

Connect: Calgary's Parks Plan

Engagement Summary

Connect: Calgary's Parks Plan has been developed using comprehensive engagement and research processes and responds to what Calgarians suggested they value most in The City's park system. A critical factor in creating a modern parks plan that resonates with and serves Calgarians effectively was ensuring that as many voices as possible were heard. To achieve this, substantial effort was made to engage a broad cross-section of the community.

Engagement activities were intentionally designed to include Calgarians from diverse backgrounds and life experiences, with special attention to reaching those who experience more barriers to participating in engagement compared to others. This extensive outreach provided a robust and nuanced understanding of the community's needs, aspirations and challenges, helping to ensure that *Connect* is truly reflective of the values and priorities of all Calgarians.

In addition to engagement, statistically representative corporate research was also conducted. The findings of the telephone survey and focus groups echoed and validated the findings of What We Heard in Phase 1 engagement, thereby ensuring the foundation of *Connect* reflects the values of Calgarians.

Phases of Engagement

Three distinct engagement phases offered a range of methods and tactics, to reach as many individuals and interested groups as possible.

- [Phase 1: Parks and Open Spaces' Foundational Pillars \(2023 April – June\)](#)
- [Phase 2: Connect's Guiding Principles and Goals \(2023 October – November\)](#)
- [Phase 1 and 2: What We Did Report](#)
- [Phase 3: Reviewing the Draft Plan \(2024 October - November\)](#)

Detailed "What We Heard" reports from these phases as well as a "What We Did" report are available on the pages linked above.

Given the distinct nature of engagement with Indigenous peoples and communities, the Indigenous engagement stream followed a separate, non-phased approach. Details on the results of these efforts are summarized below (*see Indigenous Nations and Peoples*).

Evolving our Approach

Engagement approaches and timelines were iterative and based on feedback received and lessons learned in previous engagement phases. These adjustments aimed to enhance the accessibility and inclusivity of engagement opportunities for equity-deserving Calgarians. For example, after a low turnout from youth during phase 1 engagement events, the project shifted to visiting schools in phase 2. Given the more complex engagement themes in phase 2, tactics that allowed for deeper discussion were used, including dinner conversations with community leaders to ensure that information could be effectively shared and feedback gathered from community groups and organizations in equity-deserving communities. Additionally, to increase opportunities for the public to ask questions and engage with the

project team, project team members hosted virtual "coffee and conversation" sessions during phase 2. Multiple open houses and pop-up events were hosted as they successfully increased awareness of *Connect* and increased engagement with Calgarians throughout Calgary.

External Engagement Streams and Update

Engagement was organized into five streams to ensure a comprehensive approach, offering tailored information and discussions for different groups based on their level of knowledge and interest in the project. The streams are listed below, followed by an update.

General Public – Throughout the three public engagement phases, the project's online engagement portal received over 32,400 views, with 19,625 unique visitors and 1,680 contributions. Additionally, with support of The City's Engage Resource Unit, the project team hosted 19 online workshops, 53 in-person and virtual open houses and pop-up events, consulted with nine advisory committees, and organized a *Connect* event series featuring six public events. These events attracted over 300 attendees and targeted engagement efforts with equity denied Calgarians resulted in an additional 427 completed paper questionnaires. Through the first and second engagement phases, *Connect* reached over 22,000 Calgary park users.

Phase 1 of engagement, conducted from April to June 2023, focused on three key benefits of the park system: connecting people to nature, wellness, and culture. The goal was to gather participants' perspectives on these benefits, as well as their concerns and suggestions for improvement. Participants also provided input on economic sustainability, equity in parks and draft guiding principles. Feedback from this phase revealed clear, consistent themes around what respondents value in the park system and their desired improvements.

Following Phase 1 of public engagement, a public research survey and focus groups were conducted to validate the engagement results and provide statistically representative findings.

Phase 2 of engagement, held from October to November 2023, centered on gathering feedback on potential policy directions for *Connect*. Based on input from Phase 1, four main goals were developed: Protect and Enhance, Connect and Grow, Include and Support, and Manage and Maintain. Participants rated these goals and offered insights for policy development. They also reviewed the Strategic Directions created in Phase 1, ranking them by importance. Feedback from respondents overwhelmingly supported *Connect's* development direction, enabling the project team to create the draft plan.

Following Phase 2 of public engagement, a public research survey was also conducted to validate engagement results and provide statistically representative findings.

Phase 3 of engagement took place in October 2024, during which the draft *Connect* plan was shared with the public and partners in preparation for seeking Council's approval in early 2025.

Equity Deserving Communities – Equity deserving Calgarians (defined in this project as including Racialized groups, newcomers, English language learners, persons with disabilities, seniors, the 2SLGBTQ+ community, youth and young adults, people living with low-incomes and unhoused individuals) experience increased barriers to accessing the city's park system. Although these groups benefit significantly from park access, their voices are often underrepresented in engagement processes without additional tactics to increase inclusion.

To ensure that the voices of equity-deserving Calgarians were heard and their input was integrated into the new policy's direction and implementation, *Connect* engagement leveraged community partnerships to develop appropriate opportunities and effectively communicate them to the clients they serve. This included using paper copies of surveys and enlisting community connectors to help overcome issues of trust.

In phase 2, a partnership with the University of Calgary School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape had 4th year students focusing an entire 6-week course on the *Connect Plan*. Students at Mount Royal University also provided their insight and feedback.

Indigenous Nations and People – Engagement with Indigenous Nations was held in conjunction with the City Building and the Calgary River Valleys Project, and included the Blackfoot Nations of Siksika, Piikani, Kainai, and Amskaapipiikani, the Îethka Nakoda Wîcastabi First Nations of Chiniki, Bearspaw, and Goodstoney, the Tsuut'ina First Nation, and the Métis Nation of Alberta Regions 5 & 6. The process consisted of a series of four Water, Land and Climate Summits and a final June Camp in 2024. Each Summit was centered around a particular theme and topic identified through discussions where Nation representatives were encouraged to bring forward the issues most pertinent to their community members.

Parks and Open Spaces is actively building relationships with the Nations through the development of Traditional Land Use Studies. These studies will include recommendations that will be developed into policies; however, not all studies have been completed. Once studies from all traditional land stewards are finalized, the compiled information will serve as a foundation for engaging with the urban Indigenous population.

Connect is a living document that will evolve as Elders and Knowledge Keepers share their knowledge with us. This approach aligns with best practices, ensuring sufficient time is provided for the Nations to participate meaningfully in the process. It also involves extending timelines to collaborate with Indigenous Nations on living documents that advance and adapt as relationships deepen and information is shared.

Interested parties – Engagement was also conducted with organizations and representatives who expressed specific interest in one or more aspects of the project. An invitation to participate in engagement opportunities was shared with over 200 distinct community groups and organizations in phase 1. Participants provided valuable insights for the development of *Connect*.

Throughout the project's development, the team engaged with interested parties via an initial survey and followed up with workshops to shape draft policy directions. These workshops were themed to address the specific knowledge and interests of the groups involved, covering topics such as the environment, community building, the development industry and social wellbeing.

Internal City Staff – To ensure internal alignment and effective policies in *Connect*, meaningful engagement and collaboration was conducted with City of Calgary employees and subject matter experts. Technical advisory groups were also established to provide expertise in developing specific policy areas. Staff engagement included in-person and virtual meetings, virtual workshops, presentations of initial plan goals and directions for feedback, and the circulation of draft policies for review.

The project team also presented to City committees at the outset to understand specific needs and later shared the draft *Connect* plan to gather feedback on proposed policies and operational actions.

Communications and advertising of engagement opportunities

An important component of the engagement process is communicating and advertising the opportunities available for people to participate, and therefore a comprehensive communication plan was implemented in phases 1 and 2. Word of mouth through existing networks was promoted through Neighbourhood Partnership Coordinators and Park Coordinators. External agencies and organizations were also asked to share engagement opportunities with the people they serve. Printed and digital posters advertising the *Connect* event series in phase one were widely circulated.

Traditional communication tactics and digital coverage included:

- Ward Office communications toolkit
- Neighbourhood Partnership Coordinator Board Reports to Community Associations in April and November 2023
- Sounding boards in parks around Calgary (10 park locations in Phase 1, 8 park locations in Phase 2)
- Over 1,500 promotional postcards distributed
- Curbex and Bold signs installed in all quadrants of Calgary, including downtown.
- Television 15-second spots on both CTV and OMNI.
- Radio spots on RED FM – Punjabi/Hindi and Fairchild in Mandarin/Cantonese
- Premium banner ads and “In-language” banner ads in Traditional Chinese, Simplified Chinese, Arabic, Spanish, Punjabi
- YouTube ads

Summary of Interactions

Phase 1

[What We Heard Report](#)

Audience and Tactics	Dates (2023)
Calgarians	April 17 - May 19, 2023
Businesses, agencies, organizations	April 17 - June 14, 2023
Kids Zone	April 17 - May 19, 2023
Virtual Open Houses	
MS Teams Live Q and A	Tues. April 25, 12-1:30 p.m.
MS Teams Live Q and A	Tues. April 25, 6-7:30 p.m.
Open Houses	
Varsity Community Association	Mon. April 24, 4-7 p.m.
Genesis Centre	Wed. April 26, 4-7 p.m.
Cardel South	Wed. May 3, 4-7 p.m.
Southview Community Centre	Wed. May 10, 4-7 p.m.
Pop ups – Parks	
Prairie Winds & Big Marlborough Park	Sun. April 23, 10 a.m. - 3 p.m.
Peace Bridge, Prince's Island Park	Sat. May 6, 11 a.m. - 2 p.m.
Riley Park and Stanley Park	Sun. May 7, 10 a.m. - 3 p.m.
Bowness Park	Sun. May 14, 11 a.m. - 1 p.m.
Pop ups – Other	
Village Square Leisure Centre	Mon. May 1, 11 a.m. - 1 p.m.
Seton Library	Tues. May 2, 4-6 p.m.
Judith Umbach Library	Tues. May 2, 4:30-6:30 p.m.
Crowfoot Library	Mon. May 8, 11 a.m. - 1 p.m.
Fish Creek Library	Tues. May 16, 4-6 p.m.
Central Library	Wed. May 17, 3-5:30 p.m.
Connect Event Series	
Connect to Nature: A barrier-free interpretive walk at Weaselhead Flats	Sat. April 22, 1-4 p.m.
Connect with Indigenous History: An interpretive walk at Nose Hill Park	Sat. April 29, 1-4 p.m.
Connect to Engineering, Art and Insects: Family fun at Ralph Klein Park	Sun. April 30, 12-3 p.m.
Connect with the Future: Parks planning party for young adults	Thurs. May 4, 5-8 p.m.

Connect through Play: Accessible Playground Playdate for Families at South Glenmore Park	Fri. May 5, 2-5 p.m.
Connect with Birds: Migratory Bird Day at Inglewood Bird Sanctuary	Sat. May 13, 10-2 p.m.
Connect: The Mayors Environment Expo	Tues. June 6 and 7, 2023
Static Displays	
Sounding Boards	April 17 - May 19, 2023
Central Library	April 17 - May 19, 2023
Equity-Denied Calgarians	
Action Dignity focus groups and 1:1 interviews	April 20 - May 30, 2023
Fair Entry applicant questionnaire	Mon. May 1, 2023
Alpha House questionnaire	May and June, 2023
Workshops With Key Interest Groups	
Joint Use Coordinating Committee	Thur. April 20, 8:30-12 p.m.
Development and Builder Workshop	Tue. May 9, 1-3 p.m.
Environment & Community Workshop	Wed. May 10, 10-11:30 p.m.
Environment & Community Workshop	Thur. May 11, 2-3:30 p.m.

Phase 2

What We Heard Report

Audience and Tactics	Dates (2023)
Online Portal Page (www.engage.calgary.ca/parksplan)	
Calgarians	Oct 13 - Nov 12, 2023
Businesses, agencies, and organizations	Oct 13 - Nov 12, 2023
Open Houses	
Rocky Ridge YMCA	Thur. Oct 19, 2023
VIVO for Healthier Generations	Sat. Oct 21, 2023
Southland Leisure Centre	Thur. Oct 26, 2023
Cardel Rec Centre	Sat. Oct 28, 2023
GFL 55+	Tue. Oct 31, 2023
Devonian Gardens	Wed. Nov 1, 2023
Genesis Centre	Thur. Nov 2, 2023
Westbrook Mall	Sat. Nov 4, 2023
Seton YMCA	Sat. Nov 9, 2023
Workshops With Key Interest Groups (Virtual)	
Environment workshop #1	Tue. Oct 17, 2023

Environment workshop #2	Tue. Oct 24, 2023
Development and building workshop	Tue. Nov 7, 2023
Community building workshop	Thur. Nov 9, 2023
Equity Focused Tactics	
Native Information Exchange (Virtual)	Tue. Oct 10, 2023
Group and 1:1 conversation with ethno-cultural communities/individuals, in collaboration with Action Dignity (In-person and virtual)	Mid-October to end of November
Workshop with Ethno-cultural community leaders, in collaboration with Action Dignity	Wed. Oct 25, 2023
Fair Entry applicant survey (In-person)	Mon. Oct 30, 2023
Workshop with social services sector about Safety, Security, and Inclusion in the Community (Virtual)	Wed. Nov 15, 2023
Youth - Ages 15-24 (In-person)	
University of Calgary- School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape program (6-week course)	Sept 13, 2023 - Oct 11, 2023
Mount Royal University – Ecotourism and Outdoor Leadership and Recreation and Sport Management	Oct 30, 2023 - Nov 2, 2023
Open Minds City Hall School, Bishop Carol High School students	Thur. Oct 12, 2023
West Island College High School students	Fri. Oct 20, 2023
Park Walk-Abouts (In-person)	
SE Parks - Sue Higgins, Carburn, Quarry	Sun. Oct 15, 2023
SW Parks- Griffith Woods and Glenmore	Sun. Oct 22, 2023
NE Parks- Big Marlborough Park, Elliston Park, Prairie Winds and River Walk	Sun. Oct 29, 2023
NW Parks- Nose Hill, Bowness, Bowmont	Sun. Nov 5, 2023
LIVE Open Houses (Virtual)	
MS Teams Live Q and A - Session #1	Oct 16, 2023, 12-1:30 p.m.
MS Teams Live Q and A - Session #2	Oct 23, 2023, 6-7:30 p.m.
MS Teams Live Q and A - Session #3	Oct 30, 2023, 12-1:30p.m.
MS Teams Live Q and A - Session #4	Nov 6, 2023, 6-7:30 p.m.
Coffee and Conversations (Virtual)	
Session #1	Oct 17, 12-1:00 p.m.
Session #2	Oct 24, 12-1:00 p.m.
Static Displays	
Sounding Boards (8 parks)	Oct 25- Nov 10, 2023

Devonian Gardens	Oct 25- Nov 15, 2023
------------------	----------------------

Phase 3

[What We Heard Report](#)

Audience and Tactics	Dates (2024)
Online Portal Page (www.engage.calgary.ca/parksplan)	
Calgarians	Oct 8-30, 2024
Target Group Workshops (Hybrid)	
Workshop #1- Chapters 1 – 3	Oct 22, 2024, 11-12:30 p.m.
Workshop #2- Chapter 4	Oct 23, 2024, 9-10:30 a.m.
Workshop #3- Chapter 5-7	Oct 28, 2024, 10:30-12 p.m.