

Buena Vista/Laurier Park Master Plan Implementation Results

Recommendation

That the December 2, 2020, Citizen Services report CR_3983, be received for information.

Previous Council/Committee Action

At the April 23, 2014, Community Services Committee meeting, the following motion was passed:

That Administration prepare a report on the impacts of the park infrastructure and program modification one year after completion of Phase 1 of the Buena Vista/Laurier Park Master Plan.

Executive Summary

The Buena Vista/Sir Wilfrid Laurier Park Master Plan was approved by City Council on April 23, 2014. The plan identified a phased implementation of improvements that commenced in 2015 and will conclude in December 2020. The phased implementation of the various improvements has allowed park users to adjust to the park changes gradually. Administration has monitored public response and issues through feedback submitted as improvements were implemented. This report outlines a summary of the improvements, as well as utilization of the assets and feedback gained since these assets have been put into service.

Report

The Buena Vista/Sir Wilfrid Laurier Park Master Plan was approved by City Council on April 23, 2014. The plan identified a phased implementation of improvements in the two parks. This phased implementation started in 2015 and will conclude in 2020 (Attachment 1).

The phased implementation of the various improvements has allowed park users to adjust to the park changes gradually. Administration has monitored public response and issues through feedback submitted through 311, park ranger call outs, and informal observations by staff. The findings are outlined below.

Trail Improvements

Trail improvements in Buena Vista and Sir Wilfrid Laurier Parks included paving the shared-use path, realigning the trails away from unstable river banks, resurfacing some gravel trails, designating bike routes in Buena Vista Park, and access improvements to the river at two locations. New viewpoints for park users were also added along the trail in Sir Wilfrid Laurier Park.

Observations indicate that all amenities are well-utilized. Since 2015, there were 84 complaints to the City related to this shared-use path. Park patrons have indicated that there continues to be conflict between cyclists, pedestrians and dogs. The level of conflict is similar to other river valley locations.

Yorath House

Yorath House opened to the public on September 20, 2019. Within the first six months of use, the facility hosted 74 bookings and approximately 2,800 guests. These bookings included weddings, showers, parties, corporate events and meetings. Prior to closing the facility in March due to COVID-19, more than 60 bookings had been in place for 2020. During summer 2020, a number of outdoor recreation activities and classes offered by the City of Edmonton took place on the outdoor oval. In September 2020, the Artist in Residence program commenced, in partnership with the Edmonton Arts Council, providing artists a space in the facility to create and educate the public.

Washroom Facilities

In spring 2019, the portable toilets in Buena Vista Park were replaced by a new washroom building, which included a dog water fountain and a public information board. The new facility has been highly utilized since its opening.

The three season washroom facility in Sir Wilfrid Laurier Park was replaced in 2020 with a year-round, gender inclusive facility. The facility will be in service by the end of 2020 and will support additional winter use of the park.

Wayfinding and Regulatory Signage

Signage identifying off-leash boundaries and bicycle routes was installed in 2017. Many of these signs were vandalized and, in some cases, were removed by park patrons. Park staff have continued to monitor and replace signage as required.

New wayfinding and interpretive signage was installed in October 2020. The comprehensive signage informs users of access routes, park amenities, and park regulations. Many comments and concerns previously received from the public, along with enforcement infractions, were related to the lack of information to assist in harmonious park use. While regulatory signage in both parks is consistently reviewed and replaced, the inclusion of new wayfinding signage provides further detail and clarity to help minimize future conflict. Given the recent addition of the complete signage system, data has not been received related to public perception of the signs.

Picnic Site Improvements and Natural Playground

In 2018, several group picnic sites in Sir Wilfrid Laurier Park were upgraded with new shelters and improved accessibility. Individual picnic sites were also improved throughout the park. Collectively, these have supported high usage in the park through the summer months. In 2019, 246 picnic site bookings occurred in the park.

In September 2020, two natural playgrounds areas were completed, replacing the former, dated playground equipment. These were fitted with a variety of unique equipment such as a two-storey tower, logs and a climbing structure.

Following the opening of the natural playground pods in September 2020, Administration conducted on-site surveys of playground users including parents, caregivers and children. The response to these playground updates was positive. Many parents and caregivers observed their children interacting differently with this type of playground including being more adventurous, climbing and exploring more independently as well as using their imaginations in a more creative way. Children of all ages were 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 bushes.

Park Access and Parking

The entrances to both parks were enhanced through the addition of a new roundabout which increases safety, improves traffic flow and minimizes both traffic and pedestrian conflict. The native landscaping around the infrastructure also raised the aesthetic appeal of the park’s main access points. As many users access the parks by vehicle, parking capacity was increased to meet the high demand as well as to provide better parking options. The additional parking has been able to accommodate regular park usage volumes.

Corporate Outcomes and Performance Management

Corporate Outcome: Edmontonians use facilities and services that promote healthy living			
Outcomes	Measures	Results	Targets
Edmontonians utilize outdoor spaces and indoor amenities for healthy living	Number of picnic site bookings in Buena Vista / Laurier Park	2019: 246	Increase over prior year
	Number of event bookings at Yorath House	2019/2020: 74	Increase over prior year
Citizens are satisfied with the infrastructure improvements implemented	Number of parking complaints received	2019: 18	Reduce over prior year

Attachments

1. Buena Vista / Sir Wilfrid Laurier Park Master Plan Phased Implementation

Others Reviewing this Report

- C. Owen, Deputy City Manager, Communications and Engagement
- J. Meliefste, Deputy City Manager, Integrated Infrastructure Services
- B. Andriachuk, City Solicitor