

# Park Development Options

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## Recommendation

That the August 10, 2021, Urban Planning and Economy report UPE00463, be received for information.

## Previous Council/Committee Action

At the March 2, 2021, Urban Planning Committee meeting, the following motion was passed:

That Administration provide a report to Committee exploring options for park development where partial land assembly has occurred, considering an equity analysis and a phased park development approach.

## Executive Summary

This report outlines how park development is prioritized in Edmonton, and presents an option for applying an equity analysis and phased park development where land assembly remains incomplete. The proposed analysis and approach is intended to ensure an equitable distribution of capital funding across Edmonton's developing neighbourhoods and to help advance the Greener As We Grow Big City Move within The City Plan.

## Report

### Current Approach to Park Development

The amount, type, and distribution of open space in Edmonton's neighbourhoods is based on numerous factors that are evaluated during the planning process. Factors include the projected population for the neighbourhood, unique geographic and ecological features, and anticipated open space/educational needs identified in collaboration with school divisions. Analysis of these factors informs the future schedule for capital funding. Base-level park development (site grading, seeding or sod placement, installation of sports field fixtures, and tree planting) is normally dependent on the status of land assembly, which may be influenced by external factors including provincial funding announcements for new school construction.

Other factors may also influence the prioritization of base level funding. These include:

- The pace and amount of residential development in the surrounding area;

- The parkland and recreation options that are already available to residents in the area;
- Needs identified by the community or partner organizations;
- Changes in the timing for school construction in the neighbourhood (under Provincial jurisdiction); and
- Plans and availability of funding for significant recreation amenities or sporting centres.

These factors are considered in addition to the status of land assembly to establish a realistic timeline for park development. Typically, once most of the land for the park has been assembled, the process begins to secure a budget for the design and delivery of the base level development.

### **Equitable Prioritization**

Base-level development of park sites is the minimum standard for new parks. Additional amenities are developed based on emerging needs and are largely contingent on partner funding. Limited development funding and reduced partner capacity for programs challenge Administration's ability to meet this base-level standard in a timely manner and keep pace with the open space needs imposed by residential growth. As well, different timelines for residential subdivision and land assembly among Edmonton's developing neighbourhoods means that some areas have to wait longer for parks to be fully assembled and prioritized for funding.

To address this issue, Administration will use the existing standards and functional categories in alignment with "Greener as we Grow" direction in The City Plan, and *BREATHE: Edmonton's Green Network Strategy* to apply a holistic equity analysis to prioritization in the next capital budget cycle. The equity analysis will:

- Assess developing neighbourhoods to determine how much park space may already be developed to the base-level standard;
- Use existing policy direction to evaluate resident access to parks by assessing how much of the neighbourhood has access to base-level parks;
- Assess the open space network in the neighbourhood with consideration for wellness, ecology, and celebration functions identified in *BREATHE*; and
- Use this equity analysis in addition to the percentage of land assembly completed to target priority sites for development.

When identifying sites for prioritization, Administration's approach to date has placed considerable emphasis on the status of subdivision approvals and residential development in the neighbourhood, the percentage of parkland assembled, and any emerging school or recreation needs. Existing access to base-level amenities in the area has not been considered when advancing sites for capital funding. An analytical approach will, therefore, seek equity by focusing on funding parks to the minimum base-level standard where access to such amenities is lacking.

In alignment with *BREATHE* and The City Plan's, Big City Move, Greener as we Grow, the equity analysis will extend to include natural areas. These ecological areas are a significant and valued component of a neighbourhood's open space network. They can be managed to a base level with a modest capital expenditure that includes development of a management plan, hazard tree removal, basic trail development, interpretive signage, weed management, and restoration of areas impacted by adjacent development. A base level natural area offers passive recreation options for a neighbourhood's residents, and extends the focus on equity to include both active and passive recreation options, addressing the interests of different stakeholders within the community.

The equity analysis will be used to develop the 2023-2026 Capital Budget. In addition, a growth management lens will be applied to the prioritization criteria for the priority based budgeting process in order to advance The City Plan's Rebuildable City Big City Move. This lens will identify projects that contribute to completion of Edmonton's developing neighbourhoods, including the provision of amenities like parks.

### **Partial Development of Incomplete Park Sites**

Capital funding is approved within the current budget cycle to develop new park space in accordance with Capital Governance Policy C591. The funding is allocated within distinct composite profiles to cover both concept planning and construction delivery activities. Prioritized sites for concept design and delivery were confirmed at the beginning of the 2019-2022 Capital Budget, with new projects identified for funding consideration through the Supplementary Capital Budget Adjustment process in response to emerging needs.

Throughout the current budget cycle, park development projects have been prioritized for funding on fully assembled sites. However, planning for the next budget cycle will allow consideration for development on partially assembled sites. In cases where park assembly is not complete, but where a needs assessment confirms a service gap in the provision of parkland for the neighbourhood, interim or partial park development will be considered, subject to the following criteria:

- The area and configuration of assembled lands are suitable to provide needed park services and amenities;
- Availability of offsite infrastructure for site servicing, such as drainage and road completion;
- Completion of the project strategy phase, confirming the intended park programming, facilities, and amenities;
- Feasibility assessment for the entire site to complete concept and preliminary design, including remaining lands to be assembled, with a review of the scale of potential amendments in the event that lands are not fully assembled over time;
- Assessment of public and stakeholder engagement activities; and,

- Safety and operational considerations in the event of partial site development.

In instances where the need to advance partial development is warranted to meet the provision of neighbourhood park services, there may be risks to efficient project management and delivery. These may include:

- Higher costs, including for temporary or interim construction required to allow for staged development;
- Assessing park functionality for programming and access;
- Design and site revisions may be required if full land assembly cannot be completed, as intended; and,
- Extended timelines for overall park development completion due to additional planning requirements and approvals.

Mitigation of the above-noted risks will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis to support the application of a phased approach to park development, where appropriate and as directed by Council funding priorities. This approach to park development and delivery during the next capital budget cycle can ensure that park services and amenities are considered in neighbourhoods where parkland assembly is incomplete.

### **Budget**

Growth funding for open space planning, design, and construction has been fully allocated to sites prioritized in the current capital budget. Forthcoming work on prioritization for the 2023-2026 Capital Budget will include the equity analysis noted above. In addition, City Plan objectives and targets will be factored into this analysis to ensure that projects in the capital budget are advancing Council's vision for Edmonton.

The City's municipal reserve accounts are used to support the acquisition of new parkland, and these funds are not applied to park development related expenses. Planning, design and development are funded and prioritized through establishment of composite profiles for parkland delivery. Funding for partially assembled sites will be considered and included in the capital funding prioritization review for new park development for consideration in the next budget cycle.

### **Next Steps**

Administration will apply the framework outlined in this report to inform park development initiatives and funding requests for the upcoming budget cycle, unless otherwise directed by Council. In addition to this approach focused on developing neighbourhoods, Administration is also preparing a report which outlines the benefits and risks of the current process of acquisition of land in support of open space needs in redeveloping neighbourhoods. This report will be presented to Urban Planning Committee in Q4 of 2021.

### Corporate Outcomes and Performance Management

<b>Corporate Outcome(s): Edmonton neighbourhoods are more vibrant as density increases, where people and businesses thrive and where housing and mobility options are plentiful</b>			
<b>Outcome(s)</b>	<b>Measure(s)</b>	<b>Result(s)</b>	<b>Target(s)</b>
Access to infrastructure and amenities	Percentage of Edmontonians with access to infrastructure and amenities that improve their quality of life	75% (2019)	No targets are set for ConnectEdmonton performance indicators
Parks, green spaces, natural areas, river valley are available and accessible	Square meters of public outdoor recreation space per capita  (World Council on City Data indicator)	61 m2 (2019)	TBD through Breathe implementation (project ongoing)

### Others Reviewing this Report

- M. Persson, Chief Financial Officer and Deputy City Manager, Financial and Corporate Services
- C. Owen, Deputy City Manager, Communications and Engagement
- G. Cebryk, Deputy City Manager, City Operations
- A. Laughlin, Deputy City Manager, Integrated Infrastructure Services
- R. Smyth, Deputy City Manager, Citizen Services
- K. Fallis-Howell, Acting City Solicitor