

# LAKE ONTARIO PARK REVITALIZATION STUDY



Prepared for  
The Corporation of the City of Kingston

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In Consultation with  
LOP Advisory Group and the  
City of Kingston Culture and Recreation Department

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Cover:  
Typical summer day  
at the former swimming  
beach, looking south.  
Jennifer McKendry



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this planning process was:

- to develop and recommend a multi-year strategic direction and plan for the revitalization and rejuvenation of the Park as a public community facility (phase 1)
- to develop a detailed master plan and recommend a long-term financing and budget strategy for the capital construction and operating costs necessary to implement and maintain the recommended development plan (phase 2)
- to ensure ongoing and inclusive community consultation throughout the development of the plan and the related implementation strategy
- to use this collaborative, phased planning process as a model for future revitalization projects in City parks

This report provides the first component, the strategic direction and plan.

In this planning process, it was our intention to celebrate the history of Lake Ontario Park within an overall vision of the Park's future development. Since February of 2006, the consulting team has worked closely with an advisory working group that includes representatives of all the major groups with an interest in the Park, as well as the District Councillor. City staff worked with the stakeholder advisory group and consultants reviewed the current state of the Park, discussed the range of uses that would be suitable there, and reached consensus on a vision statement and list of planning principles. These principles were then illustrated in three versions of the guiding vision: a camping emphasis; an event emphasis; and a waterfront emphasis.

These three scenarios were displayed at a public open house held in the Park in late June. A survey was prepared so that members of the public could comment on the overall vision and principles as well as the three development scenarios. The event was very well attended and the response to the survey excellent. Over 300 people from all parts of Kingston replied and gave overwhelming support to retaining the site as public land and enhancing it as a major urban waterfront park. There was strong support for environmental enhancements and for activities that made use of the natural setting. Other uses such as camping and events were also supported, but only in support of the primary focus on enjoyment of the natural environment.

The vision for the Park's future, and the Park planning principles, are as follows:

“Lake Ontario Park will be maintained and enhanced as publicly owned parkland in support of its role as one of Kingston's primary waterfront open spaces.”

1. Waterfront access will be fostered and the waterfront conserved and rehabilitated.
2. The park will provide facilities suitable for both local and regional residents as well as visitors.
3. The contrast between the park's two main character areas of tableland and waterfront will be celebrated.
4. The park will remain accessible to people of all means and backgrounds.
5. Vestiges of past uses will be conserved and interpreted.
6. All improvements to the park will support environmental enhancement through habitat restoration and sustainable development practices.
7. Revenue generating uses should be considered in support of ongoing park operation and improvement, but not as a primary focus.
8. In determining appropriate uses for the park, priority should be given to:
  - a. family activities
  - b. cultural/community activities
  - c. activities that promote enjoyment of the natural environment

The consultants and City staff reviewed the results of the open house and survey with the stakeholder advisory group, who strongly endorsed the survey findings and expressed their preference for the waterfront emphasis scenario, along with some elements of the other scenarios. The consulting team has now prepared the final report for this phase of the study and will present it to the City's Arts, Recreation & Community Policies Committee and Council. The intent is to have Council approve a budget allocation for the next phase in the enhancement of Lake Ontario Park, namely a park master plan that is supported by a development feasibility analysis and implementation strategy. Once that work is completed, the City will be able to begin a concerted effort to revitalize this essential public open space.



View of Lake Ontario  
from Park  
Jennifer McKendry



# PART 1

## CONTEXT FOR THE CURRENT STUDY

### 1.1 HISTORY OF PARK DEVELOPMENT

A complete chronology of historical development is provided in Appendix C. What follows is a summary of the Park's history, identifying some of the issues and opportunities that gave rise to the current study.

Little is known about the very earliest occupation of the site, but it can be assumed that aboriginal peoples would have taken advantage of the shoreline promontory and sheltered river estuary for their seasonal hunting and fishing. Current use of the Park by aboriginal people for ceremonial purposes reinforces this longstanding connection.

By the time of European occupation of the Kingston area, the lands around what is now Lake Ontario Park assumed strategic military importance in protecting the western flank of the early military garrisons. According to research conducted for this study, the French were the first to construct major military fortifications in the vicinity of the Park. By the first half of the 18th century, the French had constructed batteries near and, possibly, within the lands now occupied by the Park. Once the British captured Fort Frontenac and took control of the Kingston area in the late 1750s, the fortifications appear to have languished and the land was granted to Rev. John Stuart, an early Loyalist settler whose easterly lands later became the site of Queen's University.

However, in the early 19th century, the new threat of American invasion appears to have spurred the military into action. In 1812, the British War Department bought lands including the current Park site with the intent of building fortifications to secure Kingston's western flank. A circa 1813 map shows "breastworks" and a "small battery" in locations that roughly correspond to the northern portions of what is now the Park. Once the War of 1812 ended, the military continued to have an interest in the property, and it was not until the 1840s that they leased the southern portion to private individuals wishing to farm. The Revel family leased the land for many years starting in the mid-1800s (and descendants were park managers into the 1970s).

The first major change came in 1894, long after the military had foregone any plans to use the site for military purposes, and well into the fourth decade of the land being farmed by leaseholders. In 1894, the City passed a by-law permitting a local street railway company to construct lines to the west of the municipal limits, into the adjacent township. The electric streetcar system now extended out to Little Cataraqui Bay. Since there was no development of any significance in this part of the township, the street railway company purchased



Top: Streetcars on the  
Lake Ontario Park route,  
early 20th century  
Bottom: Trailer park,  
circa 1950  
Queen's University Archives

and developed the southern portion of what is now Lake Ontario Park into a place of recreation that would entice customers to ride to the western end of the line. The company built a dance pavilion and began shuttling passengers to and from the Park throughout the summer months. The Park was popular and remained one of the only public attractions west of the City. By 1917, however, the lands to the north had been developed into the Cataraqui Golf and Country Club, and in 1923, the club leased the northern part of what is now the Park from the government and built three new holes. In 1929, construction began on the grain elevator and breakwater in Little Cataraqui Bay, a prelude the major industrial, institutional and residential expansion of Kingston that came soon after.

By this time, Lake Ontario Park was well established as a popular lakeside attraction. In addition to its dance hall, it had a rudimentary swimming shore and change house. Tourist brochures from the mid-1920s tell of a Tourist Motor Camp that had accommodation for up to 100 cars, electric lights, a cook house, children's playground, a refreshment booth and tourist cabins.

The Depression curtailed development of the Park and the failure of the street railway company in 1930 left the City as the owner of the Park. The City then bought the remaining lands north of the street railway park lands from the Club, whose members had only just purchased it the year before. Throughout



St. John's and St. Mary's  
school picnic  
Queen's University Archives

the 1930s, public transit continued to bring families to the Park, especially on summer holidays, and the water, playground and merry-go-round were in full use. Once the Second World War began, an influx of military trainees put new strains on the Park, and its dance pavilion became a popular attraction while Park maintenance fell behind due to wartime priorities. By the war's end, the Park was in disrepair and soon after, the canteen closed.

The real turning point in the development of Lake Ontario Park came in the late 1940s, when the Kiwanis Club of Kingston entered into an agreement with the City of Kingston to operate the Park. The terms were very reasonable — \$1.00 per year — and the onus was on the volunteer members of the Club to do a substantial amount of work in improving the Park setting and operation. This they did, beginning with a general cleanup and painting campaign, and continuing with maintenance of the existing and new components. Club members maintained the operation of the trailer camp, restarted and chaperoned Saturday night dances in the pavilion, reopened the canteen and installed a variety of facilities for children and teenagers. These included a baseball diamond, a zoo, a miniature train and a merry-go-round, as well as supervised swimming at the lake shore. Access from the high tableland down to the water was improved by the construction of concrete steps. New gates were installed, and better electrical service added. By the time the Club handed the Park back to the City in 1955, the Park was again a very popular place for local families and tourists.



Beach and swimmers,  
circa 1960  
Queen's University Archives

The City was able to continue improving the Park for the next two decades. Live-in managers now provided on-site supervision around the clock. In 1960, the City installed a sand beach and re-graded the hillside to provide a grassed sunning slope. More lifeguards were hired and new change rooms, shade shelters and washrooms constructed. By the mid-1960s, the City had replaced the original dance hall with a new steel frame pavilion that included a canteen and open picnic area (later enclosed with side walls). In the late 1960s, the City relocated the now closed tourist cabins and created an aboriginal theme park, using the picnic pavilion as the “longhouse”. A painted totem pole remains from this project.

Work slowed in the Park during the next three decades as budgets shrank. New washrooms were added in the 1970s and a private operator leased space to run a midway, with a miniature golf course, roller coaster and Ferris wheel among its many attractions. Once the grain elevator was demolished in the late 1980s, its site was transferred to the City for park space as part of a development agreement for new residential buildings on King Street, next to the Park. The City added new trails and a footbridge in the 1990s to link this new open space to Lake Ontario Park.

Budget constraints in recent decades have led to a reduction in investment in the Park. Both maintenance of the existing facilities and development of new



Merry-go-round  
Enid and Abe Barnett

components have been affected by funding and staffing reductions that resulted from a review of the City's operations across the municipality. In the past five years, the City terminated its lease with the operator of the private midway and ceased operations of the municipal campground. Events programming has also been substantially curtailed. The City since then has maintained the Park as a passive public open space while it considered its options.

## 1.2 STUDY PURPOSE

With the current study, the City is now seeking direction as to the best future for the Park. According to the study terms of reference, the purpose of this study is:

- to develop and recommend a multi-year strategic direction and plan for the revitalization and rejuvenation of the Park as a public community facility
- (in the second phase) develop (a detailed master plan) and recommend a long-term financing and budget strategy for the capital construction and operating costs necessary to implement and maintain the recommended development plan
- to ensure ongoing and inclusive community consultation throughout the development of the plan and the related implementation strategy

The current study has produced an assessment of the Park today, a vision for the Park's future, a set of park planning principles, and a set of development scenarios illustrating these principles along with suggested components to be included in the Park's future development. Each of these components will be described in greater detail in the text below.

## 1.3 STUDY TEAM

BRAY Heritage was the consultant selected by the City, working with City staff in leading this study. Carl Bray, Principal, was project manager and park planner, in collaboration with John Wright, Partner, Corush Sunderland Wright landscape architects, and members of his staff, and Jennifer McKendry, historian. City management and staff were an integral part of the study and were essential to its success. Mark Fluhrer, Director, Culture and Recreation, was consistently supportive of the study and also contributed his per-

sonal knowledge of the Park. He was ably assisted by Kris Hebert, project manager, and by Robin Etherington and Marc Letourneau. Special thanks go to the volunteer members of the stakeholder advisory group, whose dedication, careful thought, and good humour brought the key issues into focus quickly and allowed reasoned discussion to prevail and a consensus to emerge.

They are:

- Beth Pater, Councillor, Portsmouth District
- George Speal, Kiwanis Club of Kingston
- Jim Cannon, Liz Schell, Clint Hierlihy, Portsmouth Villagers' Association
- Mary Vincent, Alida Moffat, Wendy Mayoff, Friends of Lake Ontario Park
- Hans Vorster, Commodore's Cove residents' association
- Barbara Bennett, Enid Barnett, Gerry de Jong, 606-1000 King St. West residents' association
- Eartha, Urban Aboriginal Community
- Krista Wells, Providence Continuing Care
- Mark Christie, Ontario Realty Corporation
- Blayne Mackey, St. Lawrence College
- Jay Gazely, Cataraqui Golf and Country Club
- Rob Carnegie, Charlie Mignault, Kingston Economic Development Corporation
- Mark Lewis, Kingston Chamber of Commerce

Thanks also to Councillors Floyd Patterson, Ed Smith, and Bittu George, who attended advisory group meetings and responded to questions from the group, and to Councillors Rick Downes and Kevin George, who attended the project open house. Special thanks to guest speakers Jack Wright, retired Professor of Landscape Architecture, and Barry Hughes, Director of Parks and Recreation for the St. Lawrence Parks Commission, for sharing with the group their extensive knowledge of park planning and operation.



**Important Notice**  
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# PART 2

## THE PARK TODAY

### 2.1 NATURAL SETTING

#### Ecosystem

Lake Ontario Park is located on a south-facing promontory on the eastern shore of the Little Cataraqui Creek estuary as it opens into Lake Ontario. The primarily southwest orientation places the Park in the path of the prevailing summer winds, ensuring a cooling breeze during many of the hottest days, and providing maximum solar exposure during the cooler times of the year. Tree cover is located primarily along the ridge at the western side of the Park, thus providing shade in the hot afternoons of summer days while the open lawns along the eastern edge provide access to morning and mid-day sun in the cooler seasons. Winter snows typically drift heavily along the western slopes and ridge line and the shoreline accumulates significant mounds of ice as winter progresses. Ice action against shoreline structures and water's edge causes erosion of the concrete seawall and the former beach.



Winter view to west  
Jennifer McKendry

Soils in the Park are typical of the Kingston area, that is, heavy, poorly drained clays thinly spread over layers of underlying limestone bedrock. Accounts of early farming practices indicate that the portions of the site cleared of tree cover were suitable for pasture (and, perhaps, for fodder crops) but would not support more diverse crop production. These areas included the northern third of the tableland and small portions of the lower terrace, where the soil has a higher sand content. Tree species native to the area and probably present as a climax forest prior to European settlement would have included such deciduous species as sugar and red maples, beech, basswood, white and red ash, yellow and white birch, and red, white and burr oaks, and coniferous species such as eastern hemlock, eastern white pine, and balsam fir.

Remnant specimens of the oak, ash, maple and beech overstorey remain in the Park today, especially on the tablelands and upper slopes of the ridge. However, comparisons with historic mapping and with aerial photographs from the 1950s show that there has been a significant reduction in tree cover over the past century. The landscape prior to development of the Park in the late 19th century was a combination of open pasture in the north tableland and the western terrace below the ridge, and dense second-growth woods (or “scrub timber,” as it is described on the 1860 map). This pattern continued once the Park was developed, with clearing in the wooded portions limited to space for small buildings and play equipment. Major changes to the Park in the 1950s and 60s led to further clearing of the southern and western tableland and slopes, especially when the rocky ridge was re-graded to create a gently sloping grassy amphitheatre.

Overall, however, loss of tree cover seems to have been the result more of natural causes than human intervention. Observations by Park staff as well as site investigations confirm that the more recent thinning process has been caused by a combination of tree overmaturity, structural damage from the 1998 ice storm, and blow downs from the heavy prevailing winds, a process that is accelerated as the tree density is reduced and individual trees are exposed to greater wind force. This problem is most evident along the ridge line in the southern half of the Park, adjacent to the main activity areas. The most diverse and robust tree cover is found on the western slopes of the ridge in the Park’s northern half, an area sheltered from the prevailing winds by a belt of trees along the shoreline and precluded from development by the steep gradient. Mature willow colonize the marshland and anchor the shoreline ridge in the northwest part of the Park; native cedar shelter portions of the southern shore.



Park layout and  
tree cover, 1953

Queen’s University Map Collection



Top: Picnic, 1913.

Note tree cover

Queen's University Archives

Bottom: Thinning trees  
in "Shady Grove, 2006

Jennifer McKendry

Wildlife in the Park is restricted to animal and bird species that tolerate human presence. These include grey and black squirrels, groundhogs, and deer (moving down the Little Cataraqui drainage system). Waterfowl along the shoreline and in the Park's marshy northwestern corner include ducks, heron, gulls and Canada Geese.

Water quality in Little Cataraqui Bay has been monitored by the local health authority for many years. According to staff, testing has shown that the bay is safe for public swimming. The only time the Park's shoreline was "posted" to prohibit swimming temporarily was in August, 2006, and staff members do not know the reasons for this anomaly. In their opinion, there are few potential sources of contaminants around the bay, and this single swimming ban is unlikely to be a common occurrence. The one storm sewer outfall on the northwest side of the Park flows down an open ditch and discharges into a wetland before entering the bay, and thus seems to have some of its contaminants filtered in the process. Aside from limited amounts of surface runoff from the adjacent condo tower parking lots, the chemical plant does not appear to discharge into the bay, and all adjacent development is connected to municipal services. Overall, it would appear that water quality in the bay is at acceptable levels for public swimming and that there are only rare instances where the beach must be closed. Even so, efforts should be made to stabilize and even improve the quality of the water in the bay, as will be shown in several of the planning objectives, below.

## Topography

The Park topography is characterized by a gently sloping tableland, a steep rocky ridge and a generally level shore. The surface drainage is generally to the southwest with local pockets draining west and south down the slope of the ridge.

The shore to the west begins as a marsh at the north end and quickly emerges as a narrow sandy strand covered by wave-borne boulders, behind which is a small sandy ridge secured by tree roots. The City added concrete retaining walls and groins to the shore farther south to check erosion; they also imported sand and created a beach along the central portion of the western waterfront. As one moves south to the tip of the Park, the shore becomes progressively more rocky so that, at the tip and along the southern edge, the shore is a flat expanse of exposed bedrock sloping gently into the lake and scattered with large wave-borne boulders.



Top: Flat rocks and retaining wall; southwest shoreline

Bottom: Lower terrace aggregate extraction area; looking northwest

Jennifer McKendry

The steeper slopes behind the shore are short but very abrupt on the south side of the Park and become gentler as the shore curves north and west. The topography has been altered since the time the Park was first opened. Evidence of aggregate extraction is found in the northwest corner of the Park, where sandy deposits along the bottom of the slope have been excavated, creating a depression on the inland side of a sandy shoreline ridge. As noted above, the western slope facing the former beach was substantially re-graded (using bulldozers) in the 1960s to create a sitting slope and to extend the shoreline. Lower terraces of the cleared slope have been secured with low concrete retaining walls. Where the original contours remain, there are two terraces, one on the southern flank of the tableland and one mid-way up the western side. North of this, the slope is steep and heavily wooded.

The upper tableland is generally flat, rising only slightly at the northern Park boundary. King Street is about a metre higher than the Park, but the eastern Park boundary is level with the adjacent hospital property.

## Adjacent Land Uses

The Park is located on the western edge of the city core, in a district dominated by large institutional land uses. To the east is Providence Continuing Care, a mental health hospital occupying the western part of the larger prop-



Terraced slopes, retaining walls and change rooms; looking southeast  
Jennifer McKendry

erty of the former psychiatric hospital. The historic hospital buildings are either occupied by Provincial Government offices or remain vacant. The eastern part of the hospital property contains a YMCA-run recreation centre as part of a larger complex of Provincial Government offices. The entire property is owned by the Province of Ontario and borders the residential edges of Portsmouth Village. The Province is in the process of preparing a long-range plan for the redevelopment of this site, part of which will remain in use as a mental health and chronic-care hospital.

To the north is the Kingston campus of St. Lawrence College, a community college that has recently been undergoing a major expansion program. The historic farmhouse associated with the tenant farming period of Lake Ontario Park is located on the western edge of the campus and has been conserved and rehabilitated for use as a day-care centre. New residences and playing fields now border the northern edge of King Street West opposite the Park, and the College has recently announced plans to enhance its environmental programs with construction of a wind turbine on the southeast corner of their lands. East of the College is a major north-south arterial road, Portsmouth Avenue, and the mid-20th century residential fringe of Portsmouth Village. West of the College is the Cataraqui Golf and Country Club. Its clubhouse is set well back and the lands bordering the street are landscaped lawn, with the golf course itself occupying the rolling topography farther west.



Eastern Park boundary;  
looking east  
Jennifer McKendry

Next to the Park on the south side of King Street West are three condominium apartment towers and their adjacent surface parking lots and recreation spaces. A tennis court immediately abuts the northwest corner of the Park while the storm drainage channel otherwise forms the northern border with these properties. Elevator Bay Park, a conversion of a former coal dock, lies west of the Park and south of the towers and is linked to the Park by a foot-bridge. It has a path system, park benches, grass and the initial phases of ornamental gardens installed and maintained by community volunteers. The park and towers overlook Little Cataraqui Bay, located at the terminus of Little Cataraqui Creek. The bay has been altered by dredging and construction of docks and two breakwaters associated with the grain elevator constructed there in 1930 (demolished in the late 1980s). West of the bay is Carruthers Point, the northern half of which contains the large DuPont chemical plant. The southern half has a Girl Guide camp and a few cottages but is otherwise undeveloped.

Offshore from the Park is the entrance to Kingston harbour from Lake Ontario. Due south is Wolfe Island and its satellites Garden and Simcoe Islands. Smaller islands dot the harbour entrance as it opens into the expanse of the lake, but the channel is wide and deep otherwise.

Dupont plant and  
condominium towers;  
looking west  
Jennifer McKendry



## Sensory Qualities

Its lakeside setting gives Lake Ontario Park wonderful views of Lake Ontario, Carruthers Point, and the outer islands. The remaining views are less compelling. To the east, past a chain link fence along the property boundary, is an open expanse of grass terminating in a view of the squat, nondescript buildings of Providence Continuing Care hospital, but with glimpses of the more substantial and elegant former psychiatric hospital buildings behind. A wooded shoreline occupies views to the southeast. To the north is the busy thoroughfare of King Street across which is the golf course clubhouse, seen in the distance, and the various buildings and open spaces of St. Lawrence College. Three tall condo towers capture the view to the northwest, while the DuPont plant occupies most of the western view.

Views within the Park are varied. Approaching the Park from the east along King Street, drivers catch glimpses of the lake through the trees, but when they turn into the Park, the view is taken up with the open events area and campground. By the middle of the Park, trees again obscure distant views and it is only when one reaches the main parking lot that the lake begins to appear along the horizon. As one approaches the ridgeline, the full view is revealed. Down the slope along the shore, the view is confined to Little Cataraqui Bay. Further north, down the slope is a sheltered area that is ringed with trees so



Park entrance drive;  
looking south  
Jennifer McKendry

that the towers, the lake and the rest of the Park are screened and the views are entirely local. At the opposite end of the shore, the rocky point provides a panoramic view of the lake and outer islands.

Being downwind from the DuPont chemical plant means that the noise and smells of that industry affect the Park, especially when the weather is humid, but not so much that they are obnoxious. The busy traffic on King Street is definitely audible in the northern campground and is a nuisance during the day. Proximity to a small airport means occasional noise from aircraft, while proximity to a major lake means occasional noise from powered watercraft. Aside from these intrusions, the Park is isolated from other urban development, buffered by institutional uses and open spaces, and so is free from most of the impacts suffered by downtown parks.

## Security

According to comments heard from Park staff and from Kingston police officers on patrol there, the Park is considered to be safe. There has been relatively little vandalism and the only trouble police have to face normally is rowdy parties in the more isolated parts of the setting. There are street lights along the major access routes and the office building has a tenant who also provides informal surveillance. The Park is used throughout the day and in all seasons, and is overlooked by many of the apartments in the adjacent condominiums.



View to lake  
looking south  
Jennifer McKendry

More security was available when the Park was more heavily used, especially when the campground was occupied, but the advisory group did not report any marked increase in security problems since the campground closed. Most seemed to feel that the Park would be safe as long as plenty of people used it and there remained an on-site custodian.

## 2.2 STRUCTURES AND UTILITIES

### Buildings

The original dance hall and the later holiday cabins are gone, in the former case replaced by a multi-use pavilion. This pavilion originally had open sides but was later enclosed to provide better weather protection. It is a late 1950s prefabricated steel structure with a canteen attached to the south end of a large interior space suitable for special events in season, and storage otherwise. The remaining buildings in the Park include a small frame ticket booth (now dis-used), two single-storey frame washroom/change rooms, two circular masonry washrooms, both on the edge of the ridge overlooking the shoreline, a small storage shed and workshop on the shoreline next to the boat launch, and a two-storey frame office/residential building at the campground entrance, next to which is a one-storey masonry camper washroom/shower building,. The ensuing master plan for the Park will include a condition assessment and feasibility analysis for the future use of these buildings. At present, they are functional but require repair and renovation. The office is closed but the building's residential portion is tenanted.

### Utilities and Access

All municipal services enter the Park from King Street West. Electrical service is provided by pole-mounted cables installed alongside the entrance drive, running south from the King Street east-west electrical service line and connecting to all major buildings and to some campsites. Local distribution within the Park is via pole-mounted transformers and panels. A waterline runs south along the entrance drive and services all the buildings as well as campsites on the tableland and in the valley at the northwest corner of the Park. A sanitary sewer connects all the buildings and six of the campsites with the main sewer running along King Street West. A dump station for campers is provided midway up the driveway that slopes down to the boat launch.

Stormwater runoff is allowed to drain over the existing landscape; the exception being a main that directs stormwater off King Street West in a westerly direction along a depression that runs along the north edge of the campground. The pipe emerges from the ground near the top of the ridge and discharges down a terraced channel into a wide ditch that empties into a small wetland at the northeast corner of the bay.

As mentioned above, the former campground is partially serviced. Of the approximately 250 spaces provided, 150 have electricity and water hookups and 6 also have sanitary sewer connections (these are RV sites located immediately north of the office).

Vehicular access is via an unpaved road running south from King Street West parallel to the east property boundary. The entrance gates that formerly existed have been relocated and the Park is now open to the public year-round. This road terminates in a large asphalt-paved parking lot in the middle of the Park tableland. Traffic from the campground exits through a one-way route running up the middle of the Park northwards from the office. Access to campsites in the valley west of the main campground is via a steep gravelled roadway that switchbacks down the slope along the north edge of the Park and terminates at the storage/workshop building. Streetlights illuminate the entrance drive, parking lot and vicinity, and the valley campground.



Trail along ridge  
Jennifer McKendry

Pedestrian access to the east is curtailed by a chain link fence running the length of the easterly boundary and having a single opening through which runs a paved footpath/bikepath from Portsmouth Village. This route, now part of the waterfront trail that runs along the north shore of Lake Ontario, enters the Park through an opening in the fence at the top of the ridge near the Park's southern boundary, crosses the tableland, and descends to the valley (note: the Waterfront Regeneration Trust, via the SuperBuild program, has helped the City fund improvements to this trail system through the Park). A footbridge in the northwest corner of the Park crosses the drainage ditch and gives access to the path system on Elevator Bay Park and provides a link northwards to the Little Cataraqui Creek Conservation Area and the Rideau Trail.

Kingston Transit carries on the tradition of providing public transit service to the Park but does not run transit vehicles into the Park itself, as was once the case. The No. 6 bus route along King Street West has stops both eastbound and westbound on King Street at the Park (with 30-minute head times) every day except Sunday. Additional bus service may be provided during special events at the Park.

## Amenities

Many of the amenities formerly present in the Park have been removed over the years. The original dance hall was demolished in the 1950s and the base-



Picnic and dogwalking area; looking southwest  
Jennifer McKendry

ball diamond, miniature train and merry-go-round provided by the Kiwanis Club in the early 1950s are also gone. The beach is gone as are the swimming and wading pools and the associated shade shelter. The tourist cabins, moved in the 1960s to create a miniature theme park, are gone, and the campground is closed. The midway, with its many rides and miniature golf course, is also gone.

However, the pavilion, which replaced the old dance hall, is still available for group events, as is the large open space in the campground. There is a children's playground where the baseball diamond used to be, and a boat launch ramp next to the former swimming area. The grassy sitting slope is still there, as are the concrete lookouts and access stairs. The picnic area in the southern terrace is still actively used, and the trail system has recently been upgraded.

## 2.3 PARK USERS AND USE PATTERNS

### Current Conditions

While it is evident that the Park is popular and well used throughout the year, comments made in the advisory group meetings identified several aspects of the current Park operation that members felt were not adequate. They complained that the Park was not well maintained: washrooms were either closed or dirty, roads potholed, trees were decaying and not being replaced, supervision was not what it had been, shoreline bulkheads were becoming dangerously deteriorated, facilities for swimming were either poor or non-existent, vandalism was not being addressed, and dead fish and birds were not being removed. All of this speaks to a lack of maintenance on the City's part, a direct result of reduced municipal budget allocations to park operations.

Most advisory group members felt that the Park was generally acceptable as a natural open space; however, they felt that several aspects of the Park's design needed to be improved. In their view, the trail system was disconnected, four-season use was difficult, the needs of dog walkers were not being met (for off-leash areas), conflicts existed on the trails between pedestrians and cyclists, the steep grade down to the boat ramp was dangerous and made the lower terrace inaccessible to those with limited mobility, and benches and picnic facilities were lacking. Drainage in the campground is poor after heavy rains, and the shoreline is eroding. Loss of the midway and swimming leaves little for chil-

dren and young people to do there. The group felt that the Park was not well promoted by the City, either through entrance signage or through upkeep and enhancement of Park facilities. These comments reflect that fact that the City has not done any comprehensive master planning for Lake Ontario Park since the early 1960s.

## Daily Uses in Four Seasons

In spite of these conditions, the Park remains very popular with Kingstonians, who use it daily for recreational walking, running, dog walking, picnicking, swimming, and boating. The local aboriginal community also uses the site for ceremonial purposes. Visitors to the city still ask if the campground will re-open. Members of the study advisory group felt that the Park functioned well as a natural area suitable for families. They also felt that the beautiful waterfront setting was a great attraction for people of all ages, year round.

In all but the most inclement weather, the Park is occupied by people actively or passively enjoying its setting. Dog walkers predominate early and in the late afternoon, joggers are there early, at lunch, and after work, and there are strollers present throughout the day. Some people park their cars in the central parking lot and sit there to look out at the lake. Aside from the trails, waterfront and small playground, there are no facilities for active recreation and



Jogger on waterfront trail;  
looking southwest

Jennifer McKendry

the Park has not made provision for such activities since the days of the dance hall, baseball diamond and supervised beach. Family picnics remain a popular use of the Park, as do special events. The public boat launch gets some use, and the bay is a venue for kayakers and windsurfers.

## Camping

Although the City closed the campground in 2005 as part of a review of municipal services, the City records of campground use provide an overall picture of use patterns for the existing campground facilities in the years leading up to closure.

According to municipal and consultant studies of the campground, the City operated the campground to meet two corporate goals: to provide a venue for large events that would attract both tourists and residents; and to provide economic benefits to surrounding neighbourhoods and the downtown. The campground was open from May to October and allowed a maximum two-week stay. It thus excluded seasonal campers and catered exclusively to tourists (area residents were prohibited from camping there). Of that market, it tended to attract the majority of its clients from elsewhere in Ontario and from the United States. In peak summer season the campground would reach approximately 50% capacity on weekends but was rarely more than a quarter full on weeknights. The full-service campsites tended to be the most popular.

The campground was unique because it was the only campground close to downtown Kingston, it had low rates compared with privately run campgrounds in the area, and it did not allow residents of Kingston and region to camp overnight and thus was geared to visitors. Its role in the City's future provision of community services and tourism was not clear, however, and this is a major reason why the campground is closed at present. Initial figures from the consultant studies tended to show a drain on the City's budget, but while the campground's annual costs to the taxpayer were calculated, its economic benefits were not. Comments from the advisory group and survey responses show that there is a widespread belief that the campground is beneficial to the community to the whole and is not just an attraction on its own, and as an added feature in the Park. As a result of these comments, the future of the campground operation is one of the key issues to be addressed in the current and ongoing planning process for Lake Ontario Park.

## Special Events

One obvious benefit to the community as a whole and to visitors is the use of the Park for special events. The Park has been a popular venue for large group events for many years. Participants tend to focus their activities in the large open space in the northern part of the Park and, for larger events, use the campground. As noted in the service review (p. 5), recent examples include:

- Braun Cycling (240 cyclists)
- CORK (50-75 participants in annual sailing regatta)
- HOG rally
- Kingston Kennel Club (180-200 participants, with 93 campsites booked)
- Limestone Dog Show (300 participants, with 153 campsites booked)
- Scuba divers (100-125 participants, throughout the season)
- Square Dancers (200-215 participants)
- Teddy Bear Picnic (annual children's event)
- COK day camp program (children's summer programming)

In the past, the Park was also the preferred venue for annual civic fireworks displays, with spectators crowding the slopes overlooking the lake to see fireworks set off from the adjacent elevator dock. It has also been a popular venue for company picnics. Most recently, the local aboriginal community has held its annual powwow there.



Observation deck and bathhouse, 1951

Queen's University Archives



# PART 3

## PARK PLANNING GOALS

### 3.1 PARK PLANNING TRENDS

At one of the workshops that were an integral part of the current Park planning process (see below for details), author and educator Jack Wright discussed modern trends in parks and recreation planning and referenced his book titled, *Urban Parks in Ontario/The Modern Period*.

TRENDS IN USE	
From 60s-70s	To 80s plus
Structured use in parks	Flexible, non-structured uses
Narrow age band of users	Broad age band of users
Planned programmed activities	Self-directed, spontaneous
Large and small groups	Individuals/small groups
Competitive uses	Non-competitive uses
Activities	Experience/Self-actualization
Recreation-physical elements	Integrated physical/social/cultural
Formal social groups	Informal social networks
Sedentary lifestyle	Fitness walking

TRENDS IN PROVISION OF PUBLIC OPEN SPACE	
From 60s-70s	To 80s plus
Parks	Open space
Single function	Multiple uses
Site specific-unitary	Linked linear O.S. systems
Formal maintenance	Lower cost/variety of standards
Development	Re-use/redevelopment
Blue print	Strategy and policies
Planned for	Planned with
Utilitarian	Functional aesthetic
Public space	Private/public mix
Horticulture	Eco-friendly/sustainable
Public funding	Public/community partnerships

## Most Popular Recreation Activities (1995)

(in order — highest to lowest by percentage):

- Walking (85%); Gardening (72%); Home exercise (48%);  
Swimming (44%); Bicycling (44%); Skating (34%); Baseball (30%);  
Bowling (24%); Jogging (24%); Weight training (23%); Golf (23%);  
Alpine skiing (17%); Volleyball (17%); Exercise classes (17%);  
Cross-country skiing (14%); Tennis (13%); Hockey (12%);  
Soccer (12%)

## Shifting Context for New Millennium:

- Acquisition of large public parks is unlikely due to budget deprivation and apathetic societal attitudes to the public good.
- Demands for public parks will be for a diversity of recreational opportunity. Greater demand from a wider age band of potential clients of all skill levels.
- Demographic changes as evidenced by an aging population are affecting the purpose and functions of urban-core open spaces where social interaction of these spaces is the highest and best use in a spontaneous, non-competitive nature.
- There has been a shift towards providing family-oriented picnic areas and unstructured open space opportunities within the city limits as opposed to outside urban limits as in past practices.
- Emphasis on the effective use of open space rather than the quantity of open space.
- A growing demand for quality outdoor experiences, including interpretative and outdoor skill programs.
- An ever-growing recognition of the links between preservation and protection of historic and cultural sites, natural areas and recreation.
- Public open space has become a measure of local culture; the quality of the public realm reflects local quality of life.
- Economist David Foote comments: "... future growth in outdoor recreation is likely to be found in the natural environment and general recreation activities."

Barry Hughes, Manager of Parks and Recreation for the St. Lawrence Parks Commission, reviewed the feasibility, development implications and costs of typical park components in Eastern Ontario.

For camping, he noted the increasing popularity of RV camping and the de-

cline of tenting, in all age brackets. RV camping is the fastest growing part of the recreational camping market. It requires a significant investment — up to \$12,000 in capital costs per site — but also generates revenue in the range of \$2,500/per space/per annum. By contrast, tent camp sites cost around \$3,000/per site to construct and generate about a third of that each year in revenue. Other popular forms of camping now emerging include basic cabins, with a construction cost of approximately \$25,000 and an annual return of up to \$7,000, and yurts (large circular tents for group camping) that cost up to \$14,000 to build and return up to \$5,000 per year. Ancillary support uses for campsites include washroom/showers for basic campsites all the way up to central office/recreation centres offering laundry, common rooms, food service and internet access, for full-service RV campgrounds. Children's playgrounds, outdoor amphitheatres and interpretive centres are also popular adjuncts to large campgrounds. An increasing concern in campgrounds is security: most campgrounds now offer round-the-clock supervision and many are gated.

For swimming and water activities in general, the most popular feature remains a sand beach. However, recent concerns in the Lower Great Lakes over environmental issues such as loss of fish habitat have dictated a new approach to the construction of swimming areas. Sand is no longer permitted at the water's edge and is now available inshore or well out into the water body. The shoreline itself can still be suitable for swimming and play but must now be made of other materials than sand: pea stone is a popular alternative that has been generally accepted by the public. Uses associated with the beach include adjacent shady areas for picnicking and observing waterside activity, washroom/change rooms. Increasingly popular alternatives to wading pools and other water activities for children are spray parks, and these can be built near beach and picnic areas to provide a full range of facilities for families.

Aside from camping, other potential sources of revenue were discussed. Food service is often a desired addition but operational experience has shown that restaurants are not successful in our short park seasons and that all one can reasonably expect is a basic canteen operation that is offered as a service by the park but is not expected to make a profit. Many people now bring their own food, a further disincentive to having a for-profit food service enterprise in the park. Similar comments apply to other potential sources of revenue that the park itself might offer, such as watercraft rentals, although private operators have been successful within other parks in the area. More promising are spe-

cial events, such as dog shows, and programmed activities, such as summer day camps. These can be offered within areas that are cordoned off with temporary fencing.

## 3.2 PARK PLANNING PROCESS

### Consultation Process

The consulting team were assisted throughout the study process by a stakeholder advisory group. Members were selected by the City and represented the main interest groups from across the municipality. These individuals included representatives of the immediate neighbours, such as St. Lawrence College, Ontario Realty Corporation, Providence Continuing Care, Cataraqui Golf Course, and residents of the condominium towers and townhouses, as well as those who represent other Park users, such as the local Councillor, the urban aboriginal community, Friends of Lake Ontario Park, KEDCO, the Chamber of Commerce, Portsmouth Villagers Association, the Kiwanis Club. Staff of the City's Culture and Recreation Department assisted the consulting team and contributed to advisory group meetings.

Consultants facilitated a series of meetings in which the group reviewed the Park's history, reviewed the current Park in terms of what worked and what



Public open house,  
June 2006  
City of Kingston

did not, discussed a full range of potential development types and components, and reviewed examples of similar park development elsewhere, in a workshop with park planning experts. The result of this was consensus on the overall vision for the Park's future and a set of related planning principles (see Appendix A for Meeting Minutes).

The vision and principles were then illustrated in three development scenarios, each with a different emphasis (camping, events, waterfront: see below for details) and these were displayed at a public open house held in the Park in the early summer. Visitors to the open house were asked to complete a survey that recorded their opinions on the proposed vision, principles and plan components. This survey was also offered on line. The open house was very well attended and the survey had a very high level of response (see Appendix B for Survey Results).

### 3.3 PARK PLANNING VISION AND PRINCIPLES

The advisory group and respondents to the opinion survey strongly supported the following vision statement:

*“Lake Ontario Park will be maintained and enhanced as publicly owned parkland in support of its role as one of Kingston’s primary waterfront open spaces.”*

#### Park Planning Principles

The advisory group and survey respondents also strongly endorsed the following principles for realizing this vision:

1. Waterfront access will be fostered and the waterfront conserved and rehabilitated.
2. The Park will provide facilities suitable for both local and regional residents as well as visitors.
3. The contrast between the Park's two main character areas of tableland and waterfront will be celebrated.
4. The Park will remain accessible to people of all means and backgrounds.
5. Vestiges of past uses will be conserved and interpreted.
6. All improvements to the Park will support environmental enhancement

through habitat restoration and sustainable development practices.

7. Revenue generating uses should be considered in support of ongoing Park operation and improvement, but not as a primary focus.
8. In determining appropriate uses for the Park, priority should be given to:
  - family activities
  - cultural/community activities
  - activities that promote enjoyment of the natural environment.

Much of the flavour of this discussion centred on the need to provide community-scale activities that would complement, but not compete with, the attractions already provided in the downtown and private sector and provincially or federally managed sites in the surrounding region.





# PART 4

## PARK PLANNING GUIDELINES

### 4.1 THREE SCENARIOS

Once the stakeholder advisory group, staff and the consulting team had reached a consensus on a vision for the Park's future and related planning guidelines, the next step was to apply these ideas to the existing layout of the Park. The consulting team reviewed the results of the previous workshops with the advisory group and determined that the group had generally been looking at three versions of the overall vision and planning principles: one that emphasized camping, another that emphasized events, and a third that emphasized the waterfront. The team decided to demonstrate the implications of each of these three approaches by preparing preliminary plans for each approach. These plans, or development scenarios, were then presented to the public for their response, via comments at the open house and in the opinion survey, and then reviewed by the advisory group. The resultant comments are reflected in the recommendations described in Section 4.2, below.

The following plans are very preliminary and contain some elements that have since been rejected by both the public and the advisory group. Each plan was prepared to illustrate one version of the planning principles and, in some cases, to provide an extreme version of the principles in order to provoke a response.

## Scenario 1: Camping Emphasis

This scenario shows the impact of developing a full-service recreational vehicle (RV) campground. Although camping of various kinds has been discussed in the advisory group, it is evident from the City's own experience with the former campground, and from current industry best practices, that the optimum type of campground is one that caters to the profitable RV market and provides a sufficient number of spaces for an efficient and profitable operation. It is also important that such a campground be financially self-supporting and meet the City's tourism objectives.

The plan shows a layout that offers approximately 120 fully serviced, drive-through RV sites. What is immediately evident is the large amount of space that such a campground would require, and that the campground would dominate the Park entrance. When shown this option, both the advisory group and the majority of respondents to the survey rejected it as being too intrusive and in conflict with the vision and most of the planning principles.

Other components of note in Scenario 1 include:

- smaller, ancillary campsites for trailers and tents
- a looped vehicular access route connecting the major building groupings on the upper terrace
- two additional parking lots, one near the washrooms on the upper terrace, and another next to the workshop building on the shoreline
- a gazebo overlooking the water, on one of the lower terraces
- a linked pedestrian path system

As in the other scenarios, the wetland at the northwest corner of the Park is enhanced in order to improve water quality in the bay.

These components were generally acceptable, with the exception of the new roadway and parking lots, which were deemed to be in conflict with the pedestrian-oriented and environmental emphasis of the vision and planning principles.



## Scenario 2: Events Emphasis

This scenario brought into focus the traditional use of the Park as a place for special events. In doing so, the plan makes use of many of the existing parts of the Park, especially the large open space near the Park entrance as well as the pavilion. It adds more facilities for group picnics and other events throughout the upper terrace. In doing so, this plan also shows a looped access road, although parking is concentrated in the large, central lot currently existing. Added attractions include an enhanced waterfront amphitheatre with the grassed terraces now facing a shoreline stage, with a gazebo.

Other components of Scenario 2 include:

- camping to support events (it is assumed that this campground would not provide fully serviced RV sites but would instead cater to tenters and those with trailers)
- a new events structure (a roof under which can be provided temporary space for events registration and portable washrooms)
- an enhanced waterfront watercraft launching area, for canoes, windsurfers and kayaks, revitalizing the existing boat launch area
- a landmark signage feature at the Park entrance

This scenario had a more positive response in that most advisory group members supported the enhancement of facilities for special events, and were pleased to see a balance of camping and waterfront uses to support events.



## Scenario 3: Waterfront Emphasis

This scenario pulled the focus directly to the waterfront and to activities related to water. Activities for children, young people and families are also emphasized more so than in the other scenarios: these activities would be both programmed and unstructured. Key features of this scenario include a swimming area, here shown as a suspended curtain creating a pool of filtered water within the bay, in order to address concerns about water quality. Access to water is also provided via a large water play area (splash pad and similar water-based facilities not requiring staff supervision). There are facilities for small watercraft and for children's play, as in the previous scenario, but they are bigger in this case.

Other components of this scenario include:

- a looped road system with small parking lots next to each major activity area
- a large events area
- a small campground supporting the events area
- a new dance/events pavilion, overlooking the lake
- a floating stage
- a re-routed entrance drive
- a new boat launch for trailered watercraft, located on Elevator Bay Park, with adjacent parking

This scenario received the most support, but with the significant exception of the new boat launch, which was rejected outright. There were also concerns about the looped access road and multiple parking lots, as noted in reactions to previous scenarios.



## 4.2 Recommended Components for a Park Master Plan

From the comments made by the advisory group member, and from responses by the public to the survey, there emerged a preliminary consensus on the components of the three scenarios that the majority of people would like to see in a master plan for Lake Ontario Park. As is evident in the analysis of survey results (Appendix B), within an overall emphasis on environmental enhancement, the swimming area, specifically a beach, was a top priority. Of the remaining 20 or so facilities listed on the questionnaire, the top five were:

- picnic areas with BBQ
- children's playground
- events area (e.g. for dog shows)
- pavilion for group activities
- camping (tenting)

The Park plan would most closely resemble Scenario 3: Waterfront Emphasis. It would take into account the concerns raised by the advisory group and would reflect the survey results. The recommended components of a Park master plan include, but are not necessarily limited to the following family-oriented, waterfront-focused enhancements to the existing setting:

- a large open field for events, with ancillary camping
- a swimming area, either as a beach or water curtain
- a boating area for non-powered watercraft (but no short-term docking)
- a playground for children, and four-season activities for youth and people of all ages
- improved Park maintenance, lighting, and a live-in supervisor
- improved public transit access to the Park
- a trail system linked within the Park and offsite
- conserved and regenerated natural areas, including shoreline, wetland, forested slopes and shaded upper terrace lawns

Access and servicing requirements for these components were not part of the survey and will have to be addressed in the master plan.

## 4.3 Next Steps

The current planning study has achieved its goal of reaching a consensus on the future of Lake Ontario Park. In doing so, it has ensured that two of the three main objectives of the study terms of reference have been met. The first

objective, “to develop and recommend a multi-year strategic direction and plan for the revitalization and rejuvenation of the Park as a public community facility” has been achieved. The third, “to ensure ongoing and inclusive community consultation throughout the development of the plan and the related implementation strategy” has been achieved so far. The second objective, “develop and recommend a long-term financing and budget strategy for the capital construction and operating costs necessary to implement and maintain the recommended development plan,” remains to be achieved in the second phase of this planning exercise.

Overall, the master plan and implementation strategy must address three key issues: the quality of human experience intended; the ecology of the site; and the financial and management requirements of the desired plan. Involvement of the existing advisory group should be assumed, as should a long-term strategy for partnerships with volunteer groups, institutions and non-profit agencies within the community, many of whom are represented on the advisory group.

The terms of reference for the next phase are focused on finding a viable way of putting in place the vision and planning principles agreed to in this study. Some further guidance for this task has been provided by the detailed comments provided by the advisory group and respondents to the public opinion survey, as summarized in the previous section. Comments provided by the invited experts on park planning will help shape aspects of the design and proposed operation. Recommendations from City reports assessing the former campground operation will also identify issues requiring resolution in the final plan. Using these as a basis, the next phase, or revitalization strategy, will have the following components:

- A master plan for the Park’s physical development, including, but not limited to:
  - habitat conservation and restoration
  - shoreline rehabilitation
  - water quality improvements (surface runoff as well as bay)
  - an assessment of the Park’s role in the City’s overall parks and recreation system, and as a component of the Provincial Waterfront Trail
  - access and parking
  - LEED certification-eligible development of buildings and infrastructure

- facilities for both programmed and non-programmed recreational activities for families and people of all ages
- revenue-generating uses in support of core Park uses
  
- A series of development options for achieving the vision and planning principles including, but not limited to:
  - assessment of the Park's role in the City's park system and tourism development strategy
  - life-cycle assessment of existing park service infrastructure, structures and buildings
  - assessment of existing natural resources and cultural heritage resources
  - order-of-magnitude costing for all major Park components
  - development feasibility analysis for priority items identified in Phase 1 study, including the campground
  - preparation of three feasible options for park revitalization
  - recommendations for a preferred option
  - stewardship and maintenance plan for the preferred option
  - funding and partnership strategy for the preferred option

A budget allocation of \$100,000 inclusive should be secured to undertake this work.

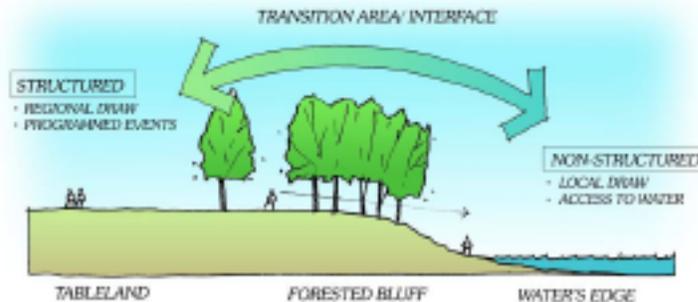
Once this second phase has been completed, Council should adopt the report recommendations and approve a phased development strategy for Park revitalization, with annual budget allocations for capital and operational needs, and a partnership strategy. Only then will Kingston residents be fully confident that the Park will be maintained and enhanced as a key public open space.

## VISION

*Lake Ontario Park will be maintained and enhanced as publicly owned parkland in support of its role as one of Kingston's primary waterfront open spaces.*

## PLANNING PRINCIPLES

1. Waterfront access will be fostered and the waterfront conserved and rehabilitated.
2. The park will provide facilities suitable for both local and regional residents as well as visitors.
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  - b. cultural/ community activities
  - c. activities that promote enjoyment of the natural environment



## LAKE ONTARIO PARK REVITALIZATION STUDY CITY OF KINGSTON

JUNE, 2006

BRAY HERITAGE ● CORUSH SUNDERLAND WRIGHT LTD ● JENNIFER McRENDRY



# APPENDICES

A. Meeting Minutes

B. Survey Results

C. Chronology of Park Development

D. References