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May 5, 2020

The Honorable Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario  
Ontario Premier's Office  
Legislative Building, Queens Park,  
Toronto, ON M7A 1A1  
[premier@ontario.ca](mailto:premier@ontario.ca)

The Honorable Minister Christine Elliott, Minister of Health  
Ontario Ministry of Health  
5th Floor, 777 Bay St.  
Toronto, ON, M7A 2J3  
[christine.elliott@pc.ola.org](mailto:christine.elliott@pc.ola.org)

Steve Kanellakos, City Manager  
City of Ottawa  
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Premier Ford, Minister Elliott, and Mr. Kanellakos,

We would like to thank you for your steadfast and focused service to the people of Ontario during the pandemic. We write to you today, as seven City Councillors, representing 260,000 residents in urban and suburban wards across Ottawa.

Cities and communities across Ontario are following the Provincial guidance on the closure of outdoor recreation amenities due to COVID-19. Many residents have been struggling with physical and mental health without adequate space to physically distance while getting outside. Access to nature, open spaces and room for exercise are important and necessary coping strategies that are well documented to increase well-being and physiological resilience. For families with small children, and those who have little to no green space on their properties, the closure of parks has been especially difficult.

As summer approaches and with travel plans cancelled, access to local green space will be an important part of encouraging people to stay close to home to limit the spread of the virus. As

referenced by the National Collaborating Centre for Environmental Health, *“There are a number of reasons why closing parks and green spaces may be highly undesirable”*....including *“the mental health impacts of the pandemic, the overall health benefits of access to green space, the potential for riskier alternatives, and health inequities created by closing public spaces.”* Over the past two months, we have been heartened to see the vast majority of citizens limiting their trips outside of the home and employing physical distancing measures when accessing essential services. Our residents want to do the right thing.

We are writing to ask that, in consultation with local boards of health, you reopen the green spaces in public parks as soon as possible. Ottawa Public Health has expressed its view that *“physical activity and getting fresh air are important for our overall physical and mental wellbeing”*. There are many low risk activities in parks that can be enjoyed while following physical distancing measures. Other cities have successfully employed strategies to minimize transmission risk in outdoor spaces while keeping parks open. Richmond, BC has instituted one-way walking trails in a popular park, Vancouver is using champions similar to Ottawa’s red-vest ambassadors at the LRT to remind people of physical distancing requirements, and Toronto is discouraging rather than penalizing the use of park benches.

Exercise, play, and a connection to the outdoors are all important elements of health that should be facilitated. We would welcome the opportunity to work with the Province and Ottawa Public Health to enable and encourage healthy behaviours at this time. **We need public parks and greenspaces to reopen while ensuring guidelines for distancing.**

We appreciate the important work you have been doing in this time of crisis.

Sincerely,

Shawn Menard  
Riley Brockington  
Catherine McKenney  
Carol Anne Meehan  
Rawlson King  
Jeff Leiper  
Theresa Kavanagh