

City of Edmonton Unfunded Parks - Status Update

Recommendation

That the March 2, 2021, Urban Form and Corporate Strategic Development report UFCSD00096, be received for information.

Previous Council/Committee Action

At the September 21/23, 2020, City Council meeting, the following motion was passed:

That Administration provide a report to Committee on the status and plans for any unfunded parks in the City of Edmonton, including information on the status of land acquisition, how long residents have lived in the area, status of funding and any known timelines for design and construction.

Executive Summary

This report outlines how the City's policy framework guides the assembly, purchase, development, and distribution of parks in new and mature neighbourhoods. It provides a summary of the status of parkland acquisition and development, including information on the amount of parkland pending acquisition, average timelines for neighbourhood and park development, and existing plans for park design and construction in approved budget profiles.

While the primary function of this report is the provision of a status update on unfunded parks across the city, the results speak to the need for implementation of The City Plan. Work focused on growth management and district planning will enable a better understanding of the tie between new growth and the need to develop infrastructure and deliver associated services.

Report

The development of an equitable open space system that meets the existing and emerging needs of Edmontonians is crucial to implement the Big Moves identified in City Plan such as "Greener As We Grow" and "A Community Of Communities." At present, the Urban Parks Management Plan and *Breathe: Edmonton's Green Network Strategy* provide the policy framework for assembly, purchase, and development of

parcs in new and mature neighbourhoods. In newly developing areas of the city, parkland is usually assembled through municipal reserve dedication at the time of subdivision. The distribution of green space (park type, size, and overall function within the neighbourhood) is planned based on the anticipated population and unique geographic features within the plan area. Land assembly is prioritized and contingent upon:

- Parks identified in Council approved plans,
- The pace of residential development in the plan area,
- Recreation goals identified in facility plans, and
- School Board capital plans and approved Provincial funding for school construction.

Land required for parks that cannot be fully assembled through subdivision, such as district parks, school community parks, or significant natural areas, is purchased through the Funds-in-Lieu of Reserve Account and/or the Natural Area Reserve Fund. However, changing market conditions, neighbourhood development patterns, increasing property values, motivation of individual land owners, and the overall health of the reserve account present challenges that often limit Administration's ability to undertake land assembly in a timely manner.

Status of Parkland Acquisition

At present, there are 78 approved structure or redevelopment plans that contain undeveloped park sites. These plans commit the City to the assembly and construction of parkland to meet the recreational needs of residents. There are 353 sites, representing approximately 1,114 hectares of parkland, within approved plans that are actively being assembled (Attachment 1) or where land assembly is complete but development remains pending (Attachment 2). Many of the parks where land assembly is ongoing may be years from completion and integration into City inventory.

The acquisition of parkland through subdivision is complex and can take many years. Timing of acquisition is determined by market forces, servicing considerations and development industry decisions. Land developers choose where and when they develop land, driving the schedule for applying the municipal reserve requirement; either requesting that municipal reserves are dedicated as funds-in-lieu, or purchasing land to meet parkland assembly requirements.

Timelines for Park Development

Administration completed a spatial analysis to determine how long residents have lived in neighbourhoods with undeveloped parks (Attachment 3). Parks designated for redevelopment funding were removed from the analysis, and the modelling focused solely on residential subdivisions to limit potential skewing of results from non-residential areas. The registration date of the first subdivision in each

neighbourhood was used to establish a benchmark for residential tenure. The intervals illustrated in Attachment 3 were derived by confirming the presence of at least one undeveloped park and the date of the first subdivision in each neighbourhood.

As anticipated, the amount of time that residents live in areas with undeveloped parks is often determined by development industry decisions beyond the City's control. Neighbourhoods with the highest "wait times" for park funding are geographically dispersed across Edmonton's developing areas. This is consistent with the geographic patterns in land development seen throughout Edmonton and the corresponding timeframes to complete land assembly and secure development funding. There are a total of nine sites within the 20-25 year category identified in Attachment 3, including six small pocket parks, one urban village site and two school park sites. One of the school sites identified is a mostly developed park where final subdivision and assembly of 0.6 hectares has been delayed by a non-participating landowner. Attachment 3 highlights the often discontinuous nature of land development, which affects Administration's ability to finalize land assembly and place park sites into the queue for base level development.

The requirement to purchase land (particularly in areas with multiple or non-participating landowners) is another significant factor that extends the timeline for land assembly and ultimately affects when a park will be advanced for development. It is rare for Administration to recommend prioritizing a park site for development funding until all the land is assembled. School and district sites are an exception to this practice and these parks will often require priority attention (for both assembly and development funding) to meet the City's obligations under the Joint Use Agreement and meet school board needs for educational programs.

The identification of infrastructure and assets required at the district level for subsequent population thresholds and the application of a growth management lens on budget processes, seeks to focus municipal investment and reduce the current and future unfunded needs across the city. District planning will identify neighbourhood open space within each district that will be measured and monitored over time providing input on future need. In addition, defining what it means for an area to be substantially complete will offer further understanding of service, amenity and infrastructure gaps related to growth. These initiatives are in early stages, but will consider those needs that are not currently fulfilled.

Status of Parkland Design and Construction

Once the majority of the land for a park is acquired by the City, budget requests are submitted. Budget approval initiates concept planning design and construction, which can take two or more years to complete. New park development was historically funded with Pay-As-You-Go money or Municipal Sustainability Initiative grants. Land

assembly has historically outpaced the funds available to undertake park development.

A 10 year Capital Investment Outlook (CIO) prepared for the 2019-2022 capital budget, which estimated funding required for 214 new or redeveloping parks (including eight district parks, 33 natural areas, 104 pocket parks, 29 school park sites, 24 urban village parks and 16 park upgrades in line with approved Area Redevelopment Plans). The total estimated municipal cost to undertake design and construction of all sites identified in the CIO was \$379.9 million (locations illustrated in Attachment 4).

Base level park development (primarily turf, sport fields, landscaping, and signage) is prioritized based on:

- the status of residential construction and parkland assembly in the neighbourhood,
- the type and quantity of parks assembled,
- identified community needs,
- facility plans, and;
- the schedule for school construction set out by School Districts.

Prioritization represents a careful balancing of competing needs and emerging issues. The limited funds available for base level development limit Administration's ability to keep pace with the open space needs imposed by residential growth. Approximately \$17.2 million is allocated for new park development during the 2019-2022 capital budget cycle. Inclusion of park assets within the City's inventory also adds operational costs related to maintenance. The parks currently approved for development are funded to various points of design or construction as illustrated on Attachment 5.

Prioritization to inform the 10 year Capital Investment Outlook and the next capital budget will begin this year and an updated funding package to advance new park development will be prepared as part of the forthcoming budget cycle. City Council will have the opportunity to reassess the 10 year Capital Investment Outlook through the upcoming 2023-2026 budget cycle.

Additional Funding Strategies

In addition to approved capital budgets, Administration works with the development industry to fund park development via the Shared Park Development Program, a program designed to reduce inherent risks to the development industry while providing park amenities to the community and substantial cost avoidance to the City. Administration relies on the Capital Budget process to support the program and address emerging needs and opportunities.

With the Shared Park Development Program, the City partners with industry to develop park sites. The program has proven successful and has helped reduce the 10 year park development funding deficit. Over 25 parks have been advanced through this program with amenity contributions of approximately \$13.5 million from development companies and a capital cost to the City (excluding establishment and warranty deficiencies funded through the program) of just over \$750,000. Administration continues to work with the private sector on expanding this program. The current approved budget is fully subscribed to the end of 2022, and Administration anticipates the need to prepare a budget request for consideration during the next budget cycle to maintain the program.

Emerging needs are prioritized and discussed through the Supplemental Capital Budget Adjustment (SCBA) process. The SCBA remains the primary mechanism through which Administration addresses unanticipated funding challenges.

Additional work on prioritization to inform the 10 year Capital Investment Outlook will begin in 2021. As part of the next four year capital budget cycle, Administration will prepare an updated funding package to advance new park acquisition and development, to be prioritized and supported by city policies and strategies.

Corporate Outcomes and Performance Management

Corporate Outcome(s): Edmonton neighbourhoods are more vibrant as density increases, where people and businesses thrive and where housing and mobility options are plentiful.			
Outcome(s)	Measure(s)	Result(s)	Target(s)
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 Connect Edmonton performance indicators
Parks, green spaces, natural areas, river valley are available and accessible	Square metres of public outdoor recreation space per capita (WCCD Indicator)	64 m ² (2018)	TBD through Breathe Implementation (project underway)

Attachments

1. Parks Currently Under Assembly
2. Assembled Parks - Development Pending
3. Residential Tenure in Neighbourhoods with Undeveloped Parks
4. Parks Approved for Development

5. 2019-2022 Capital Budget - Park Development

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
- K. Armstrong, Deputy City Manager, Employee Services
- R. Smyth, Deputy City Manager, Citizen Services
- B. Andriachuk, City Solicitor