



RESEARCH BULLETIN

Cooksville Parkland Long-Term Acquisition

How the City of Mississauga utilized a voluntary buy-out model to advance social and ecological co-benefits

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Above: A home that had been purchased by the City of Mississauga and slated for demolition (Watterodt, June 2024)

KEY MESSAGES

- The City of Mississauga's [*Cooksville Parkland Long-Term Acquisition*](#) project is a strategic planning initiative designed to convert 25 acres of flood prone land into public parkland.^[1]
- The initiative highlights the importance of integrating flood risk reduction and stormwater management planning with broader community development and resilience goals, such as ensuring equitable access to greenspace by urban residents in areas undergoing rapid densification.
- The City of Mississauga engaged in a voluntary buyout program, guided by the “willing buyer, willing seller” principle, and provided fair market value compensation to buyout participants.
- This case study provides unique insights into enabling policy and planning tools, innovative funding mechanisms, and the importance of (re)framing retreat around community co-benefits.

THE ISSUE

Located southwest of Toronto, the City of Mississauga is experiencing rapid densification and population growth, particularly within its Urban Growth Area—which includes the downtown core and surrounding Cooksville neighbourhood. The loss of permeable surfaces within the Cooksville Creek Watershed, due to increased development, coincides with aging stormwater management infrastructure and the need to improve resilience to extreme weather events.^[2] Flooding in 2009 and 2024 highlighted the vulnerability of buildings and infrastructure located within the floodplain.^[3, 4] The watershed also faces challenges related to streambank erosion, water quality degradation, and threats to aquatic habitat.^[3] Although the City's 2012 [*Cooksville Creek Flood Evaluation Study*](#) identified managed retreat as a potential mitigation strategy, the option was deemed a “last resort alternative” and was not recommended at that time.^[3]

However, in 2017, the City of Mississauga began a multi-year process to acquire strategic parcels of flood prone land in the Cooksville area for a different purpose: addressing the neighbourhood's parkland deficit. The City's strategic planning recognizes the many social, ecological, health, and economic benefits of parks and open spaces, including improved quality of life, carbon sequestration, stormwater management, improved air quality, climate resilience, physical activity, active transportation, crime reduction, psychological well-being, and social cohesion.^[5] The City established minimum parkland provision targets, assessed at 1.2 hectares per 1,000 people at the city-wide level and 12% of the Urban Growth Area, which includes Cooksville.^[5]



PROGRAM DETAILS

Led by the Parks Planning Section, Parks Forestry and Environment Division, the City of Mississauga negotiated the acquisition of properties through a “willing buyer, willing seller” model. This model ensured that participation in the program was voluntary, avoiding expropriation and providing compensation based on the home’s appraised fair market value.^[1] As of June 2026, the City has acquired approximately 22 properties.^[1]

Although funding is often cited as a barrier for buyout programs, the acquisition was supported by cash-in-lieu funds and not reliant on taxpayers or external sources. The municipality’s parkland conveyance by-law requires that developers either set aside a percentage of the net land area for greenspace or provide a cash-in-lieu payment based on the land’s value.^[6] The *Ontario Planning Act (1990)* grants local governments the authority to mandate greenspace contributions as a condition of development approvals.

Through various public consultations and planning studies, the City of Mississauga has identified a continuous need to strategically acquire land to support community well-being and sustainable growth through the design of a network of open spaces and trails that coincide with new public facilities, transit hubs, and development.^[7, 8, 9] The City of Mississauga is currently expanding and redeveloping Cooksville Park and Iggy Kaneff Park with the aim of improving access to greenspace and community amenities, enhancing flood resiliency and natural ecosystem functions, and replacing outdated infrastructure.^[10]



Above: Previously a residential property, the now vacant land is adjacent to Cooksville Creek (Watterodt, June 2024)

PROGRAM INSIGHTS & ENABLERS

Evidence-Based Decision-Making

- Studies, such as flood risk assessments and parkland deficiency mapping, enabled city planners to identify target properties that were both at-risk of flooding and strategically important for ecological and recreational functions.
- Interdepartmental collaboration on strategic land-use planning has enabled the City of Mississauga to streamline policy objectives and design multi-functional spaces that integrate co-benefits.

Transparent Governance and Communication

- The City of Mississauga encountered initial barriers related to misinformation, skepticism, distrust, and concerns related to compensation and legality, which delayed the project.
- The City overcame these challenges by building trust with property owners through sustained one-on-one engagement with a dedicated point-of-contact, as well as via ongoing community engagement, aiming to strengthen community cohesion and effectively communicate information about flood risk and park deficits.

Fair Compensation

- The City completed appraisal reports to ensure property owners understood the land valuation methodologies used to assess fair market value and the compensation they would receive.
- A funding model using levies, mandated under municipal bylaws and the Planning Act, granted the City the financial flexibility to acquire land without requiring taxpayer funds.

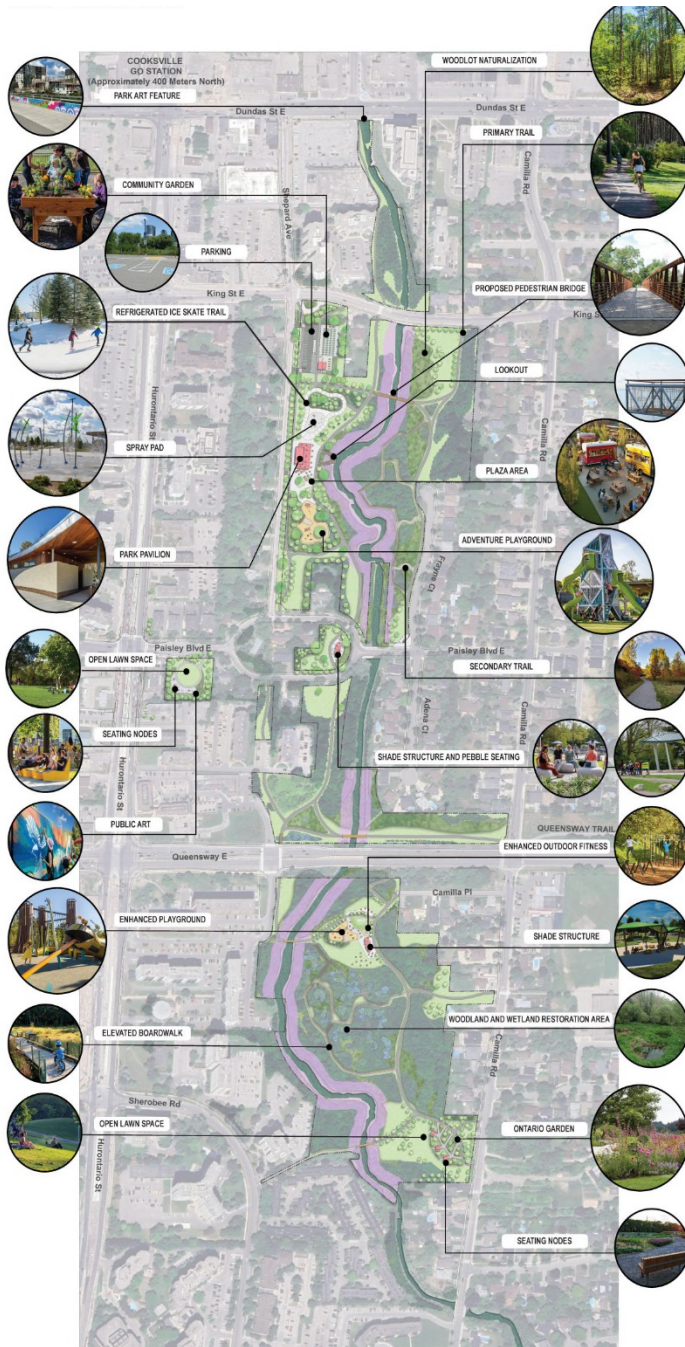
Framing and Community Values Matter

- The *Cooksville Parkland Long-Term Acquisition* project illustrates the importance of framing and packaging policy proposals in a way that resonates with community priorities and delivers tangible outcomes for residents. While land acquisition was not considered a viable flood mitigation strategy for Cooksville in 2012, this same approach eventually became an essential component of advancing other community development goals nearly a decade later.



Retreating from Risk

Decision-supports for the equitable implementation of retreat to build climate resilience



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FIGURE 02
Preferred Concept Design with Precedent Imagery

Above: Conceptual park design for the expansion and redevelopment of Cooksville Park and Iggy Kaneff Park within the Cooksville Creek Corridor (City of Mississauga, 2026)

SUMMARY OF LESSONS LEARNED

The City of Mississauga's *Cooksville Parkland Long-Term Acquisition* project is a unique case study that illustrates how the acquisition of flood prone land in a high-density urban environment can serve the dual purpose of improving stormwater management capacities and supporting community resilience. This project is just one component in a broader suite of strategic land-use planning, stormwater management, and climate resilience initiatives currently ongoing within the City of Mississauga, suggesting an integrated planning paradigm at the institutional level.

The success of the project has been enabled by strategic policy design, interdepartmental collaboration, sustained stakeholder outreach and ongoing community engagement, and innovative planning tools and funding mechanisms. Ongoing, clear and transparent communication helped strengthen trust, mitigate public concerns, and build support for the initiative. Consistent with best practices identified in the literature, the City of Mississauga's decision to engage in a voluntary land acquisition process and to provide fair market compensation afforded homeowners a degree of choice in the process and reduced economic barriers.

LEARN MORE

This research brief draws on research conducted by Izzy Jackson-Janzen for her 2025 undergraduate honours thesis, "*Voluntary Buyouts: A Case Study of Cooksville's Parkland Acquisition*."

To request a copy, please email ivjacksonjanzen@uwaterloo.ca

Retreating from Risk (RFR): Decision-Supports for the Equitable Implementation of Retreat to Build Climate Resilience is a multi-year international research project jointly funded by Government of Canada's New Frontiers Research Fund–International (Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation) and the U.S. National Science Foundation. RFR aims to explore how managed retreat—the strategic relocation of housing and infrastructure from high-risk areas—can be used as a proactive strategy to reduce flood risks while enhancing community well-being.

VISIT OUR WEBSITE:

<https://uwaterloo.ca/retreating-from-risk/>

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SUGGESTED CITATION

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