and a Master's degree in Landscape Architecture.



Dave Harvey

Executive Director and Founder, Park People

Dave is the founder and Executive Director of Park People, an independent charity created in 2011 that builds strong communities by animating and improving parks, placing them at the heart of life in the city. Under Dave's leadership, Park People has quickly emerged as Canada's leading city park transformation organization. He played a key leadership role in many aspects of the Ontario Government's progressive agenda, including the 1.8-million-acre Greenbelt, the GTA Growth Plan and the City of Toronto Act.



Marc Cadotte

Professor at University of Toronto Scarborough Campus and Executive Editor of Journal of Applied Ecology

Marc is the TD Professor of Urban Forest Conservation and Biology at the University of Toronto and runs the Cadotte Urban Biodiversity & Ecosystem Services Lab (CUBES). His research interests focus on human impacts on biodiversity and the importance of biodiversity for the environmental benefits people derive from nature. With a passion for ecology, Marc can speak to environmental trends, issues and other research findings.



Mary-Margaret McMahon

Chair, Parks and Environment Committee and Toronto City Councillor for Ward 32 Beaches-East York

Mary-Margaret is an activist and a champion of community and collectivism. As the City Councillor of Ward 32 Beaches-East York in Toronto, she is committed to nurturing the integrity of Ward 32 and Toronto through a sustainable partnership between community and Councillors. She believes in uniting the city to face challenges together, where good things come from combined engagement and efforts. Prior to being elected to City Council, Councillor McMahon's passion for fostering community drove her to create the East Lynn Park Farmer's Market to improve access to healthy foods and stimulate the economy along the Danforth.



Jane Farrow

Community Organizer and Expert in Public Consultation and Engagement

Jane Farrow was the moderator for the TD Common Ground Think Tank. An author and former CBC journalist, Jane is a community organizer who specializes in bringing people together for constructive dialogue and creative city-building initiatives. Her expertise is in public consultation, research, facilitation and engagement. She was the first executive director of Jane's Walk, beginning in 2007, bringing it from its local inception to an international phenomenon.