

COMMUNITY PARK AMENITIES PROGRAM

RECOMMENDATION

That the July 11, 2023, Urban Planning and Economy report UPE01630, be received for information.

Requested Council Action	Information Only		
ConnectEdmonton's Guiding Principle	ConnectEdmonton Strategic Goals		
CONNECTED This unifies our work to achieve our strategic goals.	Healthy City		
City Plan Values	LIVE		
City Plan Big City Move	A Community of Communities	Relationship to Council's Strategic Priorities	Community Safety and Well-Being 15-Minute Districts
Corporate Business Plan	Serving Edmontonians		
Council Policy, Program or Project Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community Parks Framework Breathe, Edmonton's Green Network Strategy Urban Parks Management Plan Policy C598 - Infrastructure Asset Management Policy Policy C591 - Capital Project Governance 		
Related Council Discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CS01247 Equity and Efficiency in Application Processes - Community League Operating Grant and Community League Infrastructure Program (Community and Public Services Committee, September 9, 2022) UPE01518, Joint Use Agreement: Land Review update (Community and Public Services Committee, March 20, 2023) UPE01728, Open Space Amenities in Developing Neighbourhoods (Urban Planning Committee, August 29, 2023) 		

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Previous Council/Committee Action

At the November 30, 2022, City Council Budget meeting the following motion was passed:

That Administration bring back a report that outlines the Community Parks Amenities program and intended outcomes, the report should identify needs for community park amenities across the city and consideration for a potential program.

Executive Summary

- The City's approach to park development, previously informed by the Urban Parks Management Plan and Neighbourhood Park Development Program, is changing as Administration adopts the new framework centred on equitable access and direction provided by The City Plan and Breathe.
- The Community Parks Framework outlines an approach to the prioritization of development and renewal of amenities within community parks.
- Capital funding for Neighbourhood Park Development projects (growth and renewal) was approved through Budget 2023-2026 to support the transition of the program into the Community Parks Framework. The Neighbourhood Park Development Program will be phased out at the end of the 2023-2026 Capital Budget.
- The Community Parks Framework will be applied through the implementation of Breathe, which includes updates to the City's open space standards and guidelines, and associated green network analysis to map out and assess the open space network in alignment with The City Plan.

REPORT

Neighbourhood Park Development Program - Previous Approach

Under the former Neighbourhood Park Development Program (NPDP), community groups initiated the development and renewal of community park amenities. The NPDP aligned with open space standards identified in the Urban Parks Management Plan that associated playgrounds and similar park amenities as shared level amenities. These park amenities were funded by the City and community on a cost-shared basis. In addition to new development, the NPDP was the primary way that communities undertook playground renewal work. The City assumed responsibility for asset maintenance under the NPDP model and as park amenities, such as playgrounds, reached the end of their lifecycle, or became unsafe; they would be removed unless a community was able to initiate and access renewal or replacement funding through the NPDP program. Communities lacking the capacity to initiate renewal through the Program risked the removal of playground and park amenities. This approach did not align corporately in that other City assets are not delivered or renewed with this type of funding model.

Due to the dependence on the community to initiate and cost share the funding of park development, the Program had the unintended consequence of creating inequity across neighbourhoods. Administration reviewed data from 2009 to 2020 and found that there were a number of neighbourhoods that did not access program funding, while others had accessed

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funding multiple times over the same time period. This has resulted in areas of the city receiving several new playgrounds and a variety of other community park amenities, while other neighbourhoods received no new park amenities (Attachment 1), nor renewed existing amenities.

Community Parks Framework

Nested under The City Plan, the Community Parks Framework¹ was developed in 2022 as Administration's approach to prioritizing development and renewal of amenities within community parks. Community parks in this context are defined by *Breathe*, Edmonton's Green Network Strategy², as the basic units of the green network. These parks are intended to be frequent in the landscape and meet the social and recreational needs of most people in their catchment areas. Community parks, along with metropolitan parks, district parks, pocket parks, greenways and ecological parks comprise the City's overall green network.

The Community Parks Framework identifies community park amenity needs across the city. The Framework provides a needs-based and equitable model, including targeted investment in areas of the city that are underserved with park amenities. The Framework reflects a shift from the former Neighbourhood Park Development Program, which was a cost-shared funding model, did not consider citywide priorities, equity or overall amenity provision levels and did not allow Administration to direct capital investment to parks or neighbourhoods where need was highest.

Through the Framework, the City will initiate community park development, and develop and renew amenities in line with identified priorities and based on available City funding. Park amenities that are maintained and operated by the City will be delivered by the City. The Framework is the tool Administration will use to ensure social, financial and community factors are considered when planning for renewal or development of community park amenities.

A New Approach to Open Space Provisioning

The City's approach to parks and amenity planning is transitioning through an update to the Urban Parks Management Plan (2006-2016) to meet the needs of current and future Edmontonians. This transition is guided by The City Plan and *Breathe* to provide equitable access to open space and supporting amenities for all Edmontonians. The development of this updated approach is funded and underway and will replace the Urban Parks Management Plan.

Administration will present an update report in Q1 2024 that will review the proposed approach and work completed to date. This review will consider all park types outlined in *Breathe* and includes a locational assessment of ecological, wellness and celebration opportunities for all open space, including Community Parks, by the districts outlined in The City Plan.

The review will also include a refresh of the park and amenity standards referenced in the Urban Parks Management Plan that guide the types of open space, sizes and potential amenities each park could include. Once the open space location assessment and park standards are complete, the next stage of phase of work includes an equity assessment and prioritization of park development according to the Community Parks Framework, which is discussed in detail below.

¹ https://www.edmonton.ca/projects_plans/parks_recreation/community-parks-framework

² https://www.edmonton.ca/city_government/initiatives_innovation/about-breathe

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This work will further inform growth and renewal priorities and inform estimated costs for open space and amenity development for all park types.

Community Parks Framework - Application and Analysis

Application of the Community Parks Framework is intended to improve equity and access, allow for implementation of The City Plan, *Breathe*, the City's Asset Management policy and ensure a more strategic approach to community park development and renewal.

The Framework identifies provision targets for Community Parks to guide the optimal quantity and distribution of City-funded amenities, including a prioritization process to allow Administration to plan and deliver needed infrastructure. Establishing provision targets departs from the Urban Parks Management Plan, which focuses solely on development standards but provides no direction to help inform amenity supply and provision expectations. A shift towards provision targets aligns with the planned changes to open space standards and guidelines that will be developed through the implementation of *Breathe*. The Community Parks Framework considers three scales of amenity provision in Community Parks including:

- Core amenities: key components of community parks (e.g. playgrounds, gathering spaces and supporting amenities), intended to be provided widely across the city assessed at a neighbourhood-level using a 400 metre catchment area (five minute walk scale). Because core amenities are integral to the fabric of the neighborhood and support community health and wellbeing, every resident should have walkable access to these amenities.
- Secondary amenities: intended to be provided widely across the city, at a district-level assessed using a 1200 metre catchment area (15 minute walk scale). Secondary amenities may include basketball courts, spray decks, fitness equipment, skateboard elements and bike bumps. Every district should have one type of secondary amenity available.
- Speciality amenities: provided widely across the city, at a district level using a 1200 metre catchment area (15 minute walk scale). Amenities may include art elements or dog off-leash areas. There is no minimum target identified at this time. Speciality amenities will be provided on an opportunity basis and/or guided by other City strategies, policies and operational capacity.

With a focus on equitable distribution of assets, prioritization will be given to areas where there is a lack of community park amenities (i.e. areas that fall below the distribution and/or quality provisions). Additional factors considered will be the use of demographics, the Social Vulnerability Index and alignment with The City Plan, including District Plans and Growth Management Framework, to further refine priorities.

The Community Parks Framework was applied at a city, district and neighbourhood level to assess the current level of service with consideration given to core, secondary and speciality amenities. Analysis identified opportunities to improve community park amenity provisions citywide with the highest needs being identified in the northeast, southeast and southwest. There is wide variation in amenity levels of service between The City Plan districts. Districts lacking many amenities (core, secondary and specialty) include the Northeast, Northwest, Southwest, West Henday, Ellerslie and Whitemud. These districts generally fall in the Developing Area; however, no district could be said

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to fully meet the service targets for all scales of amenities. The Horse Hill and Rabbit Hill districts lack amenities, but currently have low population and remain rural in nature.

Funded/Unfunded Playground and Park Amenity Projects

Funded Profiles 2023-2026:

Community Park Amenity: Renewal (CM-32-0000):

- There was \$4 million allocated to complete the Neighbourhood Park Development Program renewal projects that advanced prior to the October 15, 2022 deadline and a further \$6 million is allocated to advance renewal priorities.
- Renewal priorities are established through the application of the Risked Based Information Management System (RIMS) model and Community Parks Framework.
- Administration anticipates that available renewal funding will be fully allocated by the end of the current budget cycle (2026).

Currently, community parks amenities are planned to be renewed in Tipton Park (Queen Alexandra), Allin Park (Glenwood), Zoie Gardner Park (Balwin), Blue Quill Park (Blue Quill), Skyrattler community park (Skyrattler), Crestwood arena/pocket park (Crestwood) and Duncan Innes Park (King Edward Park).

Neighbourhood Park Development New: Growth (CM-36-3636):

- \$5 million is allocated to complete growth Neighbourhood Park Development Program projects advanced prior to the October 15, 2022 deadline.
- The Neighbourhood Park Development program will then be phased out in the 2023-2026 capital budget.

Unfunded Profiles 2023-2026:

Community Park Amenities: Growth

- \$5.5 million is identified for community park amenities (growth) as unfunded as part of the Proposed Capital Budget 2023-2026 (pg.657).
- This profile remains unfunded; as a result there are no community park amenity growth projects advancing in the 2023-2026 Capital Budget.

Growth priorities for community parks were identified through the 2023-2026 Capital Budget but remain unfunded. Administration has identified the playground development for new school sites located in Secord (Catholic), Chappelle (Public - Garth Worthington School), Keswick East (Catholic - Joan Carr School) and Keswick West (Public - Joey Moss School) as growth priorities. The Government of Alberta allocated \$250,000 per playground to support the overall cost associated with playground development at these locations. In the past, provincial funding has been leveraged with City funding to develop playgrounds which can range in cost from approximately \$750,000 to \$1 million. In absence of available City funding, school boards and community partners are responsible for undertaking the necessary fundraising to develop playgrounds at these locations.

In addition to the above, Administration receives requests from community and developer partners (previously the Shared Park Development Program) to fund and construct park

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amenities. These requests include projects initiated, built and operated by a community group (commonly referred to as community-led); projects built on City of Edmonton property or in City-owned open space; and projects managed through a license or lease agreement with the City. Requests are reviewed and approved through Administration and may be subject to additional agreements (e.g. maintenance agreements).

As the Community Parks Framework does not currently apply to non-City owned land (e.g. land titled to the school boards), further discussion occurring through the review and update of the Joint Use Agreement: Land, will seek to clarify and confirm roles and responsibilities regarding asset ownership, maintenance and renewal obligations of aging infrastructure on school board land. This work will provide additional direction to identify instances where the City might assume asset ownership and support the delivery of park amenities on school board land.

Next Steps

The Community Parks Framework will be applied through the implementation of *Breathe*, which includes updates to the City's open space standards and guidelines, and associated green network analysis to map out and assess the open space network in alignment with The City Plan. This work received funding through the 2023-2026 operating budget and will help support the prioritization of growth and renewal projects associated with park amenities across the city. The Community Parks Framework and *Breathe* will collectively be used to evaluate gaps and establish revised provision standards with respect to park amenities (i.e. the level of amenities that are appropriate within a neighbourhood, district, etc.).

The implementation of *Breathe* will clarify City obligations with respect to base level development for park sites and formally retire the Urban Parks Management Plan. This work will confirm expectations for the distribution and provisions targets of core, secondary and speciality amenities and assist Administration in reviewing Community and Developer-led park development requests the Community Parks Framework, in combination with revised standards and supporting information developed through the implementation of *Breathe*, will enable Administration to assess and prioritize park amenities (both new amenities and renewal of existing amenities).

Budget/Financial Implications

Capital funding for Neighbourhood Park Development Program (growth and renewal) and Community Park Amenities (renewal) were approved through 2023-2026 to support the transition of the program into the Community Parks Framework.

COMMUNITY INSIGHT

As detailed in the What We Heard report (Attachment 2), community engagement was undertaken to advise key stakeholders including:

- Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues (EFCL)
- Members of community leagues (27 leagues represented)
- Edmonton Catholic School District, Edmonton Public School Board and Conseil scolaire Centre-Nord

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- Community Services Advisory Board members

There was overall support for the updated approach and stakeholders felt the Framework responded to concerns related to:

- Equity: The Framework considers the distribution of park amenities across the City.
- Inclusivity: The Framework recognizes that communities are diverse and dynamic.
- Community Collaboration: The Framework supports the continuation of the community-led process.

Resulting feedback was used to refine both the quantitative and qualitative assessment parameters comprising the framework as well as the elements considered as core, secondary and speciality amenities.

GBA+

Administration has engaged with various community members and stakeholder groups through the development of the Community Parks Framework. These discussions have contributed to a better understanding of how parks are currently funded and developed within the City of Edmonton. These discussions have also supported the need to re-examine how park amenities are developed to ensure equity is considered and incorporated into their delivery and maintenance.

The Framework shifts the responsibility of providing park amenities, such as playgrounds, from community groups to the City. The Framework considers other strategic directions including The City Plan and *Breathe* to optimize park investments, and ensure a more equitable approach is taken to community park development.

The Community Parks Framework will:

- Eliminate the need for communities to rely on their own fundraising capacity to deliver and renew core park amenities such as playgrounds.
- Support the planned update to provision standards while considering equitable park distribution and access, in alignment with *Breathe* and The City Plan to deliver an equitable approach for City-contributed park amenities.
- Reinforce a strategic approach that focuses on equity to aid in prioritizing community park development with consideration given to social vulnerability, neighborhood demographics and the specific needs of communities.

The next steps to retire the Urban Parks Management Plan through the implementation of *Breathe* will also involve community engagement. Research findings from previous GBA+ analysis have shown that open space planning and policies have the potential to lead to inequity and exclusion of marginalized community members, and that there are barriers to participating in conventional engagement activities. As such, Administration will ensure that engagement will be designed to remove barriers to participation for equity deserving groups.

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ATTACHMENTS

1. Neighbourhood Park Development Program Funding Accessed per Neighbourhood (2009-2020)
2. Community Parks Framework, What We Heard Report 2022