

Operational Services Report to  
Infrastructure and Planning Committee  
2026 March 11

ISC: UNRESTRICTED  
IP2026-0032

## Park Maintenance Levels of Service

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### PURPOSE

Maintaining our parks is important to Calgarians. However, service levels have declined because the number of parks has increased and costs have risen faster than funding. This report seeks a council directed level of service for parks maintenance.

### PREVIOUS COUNCIL DIRECTION

No previous direction.

### RECOMMENDATION(S):

That the Infrastructure and Planning Committee recommends that Council:

1. Direct Administration to implement the Option 4 service level for maintenance of Calgary's **actively maintained parkland**, to meet, at minimum, Customer Level of Service (CLOS) ratings as previously endorsed by Council (*Connect: Calgary's Parks Plan*), where regional parks are rated at least 'Good' and local parks are rated at least 'Fair'; and
2. Direct Administration to consider the required operating investments needed to enable this level of service for parks maintenance in the prioritization of investments for the 2027-2030 Business Plans and Budgets.

### CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER/GENERAL MANAGER COMMENTS

The General Manager of Operational Services concurs with the contents of this report.

### HIGHLIGHTS

- Calgarians consistently prioritize maintenance of park spaces, as reflected in annual City surveys (2025 Fall Survey of Calgarians, 2025 Pulse on Parks Survey).
- 311 service requests related to park maintenance have quadrupled between 2014 and 2025, indicating growing public dissatisfaction with declining maintenance service levels.
- Approved funding for park maintenance has increased by 12 per cent since 2014; however, this has not kept pace with a 36 per cent increase in the amount of **actively maintained parkland** or a 28 per cent increase in operating costs due to inflation.
- To manage the growing funding gap, Administration has implemented efficiencies and absorbed system growth within existing operating budgets. Despite these efforts, funding pressure has resulted in reduced service levels. Reduced service levels have further led to less usable park spaces, including longer grass, increased weed presence, declining shrub health, and more frequently overflowing garbage bins.
- Despite these challenges, Calgary was the highest-ranked municipality for overall best practice in the 2025 Yardstick benchmarking—an impressive result given that Calgary operates below the median cost for **actively maintained parkland** and spends the least on grass maintenance of all the benchmarked municipalities.

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### **DISCUSSION**

#### **BACKGROUND**

##### **Parks Network**

Calgarians highly value their access to more than 9,300 hectares of **actively maintained parkland** and natural areas. **Actively maintained parkland**, including regional, local parks, playfields and roadside greens, requires more intensive maintenance than natural areas. This extensive network of living infrastructure provides benefits beyond recreation, including stormwater management, heat reduction and biodiversity. In 2025, 4,389 hectares were actively maintained, representing a 36 per cent increase over the past decade.

##### **Parks Maintenance Current Service Levels**

The City delivers park maintenance at varying service levels based on park type and use. Priority activities identified in this report reflect feedback from Calgarians and 311 service request volumes and other forms of resident feedback. In 2025, service levels were as follows:

- **Mowing:** Seasonally mowed, on average: regional parks 15 mows; playfields 19 mows; local parks 8.5 mows; and roadside greens 4 mows.
- **Turf maintenance:** Only 13 per cent of turf was maintained in 2025, meaning turf receives maintenance only once every nine years. This work includes activities such as, but not limited to, essential weed management and fertilization.
- **Shrub bed maintenance:** Only 12 per cent of shrub beds received maintenance in 2025, meaning shrub beds receive maintenance visits once every eight years.
- **Garbage collection:** All garbage is collected, but only 80 per cent of bins are serviced at their targeted frequency due to budget-based service prioritization.

#### **CHALLENGES**

##### **Impact to Calgarians**

Reduced service levels have made **actively maintained parkland** less usable, with longer grass, more weeds, declining shrub health and overflowing garbage bins in high-use areas. Service requests have quadrupled between 2014 and 2024, signaling growing public dissatisfaction. Survey results consistently show maintenance, cleanliness and landscaping are top priorities for improving parks. While parks remain highly valued, overall satisfaction has declined by four per cent in recent years (Spring Survey of Calgarians, 2025 – 89 per cent), indicating we are on the verge of a tipping point.

##### **Funding Gaps and Rising Operational Costs**

In 2025, \$33 million was invested in core maintenance of **actively maintained parkland**, equating to about \$8,500 per hectare—\$2,000 less than the \$10,500 per hectare invested in 2014. While funding per hectare has declined, operating costs have increased, due to inflation (+28 per cent).

##### **Reduced Service Levels**

Funding increases not keeping pace with rising operational costs nor expanded land inventory, creates significant pressure on parks maintenance budgets. Most notably, a 77 per cent increase in mowing costs over the past decade required substantial resources to be redirected simply to sustain baseline mowing levels in response to public service level expectations. This cost pressure reduced available funding for turf and shrub bed maintenance, with local parks

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experiencing the greatest impacts. Prior to 2017, local parks were mowed an average of 10 times per season; since then, they have received approximately two fewer mows per year. Turf maintenance (ie. fertilizer, aeration, etc.) that was once completed on a two-year cycle now takes nine years, while shrub bed maintenance has declined from a two-year cycle to once every eight years.

### **SOLUTION**

Parks & Open Spaces proposes closing the gap between Calgarians' expectations and current park maintenance service levels by establishing a clearly defined level of service that meets Council-endorsed customer targets for **actively maintained parks** outlined in *Connect: Calgary's Parks Plan* and enables intensive system recovery following a prolonged period of service degradation. Strategic investment in priority maintenance activities would enable a world-class maintenance system and deliver visible, sustained improvements across Calgary's park network - particularly in local parks most affected by the funding gap. Building on an already efficient, best-in-class system, this investment would deliver meaningful community benefits at a relatively low cost.

Below, descriptions of the levels of service which would enable Parks & Open Spaces to achieve the recommended option. For further details on levels of service, please see Attachment 1.

- **Mowing:** Grass is consistently maintained at 6" or less throughout the season, including during peak seasons. Regional parks and playfields are maintained even shorter than 6". This requires up to 22 mows for regional parks and playfields, up to 14 mows for local parks and up to 6 mows for roadside greens.
- **Turf maintenance:** Turf conditions are even in appearance and walkability in high-traffic areas and on sports fields is considerably improved. This level of service requires all turf is maintained annually, including agronomics and Integrated Pest Management.
- **Shrub bed maintenance:** Improved visual quality, health and longevity of shrub beds. All shrub beds would receive maintenance up to once every two years.
- **Garbage collection:** Bins are emptied before overflowing. At least one additional round of garbage pick-up than is currently provided in high use areas.

**The funding request associated with the level of service recommended above is for an additional \$14 million in operating budget annually for the 2027-2030 budget cycle.**

This funding would enable Parks & Open Spaces to achieve targets outlined in the Connect plan, enable intensive system recovery after prolonged period of system degradation and improve park users' experience.

### **EXTERNAL ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public engagement was undertaken        | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Dialogue with interested parties was undertaken |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public/interested parties were informed | <input type="checkbox"/> Public communication or engagement was not required        |

Parks & Open Space conduct an annual *Pulse on Parks Survey* to understand Calgarians' usage and perceptions of City parks. Relevant insights from the 2025 survey include:

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- Overall, park visitation remains consistent (from the Pulse on Parks research conducted from 2021-2025). More than 93 per cent of Calgarians visited a park at least once within the past year.
- High-quality park maintenance is the most desired improvement to parks. When asked about the most important thing The City can do to improve park spaces, maintenance, cleanliness and landscaping are rated highest (19 per cent).

The [2025 Spring Survey of Calgarians](#) (April 2025) reports that 98 per cent of Calgarians listed parks and open spaces as “very important” or “somewhat important”. 98 per cent of Calgarians thought The City should invest more or the same amount in parks and open spaces.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

### **Social**

Establishing a city-wide parks maintenance Level of Service ensures consistent and equitable service delivery across Calgary. Well-maintained parks support social connection, recreation and environmental enjoyment, and contribute to improved mental health and overall wellbeing for Calgarians.

### **Environmental**

Calgary’s park system is a critical network of living infrastructure that supports biodiversity, climate resilience, and environmental health. Investing in regular maintenance aligns with The City’s Environment Strategy and Climate Strategy by supporting carbon sequestration, reducing climate risk and maintaining healthy, functional green spaces for current and future generations.

### **Economic**

High-quality parks contribute to vibrant, competitive cities and are associated with increased property values and stronger local economies. By supporting physical and mental health, well-maintained parks help reduce long-term social and health-related costs. Investing in preventative maintenance also mitigates the need for more costly capital rehabilitation of park spaces in the future.

### **Service and Financial Implications**

#### **Existing operating funding - base**

If the recommended service level is not approved, Parks & Open Spaces will be unable to deliver the level of service Calgarians expect from their parks. In this case, a reduced standard of service would need to be formally established and clearly communicated to the public.

## **RISK**

**Reputational risk:** If the funding gap continues to widen, public satisfaction with the quality of parks and open spaces is expected to decline, creating reputational risk for The City. Expectations would need to be clearly set and communicated regarding the time required to implement service improvements if additional funding is approved.

**Safety risk:** Insufficient maintenance funding may result in park spaces being perceived as unsafe or unwelcoming, leading residents to reduce their use of parks, along with the associated

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potential negative social and physical consequences of reduced outdoor recreation to Calgarians. Playfields may pose safety risks due to uneven ground conditions, including those caused by ground squirrel burrows, which can result in injury.

**Environmental risk:** Limited weed management will allow invasive and nuisance weeds to spread beyond park spaces. When weed control is deferred, impacts tend to compound over time, becoming more costly and resource-intensive to address and requiring greater future investment.

### **ATTACHMENT(S)**

1. Background Report
2. Appendix
3. 2025 Pulse on Parks Survey
4. Presentation

#### Department Circulation

General Manager/Director	Department	Approve/Consult/Inform
Doug Morgan	Operational Services	Approve
Kyle Ripley	Parks & Open Spaces	Approve
Les Tochor	Finance	Inform

Author: Erin Shoultz, Parks and Open Spaces, Operational Services