

# Connect: Calgary's Parks Plan

## Key Proposals

*Connect: Calgary's Parks Plan* includes both policies and operational actions designed to implement the vision for Calgary's park system and address the plan's strategic directions. Below is a summary of *Connect's* most significant policy proposals.

### Increasing Park Size

- To create functional parks that meet the diverse needs of Calgarians, *Connect* has increased minimum park size from 0.2 hectares to 0.4 hectares. This change will better support the development of multifunctional parks during the planning and development process.
- The minimum width of linear parks has also increased from 10 to 13 metres to improve the quality of these spaces. The added width allows for the integration of additional functions beyond mobility, such as stormwater management, wildlife movement and passive recreation opportunities.

### Building Multifunctional Connected Parks in New Communities

- Future parks informed by *Connect* will be part of an interconnected system of public spaces. Previously, the focus was on providing small single use parks to maximize access to parks for all residents. Over time, many single-function parks have become underused as the community has changed and evolved.
- *Connect* includes policy that changes how future parks are prioritized in community development:
  - The first priority is one large multifunctional neighbourhood park that would act as a hub of activity in a community;
  - The second priority are linear parks that provide connections to neighbourhood parks and other destinations; and
  - The third priority are sub-neighbourhood parks that supplement park amenities and support greater access to the overall park system.

### Addressing Gaps in Established Communities

- In established communities many neighbourhoods lack access to park space and a diversity of amenities, due to the standards and practices of the time when they were first built. As it is challenging to acquire land in existing neighbourhoods for new or expanded parks, *Connect* includes policies to add multifunctionality to existing parks.
- A park is considered multifunctional when it provides two of the three functions - recreation, sport and access to the environment. Currently, 96% of Calgarians have access to a park within 400 m, but only 62% have access to parks with at least two functions.
- *Connect* includes policies that all residences should be within 400 m of a multifunctional park with two or more of these core functions. This would be achieved by enhancing existing parks through capital improvements, adding new amenities, and addressing gaps in the pedestrian and cycling networks leading to parks.

- *Connect* also includes policies to create more park space such as converting public land, streets, or boulevards into parks. When creating new park space isn't feasible, the focus shifts to enhancing the quality of existing parks with improved amenities and programming to support greater and more diverse use.

### Standardizing Levels of Maintenance

- *Connect* focuses on ensuring consistent investment into maintenance and operational standards across Calgary's parks, delivering value to all communities. *Connect's* policies are committed to ensuring that all parks meet a standard level of maintenance by 2035.
- By combining insights from improved data and mapping developed for *Connect*, along with Customer Level of Service scores and maintenance costs, The City will be better equipped to make data-driven decisions about future investments. Guidance from *Connect* will help ensure that every community has access to high-quality, well-maintained parks supported by thoughtful planning.

### Protecting and Enhancing Calgary's Ecological Network

- *Connect* includes policy direction to expand and protect The City's ecological network to support biodiversity and better protect natural areas. Policies on protecting and expanding wildlife corridors and the restoration of natural linkages will also help reduce the negative impacts of habitat fragmentation.
- The City's target is to grow urban tree canopy to 16 per cent by 2060. *Connect* supports this by providing direction on ensuring suitable species are planted, protecting soil, prioritizing equity in planting and supporting micro forests and tree planting. *Connect* commits to achieving no net loss of canopy on public lands and to planting 1.3 million trees on public land over the next 10 years.
- Climate resilience and environmental protection are key priorities in *Connect*, supported by policies focused on the ecological network. The primary components of this network are Calgary's natural areas and river valleys, with much of the ecological network located within the park system.

### Clarifying Park System Terminology

- *Connect* introduces terminology changes to bring greater clarity and consistency to park system planning and operations. Until now, the terms parks and open space have often been used interchangeably in planning documents such as the Municipal Development Plan. This has created confusion about how parks differ from open space.
- *Connect* addresses this by clearly defining three distinct categories, parks, natural areas, and open space, under the umbrella term "park system."

Parks	Natural Areas	Open Spaces
This includes typical park types (e.g., neighbourhood park, linear park), as well as joint use sites (shared with schools) and community association sites.	This includes lands with protected habitats, as well as areas that have been naturalized.	This refers to lands with a specific utilitarian purpose or function that is not primarily focused on free active or passive outdoor recreation.

		Examples include stormwater ponds, road rights-of-way, athletic parks, golf courses, and cemeteries.
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### **Simplifying Park Types**

- *Connect* also refines the classification of park types. The current Open Space Plan includes a large number of park types, many of which overlap with various school sites, leading to confusion. The Open Space Plan provides limited guidance on how the park types differ, beyond size, and offers little clarity on their role within the system or the amenities they are expected to provide, apart from playgrounds.
- In *Connect*, the number of park types has been reduced, and new policy guidance has been introduced to clarify the distinct objectives of each type. For example, neighbourhood parks should have a minimum 33 per cent (one third) of the parks' perimeter with street frontage to maximize visibility within the neighbourhood.

### **Next Steps and Implementation**

- *Connect's* Chapter 7 – Implementation, outlines the metrics that will be used to evaluate how *Connect's* policies and operational actions are performing, drawing on both qualitative and quantitative data to inform future decision-making. The chapter also outlines high-level implementation requirements for each operational action, based on priority, timeframe and cost.
- Following *Connect's* approval, a detailed implementation plan will be developed to refine the budget and timeline estimates outlined in Chapter 7, and to prioritize the rollout of policies and projects over the plan's 20-year horizon.