



It All Begins with Space

Maximizing use of public assets for engaged and healthier neighbourhoods in Toronto

Acknowledgements

IT ALL BEGINS WITH SPACE: MAXIMIZING USE OF PUBLIC ASSETS FOR ENGAGED AND HEALTHIER NEIGHBOURHOODS IN TORONTO

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SPACE Coalition

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Table of Contents

Toronto and Space.....	1
More Needs to Be Done	3
Community Hubs	4
Youth and Space.....	5
 What We Did	 6
 What We Heard	 7
Changes in Permit Fees and Programming Impacts.....	7
Changes in the Use of Space	9
Cancelled or Reduced Programs.....	10
 Conclusions	 11
 Recommendations.....	 13
 About SPACE	 18
 References.....	 19
 Appendix 1 – Survey Distribution and Respondents	 21
 Appendix 2 – Detailed Findings and Conclusions.....	 23
Changes in Permit Fees and Programming Impacts.....	23
Changes in the Use of Space	25
Cancelled or Reduced Programs.....	26
Permit Process	27
School Board Community Outreach Coordinators	29
Community Use of Schools Advisory Committees	29
Improving Access to Space.....	30

Toronto and Space

In the City of Toronto, while government agencies and institutions struggle under fiscal constraint and to manage growth, residents, businesses, government workers and non-profit organizations come together to make Toronto a healthier, welcoming and more vibrant place to live. A key component of neighbourhood infrastructure is safe public places for people to come together: whether to celebrate, discuss neighbourhood needs or priorities, integrate into Toronto's social fabric or to volunteer and be part of building their community. In our schools and municipal spaces this can also mean greater parental involvement, greater engagement from children and youth, increased readiness to learn and more positive educational outcomes for children and youth.

Equitable access to affordable neighbourhood space has an enormous positive impact on health and wellness, learning and leadership, arts and culture, educational outcomes and sense of belonging. Public space is necessary for community engagement and participation by a full range of neighbours and supports for ongoing improvements to quality of life.

The lack of, or loss of, access to our public assets is a critical barrier in building resilient and strong neighbourhoods. United Way of Toronto's *Vertical Poverty* report identified the importance of accessing space to provide "healthy and safe activities for children and youth living in the building... reducing social isolation, distrust among neighbours, and anti-social behaviour. For many tenants, the loss of common spaces has meant losing community. For others, living in buildings with such spaces is what has brought community to life" (United Way, 2011, pg. vii). It all begins with space. Change and strategic investment are needed to enable greater access to Toronto's public spaces.

"For newcomers to Canada public space is a starting point to know their neighbourhood and its people."

Community Space Advocate

"The [Toronto Aboriginal Research Project] community survey revealed that 96% of respondents indicated that there was a need for an Aboriginal arts centre. This is an important link to these issues around the arts providing an important visibility of the Aboriginal population."

McCaskill, FitzMaurice, and Cidro,
2011, pg. 355

The City of Toronto and the Ontario governments are starting to address this need, as witnessed through their actions:

- The Province of Ontario invests in its Community Use of Schools (CUS) program approximately \$48 million per year and has matched federal government investments under the Infrastructure Stimulus Fund, which has led to the building of community infrastructure projects, such as the Bathurst-Finch Community Hub.

- The City of Toronto has committed to increasing its per capita spending on the arts from \$18.30 to \$25. Much of this funding is being directed toward increasing access to dedicated physical space. The City has also approved the expansion of the number of Priority Centres for community recreation from 22 to 39.

The City of Toronto and four local school boards have made commitments and enacted broad policies to support community and neighbourhood group efforts to meet and offer programs by providing community space in which to meet. In so doing they have acknowledged that public space should be equitably accessible to everyone in the community. Creative use of public space (such as schools, community centres, health centres, public libraries, etc.) strengthens neighbourhoods; it acts as a catalyst to bring people together for activities that build a healthy and engaged society. Using public spaces to offer accessible programs and nurture ideas generates a greater sense of belonging among residents and makes possible new relationships and connections. In turn, these social interactions create additional opportunities for more organizing, volunteering and leadership development. As a result, residents are healthier and more engaged in their neighbourhoods. The contributions to improved mental and physical health and fitness are clear.

The SPACE Coalition was created to address this issue of space, focusing on the most extensive and geographically dispersed public asset in the City of Toronto – its schools and municipal buildings and grounds. We conducted this research to investigate barriers to accessing school and municipal space and to work to eliminate them to build a healthier and more equitable Toronto.

Access to space:

- Improves student performance;
- Encourages artistic and cultural expression to create vibrant communities and expand capacity for learning;
- Promotes life-long learning;
- Is good value for taxpayers;
- Encourages physical activity, healthy lifestyles, and saves money;
- Promotes safer neighbourhoods and crime-prevention;
- Promotes newcomer settlement and integration;
- Supports and sustains free or low-fee community programs to foster access and inclusion;
- Promotes volunteerism and community participation (for all age groups); and
- Promotes community well-being.¹

Recognizing this, since 2004, school boards have received provincial investments through the Ministry of Education's Community Use of Schools and related programs. This has enabled boards to lower permit fees for children, youth, seniors and non-profit groups, increasing the use of schools as 'hubs' of community activity and support (Ministry of Education, 2011). The City of Toronto allocates permits

¹ See the SPACE Coalition's *Top Ten Reasons to Support Better Community Access to School Space* for the full list of references <http://spacecoalition.ca/wp-content/uploads/SPACE-Top-Ten-bilingual.pdf>.

based on group classification and facility type required, providing similar subsidized rates for the same group categories (City of Toronto, 2013a).

More Needs To Be Done

Much has been accomplished through these community use policies and programs. However, many barriers to accessing space still exist and service provision remains a patchwork, unable to meet complex neighbourhood needs due to institutional silos, escalating costs and an overall lack of space in neighbourhoods that need it most.

Existing community use policies and programs are a start; they are not enough.

Despite decades of talk in Ontario about dismantling service “silos”, there is still no integrated framework of education, health, health promotion, children and youth services and recreation services that would effectively address the needs of Ontario’s children and youth, and overcome barriers to coordination.

People for Education, 2012, pg. 4

“Despite Ministry of Health commitment of funding and the Ministry of Education’s “Facility Partnership Guidelines” (2008) affirming the joint use of schools, significant Provincial barriers made pursuing Recommendation 30 [to create youth space – see The Roots of Youth Violence report] a difficult challenge. Regulation 444/98 of Education Act that directs how surplus schools are to be disposed of, creates a rigid process of timelines and order of precedence for public institutions and necessitates that market value be obtained from another public institution to maintain a public use, resulting in a very high cost of acquisition from one government to another, and competition among public institutions.”

City of Toronto, Toronto Youth Equity Framework, 2013b, pg. 7

Community Hubs – the Heart of the Community

Though research and multiple reports have found that community hubs and integrated service delivery are the way to move forward, public policy support, funding and infrastructure often lag behind. Some regions, however, have made greater advances in implementing this type of service delivery, with others coming on board. Nova Scotia's Schools^{Plus} collaborative, inter-agency approach supports the co-location of services within schools, such as community services, justice, health and mental health, and addiction services, maintained through inter-ministerial cooperation and funding assistance (Province of Nova Scotia, 2010).

Recognizing the importance of hubs in reducing isolation and poverty, Calgary has recently proposed the creation of "community hubs [that] could provide a variety of programmes and services including childcare, community gardens, mobile health services, civic services, justice services, library services, food trucks, recreation and arts programming, community kitchens, financial literacy, social services, youth and seniors programming, immigration services and InformAlberta service kiosks. Such centres can also provide local economic development as potential centres of community economic development activity" (Secretariat of the Calgary Poverty Reduction Initiative, 2013).

"Toronto needs more space for arts and must expand creative and cultural space beyond the downtown core. When you make space for the arts in neighbourhoods you transform communities."

Community Space Advocate

The Ontario government recognizes that "schools are the hubs of their communities and offer an effective use of taxpayers' investment in providing citizens with a place to come together, volunteer, build skills, access community programs, become physically active and build strong and healthy communities" (Ministry of Education, 2013a). While the City of Toronto is moving forward with its development of creative cultural hubs and a series of community hubs have already been created, true integration of service delivery across silos remains to be realized.

What is still needed:

- Cross-sectoral service integration;
- Re-purposing of space;
- A public policy framework for the development and ongoing support of community hubs to coordinate efforts;
- Research and evaluation;
- Coordinating body, linked to other local planning tables;
- Core funding to address capital and core funding needs for community hubs.

Intergovernmental Committee on Economic and Labour Force Development, 2011

Youth and Space

Since inception in 2000 the SPACE Coalition has long recognized the importance of providing space for all residents but has noted with concern that seniors, newcomers and youth face particular barriers when it comes to accessing space and programming.

“While the many benefits that result from community use of public spaces are well documented, youth organizations struggle to access affordable space where they can create environments where they feel included. They are often not welcomed, or received with a friendly and accessible application process. Organizations often are unwilling to trust young people with the space, time and funds needed for their ideas to evolve into a tangible reality.” (SPACE Coalition, 2011, pg. 2)

In February 2013 Toronto City Council requested a report on the status of joint Provincial-Municipal actions recommended in "The Review of the Roots of Youth Violence" and "Ontario's Youth Action Plan" reports, to identify initiatives that the City of Toronto can implement immediately to address the underlying causes of youth violence. Council has already recommended the creation of community hubs to provide space for meetings, recreation, the arts, and service providers, (including mental health services,) and to reduce the barriers youth face when accessing recreation programs.

Access to space connects the dots with regard to human development from 0 to 20 years old (and beyond). When you provide the space for children and youth to learn, play and build their resilience you provide the space for them to grow into Toronto's healthy, self-reliant, dynamic leaders of tomorrow. The City is in the process of developing and implementing its Middle Childhood Strategy, an essential complement to early years and youth strategies, for a full continuum of support. Access to space is a key ingredient, as are the policy and funding commitments from all four levels of government (City of Toronto, 2009).

We hope our four levels of government can find a way to overcome these barriers so yet another winter and another spring does not pass with our children and youth not having space to gather and play.

“There is an overwhelming consensus in favour of building community hubs and, accordingly, no reason to delay action on that front. ... [T]he Province should promptly initiate discussions with municipal governments, to begin to plan for a hub if none exists and in particular to determine the availability of recreational and arts facilities. ... Another winter and spring should not go by in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods with there being no safe place for youth to gather and play.”

McMurtry and Curling, 2008,
Vol. 2, p. 41

“As a not for profit organization providing youth programs in Toronto, we could not serve as many children in as many facilities as we do without permits being subsidized.”

Girl Guides of Canada
– Ontario Council

What We Did

Through community consultations and surveys from across Toronto the SPACE Coalition has identified the space issues that have yet to be resolved with regard to equity, access and affordability. Until these are addressed full and efficient use of our taxpayer funded community assets cannot be achieved. This report summarises what we are hearing from the public and our recommendations for action.

Thanks to generous support from Intohealth, funded by the *Healthy Communities Fund* grant program from the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-term Care, the SPACE Coalition was able to secure financial support to conduct Toronto specific research. We engaged in a broad-based consultation and collected data and stories from a wide range of non-profit, arts, community and sport organizations that use local school and municipal space across all four quadrants of Toronto. (See Appendix 1 for more about our survey distribution and analysis.)

What We Heard²

Changes in Permit Fees and Programming Impacts

- 60% of school space users reported an increase in permit fees from 2011 to 2012; 18% of municipal space users reported an increase.
- 81% of municipal users reported that fees had stayed the same; 35% of school board space users reported the same.

Due to flatlining of the Community Use of Schools grant allocations from the province, the Toronto District School Board is proposing new fees for community use for the 2013-14 school year. This increase in permit fees is in addition to a 22% fee increase already applied in 2011-12 (TDSB, 2011). Subsidy subscription for permits outpaced its Community Use of Schools (CUS) grant in 2012-13 by over \$2 million. The City of Toronto, for the first time, starting in 2013, also has instituted charging permit fees for children and youth groups who access field space, (although this increase is accompanied by a stated commitment to improve field quality) (City of Toronto, 2012).

"On the affordability note if you look at the cost of the TCDSB gym space it's reasonable, but with the added costs per hour of a supervisor and a cleaner, \$15.43 an hour and \$33.61 it becomes unaffordable. We had to pay almost \$500 on a Saturday afternoon for four hours of gym time for a basketball tournament!"

"An issue with Parks and Rec is the high cost of having to get a permit for a basketball court or to run a good food market in a community park."

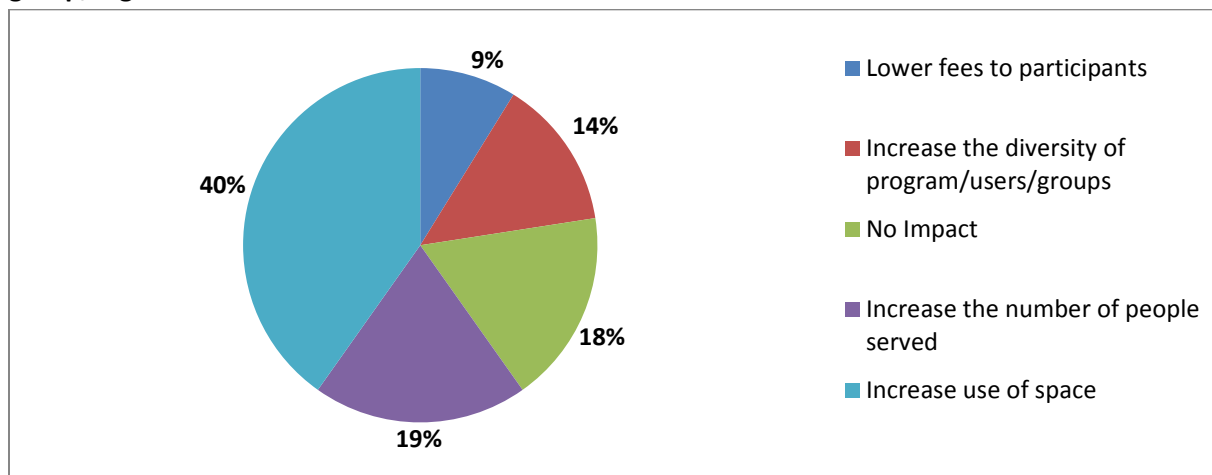
"For one of our annual youth events the Showmobile cost (payable to the City) has gone from \$900 to \$2500."

"If groups can find space they may have to not only pay high costs for the janitors but also the cost of Toronto Parks and Rec staff for opening up the facility if it's not within their normal operating times. This means exorbitant costs for community groups."

Community Space Users

² See Appendix 2 for more detailed findings and conclusions.

If your School Board/Municipality were to decrease permit fees how would this impact your group/organization?



When asked if school boards and municipalities were to further invest in public assets and decrease fees for community use, the majority of respondents reported that programs and services available in neighbourhoods would grow. Note that 14% of space users said they would use the decreased permit fees to increase the diversity of groups served. The SPACE Coalition has noted the current under-representation of many traditionally marginalized groups such as ethno-cultural and ethno-specific, newcomer, youth and senior-led groups among space users. The lowering of permit fees has the potential to improve equitable access to public space for all Toronto residents.

“Public space facilitates capacity building for community groups.”

“Public space provides the venue for cross cultural understanding and friendship.”

Community Space Advocates

“Sport facilitates social cohesion which transcends many of the community barriers experienced by newcomers to our City and country.”

Nikesh Amit,
Peel Newcomer Strategy Group,
Keynote address Sport4All,
Diversity in Sport Summit,
Hosted by Sport4Ontario and
Toronto Sports Council

Changes in the Use of Space

- For users of school space 19% of organizations reported an increase in use in 2011-12, while the equivalent number reported a decrease; 63% reported no change.
- The situation is similar for municipal users with a 17% increase and a 17% decrease, with 67% reporting no change in 2011-12.

While many gains have been made over the last decade, the result of the recent flatlining of investment at the provincial and municipal level is beginning to show. When we last conducted this survey four years ago the SPACE Coalition reported growth in community use of space – more programs were being offered in more communities. In 2013 use of neighbourhood space has flatlined – the number of programs being offered in communities has stopped growing. Insufficient space and cost were the reasons reported for this flatlining.

"In our experience it is difficult to access community gym space because the TCDSB needs it for their school requirements and Toronto Parks and Recreation needs it for the rest of the time to offer their recreation programs to the public. That leaves almost no time for other community groups to access the space."

Community Space User

"We no longer even attempt to permit space in the Toronto District School Board because it is such a headache and due to the expense."

"If there was more access to school space, there would be more programming."

Community Space Users

Cancelled or Reduced Programs

- **21% of respondents offering programs reported having to cancel or reduce school-based programs in 2011-12; 4% of respondents had to cancel programs run out of municipal spaces.**
- **18% of respondents reported that school closings have impacted their ability to use school space.**

School space users reported many challenges. Eighteen percent of respondents reported that school closings had impacted their ability to use school space; 21% also referenced that the school board was discussing selling off green space. They expressed concern that this would limit field access for sport and recreation groups. As the Full Day Kindergarten program continues to expand and the pressure to close schools and sell off green space around schools mounts, organizations' ability to access school space will continue to decline. The closing of municipal space proved a challenge for 14% of respondents, with 8% considering schools as an alternative.

"We had to cancel the program we wanted to run because we did not get space in any of the schools we applied for."

"In the summer, the gym space and others is used for camps so it is difficult for community groups to access it. We are going to try again next year with lots of advance notice. In the fall we'll have to apply for the upcoming summer to see if we can get a few hours a week during the day."

Community Space Users

"Community space is becoming more difficult to secure according to many local sport and recreation groups. The situation is getting increasingly worse as the City keeps adding more and more development but no new sports infrastructure is built to add the necessary capacity to meet increasing demand. We hear this every day."

Karen Pitre,
Toronto Sports Council

Conclusions

In the mid-2000s the Ontario provincial government, school boards, and the City of Toronto made a concerted effort to address the barriers community groups were facing when it came to accessing school space, and as a consequence neighbourhood health was enhanced. We compliment them for their efforts and the gains that were made. However, we are beginning to see the impact of flatlining and/or shrinking of these investments. This has led to increases in permit fees, which is resulting in the reduction and cancellation of programs in schools. Meanwhile subsidies for space are disappearing or proving inadequate to meet rising costs.

Beyond the cost of permits other changes could be implemented to improve access to space. To promote equity and inclusion both school and municipal space providers should increase the speed with which permits are approved. Improving access to more facilities and creating a more user-friendly permitting process should also be considered priorities. While decreasing restrictions on use of space is important for groups, Toronto's school boards could implement practices used by the City of Toronto to improve transparency, ease of application process, turnaround times for cancellation notification, and make the available times free for permitting. The services provided by Community Outreach Coordinators should also be promoted more widely.

More broadly, what is needed is a change in culture at all levels: provincial, school boards and City of Toronto. These institutions should aim to re-vision and broaden their view of how taxpayer built and funded public assets may be better and more fully used to serve the neighbourhoods in which they are located. These public spaces are already well suited to provide integrated-service delivery of programs, supports and opportunities for all Toronto residents, via a community hub approach.

Such community hubs would allow school boards and the City to be leaders in supporting students' academic, emotional, social and physical success, as well as meeting the complex needs of Toronto residents by providing transition services such as employment, immigration, health and settlement in the heart of their neighbourhoods. Creatively use of these public assets builds community and acts as a catalyst for programs and the delivery of services that create healthier communities. As a result, belonging, connections, and volunteer/leadership opportunities increase in our city, while more

"Communities need spaces where services can be delivered and synergy can happen. Current funding structures still make that difficult."

Diane Dyson,
WoodGreen Community Services

"The availability of community space is critical to support work of community development and neighbourhood improvement which, in part, works to ensure the availability of local resources for families. A Toronto District School Board, with real strategies and effective polices that support the world that parents live, that works with community to create models to access, utilize and even build on school space will absolutely do wonders in ensuring students receive the support and attention they need."

Cutty Duncan,
Community Organizer

affordable, community-based programs and service delivery are locally-provided for people who might be otherwise excluded. This needs to be done for the benefits of our children and youth, and all residents of Toronto.

Bringing partners to the table, each with its own agenda and expertise would provide an opportunity to build toward outcomes greater than just a lower permit rate. The SPACE Coalition has a long history of bringing together groups to discuss these important issues and looks forward to continuing this work, with increasingly diverse stakeholders from community and all four levels of government to examine how the issues and costs can be resolved to find the most appropriate and cost effective solutions.

“Access to community spaces plays such an important role in building healthy communities and meeting the needs of residents. These spaces make it possible to offer services and resources that families, and particularly youth, need to thrive, and in some cases just get by. School Boards must work with communities and the agencies that provide vital services to make sure that access to spaces in our schools is affordable, transparent, and on-going. There are many innovative solutions, like portable structures, that community groups and TDSB can explore together to address the issues of space if we can get past the bureaucracy and get back to the matter at hand. We need space.”

Keddone Dias, Youth Program
Supervisor, Rathburn Area Youth

Recommendations

Torontonians expect all levels of government to work together to improve service delivery and maximize investments. We urge our elected officials to note our recommendations and work together so that Toronto taxpayers may take better advantage of their community assets. These recommendations can largely be applied across the province.

“One point which is a pressing barrier is that when the TDSB and TCDSB have partnerships with Parks, Forestry and Recreation and they get to decide on space permits for outside groups. As a result, other community groups have a real disadvantage in getting space. It’s important that Parks and Rec do programming but it is also important that the youth and other community groups have space. I think there has to be some FORCED collaboration where community groups and Parks and Rec and the City of Toronto have to accommodate community needs.”

Community Space User

“For five years (2007-2012), I was part of the advocacy coalition Let’s Make Waves that saved 64 TDSB pools from being drained. Our efforts in concert with those of the recognized stakeholder body, Aquatics Working Group, led to the creation of the Swim Toronto concept of governance and fiscal sustainability. Here aquatic organizations in the community permit the pools, creating a revenue stream for the TDSB and promoting participation in aquatic recreation. But this was not the first round that TDSB pools were saved and I believe that at some point in the next five years the issue will re-emerge. For one thing, many permit holders are volunteer run organizations and with time demands posed by work and family – that makes succession difficult. For another, decision-makers like MPPs, Councillors and Trustees turn over at elections and key staff moves on, so all the institutional memory and trust ties that hold the system together will need to be forged anew. With foresight measures can be taken to avoid another cycle and all that energy can build a great aquatic recreation system for Toronto—one in which ‘everyone swims’.”

Andrea Demchuk, Pools Advocate

Provincial Level

Long Term Legislative Changes

1. Add Community Use of Schools (grounds and facilities), on an incremental cost-recovery basis, into the Purpose clause of the Education Act, entrenching the benefits of community use for people of all ages in Ontario.

Regulatory Changes

2. Expand the current work underway in various provincial ministries to further implement and regulate policies and processes that support the creation of community hubs, through cross sectoral collaboration, the re-purposing of public space, and the coordination of funding.

Changes with a Financial Impact

3. Deliver on the \$66 million investment promised for community use, with a yearly inflationary increase, and as part of this investment expand the current number of Priority Schools from 220 to 500 as promised at the initial announcement of the Priority Schools Initiative (Government of Ontario, 2008).
4. Expand the authority of the Provincial Ombudsman for the oversight of the Community Use of Schools program. Ombudsmen are impartial investigators of residents' complaints about the administration of government. The Office is a place of last resort, with free and confidential services to ensure the provision of services that are fair and equitable to all of Ontario's residents (to be considered in conjunction with Recommendation 8).

School Board Level

Regulatory Changes

5. Improve the permit application process so it is more straightforward, user-friendly, transparent, accessible and accountable.
 - Adopt appropriate policies and practices to move towards more consistency in the permit application process and import promising practices;
 - Ensure that principals and caretakers cannot arbitrarily block access to user groups;
 - Track permit refusals;
 - Give priority to neighbourhood space users in the application process;
 - Implement accessible and effective dispute resolution processes at both the local board and at the provincial level to ensure the Community Use of Schools policy is upheld and that barriers to access are addressed;
 - Design methods to better inform potential permit groups about general space availability and which schools fall under the Priority Schools Initiative;

- Increase outreach to improve awareness of how to permit schools;
 - Develop access and equity policies and procedures to balance the needs of existing long-term groups using school space with new and emerging community groups, particularly those working with traditionally underserved communities.
6. Create or open up more spaces to increase opportunities and reduce over-crowding during peak times.
 7. Expand the current work underway and create cohesive policies and processes that support the creation of community hubs, through cross sectoral collaboration, the re-purposing of public space, and the coordination of funding, with an emphasis on a continuum of care and support for Toronto residents.

Changes with a Financial Impact

8. Create an Office of the Ombudsman for each school board, whose authority includes the oversight of the Community Use of Schools program. Ombudsmen are impartial investigators of residents' complaints about the administration of government. The Office is a place of last resort, with free and confidential services to ensure the provision of services that are fair and equitable to all residents (to be considered in conjunction with Recommendation 4).

Province and School Board Level

Regulatory Changes

9. The Province and School Boards work with community stakeholders to actively improve accountability in the following ways:
 - School boards should table an annual report at Queen's Park demonstrating how Community Use of Schools and related funds were used to improve public access to schools;
 - Stakeholder representatives, such as the SPACE Coalition, should be consulted in the development of indicators to be measured for the annual report, such as:
 1. Who used/was refused access to space,
 2. Reasons for refusal of access,
 3. Program outreach description,
 4. Fee structures,
 5. Gaps between needs and access to service;
 - Establish Community Use of School Advisory Committees in the school boards that do not already have such a committee, with representatives from youth, senior and newcomer groups;
 - Increase awareness of the existence of Community Outreach Coordinators and the role they play in enabling groups to access space;

- Establish a Ministry of Education Community Use of Schools Advisory Committee to provide advice and recommendations on Community Use of Schools funding and utilization, and on issues such as permitting processes, space allocation decision making and classifying permit groups. Membership should include representation from youth, senior and newcomer groups.

Municipal Level (City of Toronto)

Regulatory Changes

10. Work with community stakeholders to improve access to municipal public space by:
 - Creating a work group that includes community stakeholders to evaluate municipal policies to ensure more affordable and equitable access to spaces for community use, including a re-examination of the Welcome Policy, permit fees, the recent implementation of fees for children and youth fees to use sport fields, and to ensure policies meet community need. Membership should include representation from youth, senior and newcomer groups;
 - Improving accountability by strengthening the evaluation process;
 - Giving priority to neighbourhood space users in the application process;
 - Tabling an annual report to City Council's Community Development and Recreation Committee demonstrating how public dollars were used to improve public access to municipal space;
 - Involving stakeholder representative organizations including the SPACE Coalition, in the development of indicators to be measured for the annual report, such as:
 1. Who used/was refused access to space,
 2. Reasons for refusal of access,
 3. Program outreach description,
 4. Fee structures,
 5. Gaps between needs and access to service.
11. Keep service provision not-for-profit.
12. Encourage and facilitate organizations to trustee (sponsor) grants for youth-led organizations.

Changes with a Financial Impact

13. Continue expansion of Priority Centres and other free spaces and programs.
14. Index the *Welcome Policy* to user fee increases, or return it to a program-based allocation.
15. Provide designated, staffed youth drop-in space every evening, at every community centre.

16. Increase hospitality in non-programming spaces – permit lobby, phone and bathrooms use; provide places to sit; hire welcoming, front desk referral staff during open hours for all community centres.
17. Extend community centre hours.
18. Reduce permit costs.
19. Create fiscal policies to reduce cost barriers and increase access to space, such as the Ministry of Education's *Priority School Initiative*.
20. Expand City-run before and after school programming.
21. Continue to expand arts and recreation funding and partnerships.

Provincial and Municipal Level

22. The Ontario government and municipalities should examine reciprocal agreements between school boards and municipal governments regarding community use of facilities to harmonize them with Community Use of Schools policies and ensure they uphold the principles of affordable and equitable community access to space for community benefit.

Municipal and School Board Level

23. The City of Toronto, including Parks, Forestry and Recreation, and the four local School Boards should work together to align their policies and processes to improve the customer service experience for the user. This should include consistency with regard to:
 - Online application software;
 - Priority ranking for underserved groups;
 - Streamlining the renewal process for recurring users;
 - Create a centralized, accessible website with a shared schedule and booking function that is coordinated between a number of space providing agencies and institutions;
 - Ensure that rules and regulations are readily and equitably available, easily understood and involve users in their creation (including youth, seniors and newcomers).
24. Expand the current work underway to create cohesive policies and processes that support the creation of community hubs, through cross sectoral collaboration, the re-purposing of public space, and the coordination of funding.

About SPACE

The SPACE Coalition is a strategic outreach and action research coalition, composed of diverse community organizations and networks from across Ontario, committed to improving access to public space. SPACE was formed in 2000 following the implementation of new provincial funding formula policies that resulted in school boards dramatically increasing the fees they charged community groups for the use of public space. Projects conducted in 2005, 2007 and 2009 further demonstrated the impact of the Province's Community Use of Space (CUS) funding, policy and program and identified issues requiring policy reform and improvement. In 2009, SPACE expanded its work to gather information on access to municipal space. In 2011, SPACE released a report examining youth and their ability to access space, as our past environmental scans had identified youth as a marginalized group facing specific barriers. We continue our work with youth-and young adult-led groups to address these barriers.

Our research and mobilization efforts helped lead to a first Community Use of Schools investment of \$20 million annually in 2004, allocated among the 72 School Boards of Ontario. In 2009, the Ontario government committed to enhancing funding of CUS to these boards, promised to reach \$66 million by 2012. SPACE also played a leadership role in advocating for opening schools for free in the summer, resulting in the Province's \$4 million 'Focus on Youth' program. One hundred schools opened free of charge in 2007 in Toronto, providing space to run employment programs funded by the United Way of Greater Toronto. This program has since expanded to include schools in Ottawa, Hamilton and Windsor. We have achieved impact by causing community use of school fees to be reduced or eliminated in some places in Ontario ranging from 100% reductions to 40% (Office of the Premier News Release, 2005). More work remains as fees still remain high in the summer and on weekends, and several school boards increased fees in 2012.

There is strong evidence that the CUS program is in high demand and has high impact: 32% of school permit users increased their use in 2006/2007 following funding from CUS (SPACE Coalition, 2007). There are many benefits to increasing affordable access to public space; these include the promotion of social inclusion, more affordable or free programs being offered to marginalized groups, and enhanced community engagement.

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Appendix 1 – Survey Distribution and Respondents

Surveys were distributed electronically using *SurveyMonkey.com*.

Surveys were distributed to:

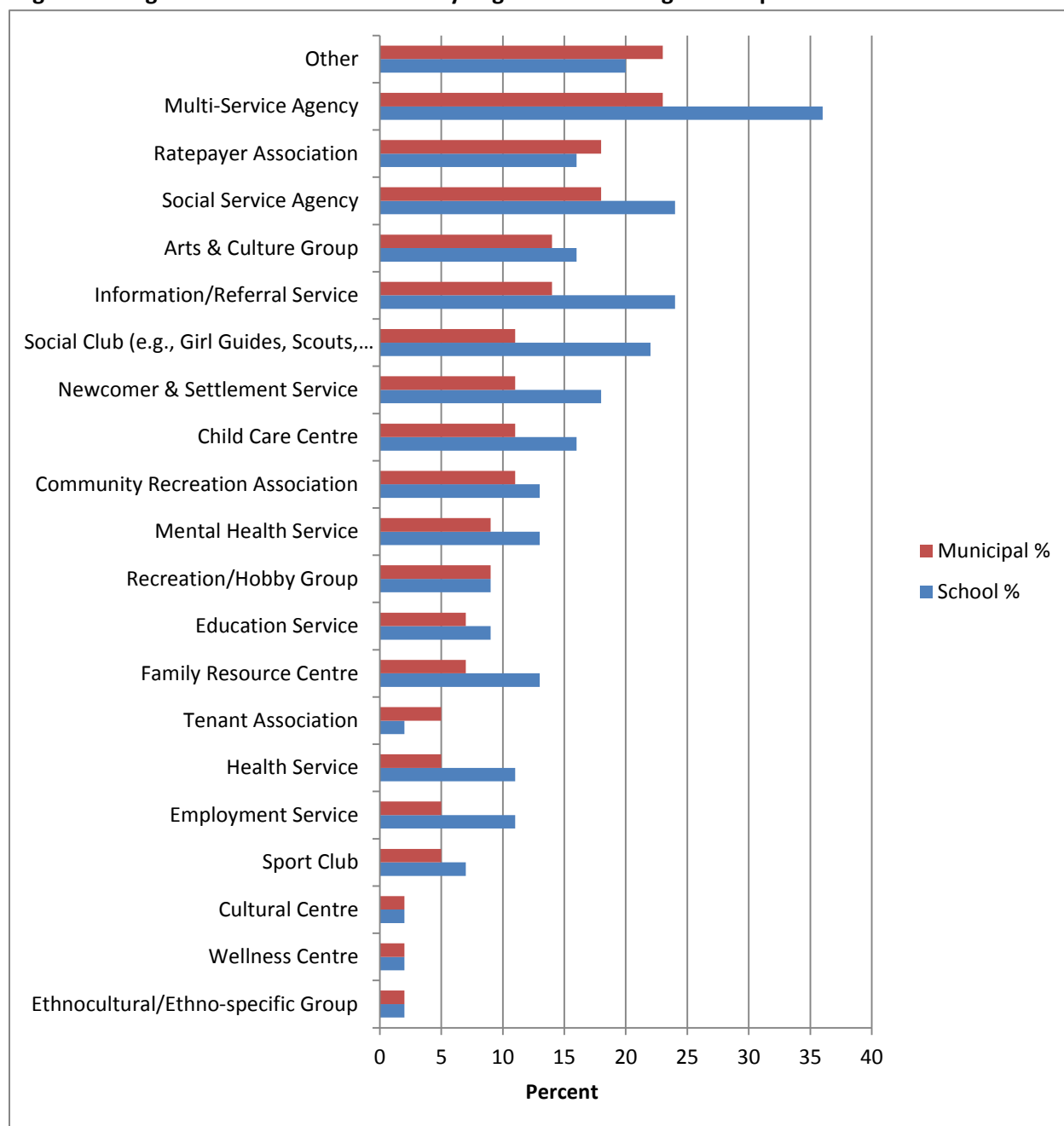
- SPACE Coalition contacts;
- Social Planning Toronto's agency list;
- Organizations listed in the electronic Toronto Blue Book;
- Organizations that had participated in the 2005, 2007 and 2009 survey and youth contacts from our 2011 report;
- Networks including: anti-poverty groups, health groups, arts organizations, housing groups, youth networks, etc.

Data from 64 survey respondents was analysed using SPSS Version 21 and Microsoft Excel. Of the respondents 45 used school space and 44 used municipal space, with multiple respondents permitting dozens, or even hundreds, of spaces for numerous programs every year. Follow-up interviews were conducted with eight space users who offer diverse services and programs across the city.

Profile of the 2013 Respondents

Respondents from the four corners of Toronto reported offering a wide variety of programs and services in the neighbourhoods they serve ranging from health and newcomer supports, to programming for children and youth; from arts and athletics, to employment services and neighbourhood support associations. The majority were incorporated, non-profit organizations, with a multi-age mandate, of which 72% had been in operation for at least 20 years. Fifty-one percent of respondents had at least one fulltime staff member; 60% had at least one part-time, and 72% had at least one volunteer. As outlined in Figure 1 these organizations are able to offer a broad range of programs and supports.

Figure 1. Programs and Services Offered by Organizations Using Public Space



We note with concern that only two respondents identify as serving ethno-cultural and ethno-specific groups. Our research has consistently identified that these groups, along with newcomer, youth and senior-led groups, experience considerable additional barriers to accessing space.

Appendix 2 – Detailed Findings and Conclusions

Changes in Permit Fees and Programming Impacts

- 60% of school space users reported an increase in permit fees from 2011 to 2012; 19% of municipal space users reported an increase.
- 81% of municipal users reported that fees had stayed the same; 35% of school board space users reported the same.

Figure 2. Did your school permit fees increase for 2011/12 compared to 2010/11?

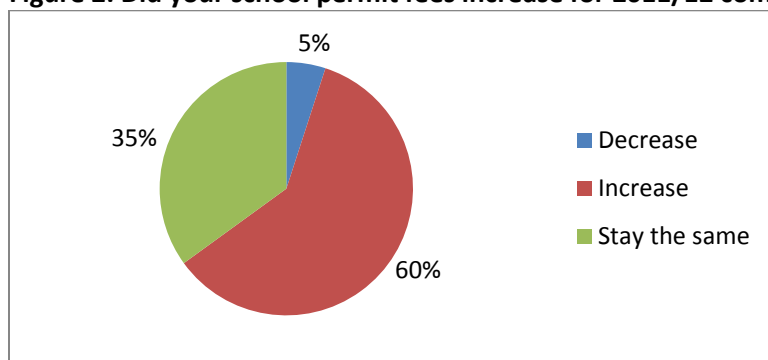
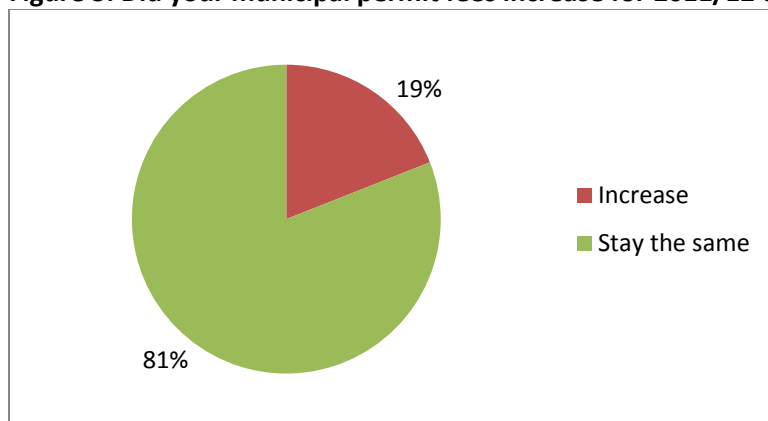


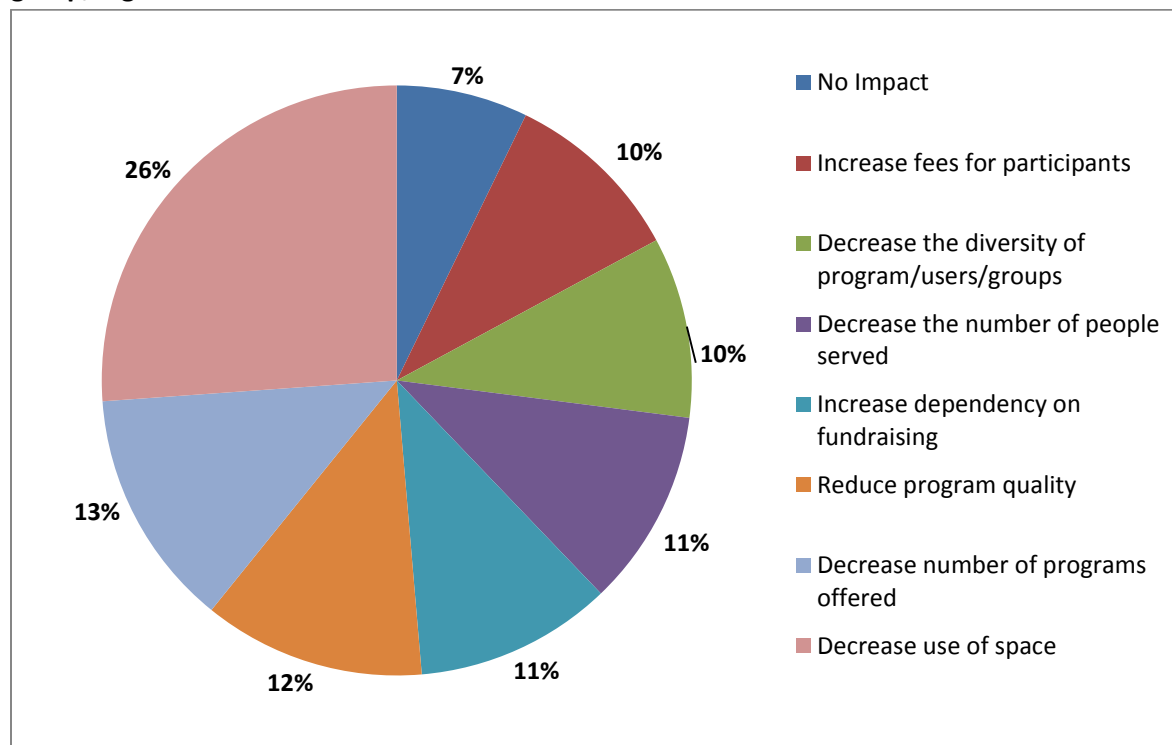
Figure 3. Did your municipal permit fees increase for 2011/12 compared to 2010/11?



The Ontario government's flatlining of the Community Use of Schools (CUS) grant underlies the increase in permit fees for schools. The Toronto District School Board applied a 43% increase in fees for community use for the 2013-14 school year, as permit subsidy subscription outpaced its CUS grant in 2012-13 by over \$2 million. This is on top of the 22% fee increase already applied in 2011-12 (TDSB, 2011). Of similar concern, the City of Toronto has approved charging permit fees starting in 2013 to children and youth serving groups who access field space, although it is noted that this increase is accompanied by a commitment to improve field quality.

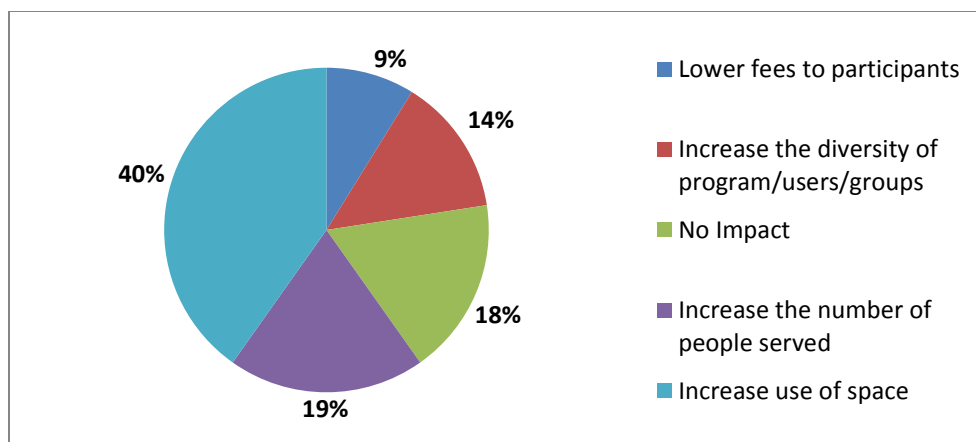
Given that school boards and the City are generally increasing permit fees for community groups we asked how this would impact programming and service delivery.

Figure 4. If your School Board/Municipality were to increase permit fees how would this impact your group/organization?



Respondents were most likely to say the increase in permit fees would result in their decreased use of space. Some reported that if they had no other alternative space to access or could not fundraise to cover the new costs, the impact of the fee increases would be downloaded in some way onto participants. When school boards and municipalities increase permit fees they may lose revenue when the permitting group finds other space. Otherwise, program costs increase or programs can be reduced or cancelled.

Figure 5. If your School Board/Municipality were to decrease permit fees how would this impact your group/organization?



Alternatively, if school boards and municipalities invest in public assets and fees are decreased for community use, the majority of respondents report that programs and services available in neighbourhoods would grow. Note that 14% of space users said they would use a decrease in permit fees to increase the diversity of groups served. Given the current under-representation of many of these traditionally marginalized groups, such as ethno-cultural and ethno-specific, newcomer, youth and senior-led groups, the SPACE Coalition notes that the lowering of permit fees would likely improve equitable access for all Toronto residents.

Changes in the Use of Space

- For users of school space 19% of organizations reported an increase in use in 2011-12, the equivalent number reported a decrease; 63% reported no change.
- The situation is similar for municipal users with a 17% increase and a 17% decrease; 67% reported no change in 2011-12.

Figure 6. Use of school space in 2011/12 compared to 2010/11:

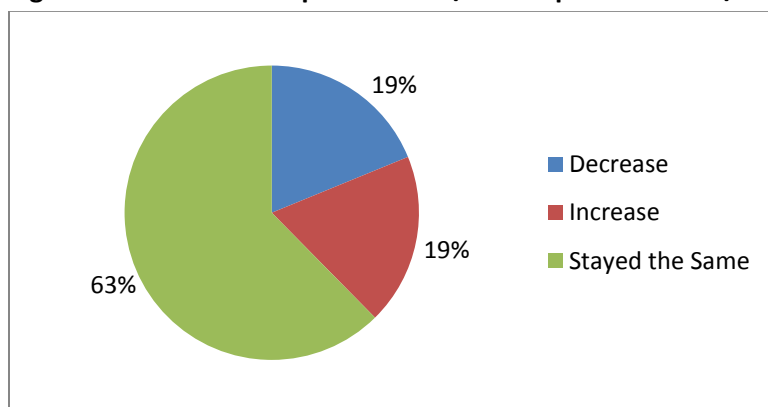
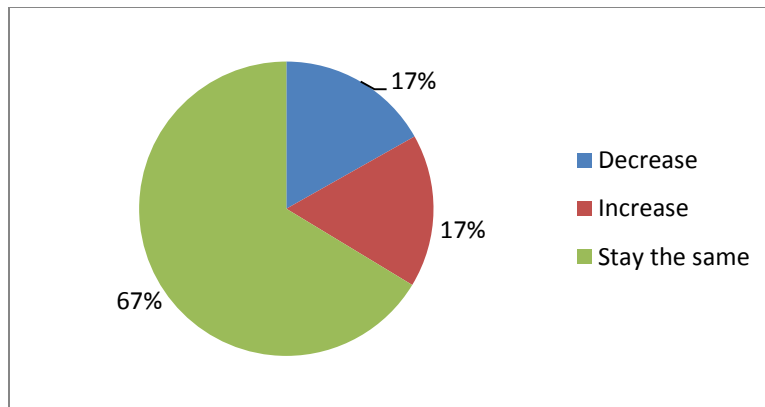


Figure 7. Use of municipal space in 2011/12 compared to 2010/11:



Community use seems to have plateaued. Perhaps use would still be growing had the Province continued to expand their Community Use of Schools grant, which has been flatlined since 2008. The grant has not reached the \$66 million promised by the government upon their election in 2008, and only 220 of the promised 500 schools have been included as part of the *Priority School Initiative* (meant to provide free use of space in schools found in underserved areas) (Government of Ontario, 2008).

Municipally and within some school boards new pricing structures are being introduced for the 2013-14 school and fiscal year in response to grant flatlining and increasing costs. Yet many survey respondents find fees are already too high and are rising too quickly: “We no longer even attempt to permit space in the Toronto District School Board because it is such a headache and due to the expense”.

The City of Toronto has taken some positive steps to support access to public assets, announcing that adults once again are able to use the City’s Priority Centre recreation facilities for drop-in programs free of charge. Toronto also has a “Below Market Rent” policy that allows non-profit community groups to lease space from the City at a below market rate, as long as City costs are covered. A recent report from the Office of the Ombudsman, however, revealed that there have been serious flaws in the program, noting that service-providing agencies have not received good service, including poor communication on the part of the City by not providing written notices of impending rent increases and chronic delays with information provision. The City has committed to implementing all 22 of the Ombudsman’s recommendations to improve the program (Office of the Ombudsman, 2013).

Cancelled or Reduced Programs

- 21% of respondents offering programs reported having to cancel or reduce school-based programs in 2011-12; 4% of respondents had to cancel or reduce programs run out of municipal spaces.
- 18% of respondents reported that school closings had impacted their ability to use school space.

Figure 8. Did you have to cancel or reduce your school-based programs for 2011/12?

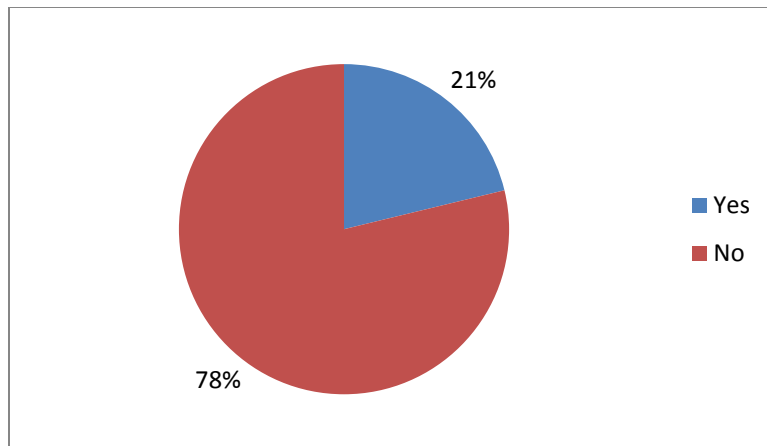
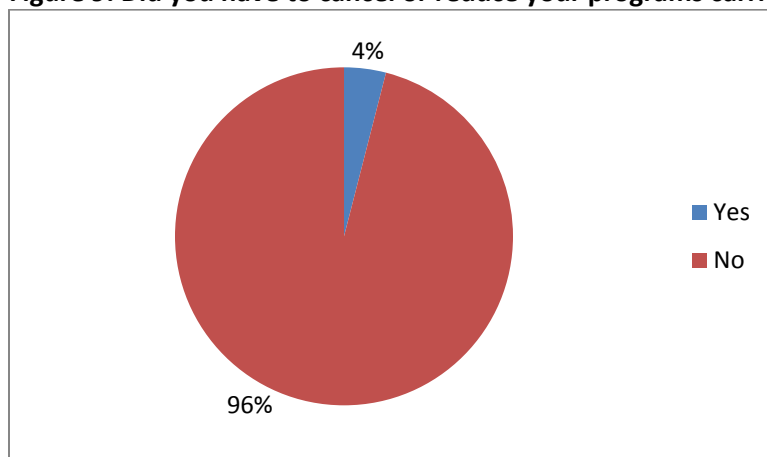


Figure 9. Did you have to cancel or reduce your programs carried out in municipal space for 2011/12?



Respondents who offered an explanation as to why they had cancelled or reduced their use of space were most likely to reference the increase in costs and a lack of space: “We had to pay almost \$500 on a Saturday afternoon for four hours of gym time for a basketball tournament” or “If there was more access to school space, there would be more programming”; “We had to cancel the program we wanted to run because we did not get space in any of the schools we applied for”.

Eighteen percent of respondents reported that school closings have impacted their ability to use school space; 21% also referenced the school board was discussing selling off green space. They expressed concern that this would limit field access for sport and recreation groups. The closing of municipal space proved a challenge for 14% of respondents, with 8% considering schools as an alternative. As the Full Day Kindergarten program continues to expand and the pressure to close schools and sell off green space around schools mounts, organizations’ ability to access school space will continue to decline.

A decrease in volunteer support was also referenced as a reason underlying the cancellation of programs.

Permit Process

- 48% of municipal permits are approved in less than one month; 31% of school-based permits are approved in that timeframe.

Figure 10. What is the average time it takes from submission of your school permit application to the response that your application has been approved or rejected?

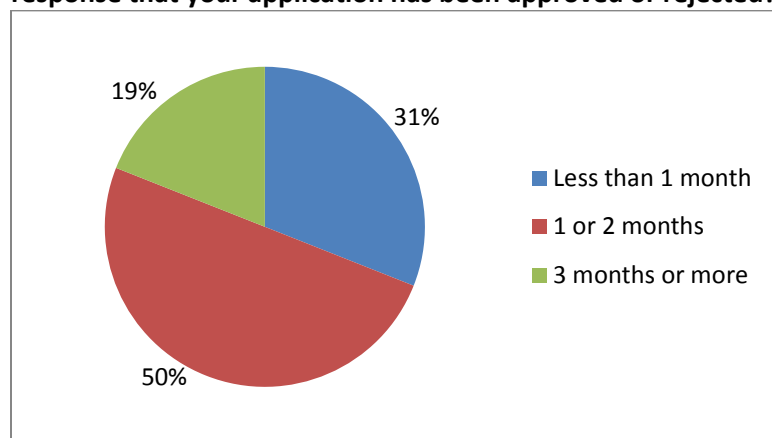
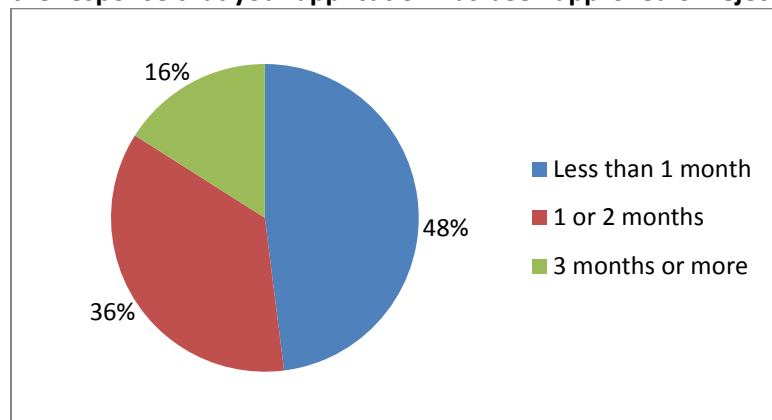


Figure 11. What is the average time it takes from submission of your municipal permit application to the response that your application has been approved or rejected?



The process of approving permits is a complicated matter. Municipal bookings are often site-specific when it comes to approving permits, unless the Parks, Forestry and Recreation Permits office must approve the permit. Permit approvals are more complicated at schools where 56% of respondents report that school principals must be involved in approving permits, in addition to the board's

permitting office. Some respondents reported that principals and caretakers have blocked access to certain user groups. Oversight is required to resolve disputes around access and to ensure that principles of equity and inclusion are met.

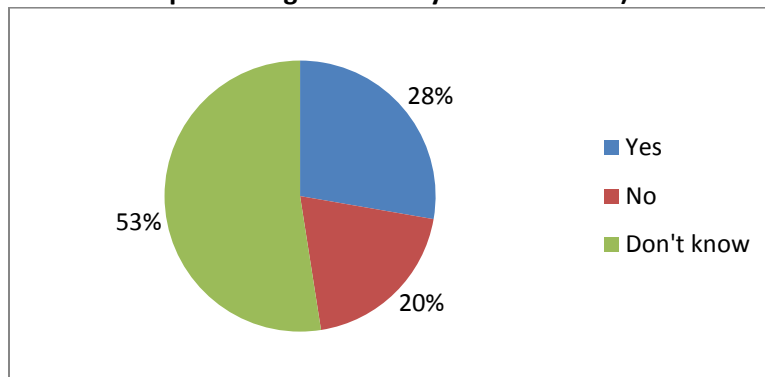
One of the ways the City of Toronto monitors accessibility in the community use process is through the Office of the Ombudsman. Following their lead in this promising practice, the Toronto Catholic District School Board has begun the process of creating an Ombudsman position. The SPACE Coalition hopes that this position will include oversight of the Community Use of Schools program.

The SPACE Coalition encourages all school boards to create an Ombudsman Office to resolve conflicts and increase equitable access, and to import promising practices around the permit process and improve the speed with which permits may be issued. Delays can stifle innovation and creativity, and inhibit groups and organizations from being able to respond to immediate neighbourhood need.

School Board Community Outreach Coordinators

- Only 28% of respondents know that their school board has a Community Outreach Coordinator.

Figure 12. Does your School Board have a Community Outreach Coordinator-type position (a person dedicated to promoting community use of schools)?



All school boards Community Outreach Coordinators who help ensure the effectiveness of the Community Use of Schools program, support schools as community hubs at the local level, and explore options for the sharing of underutilized school facilities (Ministry of Education, 2013b). Considering that 73% of respondents using space in schools are not familiar with the position more effort should be made to promote the positions and the supports they are meant to provide.

Community Use of Schools Advisory Committees

Of the four school boards in Toronto, only the Toronto District School Board has established a Community Use of Schools Advisory Committee. This committee exists to:

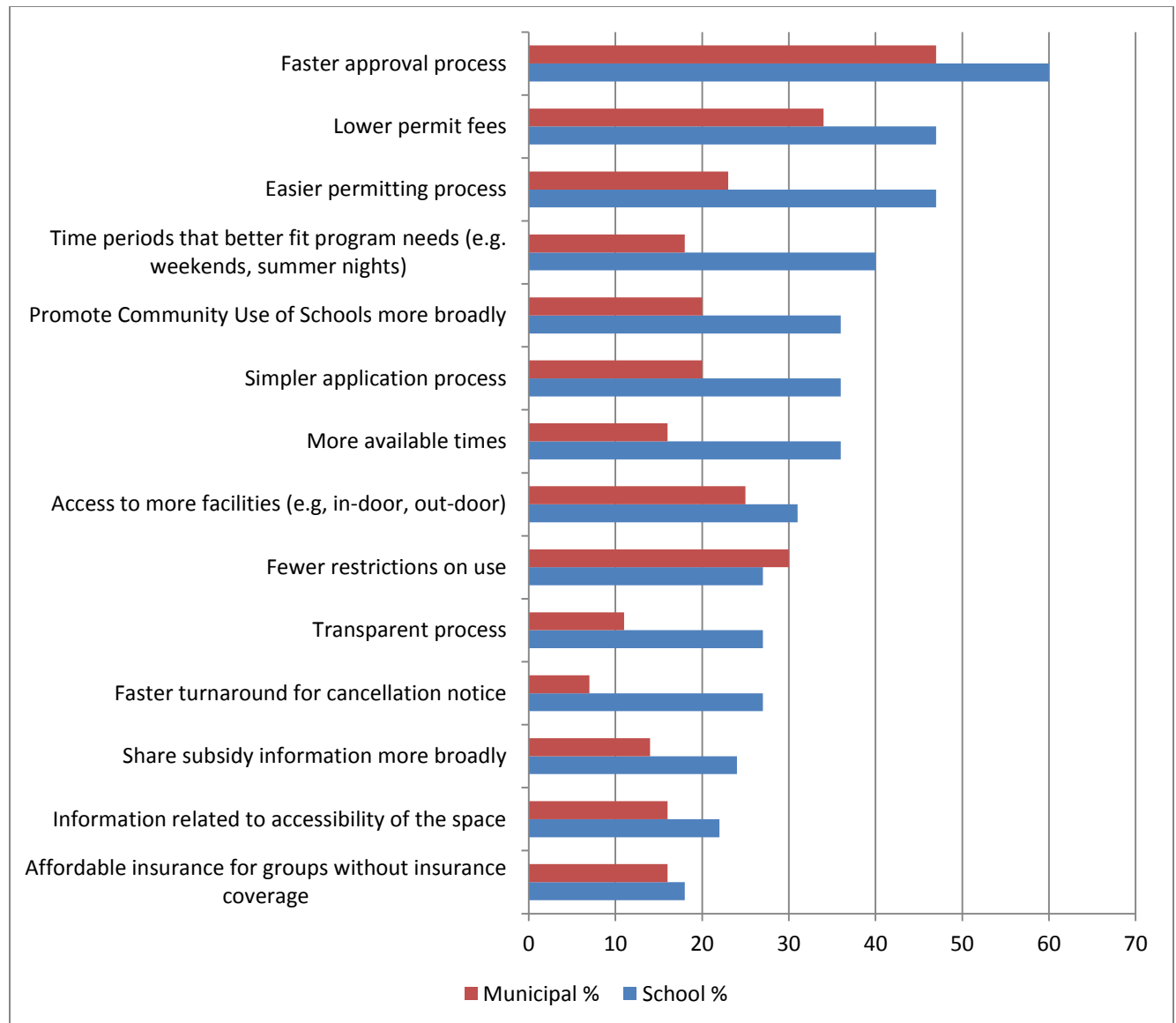
- Facilitate ongoing feedback from community organizations on the continued implementation of

- TDSB Community Use of School policies;
- Suggest improvements to the policies;
 - Provide an opportunity to explore the concept of Integrated Service Delivery (ISD) with community agencies and groups;
 - Assess the impact of CUS funding from the Ministry of Education on use of space and make recommendations regarding that funding;
 - Make recommendations to the TDSB in order to:
 - Increase the accessibility and use of school facilities by community groups
 - Increase the concurrent use of school facilities by multiple community groups
 - Increase revenues from the Province of Ontario to support CUS
 - Improve and streamline the permit application process and reduce barriers to access
 - Ensure access and equity considerations regarding CUS
 - Consider and coordinate the work of other initiatives within TDSB as they impact on CUS.
- (TDSB, 2013)

SPACE salutes the Toronto District School Board for implementing this best practice of creating an advisory committee and urges all other school boards to do the same.

Improving Access to Space

Figure 13. How could access to school and municipal space be improved?



The ability to access space in both school and municipal facilities has improved over the last 11 years since the United Way of Greater Toronto released *Opening the Doors: Making the Most of Community Space* in 2002. To promote greater equity and inclusion, however, further enhancement to the permit process is still required. Respondents recommend that both school and municipal space providers should increase the speed with which permits are approved. Lowering permit fees, improved access to more facilities, and an easier permitting process are also considered priorities for both. While decreasing restrictions on use of space is important for groups, responses indicate that Toronto's school boards could implement practices used by the City of Toronto to improve transparency of process, turnaround times for cancellation notification, notification of the times available for use, and adopt their more user-friendly application process.

