

IMAGINEPARKS – 30 YEAR VISION FOR PARKS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

imagineParks is a 30 year vision and strategic planning framework which sets the overall direction for the development and management of public parks and open space in Calgary. Our vision aligns with *imagineCalgary*, a long range urban sustainability plan and the *Municipal Development Plan* (MDP) which addresses future land uses and services in Calgary. *ImagineParks* commits us to action with a focus on people, open space and excellence in governance and management and recognizes the need for flexibility to adapt to the changing environment and evolving needs of citizens. Public engagement, research, best practices, and legislation informed the development of *imagineParks* (Attachment 1).

ADMINISTRATION RECOMMENDATION(S)

That the SPC on Community and Protective Services recommend that Council approve *imagineParks* in principle as a guiding framework for current and future Parks planning and management.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL DIRECTION / POLICY

In 2007, City Council directed that the Municipal Development Plan (MDP) be created to align with the *imagineCalgary* vision that was created by engaging over 18,000 Calgarians - *Calgary: a great place to make a living, a great place to make a life*. On 2009 September 28, City Council approved the new MDP.

BACKGROUND

Proactively, the Parks business unit committed to develop a long-term vision to deliver on the parks related objectives in the MDP resulting in *imagineParks*. In our local communities, parks play an integral role in shaping neighbourhoods. As the population has grown and evolved, so has the need to plan for future generations of Calgary park users. *imagineParks* provides strategic planning framework to: enable consistent and high-calibre planning, management and operations of public parks and open space; guide shorter-term strategies; and better inform resourcing and budget considerations during business planning.

INVESTIGATION: ALTERNATIVES AND ANALYSIS

Calgarians enjoy a variety of public open space from natural areas to playgrounds, playfields, off-leash areas, community gardens, festival space, and pathways. *imagineParks* serves as the foundation for future planning and policy development to efficiently and effectively manage these valued assets and associated programs and services for long term sustainability.

imagineParks will frame the development of:

- A. Ten (10) year strategic plans for Parks, which will guide;
- B. Four (4) year business plans and budgets; and
- C. Parks' annual work plan and performance objectives.

Stakeholder Engagement, Research and Communication

A preliminary step in developing *imagineParks* was gathering input from Calgarians and key stakeholder groups on what kind of parks and open space they envisioned over a 30-year time horizon. Citizen engagement captured the values and top priorities of Calgarians about the programs and services they desire, depend on and foresee in the future.

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Engagement was completed through internal and external workshops with key stakeholders; focus groups with citizens; telephone and online surveys and 311. The comprehensive engagement process focused on collecting qualitative information at face-to-face workshops and focus groups balanced by statistically relevant survey information. Almost 1600 detailed responses were received from citizens, including frequent and infrequent park users, stakeholder groups, subject matter experts, City staff and the general public. Attachment 2 outlines telephone survey attitudes expressed by Calgarians towards future parks concepts.

Research on parks and open space show a multitude of benefits including ecological, human and economic benefits. Parks and open space provide healthy environments which contribute to psychological health benefits for people residing in them and to improved socio-economic benefits for those communities. Studies show that spending time in nature helps with recall and memory, problem-solving, and creativity. More greenery in residential areas is linked to residents' tendency to be more physically active and less overweight. Parks provide recreation, aesthetic and environmental benefits but they also provide economic benefits. Some research indicates that parks and open space enhance property values, attract corporations, bring in buyers, increase tax revenues and draw tourists.

Ongoing communication was supported through:

- A dedicated project web page on Calgary.ca to keep stakeholders informed about the process, engagement and research results, and for stakeholders to provide feedback on document drafts.
- Public service announcements at key project milestones
- *Reports to Calgarians* at key project milestones.

Strategic Alignment

ImagineParks grounds the existing objectives and policy themes related to public parks and open space contained within The City's existing long-range planning and policy documents. It also considers current trends, research, opportunities and challenges. The vision document aligns with the following current long-term planning and policy initiatives:

- *ImagineCALGARY Plan for Long Range Urban Sustainability* (2006);
- *Municipal Development Plan* (2009); and
- *Calgary Transportation Plan* (2009), specifically providing transportation mobility choices.

Social, Environmental, Economic (External)

ImagineParks is built on social, environmental and economic considerations. The goal areas are: a focus on people; a focus on open space; a focus on governance and management. These areas together are aimed at individual and community well-being, urban nature conservation and the optimization of staff and financial resources.

Financial Capacity

Current and Future Operating Budget:

There are no operating budget implications associated with this report. Further budgetary analysis will occur with implementation plans and four year departmental business plans.

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Current and Future Capital Budget:

There are no capital budget implications associated with this report. Further budgetary analysis will occur with implementation plans and four-year departmental business plans.

Risk Assessment

The *imagineParks* plan provides a framework to deliver on parks-objectives in the 60 year *Municipal Development Plan* and *Calgary Transportation Plan*. Lacking the long-term vision of *imagineParks* might impede a comprehensive and strategic approach to meeting Council's requirements.

REASON(S) FOR RECOMMENDATION(S):

imagineParks provides a long term vision for the delivery of sustainable, efficient and effective parks and open space, programming and initiatives. The goals identified in the plan will inform a holistic approach to the development of Parks strategic plans and budget decision making. The plan is the result of collaborative work with staff, stakeholders and the general public. It is aligned with Council long range plans.

ATTACHMENT(S)

1. *imagineParks: a long term vision of Calgary's public parks and open spaces*
2. *Leger Report: Attitudes Towards Future Park Concepts*