

Piloted Naturalized Playgrounds Development and Implementation

Recommendation

That the December 2, 2020, Integrated Infrastructure Services report CR_4316, be received for information.

Previous Council/Committee Action

At the December 5, 2016, Community and Public Services Committee meeting, the following motion was passed:

That Administration provides a report on the development and implementation of the two naturalized playgrounds currently being piloted.

Executive Summary

This report outlines Administrations' experience and learnings during the development and construction of the piloted naturalized playgrounds in Sir Wilfrid Laurier Park and Dermott District Park, as well as a summary of user experience feedback.

Report

Natural playgrounds are customized, site-specific play spaces that are mostly made from wood. Some materials are pre-engineered for safety but some are straight from nature (i.e., rocks and boulders) rather than synthetic or man-made materials, like plastics and metals. They offer alternative stimulation and sensory experiences that children might not receive from other play environments by promoting less structured, informal play. Two piloted natural playgrounds have recently been constructed by the City of Edmonton at Sir Wilfrid Laurier and Dermott District Parks. These projects were identified in the Buena Vista/Sir Wilfrid Laurier Park Master Plan and reinforced as priorities through public engagement.

These playgrounds have provided the City with experience in procurement and construction of natural playgrounds. These projects used a design-build delivery model where one contractor is procured for design and construction services. By using a design-build procurement this allowed for more flexibility in development given the unique nature of this type of playspace. This also allowed for balancing risk, liability and quality of play options due to non-standard and customized equipment design that

met all Canadian Standards Association and City of Edmonton Design and Construction Standards. This methodology, along with mandatory pre-bid meetings and an identified maximum budget, resulted in a number of competitive bids that allowed the City to proceed with evaluating and awarding the contracts. Two separate successful proponents were awarded the design-build contracts for each playground.

Having different contractors complete similar projects allowed for ongoing assessment and evaluation of work practices and the ability to leverage and apply good practices from one project to the other. Design refinement and creativity by the contractors also resulted in different playspace themes providing a unique experience at each site. Both playgrounds opened in 2020; Sir Wilfrid Laurier in September and Dermott in November.

Following the opening of the Sir Wilfrid Laurier playground, the City conducted onsite play experience surveys of playground users including parents, caregivers and children. The response to the natural playground elements was very positive with parents and caregivers welcoming the change from a more traditional playspace. Parents observed their children interacting differently in this playground including being more creative, adventurous and climbing and exploring more independently. Children of all ages were very excited about the playground with highlights including the slide, the coyote structure and all the different climbing elements as well as the “hidden” areas in the surrounding tree stands. A summary of this survey is provided in Attachment 1.

With the experience gained in completing these natural playgrounds, the City will incorporate options to explore natural playground elements as part of community parks moving forward as experience and understanding of these types of playgrounds continues to evolve.

Corporate Outcomes and Performance Management

Corporate Outcome(s): Edmonton is attractive and compact			
Outcome(s)	Measure(s)	Result(s)	Target(s)
Edmonton is attractive and compact.	Edmontonians’ Assessment: Well-Designed Attractive City (percent of survey respondents who agree/strongly agree)	53% (2017 Result)	55% (2018 Target)
Corporate Outcome: The City of Edmonton has sustainable and accessible infrastructure			
The City of Edmonton has sustainable and accessible infrastructure	Edmontonians’ Assessment: Access to Infrastructure, Amenities and Services that Improve Quality of Life (percent of survey respondents who agree/strongly agree)	68% (2017 result)	70% (2018 Target)

Corporate Outcome: Edmontonians use facilities and services that promote healthy living

Edmontonians use facilities and services that promote healthy living	City Park Usage (percent of survey respondents who report using a City park in the past 12 months)	89% (2017 Result)	83% (2018 Target)
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Attachments

1. Natural Playground Play Experience Survey Results

Others Reviewing this Report

- G. Cebryk, Deputy City Manager, City Operations
- S. McCabe, Deputy City Manager, Urban Form and Corporate Strategic Development
- C. Owen, Deputy City Manager, Communications and Engagement
- R. Smyth, Deputy City Manager, Citizen Services
- B. Andriachuk, City Solicitor