

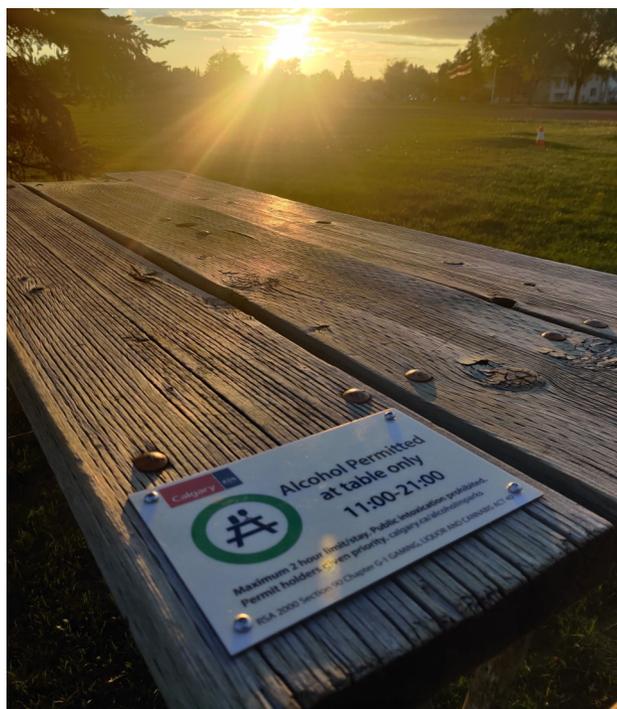


Alcohol in Parks Pilot Program 2021 Learnings and Plans for 2022

Program Objective

The purpose of the program was to provide Calgarians more outdoor opportunities, particularly during COVID, when indoor gatherings were prohibited. For Calgarians without their own backyard, the program also made it possible for them to socialize with friends and family in-person while drinking alcohol.

The program demonstrated that even without COVID restrictions, parks are essential for those without their own backyards to gather with others. As stated by reporter Marcello Di Cintio in Avenue Magazine, “Intentionally or not, the current regulations discriminate between Calgarians with their own private outdoor space, and those without. The civilized pleasure of enjoying a glass of wine with a picnic, or a cold beer with your barbecue, is the sole privilege of the deck-and-yard crowd.”



Program Summary

- 58 tables with 1556 bookings, plus non-booked use
- Only two complaints directly related to the program were reported related to litter and public urination. No concerns from Operation or Enforcement staff
- Tables were most popular in communities with high density, or areas with multi-family units
- Desire expressed by public to allow alcohol while walking around in a park, and not be restricted to picnic tables.
- Frustration with booking system by participants and staff, or being able to find a table that had been booked
- Longer booking times, more flexibility to spill onto grass, and the ability to have room for a few more people is desired

Program Improvements

The program could evolve with citizen demand. In 2022 the following improvements could be addressed:

- Designating entire parks or portions of parks as picnic sites where alcohol consumption is allowed, starting with approximately ten parks in summer 2022.
- Create new table locations in high density areas to better serve citizens without a backyard. This may require purchase of new tables to place in areas away from playgrounds. Up to 20 new tables could be placed in 2022, which could be done within existing Parks budgets.
- Include some larger bookable picnic sites in the program, to better create the ‘backyard experience’.
- Permit alcohol at winter firepits to further the Winter City Strategy and encourage outdoor activities in colder months.
- Make the program easier to use by allowing instant booking, improve ability to locate designated tables, and improve the website.

Booking Summary

- 1556 bookings occurred on 56 tables during the pilot, which ran from June 1 to Sept 7. In addition, tables were available on a first-come first-served basis, and that usage was not monitored, including 2 tables not within the booking system
- Bookings initially averaged 200 per week, but dropped in July, possibly due to restrictions being lifted or that the novelty of the program subsided. Bookings dropped again when smoke was prevalent in late July and early August, and rose again near the end of the program
- Tables located near multi-family units (eg apartments) were most popular
- Throughout the summer some tables were added by community request, including:
 - Two tables in Renfrew. One of these is within the Community Association (CA) lease and therefore not bookable, however the CA reports it was heavily used and an integral part of some of their outdoor events this summer.
 - One table in Fairview
 - One at Cliff Bungalow added in late August and therefore was not added to the booking system. However, reports indicate it was well used.
 - An additional table was requested in West Springs at the end of the program, which was not able to be accommodated.
- One table in Elbow Park (EPK252) was removed at a Councillor's request, as the community felt it would attract issues or exacerbate existing concerns



Booking Summary

Ward	Location	# Bookings
1	Cresmont	6
2	Evanston	26
	Sage Hill	18
	Sherwood	5
3	Country Hills	12
	Hidden Valley	9
	Livingston	6
	Panorama Hills	18
4	Dalhousie	14
	Edgemont	43
	Greenview	9
	Highland Park	11
5	Pineridge	4
	Redstone	3
	Skyview Ranch	0
	Taradale	2
	Temple	3
6	Cougar Ridge	5
	Glamorgan	33
	Springbank Hill	5
	Spruce Cliff	3
	West Springs	18
7	Hounsfield Heights	20
	Riley Park	148
	Rotary Park	28
	West Hillhurst (21 St)	64
	West Hillhurst (28 St)	28
	Winston Heights	8

Ward	Location	# Bookings
8	Bankview	34
	Buckmaster Park	47
	Connaught Park	69
	Garrison Green	6
	Richmond RIC700	19
	Richmond RIC851	23
	Scarboro	34
9	Bridgeland	74
	Fairview	15
	Forest Lawn	2
	Inglewood	154
	Manchester	1
	Ogden	3
	Renfrew	7
Southview	13	
10	Mayland Heights	7
	Vista Heights	0
11	Braeside	20
	Elbow Park EPK252 (removed)	21
	Elbow Park EPK300	110
	Erlton Lindsay Park	180
12	Copperfield	3
	Cranston	21
	McKenzie Towne	70
	Riverbend	15
13	Somerset	3
14	Chaparral	44
	Legacy	12

Total Bookings: 1556



Issues and Concerns

Disruptive Behaviour

- 311 calls to both Parks and Bylaw were monitored. Two complaints were related to the program including
 - One call reported litter and public urination at the site in Evanston
 - One call reported noise, public urination and litter on separate occasions at the site in Hounsfield Heights
- Parks Superintendents reported no issues and were surprised how little operational impact the program had
- Calgary Police reported they had no incidents related to any of the picnic table sites
- Bylaw Services did not experience calls directly related to a site, but two calls were fairly close including:
 - An encampment that needed to be removed four times throughout the summer, at one small neighbourhood park in Spruce Cliff, near a designated picnic table. While the encampment is not assumed to be related to the program, to avoid conflict that table should be avoided in future programs (it also received only 3 bookings)
 - Frequent complaints about a DJ playing music at Buckmaster Park. However it was a different area of the park than the designated table, and may actually be more associated with the firepit program, which was removed during the summer.

Health Concerns

- Alberta Health Services is concerned this initiative may encourage behaviours which lead to addiction. A recent study led by Dr Abdel-Aziz Shahhen, an assistant professor at the U of C's Cumming School of Medicine, found that liver disease-related hospitalization rates in Alberta nearly doubled during the COVID-19 pandemic as Albertans consume more alcohol. According to the study, the hospitalization rate for alcohol hepatitis in Alberta jumped from a pre-pandemic rate of 11.6 patients per 10,000 admissions to 22.1 patients per 10,000 admissions, and the average age of an alcohol hepatitis patients in the province also decreased from 48 to 43 during the pandemic.
- The program may be contrary to the Mental Health Strategy recently approved by Council. It was felt the program may present a risk that some Calgarians who do not consume alcohol (due to age, religious reasons, personal choice, or because they are in recovery from addiction) may feel less welcome in areas where alcohol is permitted and may make choices to avoid these public spaces.
- Feedback received via a public survey in August indicated the program had minimal or no effect on park visitation by those who disagree with the program.

Other Jurisdictions

Edmonton

The City of Edmonton launched a pilot with 47 bookable and non-bookable sites in seven parks this summer, including small sites with only one or two picnic tables, and large sites that could host 100 participants. This pilot continued into October, and experienced only minor issues including:

- Initial confusion about where to drink as participants thought all spaces were designated
- Gatherings that exceeded COVID restrictions early on in the program
- Some litter

Note the issues were the same regardless of size of site.

The City of Edmonton's pilot differed in that only major parks were included. This strategy took advantage of adequate enforcement which already existed in those areas, instead of relying on 311 calls as was done in Calgary. Edmonton officers did provide some warnings and tickets, particularly to educate participants on where they could drink.

Vancouver

A pilot specifically for parks areas was conducted this summer in Vancouver. With different provincial legislation, this pilot was not restricted to picnic areas; instead, sections within 22 different parks were designated to allow public alcohol consumption. Maps indicating designated areas were posted on the website and at the parks. Participants were expected to remain within designated areas but, in practice, they often tended to wander in and out of them. Areas were determined based on various criteria, including 20m distance from playgrounds or schools, and close access to public washrooms.



Like Calgary, Vancouver did not add additional enforcement resources to monitor the program. However, existing staff schedules of Park Rangers were temporarily reconfigured to prioritize monitoring of pilot sites for the duration of the program.

The pilot continued until Oct 11. There have been few public complaints, and some additional litter that has required extra garbage pick-ups. However, it may be worth noting that this past summer, there has been an upsurge in illegal public drinking in popular public spaces well beyond of the designated pilot sites (e.g. Granville Entertainment District), which may be related to ongoing pandemic restrictions.

Other Alberta Municipalities

Both Strathcona and St Alberta also piloted short programs this summer allowing alcohol in parks. Like others they found minor issues.

Alberta Parks

The Alberta Government has designated tables for alcohol consumption in provincial parks since the summer of 2020. Fish Creek Park staff indicated they did experience more litter, but this was attributed to overall increased level of park use rather than alcohol. Calgary Police Services states they did not experience increased calls in the area.

Penticton

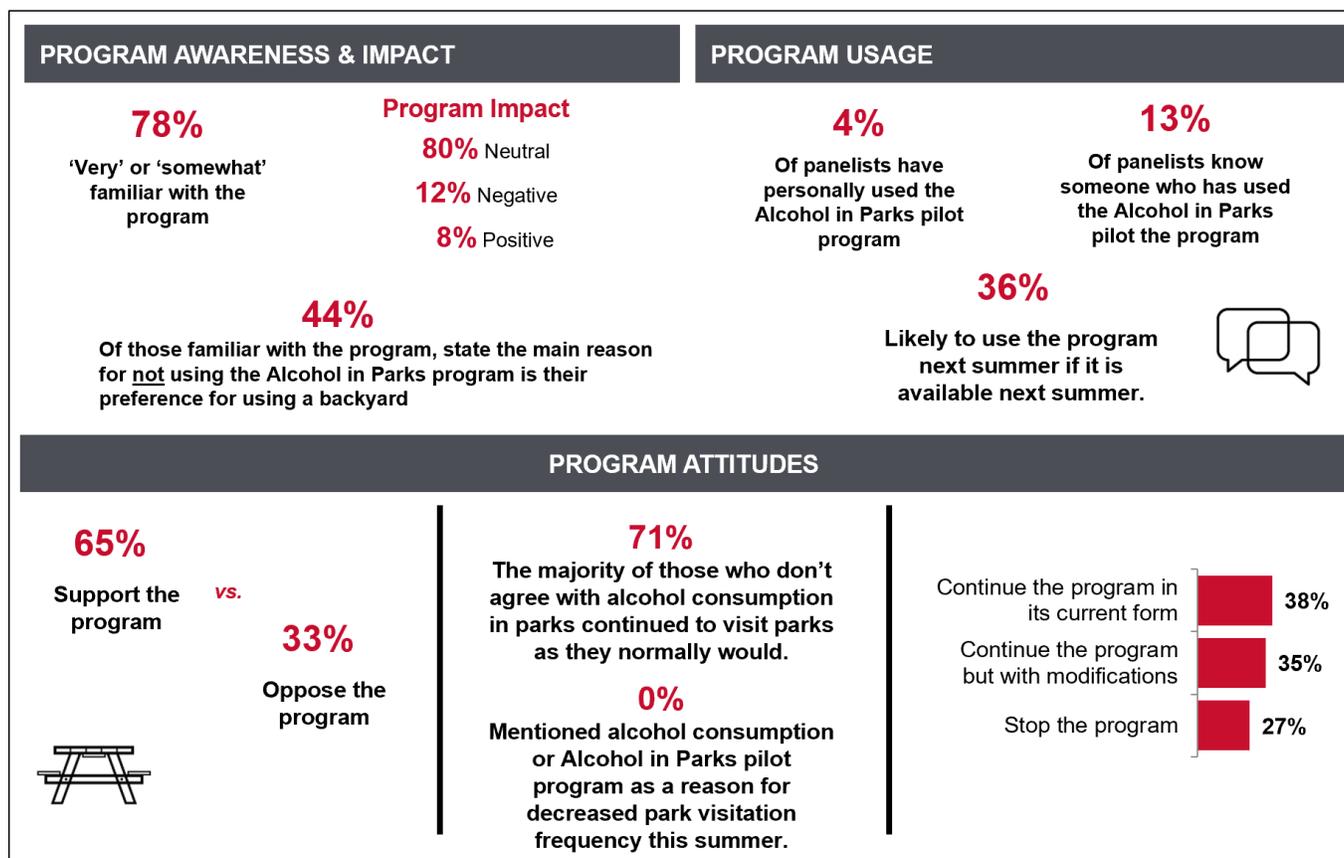
After a successful pilot in 2020, Penticton again approved the consumption of alcohol at seven beach areas in 2021. Penticton is the only municipality in the Okanagan to conduct this type of program.

Public Research and Engagement

Two surveys were conducted by the Corporate Research Team during the pilot period. One was a Citizens' View Panel survey to gauge opinions of the general public, and another was a survey of citizens who participated in the program. In addition to survey activities, feedback was obtained through a social media campaign.

Citizen Panel Survey—General Public

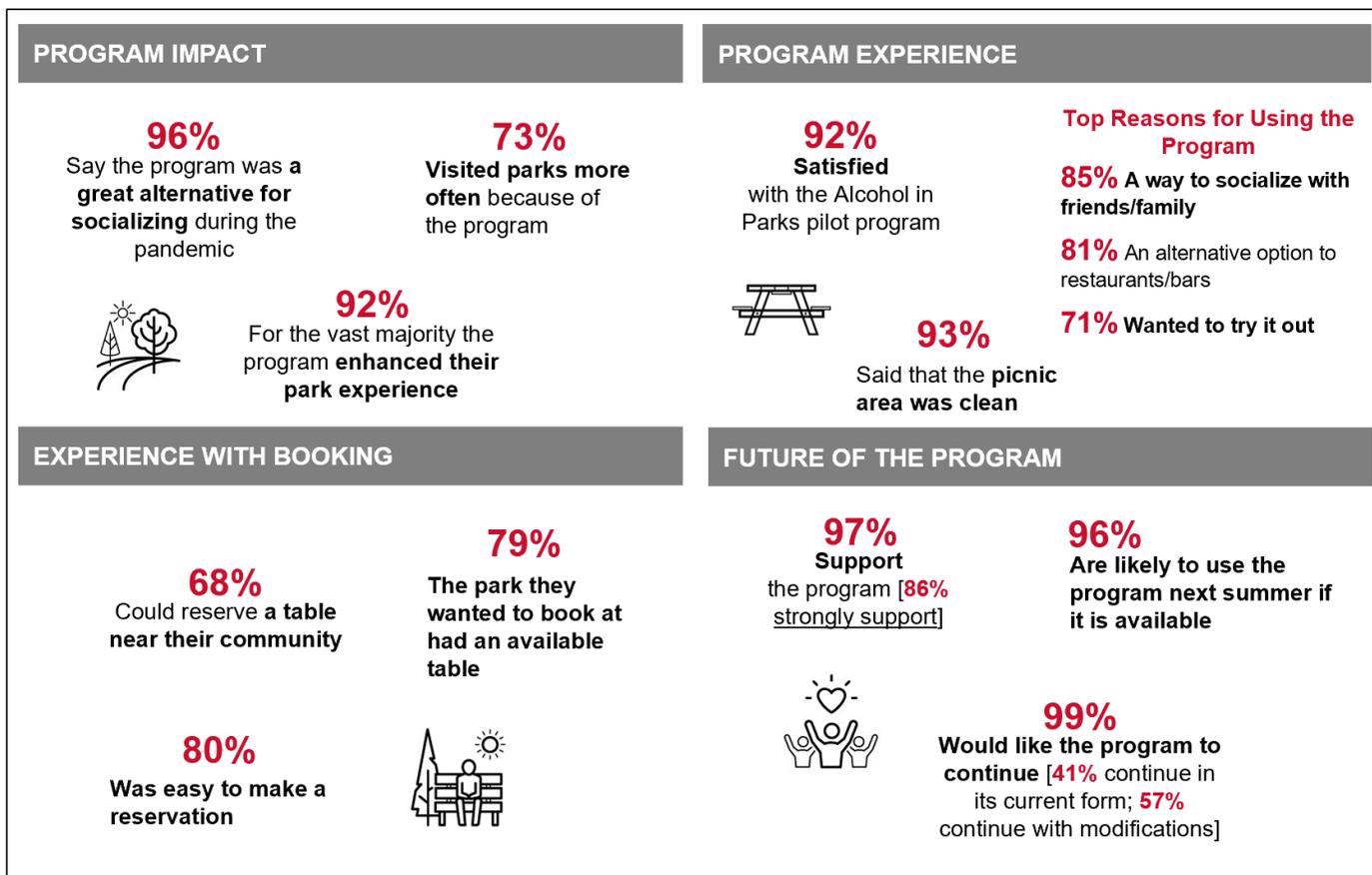
- The survey was sent to 2,783 panelists, with 1,253 completing it (45% completion rate). Survey findings are not considered statistically representative of all Calgarians. In particular, respondents tend to be older and not quite aligned with population quadrant of residence proportions.
- Overall 65% of respondents support the program, and 36% feel they would be likely to use it again next summer, if the program is available.
- Perhaps most telling, 80% of respondents felt the program had a *neutral* impact on their park experiences. This may suggest that this program is like most other programs in that it is valued by some, but otherwise does not affect others.
 - 8% felt the program had a *positive* impact, including enhanced park experience, a way to socialize with family and friends, and appreciated being treated as responsible adults
 - 12% felt the program had a *negative* impact. Reasons for this included potential exposure to public drunkenness and irresponsible adults, or generally disagreeing with alcohol consumption in parks
- Of those respondents who visited parks less frequently during the pandemic, none directly cited the alcohol program as a reason for decreased park visitation. When directly asked, the number of those whose visitation has decreased and who said that they avoided parks, is 24 people in the sample of 1,253 participants.
- Suggested improvements to the program included adding more tables to the program and designate an entire picnic area or park.



Public Research and Engagement

Participant Survey

- The survey was sent to 911 participants, with 269 completing the survey (30% response rate)
- Participant feedback was extremely positive and it was evident that the program is greatly valued by its users
- 96% reported they would use the program next summer if it is available, which indicates there is interest post-COVID
- 73% of participants indicated that their park visitation increased because of the program
- 66% indicated they used the program because they didn't have a backyard to invite friends over
- 45% used transportation other than a motor vehicle. This could potentially increase if more tables were strategically placed, as only 68% could reserve a table near their community
- Requests for program modifications included making booked tables easier to find, having more tables throughout the city, and allowing larger picnic areas to be designated for alcohol consumption..



Social Media

Two social media campaigns had very high reach and interest, with 236,781 impressions on the first, and 214,000 impressions on the second campaign. Comments on posts indicated:

- Concern that 30 tables (initial stage 1 launch) was not enough for a city of this size
- Desire for more tables, particularly in the Beltline
- Desire to walk around a park with a beverage instead of sitting at a table
- Concerns the program would lead to increased litter, disruptive behaviour, and drinking and driving.
- Frustrations with the website and booking process

Program Improvements

Ideally the program would continue to grow and evolve incrementally in response to public demand. This would allow for taking into account the program popularity may diminish as the pandemic and novelty of the program subsides. In addition impact of the program on businesses and festivals when the pandemic subsides should also be taken into consideration before a sudden expansion occurs.

Designate Entire Parks or Portions of Parks

Large areas could be designated as picnic sites allowing citizens to consume alcohol while going for a walk, playing yard games, or enjoying nature. Approximately ten parks could be launched in 2022. Parks and areas would need to be determined but the following parks would be avoided:

- Those with an intense child focus
- Parks where alcohol may conflict with business or festivals
- Major natural areas
- Parks operated by a partner or have a significant partner operation on site
- Culturally significant parks
- Parks with current user conflicts

Many parks would still be able to be used within this criteria such as North Glenmore, Edworthy, West Eau Claire, Stanley Park, Valleyview, or Buckmaster Park to name a few.

Reallocate and Expand Table Locations to meet need

- New sites would be created particularly in high density areas to better serve citizens without a backyard. In some case this may require purchase of new tables.
- In addition to almost 60 tables in the existing program, an additional 20-30 tables could be added in 2022 such as:
 - Designation of more existing tables in parks such as Bridgeland, Connaught, Lindsay Park, Riley Park, Mission
 - Purchase and install new tables in areas currently only with benches such as West Eau Claire or utilize community owned tables at Tomkins Park
 - Allow tables to be installed by community request using a process that outlines criteria such as distance from a playground, near multi-family dwellings and indication of support from the surrounding area



“For those who want to enjoy a quiet drink with a few friends without a crowd and who don’t own or have access to personal outdoor spaces, this is a great option”

- Program participant

Bookable Picnic Sites

- To create more of a backyard experience, it is recommended bookable picnic sites in large regional parks be introduced in summer 2022. These type of sites were successful in Edmonton and it is expected they could also work in Calgary. Parks Superintendents recommend Sandy Beach, Bowness, and Pearce Estates parks should be avoided as they are already very busy and frequently experience user conflicts

Winter Firepits

- To allow citizens to have popular winter-season alcoholic beverages (i.e. special coffees, mulled wine) while embracing the outdoors, the Winter City Strategy has requested that Parks consider allowing alcohol at firepits, to make winter more friendly. A Winter City Survey conducted last winter indicated four in five respondents are supportive of The City allowing some consumption of alcoholic beverages in parks.
- Only firepit locations that are at least 30m from playgrounds would be designated. In addition, only firepits close to picnic tables (eg within 50m) should be designated, in order to comply with the AGLC Act, which currently restricts consumption to a picnic area.



"I strongly hope that this program continues into the colder months - as Calgary often has nice warm spells in fall where this kind of outdoor gathering would be a safer option for those of us unsatisfied with the lack of covid restrictions but still want to see friends" - program participant

Program Logistics

- Continue the program year-round
- Continue booking program for those who want to reserve a table, but also allow for impromptu use with easy and instant bookings and QR codes
- Redesign the website, ensuring good interface with the booking system
- Ensure bookable tables are easier to find
- Allow for longer booking times
- Investigate a marketing program to encourage users to explore different parks