

Alcohol Consumption in Public Parks, Outside of Festivals and Events

Recommendation

That the April 28, 2021, Citizen Services report CS00350, be received for information.

Previous Council/Committee Action

At the January 25, 2021, City Council meeting, the following motion was passed:

That Administration conduct public engagement to identify picnic sites within City parks that would be appropriate for permitting alcohol consumption, and provide a report to Community and Public Services Committee summarizing the results and costs and timelines for installing the required signage.

Executive Summary

Throughout February and March 2021, Administration conducted public engagement activities and completed a jurisdictional scan around the consumption of alcohol in public parks. The online survey received more than 15,000 responses with the majority of respondents favouring a pilot of public alcohol consumption in City-owned parks. The jurisdictional scan provided limited guidance on best practices and lessons learned, but where applicable, those lessons have been taken into consideration.

Administration will be conducting a pilot program to allow the consumption of alcohol in select public parks from May 28 until October 11, 2021. The sites would include approximately 25 percent of picnic sites within seven river valley parks. At the end of the pilot, Administration will analyze data from the pilot including usage and complaints, and review and report those findings to City Council in consideration with any future plans to allow continued alcohol consumption.

Report

In June 2019, the City of Edmonton Youth Council provided a presentation to Community and Public Services Committee about the public consumption of liquor in municipal picnic sites. Around the same time, the Government of Alberta introduced 14 provincial, day-use picnic areas that would be designated for alcohol consumption. Food was required to be consumed with alcohol as a requirement under the *Gaming*,

Liquor and Cannabis Act, however, that requirement was removed through an amendment to the Act in 2020. The provincial park program has since expanded to include 28 day-use picnic areas and alcohol consumption is permitted between 11:00 a.m. and 9:00 p.m. in designated areas.

The *Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis Act* permits the owner of a public park to designate picnic areas allowing alcohol consumption during the hours designated by the owner with appropriate signage that:

- states that a person may consume liquor in the designated picnic area
- sets out the designated picnic area
- sets out the hours when liquor may be consumed

Between February 22 and March 7, 2021, Administration conducted an online survey seeking the level of support for a pilot project to allow alcohol consumption in designated picnic areas in City parks. In total, 15,554 responses were received with the majority of respondents supporting a pilot (71 percent strongly or somewhat support). Some of the key considerations from respondents were ensuring noise and litter issues are well managed, designated areas are clearly signed with usage rules and regulations, proximity to washrooms and ensuring enforcement to avoid any disorderly behaviours (Attachment 1). Administration also engaged with the Edmonton Police Service, Citizen Services Advisory Board, Alberta Health Services, and Alberta Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis to seek their perspectives on a potential pilot.

Administration completed a jurisdictional scan of Canadian and international municipalities that have allowed public consumption of alcohol. A key finding from the Canadian municipalities was that public consumption areas should be clearly identified and signed. International municipalities did not offer many findings that were directly applicable to municipal parks as those jurisdictions have a historical view of allowing public alcohol consumption.

Proposed Alcohol Consumption in Public Parks Pilot

Administration will conduct a pilot project to allow public alcohol consumption in select river valley parks from May 28 to October 11, 2021. The river valley parks system was chosen for the pilot due to the existing presence of enforcement and operational teams which will ensure efficient oversight of the pilot and minimize additional costs. The pilot includes both bookable and first come, first served sites and alcohol consumption would be permitted from 11:00 a.m. until 9:00 p.m. daily. Any COVID-19 public health restrictions (limited gatherings numbers, distancing, masking, etc.) would apply at these sites and peace officers would monitor/enforce infractions within their authority during that time period.

To determine which parks and specific sites would be best suited for the pilot, the following guiding principles were utilized:

- safety

- accessibility
- visitor experience
- honouring existing park uses
- inclusivity

Administration chose 47 picnic sites across seven parks based on feedback received through the public survey, stakeholder feedback, and internal staff engagement. This represents approximately 25 percent of the total picnic sites in the seven parks and Administration anticipates this will meet public demand. The selected parks include Sir Wilfrid Laurier, Whitemud, William Hawrelak, Government House, Victoria, Gold Bar, and Rundle.

Costing

The scope of this pilot project was developed to minimize the costs while providing the opportunity to understand the impacts and costs should it continue or expand. The selected picnic sites are established and furnished, including picnic tables, barbeques/fire pits, and waste receptacles. These sites receive daily service, plus additional service as required, regardless of the proposed pilot. In order to reduce the need for additional enforcement resources, the sites have also been selected to align with existing peace officer patrols. Direct communication and signage costs are expected to be around \$10,000.

Education and Awareness

Edmontonians will likely become aware that alcohol consumption will be permitted in parks, but may not know the specific rules and regulations around the activity. Communications and education programs will focus on building awareness of the rules and regulations, encouraging overall responsible consumption, and how to register concerns around public safety or disorder. All designated alcohol consumption areas will be clearly signed.

Pilot Compliance

Peace officers will take a patrol and monitor approach, increasing awareness and promoting acceptable behaviour as people use the designated consumption areas. Enforcement will focus on addressing behavioural concerns such as the protection of parkland, excessive litter or noise, and fire prevention, ensuring patrons are respectful of others enjoying park space. Peace officers will also ensure patrons are not interfering with the exclusive use of any area granted to another person or group and ensure that alcohol is being consumed in a manner that is in accordance with the Bylaw 2202 - Parkland Bylaw, Bylaw 14614 - Public Places Bylaw, and the *Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis Act*. Any serious disorder matters will be referred to the Edmonton Police Service for support and follow-up.

Budget/Financial Implications

The pilot project costs can be absorbed within Administration’s existing budgets. Administration anticipates some additional costs that can only be quantified at the end of the pilot given the unknown nature and volume. For example:

- additional calls for enforcement (City of Edmonton, Edmonton Police Service)
- additional service requirements (additional waste receptacles, servicing, sign replacement, litter pick-up)
- damage to parkland infrastructure
- additional communication requirements
- collection and analysis of pilot data

The cost for delivering the pilot will be tracked in order to determine the overall cost of the project and to gain an understanding of required resourcing should the pilot be continued or expanded.

Public Engagement

In response to City Council’s motion, an online survey was conducted with the public between February 22 and March 7, 2021. In total, 15,554 responses were received, making the survey the second-highest response rate for any public engagement conducted by the City of Edmonton.

The majority of respondents (71 percent strongly or somewhat support) supported a pilot that would allow alcohol consumption in designated picnic sites. Reasons for support include that the pilot completes an enjoyable food experience (85 percent), regulates an activity that is already happening (82 percent), increases opportunities for social interaction with friends and family (79 percent). Opposition to the pilot largely focused on public safety, with the top reasons for opposition being an increase in disorderly behaviour (92 percent), the potential for drinking and driving (85 percent), and safety concerns overall (82 percent).

Corporate Outcomes and Performance Management

Corporate Outcome: The City of Edmonton has sustainable and accessible infrastructure.			
Outcome	Measure	Result	Target
Edmontonians consume alcohol in public parks, and outside festivals and events, in a responsible manner that does not impact other citizens' enjoyment.	Number of tickets issued for consuming liquor on parkland	2020: 13 2019: 56	Reduced over prior period
	Number of warnings issued for consuming liquor on parkland	2020: 30 2019: 25	
Corporate Outcome: Edmonton is a safe city.			

Edmontonians feel safe in public parks, and outside festivals and events, that allow alcohol consumption.	Number of citizen alcohol consumption complaints to park rangers	2020: 20 2019: 69	Reduced over prior period
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Attachment

1. Public Consumption Survey Report - Summary Report

Others Reviewing this Report

- G. Cebryk, Deputy City Manager, City Operations
- C. Owen, Deputy City Manager, Communications and Engagement
- M. Persson, Chief Financial Officer and Deputy City Manager, Financial and Corporate Services
- K. Fallis-Howell, Acting City Solicitor