



# Parks Maintenance Level of Service

## Background Report

March 2026

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# Background

## Calgary's Parks Network

Parks & Open Spaces (P&OS) manages more than 9,300 hectares of parkland—an important system of natural infrastructure—comprised of both actively maintained park spaces and natural areas. Actively maintained parkland, which requires significantly more ongoing care, accounts for approximately 4,300 hectares and includes over 40 regional parks and nearly 1,000 playfields. In 2023, P&OS also assumed management of nearly 800 hectares of boulevards and roadside greens as part of a corporate realignment, adding substantially to maintenance responsibilities.

Because different park types serve different purposes and experience different levels of use, they require different levels of maintenance. For example, Parks & Open Spaces sets minimum mowing targets based on how each space is used and the role it plays in the park network.

**Regional parks and playfields** receive the highest level of maintenance—up to **20 mowing cycles per season**—reflecting their frequent use, citywide draw, and role in hosting sports and special events. **Local parks**, which primarily support everyday neighbourhood use and generally experience lower visitation, are maintained at a moderate level of approximately **10 mowing cycles per season**. **Roadside greens**, by contrast, are maintained primarily for safety and functionality rather than recreation, with a lower service level of about **four mowing cycles per season** to maintain sightlines, manage vegetation, and support public safety.



## Maintaining Calgary’s Park Network

Maintaining Calgary’s extensive park network to a standard appropriate for a world-class city is a significant undertaking. The diagram below provides an overview of the “core” maintenance activities required to keep Calgary’s parks and open spaces at the level of service Calgarians expect. Core maintenance activities are among the most visible to residents and have the greatest impact on park usability and public satisfaction.



The maintenance activities highlighted in this report represent a subset of Parks & Open Spaces’ overall responsibilities and have been identified as priority areas based on the volume of 311 service requests and other direct feedback from Calgarians.

**Mowing:** In 2025, P&OS completed an average of 15 mowing cycles in regional parks, 19 cycles on playfields, 8.5 cycles in local parks, and four cycles on roadside greens – not meeting our service targets.

**Turf maintenance:** In 2025, P&OS was funded to maintain 434 hectares of turf—only 13 per cent of the 3,338 hectares that require ongoing maintenance. At this funding level, it would take nearly nine years to complete maintenance across all turf areas in Calgary.

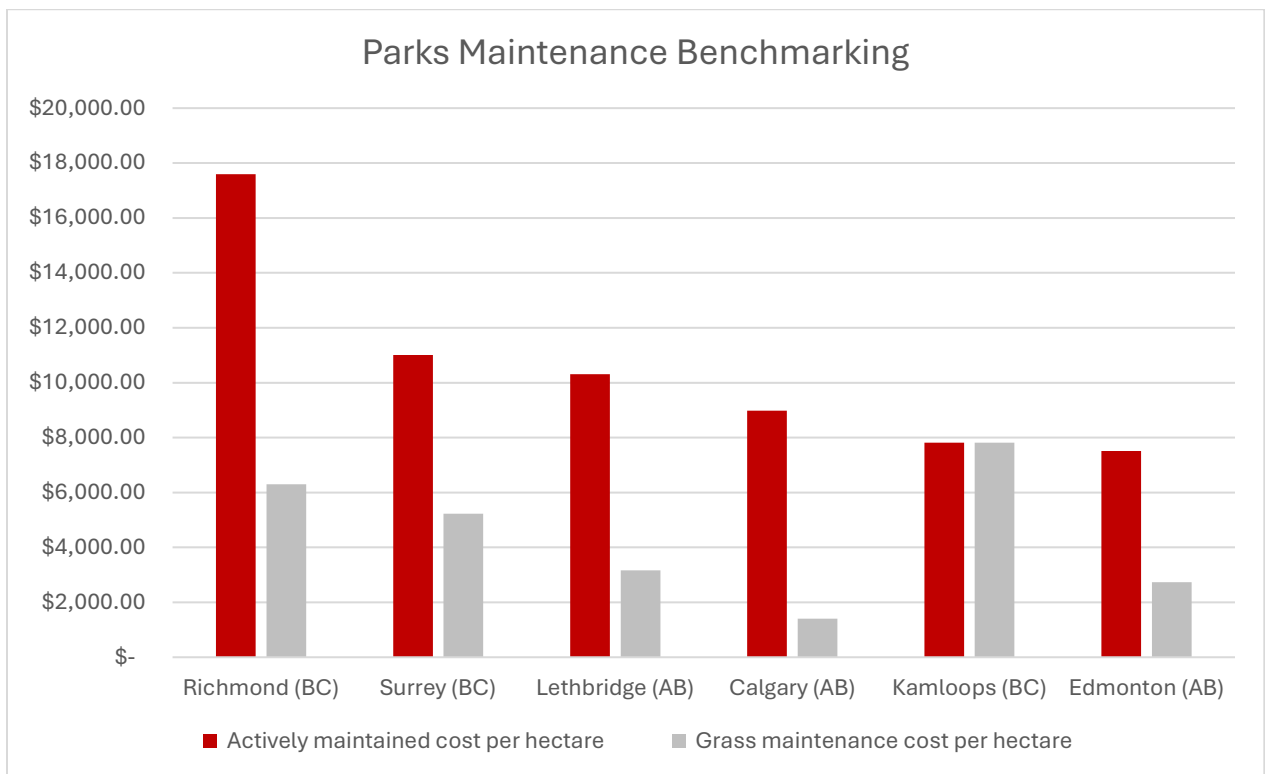
**Shrub bed maintenance:** Maintenance was completed on 143,339 square metres of shrub beds in 2025, representing just 12 per cent of the total 1,194,490 square metres citywide. At this pace, it would take nearly eight years to maintain all shrub beds.

**Garbage collection:** While 80 per cent of garbage collection targets were met in 2025, existing collection schedules are no longer sufficient in certain high-use park areas, resulting in visible service shortfalls during peak periods.

## Benchmarking and Operational Efficiency

The City of Calgary participates in annual, nationwide, Yardstick benchmarking, a tool developed by park managers to compare performance, costs, and best practices across municipalities. In 2025, Calgary ranked **highest overall for best practices**, demonstrating strong operational performance.

This result is particularly noteworthy given that Calgary operates **below the median cost** for actively maintained parkland and spends **the least of all benchmarked municipalities on grass maintenance**, including mowing. These results show that Parks & Open Spaces delivers high-quality service and industry-leading practices while operating with significantly less funding than peer municipalities.



# Challenges

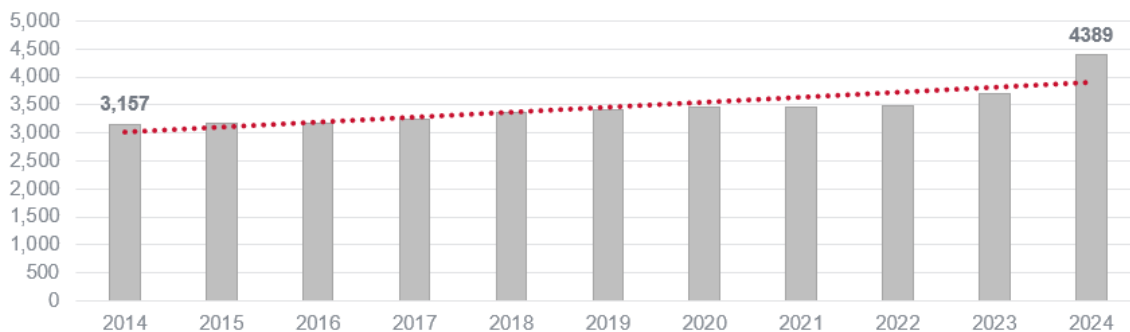
## Growing Network, Rising Operational Cost and Funding Gap

Each year, Calgary’s park network continues to expand, as new communities are developed and additional park spaces are acquired by Parks & Open Spaces through reserve obligations. Over the past decade, the total area of actively maintained parkland has increased by **36 per cent**, with a notable increase in 2024 resulting from P&OS assuming responsibility for roadside greens, through a corporate realignment.

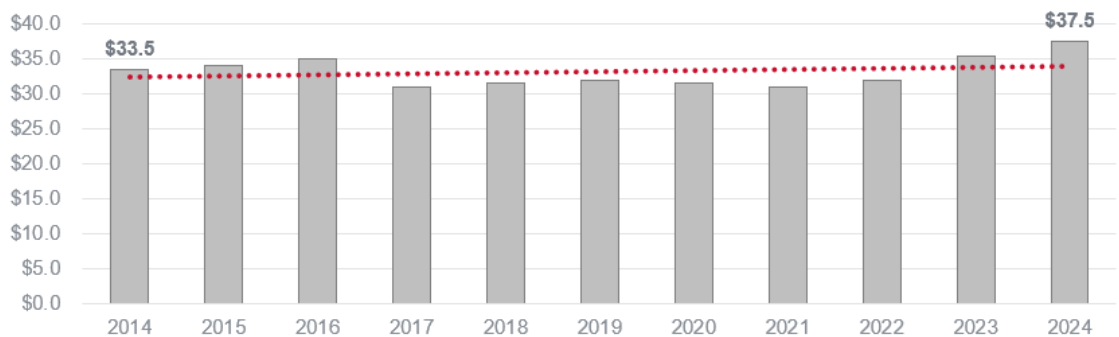
While the amount of parkland has grown substantially, funding has not kept pace. In 2025, approximately **\$33 million** was allocated to core maintenance activities for actively maintained parkland—only a modest increase (+12 per cent) from funding levels a decade ago. During the same period, operating costs have risen significantly due to factors such as **inflation (+28 per cent)** and growing demand for new and unique amenities, including pickleball and disc golf.

As a result, funding available per hectare has steadily declined. In 2024, P&OS received **\$8.5K per hectare**, compared to **\$10.5K per hectare in 2014**, representing a **20 per cent decrease** in funding on a per-hectare basis.

Actively maintained parkland (Hectares)



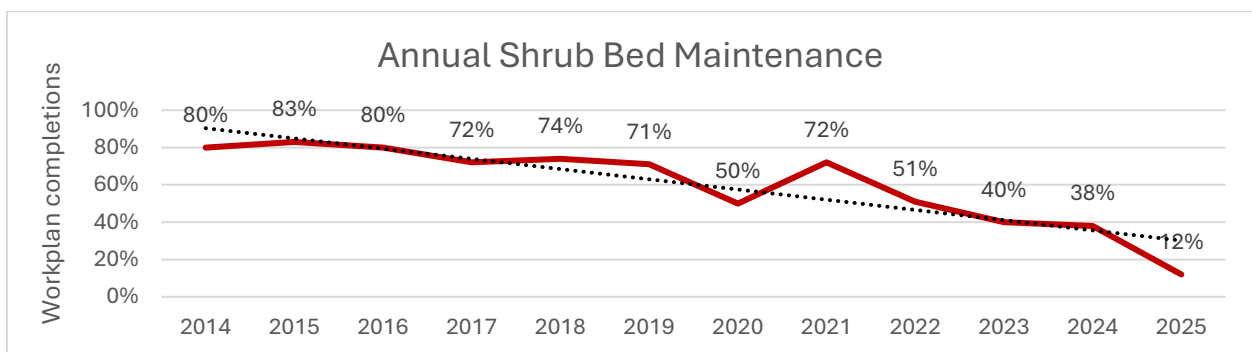
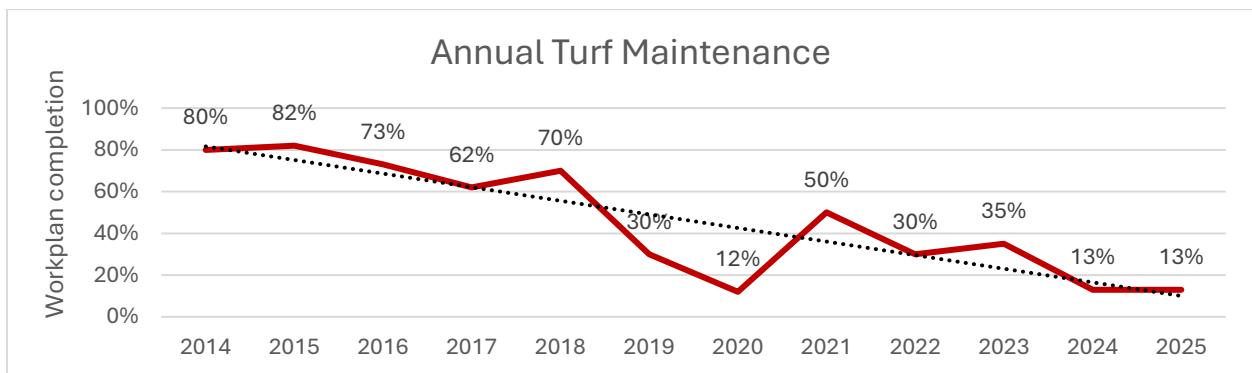
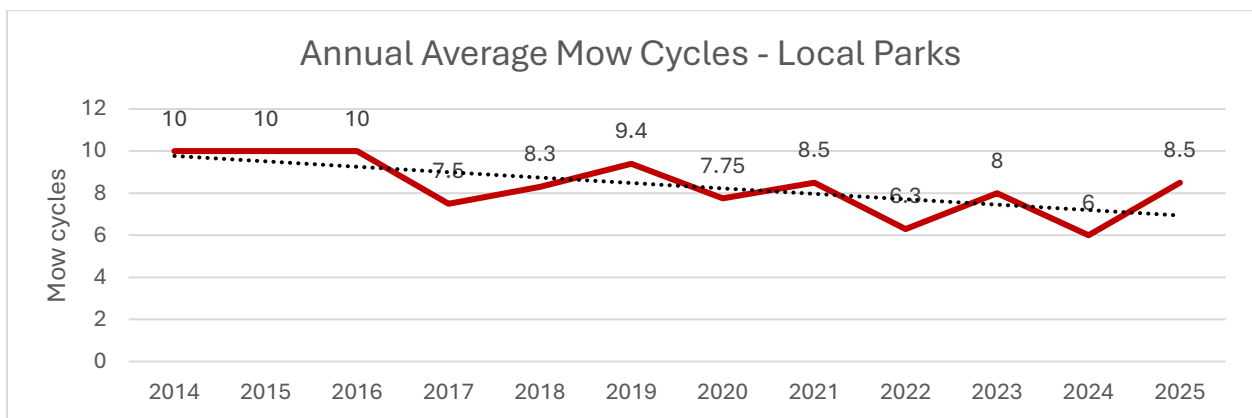
Actively maintained parkland budget (Millions)



## Reduced Level of Service

The growing funding gap—combined with rising operational costs and an expanding park network—has resulted in a measurable decline in service levels compared to what Parks & Open Spaces delivered in the past.

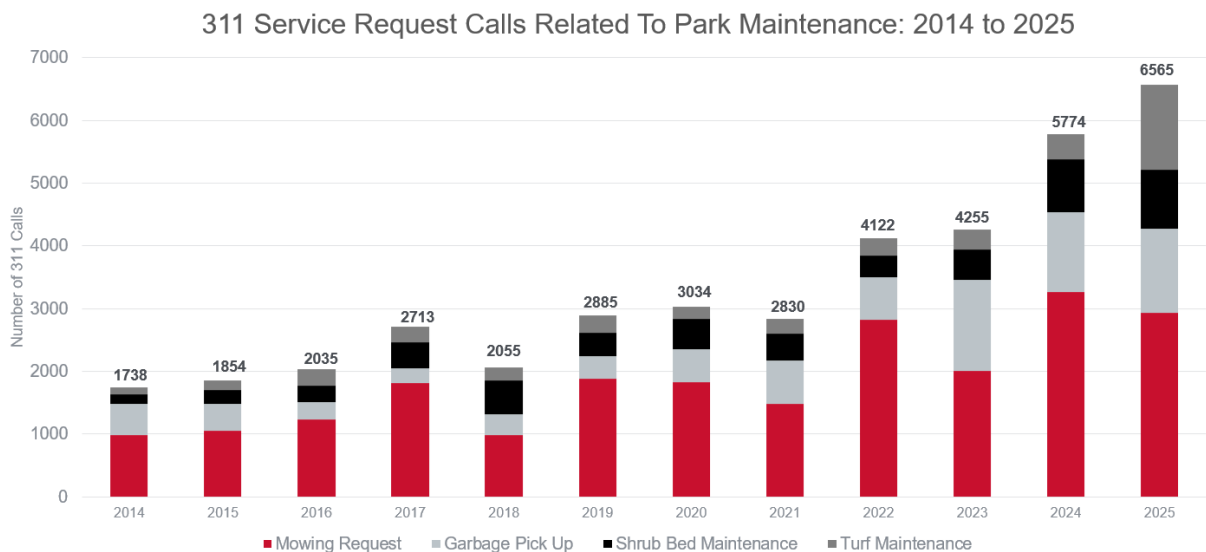
Prior to 2017, local parks consistently received 10 mowing cycles per season. Since then, local parks have experienced an average reduction of two mowing cycles per year. Reductions are even more pronounced in turf and shrub bed maintenance. In 2014, funding supported aeration, seeding, and fertilization for 80 per cent of maintained turf; by 2024, only 13 per cent received the same level of care. Similarly, while 80 per cent of shrub beds were pruned, weeded, and mulched in 2014, funding in 2024 was sufficient to maintain just 12 per cent.



## Growing Concern from Calgarians

This reduced level of service directly affects Calgarians by making park spaces less usable and less welcoming. Impacts include longer grass, increased weeds, declining shrub health, and overflowing garbage bins in high-use areas.

Reflecting these conditions, 311 service requests related to park maintenance have **quadrupled**, rising from **1,738 in 2014** to **6,565 in 2025**. This increase far exceeds broader trends: citywide 311 request volumes have remained relatively stable over the same period, and population growth accounts for only about a **30 per cent** increase, nowhere near the **400 per cent** growth seen in park maintenance service requests. The sharp rise in 311 requests is a clear early indicator of growing dissatisfaction among Calgarians with declining park maintenance service levels.



At a higher level, Calgarians consistently indicate that attention to maintenance, cleanliness, and landscaping is the most important action The City can take to improve park spaces, based on results from an annual survey measuring public views on parks (Pulse on Parks, 2025).

While residents continue to rank parks as highly important, overall satisfaction - historically in the mid to high 90 per cent range - has declined by **four percentage points** in recent years, dropping to **89 per cent in 2025** (Spring Survey of Calgarians).

# Solutions

## Focus on Customer Level of Service Evaluation

Parks & Open Spaces has developed a Customer Levels of Service (CLOS) framework to assess the quality of park experience across Calgary, using indicators such as overall satisfaction, park use, and public feedback, including annual Pulse on Parks survey data. Since 2016, the framework has matured into a comprehensive tool for evaluating both the physical condition of the park network and the delivery of safe, inclusive, and equitable park experiences.

Council-endorsed CLOS targets in *Connect: Calgary's Parks Plan* establish minimum standards of service, requiring regional parks to achieve a rating of at least **Good** and local parks a rating of at least **Fair**. Under current funding levels, P&OS can meet these targets in regional parks only by reallocating resources away from local parks, where service levels are increasingly falling below minimum standards and are more frequently rated as **Poor or Fail**.



## Level of Service Investment

The level of service achievable under current funding does not meet the minimum CLOS targets endorsed by Council in *Connect: Calgary's Parks Plan*. While Option 1 in the table below reflects existing service levels, the alternative investment options demonstrate how targeted investment can deliver significant, citywide improvements. Administration recommends **Option 4**, which will achieve **endorsed CLOS targets** by strategically investing in priority maintenance activities and enabling **intensive system recovery following a prolonged period of system degradation**. This investment would support a **world-class maintenance system** and deliver **visible, sustained improvements in parks across all Calgary communities** - particularly local parks most affected by the funding gap. Given that Calgary already operates one of the most efficient park maintenance systems among peer municipalities, this investment leverages existing strengths to deliver meaningful improvements for residents at relatively low cost.

**Intensive system recovery and achieving endorsed CLOS targets requires an additional \$14 million annually for the 2027–2030 budget cycle.** This investment delivers visible improvements starting in year one, with noticeable gains in general maintenance standards. Turf conditions will improve year over year, with all service targets met by year four.

LEVEL OF SERVICE INVESTMENT	OPTION 1 (Current Service Level)	OPTION 2	OPTION 3	OPTION 4
PLAYFIELD CLOS	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	VERY GOOD
REGIONAL PARK CLOS	GOOD	GOOD	GOOD	VERY GOOD
LOCAL PARK CLOS	POOR	POOR/FAIR	FAIR	GOOD
MOWING	up to 19 cycles playfields up to 15 cycles regional up to 8.5 cycles local up to 4 roadside greens	up to 20 cycles playfields up to 20 cycles regional up to 10 cycles local up to 4 roadside greens	up to 20 cycles playfields up to 20 cycles regional up to 12 cycles local up to 5 roadside greens	up to 22 cycles playfields up to 22 cycles regional up to 14 cycles local up to 6 roadside greens Internal fleet and resource readiness during peak seasons
TURF MAINTENANCE	All turf maintained in 9 year cycle	All turf maintained in 2 year cycle	All turf maintained in 1 year cycle	Enhanced maintenance of all turf in 1 year cycle
SHRUB BED MAINTENANCE	Maintained once per 8 year cycle	Maintained once per up to 5 year cycle	Maintained once per up to 4 year cycle	Maintained once per up to 2 year cycle
GARBAGE COLLECTION	80% of the established prioritized collection, optimized within the constraints of the current budget.	Increased waste collection in high-use areas.	Collection frequency increased up to 50% in identified hotspot communities.	Collection frequency increased up to 50% city wide with additional internal resources for peak seasonal times
EXPECTED CITIZEN SATISFACTION	<85%	<90%	<95%	<98%
ANNUAL FUNDING REQUIRED	\$33M	\$39M	\$43M	\$47M

Administration's Recommendation

## Impacts

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

**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 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. Playfields may pose safety risks due to uneven ground conditions, including those caused by ground squirrel burrows, which can result in injury.

**Environmental risk:** Continued lack of turf maintenance will further reduce turf health, combined with inconsistent horticultural 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.