

ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION AT DESIGNATED SITES IN PARKS PROGRAM - FURTHER ANALYSIS

RECOMMENDATION

That the February 27, 2023, Community Services report CS01134, be received for information.

Requested Council Action	Information only		
ConnectEdmonton's Guiding Principle	ConnectEdmonton Strategic Goals		
CONNECTED	Healthy City		
City Plan Values	Belong. Live.		
City Plan Big City Move(s)	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"> Bylaw 14614 Public Places Bylaw Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis Act, Province of Alberta 89.2 		
Related Council Discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alcohol Consumption in River Valley Parks -January 31, 2022, Community Services report CS00633 		

Previous Council/Committee Action

At the February 22/24, 2022, City Council meeting the following motions were passed:

- That Administration provide a report outlining the implications, including best practices, of an expanded and/or permanent alcohol at designated sites in parks program, including fulsome engagement with public health experts, key stakeholders, and further GBA+ analysis; and

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- That Administration implements a 2022 pilot project, including opportunities outside River Valley, to allow alcohol consumption in parks at select designated picnic sites as permitted by the *Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis Act* and that the expanded program is to be done within existing budgets.

Executive Summary

- From May to October 2022, the City of Edmonton implemented an expanded pilot allowing the consumption of alcohol in designated picnic sites across 18 City parks. Park maintenance and enforcement teams did not report any significant incidents as a result of the 2022 pilot.
- Administration, using two specialized engagement consultant teams, conducted a thorough GBA+ review along with public opinion research with Edmontonians and focused engagement with key stakeholders and equity-deserving groups.
- Both benefits and harms were identified during research and engagement including making picnic sites more enjoyable to use, regulating an activity that is already occurring, increasing alcohol exposure to those at risk, increasing undesirable behaviours and general public health concerns.
- Through public opinion research, 80 percent of Edmontonians agree drinking should be allowed in parks. There are slight differences in perceptions and attitudes among the diverse sub-segments, however the majority of each of these groups support drinking in parks.
- Through focused engagement with diverse stakeholders and equity-deserving groups, Administration heard that there was less support for allowing alcohol in parks compared to the broader public. Although the feedback was not entirely in opposition to alcohol consumption in parks, most respondents had some fears or unease with this program.
- If Council would like to implement a similar program to what was delivered in 2022, on an ongoing basis with existing resources, a motion would be required for Administration to implement the program. Otherwise, alcohol in parks will not be permitted in 2023 or beyond.

REPORT

Background

The Alberta *Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis Act* permits the owner of a public park to designate picnic areas to allow alcohol consumption during the hours determined by the owner with appropriate signage that states that a person may consume liquor in the designated picnic area; sets out the boundaries of the designated picnic area; and sets out the hours when liquor may be consumed.

In 2021, Administration conducted a pilot project to permit the consumption of alcohol in designated picnic sites in accordance with these regulations. A jurisdictional scan was completed alongside the evaluation of operational and survey data, which focused on cost, enforcement and impacts on parks. Due to constrained timelines, a comprehensive GBA+ review was not undertaken at that time. Results from the 2021 pilot were shared in the January 31, 2022, Community Services report CS00633, *Alcohol Consumption in River Valley Parks - Pilot Project Results*. At the Community and Public Services Committee meeting, representatives from Alberta

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Health Services and the University of Alberta expressed social and public health concerns with allowing alcohol consumption in parks. Concerns included exposure to alcohol leading to increased substance abuse, normalization of alcohol use, safety considerations and possible impacts to recovering addicts.

In response to these concerns and the lack of data, Council directed Administration to conduct further engagement with key stakeholders and GBA+ analysis in conjunction with an expanded pilot program in 2022.

2022 Pilot Project

The 2022 pilot project took place from May 1 to October 11, with an expansion from 47 picnic sites across seven parks in 2021 to 124 picnic sites across 18 parks in 2022 (Attachment 1). In both pilots, sites were selected based on the guiding principles of safety, accessibility, visitor experience, honouring existing park uses and inclusivity. In alignment with the Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis Act, alcohol consumption was permitted in designated picnic sites from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. daily. Alcohol consumption outside of designated picnic sites remained prohibited unless otherwise permitted through a festival and event license or at licensed restaurants.

As directed by City Council, the 2022 pilot project was completed within existing budgets. Operationally, park maintenance and enforcement teams did not report any significant incidents, such as excessive litter or damage to property, as a result of the pilot project. Unlike the 2021 pilot, no special enforcement patrols were conducted. No tickets were issued and three warnings were issued related to alcohol consumption in designated parks. There was a 42 per cent decrease in inquiries through the City of Edmonton 311 service for a total of 42 in 2022 compared to 72 inquiries in 2021. The majority of calls were from residents seeking general information related to the pilot project.

The 2022 pilot project also included an expansion in the scope of the research and engagement work with a focus on a thorough GBA+ process in order to understand the views of all Edmontonians, particularly the most vulnerable, historically under-represented and equity-deserving groups. Findings are summarized in the Community Insight and GBA+ sections below.

Review of Best Practices

Public health emerged as a key consideration. Administration's review indicated that the City of Edmonton has implemented some of the public health best practices as part of the pilot projects which include:

- Limited number of proposed sites, set designated areas and restricted hours of consumption;
- Balanced number and type (bookable/non-bookable) of proposed sites to meet a variety of park user needs;
- Posted clear signage in designated areas;
- Maintained the ability to remove sites that have ongoing problems or concerns resulting from the program;

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- Monitored and evaluated the program;
- Expanded inspection and enforcement staffing (2021 only); and
- Public engagement and feedback across diverse subgroups.

Some other considerations from the review that could be evaluated for the future include:

- Avoiding permanent bylaw changes to maintain flexibility in approach;
- Set alcohol consumption/possession limits, implement meal requirements and/or prohibit glass containers (this would require additional resources to support one or more of these options); and
- Post clear and accessible signage in non-designated areas.

COMMUNITY INSIGHT

Community perspectives were gathered through multiple engagement and research channels that have been summarized in the table below.

Type	Activity	Date	Purpose	Number of Participants
Interim Feedback	Interim online survey	May 1 - July 15, 2022	Feedback on the pilot before public opinion research launched	192
Public Opinion Research	Online survey (broader public)	July 19 - August 20, 2022	Feedback on the pilot from broader public	4,810
	Online survey (booked picnic sites)	July 28 - August 19, 2022	Feedback on the pilot from those who booked picnic sites that allowed alcohol	167
	Telephone survey	July 14 - August 9, 2022	Feedback from a representative sample of Edmontonians	409
	Intercept survey	July 26 - August 13, 2022	Feedback from people in the parks	712
Focused Public Engagement	Online workshop	October 12, 2022	Feedback from health care and education experts	4
	Intercept surveys (On-the-spot)	September 21 - October 31, 2022	Feedback from people representing equity-deserving groups at targeted locations	134
	Scheduled in-depth interviews	October, 2022	Feedback from equity-deserving groups and diverse stakeholders	11

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Interim Online Survey

An interim online survey was conducted to collect feedback on the pilot before the public opinion research survey was launched. Highlights of the findings from this interim survey include:

- Majority of responses were about perception of the pilot project as a whole and not about experiences in any particular park.
- Most respondents agreed that they would increase their use of picnic sites (63 per cent) or use of the park (61 per cent) as a result of allowing alcohol consumption at picnic sites.
- Respondents generally agreed that the program had some benefits, with more enjoyment of picnic spaces, a more enjoyable food experience and a better drinking culture being the most frequently cited benefits.
- Respondents cited exposure to alcohol use, litter and safety as the top concerns of allowing alcohol consumption at picnic sites.

Public Opinion Research

Administration engaged Advanis, an external consultant company, who undertook public opinion research to understand Edmontonians' perception and attitude of the pilot, gauge the potential impact on their use of the parks, and explore tactics to mitigate the impact of the pilot program. This research included an online survey for the public, an online survey for those who booked picnic sites, a telephone survey and intercept surveys.

Attachment 2 provides the research findings from each of these elements. Highlights are provided below:

- 80 per cent of people agreed that drinking should be allowed. Edmontonians tend to agree that allowing drinking in parks lets the City regulate this activity (67 per cent), makes picnics more enjoyable (65 per cent) and makes the parks more welcoming to different kinds of people (61 per cent).
- GBA+ and intersectional analysis of diverse groups such as recent immigrants, those of non-Christian religions, who don't have access to private green spaces, have children in the household, from different age groups, or with lower income levels, indicate no single marginalized group has demonstrated consensus on their views. There are slight differences in perceptions and attitudes among the sub-segments, however the majority of each of these groups agree that drinking should be allowed.
- The 20 per cent of Edmontonians who do not agree that drinking should be allowed tend to agree that allowing alcohol in City parks may cause more negative impacts, such as more people drinking and driving, more disorderly behaviors, more damage to parks and encourages underage drinking.

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Focused Public Engagement

The public engagement process during the 2022 pilot was designed to capture perspectives from key stakeholders, under-represented and equity-deserving voices and was conducted by consultants Intelligent Futures. This engagement included an online workshop, intercept surveys (done on-the-spot) and scheduled in-depth interviews. Attachment 3 provides the executive summary of the public engagement report and Attachment 4 provides a more in-depth look at intersectionality data gleaned from the report. The full What We Heard report is available on the City of Edmonton website. Highlights include:

- Representatives from Alberta Health Services and Edmonton Public School Board identified concerns about the misalignment between promoting healthy lifestyles and the harms associated with alcohol, as well as undesirable behaviours and activities around schools and children. They believed that the only benefit to allowing alcohol in parks is that it allows for a variety of social activities that are not usually enjoyed in a public setting.
- Among those who completed the intercept surveys, 59 per cent were not aware of the pilot program and 39 per cent stated it would affect how often they would use a park where alcohol was permitted.
- Individuals representing a cross-section of identities noted that alcohol complicates their feelings of safety and that being in public spaces can already be a difficult experience for some without the added stress of how intoxicated people might perceive and interact with them.
- Some Indigenous voices indicated that alcohol has been used negatively against their communities, it is a major factor in poverty and homelessness, and the use of alcohol in parks also has spiritual implications.
- Some participants representing the Muslim and Sikh communities noted that public drinking causes undue pressure to partake in drinking alcohol, which is contrary to religious practices. Concerns around Islamophobia and racism were also identified in connection to alcohol use in parks.
- Participants at the Boyle Street Community Services Centre and the Managed Alcohol Program Centre shared concerns that drugs and alcohol can cause problems such as social disorder. Some indicated that they would not approve of alcohol-designated sites in a park near a school or daycare.
- Boyle Street Community Services interviewees also identified benefits to permitting alcohol at designated sites including that it offers a safe place for them to drink with friends and they wouldn't get in trouble for public drinking.
- Some participants, including the LGBTQ2S+ interviewees, stated that this pilot program shows the City's trust in patrons to use the parks responsibly.

GBA+

Using the City's GBA+ framework, Administration sought to understand how diverse identities and intersectionalities might differentially experience, perceive and value the pilot project. Administration

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examined the interplay between systems of inequality and social identities, impacts on social and health outcomes, and current recommendations and best practices. As part of the GBA+ approach, Administration conducted a jurisdictional scan and a review of academic articles.

Overall, very few studies were found that specifically investigated the effects of alcohol consumption in parks. These studies largely focused on the social and health impacts children and youth experience, like increased exposure and normalization of alcohol consumption, risky use and potential for overuse. Broadening the scope to public spaces, studies tended to focus on public health perspectives, perceptions of safety issues and enforcement, commercialization and the night time economy, impacts of COVID-19, and effects on people experiencing homelessness and people engaged in substance use. Importantly, even with a broadened scope, Administration found it difficult to find population-specific studies for equity-deserving groups or studies that examined identities and intersections. Further, GBA+ analysis that works to uncover the complex contexts and root causes of health and social problems related to alcohol consumption in public spaces is underdeveloped.

In addition to the jurisdictional scan and literature review, Administration also used a GBA+ approach as part of the public opinion research and engagement processes to gather insights from the most vulnerable, historically underrepresented and equity-deserving groups. The findings have been summarized above and are available in more detail in Attachments 2, 3 and 4.

NEXT STEPS

The second year of the pilot program is now complete and alcohol is no longer permitted in picnic sites. Research and engagement on the pilot has also concluded and indicates that overall, there is support from the broader public to allow drinking in parks but there are public health, safety and social concerns from some stakeholders and some equity-deserving groups. If Council would like to implement a similar program to what was delivered in 2022, on an ongoing basis with existing resources, a motion would be required for Administration to implement the program, otherwise, alcohol in parks will not be permitted in 2023 or beyond.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Attachment 1 - 2022 Pilot Program Park Information and Locations
2. Attachment 2 - Alcohol Consumption at Designated Sites Summary Report
3. Attachment 3 - Alcohol Consumption at Designated Sites in Parks (ACaDSiP) GBA+ Public Engagement - Executive Summary
4. Attachment 4 - Public Engagement Intersectionalities