



Playground Sites Level of Service

Background Report

April 2026



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Executive Summary

Calgary's playground network is aging faster than it is being renewed, creating increasing safety risks, unplanned removals and rising renewal (lifecycle) costs under current funding levels. This report recommends establishing a playground level of service by retaining all play spaces while balancing community needs, equitable access and long-term financial risk.

Current State

Park System

Our city has over 2,900 public parks, which provide Calgarians with a wide variety of experiences and opportunities. Year over year, Calgarians continue to list parks as 'very important' or 'somewhat important' (98 per cent, [2025 Spring Survey of Calgarians](#)); and 98 per cent of Calgarians think The City should invest more or the same in parks and open spaces. Through Parks and Open Spaces' annual [Pulse on Parks Survey](#) (2021 – present), park visitations have remained consistent, with 93 per cent of respondents reporting to have visited a Calgary park at least once within the past year. In addition to annual research, [Connect: Calgary's Parks Plan](#) was grounded by feedback from Calgarians, through an extensive [public engagement process](#). *Connect* captures what Calgarians value about their park system, what they want to achieve over the next 20 years and places emphasis on quality, equitable access and long-term sustainability.

Playground Network

The City's playground network, managed by Parks and Open Spaces, includes 1,172 playgrounds. Historically, funding has supported the renewal of 10 to 12 playgrounds per year (approximately \$1.2 million annually). At this rate, replacing the entire network would take about 125 years. More than 54 per cent of City playgrounds are over 20 years old and rated in "Fair" condition; as they continue to age, safety risks and incidents are expected to increase.

The City manages safety risks through regular inspections and timely repairs. When a playground can no longer be safely maintained it must be removed, renewed, or reimagine (right-size) with alternative park amenities. At current investment levels, the network faces a significant infrastructure deficit and a rapid decline in service. By 2036, a high failure rate is anticipated, with most City playgrounds (approximately 960) requiring attention.

Over the past decade, the inventory has grown by approximately 25 per cent, largely through developer-built playgrounds. Most new playgrounds are delivered by developers through the Development Approvals Process, as part of park and amenity requirements in new communities. The former *Open Space Plan* identified playgrounds as a desirable amenity, contributing to Calgary's current inventory.

Administration has received significant community pushback when aging playgrounds must be removed without corresponding renewal or reimagine investment. The issue is amplified by shifting

demographics—particularly in established neighbourhoods—creating a “city of playgrounds” rather than a “city of great play.”

At the end of 2025, The City complement is estimated to sit at 4.97 playgrounds per 1,000 children under 12¹. This is referred to as the playground provision rate. When combined with the 312 playgrounds owned and operated by Calgary’s school boards², the city-wide provision rate increases to an estimated 6.29 playgrounds per 1,000 children—higher than most comparable jurisdictions in Canada, the United States, and Europe (Appendix A).

¹ Using [2021 Statistics Canada Population Data](#)

² Including: Calgary Board of Education, Calgary Catholic School District, and FrancoSud - [Parks Wayfinder Map](#).

Deterioration & Safety Concerns

Several factors impact playground equipment and fall surface safety and longevity. To a small degree this can be due to misuse, however most safety concerns arise from age and compounding environmental factors. As playgrounds age, maintenance costs increase and safety risks become more pronounced.








Repair Approach

Implementing timely playground repairs is the safest, most efficient and cost-effective approach to operate renew playground equipment and fall surfaces and to extend their functional life. The City manages safety risks associated with aging playground infrastructure through frequent playground inspections (seven times per year, per playground) to ensure compliance with the Canada Safety Association (CSA) guidelines, by Certified Operations Parks staff. These inspections immediately identify the need for maintenance, renewal or removal of unsafe equipment or fall surfaces.

Condition Assessment

The City relies on two primary metrics to assess playground condition and safety:

- (1) Asset Condition Rating—which reflects how an asset deteriorates under a range of factors such as use and climate; and
- (2) Age—the actual age of the playground.

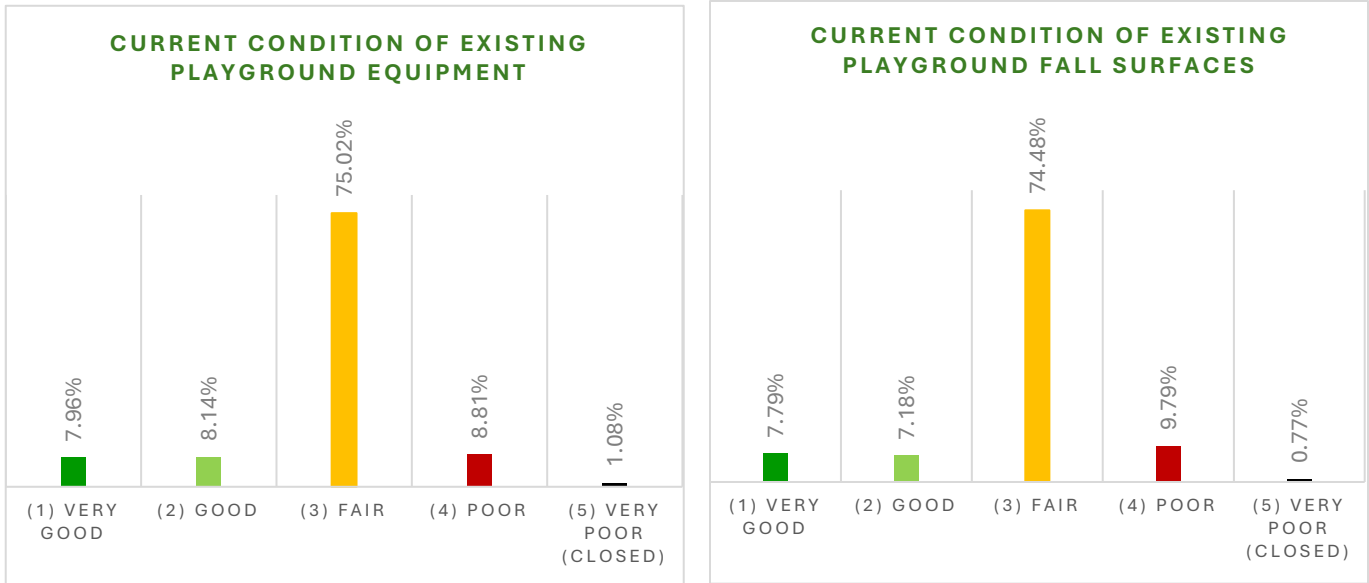
Target conditions known as “State of Good Repair”				
Very Good (ACR 1)	Good (ACR 2)	Fair (ACR 3)	Poor (ACR 4)	Very Poor (Closed) (ACR 5)
				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New equipment • No visible wear, damage, or corrosion • Fully functional • No immediate maintenance required • Compliant with Safety Standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close to New • Minor signs of wear or aging • Fully functional • No immediate maintenance required • Compliant with Safety Standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 to 18 years old • Moderate signs of wear or aging (fading) • Early signs of deterioration. • Maintenance required • Compliant with Safety Standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over 19 years old • Significant wear, rust, or damage • Some parts non-functional • Maintenance or partial replacement required • Compliant with Safety Standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over 19 years old • Components are unsafe or non-functional • Immediate removal or full replacement required • Does not comply with Safety Standards

Parks and Open Spaces use a Condition-Based Management approach to determine playground assets require repair, replacement, or removal. During inspections, an Asset Condition Rating (ACR) is assigned to equipment and fall surfaces.

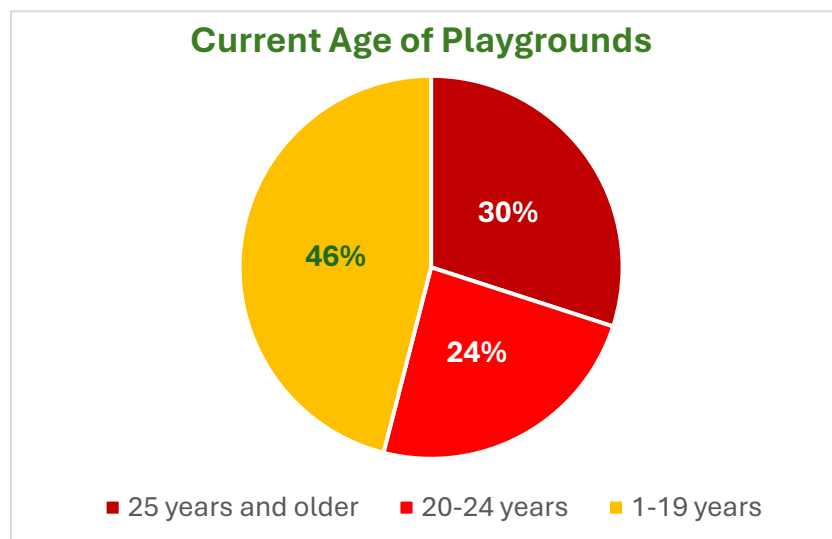
The ‘State of Good Repair’ is calculated by combining the percentages of playground equipment and fall surfaces with the Asset Condition Ratings of: Very Good (1), Good (2), and Fair (3). Currently, the ‘State of Good Repair’ for a Parks and Open Spaces’ playground is 95 per cent. Playground equipment in Calgary typically lasts 25 to 30 years, while fall surfaces require more frequent replacement. As playgrounds age, their functionality and user appeal decline, maintenance costs rise and safety risks increase.

Current Condition

The current assessment of Parks and Open Spaces' playgrounds indicates 75.02 per cent of equipment and 74.48 per cent of fall surfaces are currently rated at an Asset Condition Rating of three or 'Fair', with an additional 8.81 per cent of playground equipment and 9.79 per cent of fall surfaces rated at an Asset Condition Rating of four or 'Poor'.



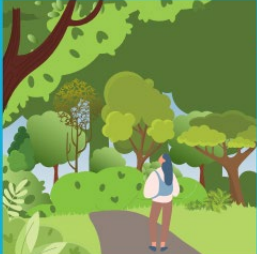

At the end of 2025, 351 Park and Open Spaces' 1,172 playgrounds (30 per cent), were more than 25 years old and should be considered for replacement. An additional 284 Park and Open Space playgrounds (24 per cent) were between 20 to 24 years old and will require replacement within the next five years. This equates to 54 per cent (or 635) of Parks and Open Space playgrounds are over 20 years old, as of the end of 2025. The average age metric refers to the combined age of all equipment and fall surfaces within a playground.



Alignment with Connect: Calgary’s Parks Plan

The Council-approved [Connect: Calgary Parks Plan](#) provides policy direction on four key priorities: protecting and enhancing environmentally significant areas; connecting and growing the park system by adding additional functionality; providing parks that are welcoming for all Calgarians; and enhancing management and maintenance of park spaces.

The City creates multifunctional park spaces by locating at least two of the three primary park functions - Environment, Recreation, or Sport - within a 400-meter (five-minute) walk of Calgary residences. *Connect* has an established target for walking access to parks (from 63 per cent to 69 per cent by the year 2035), based on multifunctionality rather than specific amenities (e.g., playgrounds). The City’s objective is to enhance access to parks for all Calgarians by providing a variety of amenities that support a variety of different ages, abilities and interests. In short, multifunctional park spaces with the right amenity, at the right time, for the right community in Calgary – enabling a ‘city of great play.’

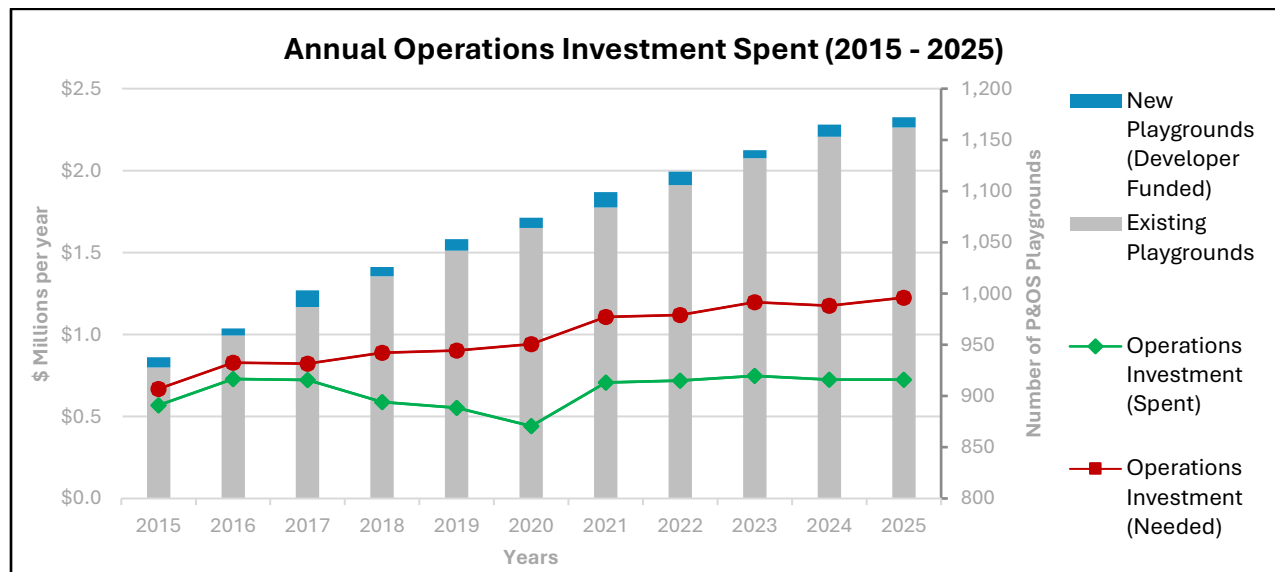
		
<p>Environment Function</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Natural areas Naturalized areas Naturalized asset Waterbodies Tree stands Green Stormwater Infrastructure (GSI) 	<p>Recreation Function</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Picnic and BBQ spaces Gathering spaces Cultural spaces Exercise equipment Spray parks Playgrounds Plazas Leisure skating (loops) Toboggan hills Off-leash dog areas 	<p>Sport Function</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Soccer pitch Cricket fields Baseball diamonds Tennis courts Basketball courts Pump tracks Skate parks Disc golf courses Ice rinks

Current Investment

The operations and maintenance annual investment for playgrounds has remained static at \$700,000 over the past decade, while the renewal investment has also remained stable at \$1.2 million annually over the same timespan. Under current investment, by 2036, approximately 100 playgrounds would be replaced, with an estimated 960 playgrounds expected to be classified as unsafe and require removal or replacement.

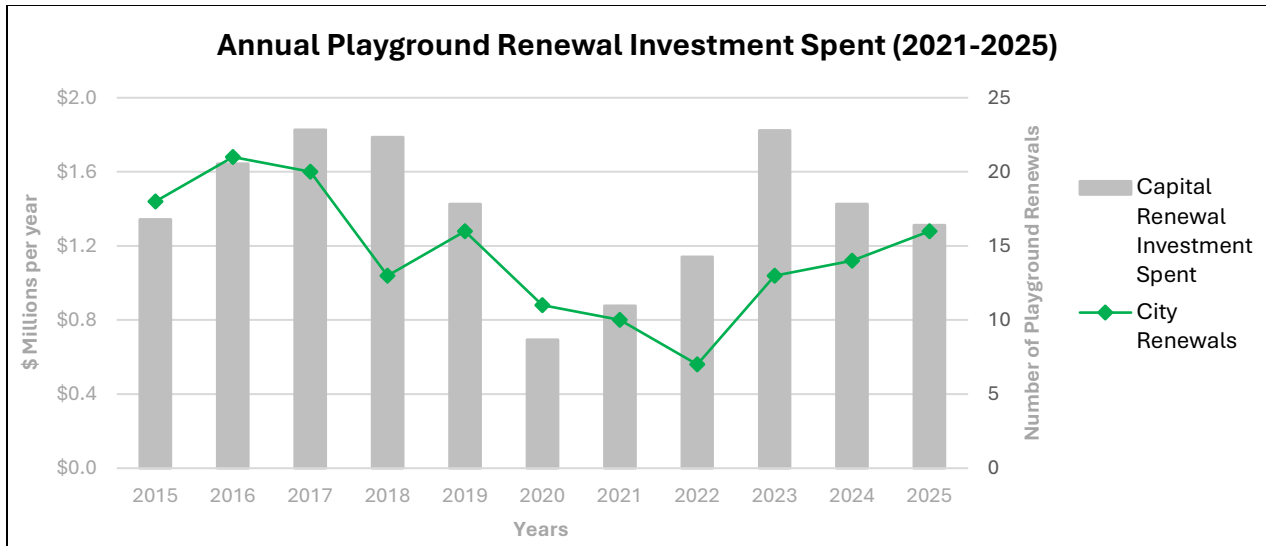
Operations and Maintenance

Over the past decade, constrained operations funding has resulted in the deferral of preventative maintenance. To maintain compliance with Canadian Safety Association (CSA) standards, Parks Infrastructure staff have been redirected to manage the growing playground inventory, contributing to chronic under-delivery across other core service areas, including playground fall-surface testing, preventative maintenance, fencing, signage and other park infrastructure. The chart below illustrates the delta between current operations spending and the investment required to meet core service levels.



Renewal

Parks and Open Spaces spend an average of \$105,000 per playground replacement compared to \$300,000 to \$700,000 per playground for new developer-funded playground installations. As a result, the infrastructure gap for park assets, including playgrounds, continues to widen as funding levels fail to keep pace with asset deterioration and inflationary pressures.



Developer-funded installations, now cost upwards of \$700,000 per playground, have increased the overall play standard, which current renewal funding is insufficient to sustain. To better align with rising costs, beginning in 2026 The City will allocate \$150,000 per playground replacement within the existing \$1.2 million annual renewal budget, reducing the annual replacement rate from 10-to-12 to six-to-eight playgrounds.

Aging playgrounds, worsening asset conditions and the ongoing addition of new playgrounds each year have collectively created a significant infrastructure deficit and increased risk of severe consequence of failure for these assets. Along with increasing per playground replacement, Parks and Open Spaces has begun to reimagine older playground sites with alternate amenities, when other playground amenities exist in proximity. In alignment with both [Council's 2027-2030 Strategic Priorities](#) and the approved operational actions within [Connect: Calgary's Parks Plan](#), with the input from community members, reimagined playground sites enhance overall park use by expanding access to multifunctional park spaces and ensuring parks are welcoming for all Calgarians.

Recommended Playground Level of Service

Establishing a Playground Level of Service for Parks and Open Spaces' 1,172 playgrounds (with an estimated \$265.5 million in equipment and fall surface replacement cost) will help improve user experience, maintain safety standards and define clear parameters for playground maintenance and replacement.

Achieving this requires increased investment funding and supports long-term financial stability. To address these challenges, several options were evaluated, taking into consideration: strategic alignment; available research, engagement data and community impact; industry best practices and guidelines; overall cost; and industry capacity. Administration is recommending the implementation of:

- A 90 – 95 per cent 'State of Good Repair' target for playgrounds (Asset Condition Ratings: Very Good (1), Good (2), and Fair (3)); and
- A provision of up to 5 playgrounds per 1,000 children.

The following section presents this analysis - from maintaining current investment levels to retaining current playground network.

Key terms:

Permanent removal: playgrounds removed from the inventory and converted to turf.

Temporary removal: playgrounds removed from the active inventory and converted to turf, while awaiting future renewal replacement capacity.

Reimagine (Right-Size): process of replacing a former playground with alternative park amenities.

Playground Level of Service Investment Options

Below are the Level of Service options and corresponding funding requirements.

NOTE: The below options do not include the additional 10-12 developer industry playgrounds constructed each year in new communities. Options 2 through 4 have investment levels that would support an increase in City and industry capacity to approximately 28 renewal playground replacements annually (~280 over the next 10 years); and align with [Council's 2027-2030 Strategic Priorities](#) and the approved operational actions within [Connect: Calgary's Parks Plan](#).

Option 1: Base Funding

This service level anticipates 1.76 playgrounds per 1,000 children under 12 years of age and retains approximately 18 per cent of the current playground sites. It reduces playground oversupply through attrition, rather than purposeful or equitable distribution throughout The City; and does not align with [Council's 2027-2030 Strategic Priorities](#) or the approved operational actions within [Connect: Calgary's Parks Plan](#).

Annual Investment:

- Operations:
 - \$700,000
- Capital:
 - \$5.8 million for playground sites renewal and permanent removal.

Impacts:

This investment option would permanently remove an estimated 960 playgrounds across Calgary by 2036. Without additional funding to renew or reimagine these spaces, the decommissioned sites would remain vacant. A playground State of Good Repair of 90 per cent is estimated to be achievable by 2036.

Option 2

This service level would see an estimated provision of up to 3 playgrounds per 1,000 children under 12 and retains approximately 60 per cent of the current playground sites. This option balances equitable access, asset condition, and long-term financial sustainability by reducing the total number of playgrounds while reinvesting in other high-quality park amenities, helping to increase access to multifunctional park spaces.

Annual Investment:

- Operations:
 - \$1.5 million
- Capital:
 - \$11 million for playground sites renewal, reimagine, and permanent removal.

Impacts:

This investment option would permanently remove an estimated 455 playgrounds across Calgary by 2036. Without additional funding to renew or reimagine these spaces, the decommissioned sites would remain vacant. The City's ability to raise and sustain to the playground State of Good Repair target of 90 to 95 per cent is estimated to be limited (between 43 to 49 per cent) by 2036.

Option 3

This service level would see an estimated provision of up to 4 playgrounds per 1,000 children under 12 and retains approximately 80 per cent of the current playground sites. This option preserves access across all communities and begins to stabilize future investment needs by reinvesting in higher-quality, multifunctional park spaces.

Annual Investment:

- Operations:
 - \$1.5 million
- Capital:
 - \$14.5 million for playground site renewal, reimagine, and permanent removal.

Impacts:

This investment option would permanently remove an estimated 220 playgrounds across Calgary by 2036. Without additional funding to renew or reimagine these spaces, the decommissioned sites would remain vacant. The City's ability to raise and sustain to the playground State of Good Repair target of 90 to 95 per cent is estimated to be limited (between 32 to 38 per cent) by 2036.

Option 4: Current Service Level

This service level retains our current playground site complement, with an estimated provision of up to 5 playgrounds per 1,000 children under 12. This option increases future renewal investment over the long-term as it will enable the renewal and reimagine all current playground sites based on community input.

Annual Investment: \$19 million

- Operations:
 - \$1.5 million
- Capital:
 - \$19 million for playground sites renewal, reimagine, and temporary removal.

Impacts:

The City's ability to raise and sustain to the playground State of Good Repair target of 90 to 95 per cent is estimated to be limited (between 5 to 28 per cent) by 2036.

Impacts

Safety: Playgrounds present inherent safety risks, particularly for children. Calgary’s playground inventory is aging, with 54 per cent of playgrounds now over 20 years old and nearing end of life. Older assets require increased maintenance and operational attention and are projected to need replacement in the next five to 10 years. Without timely replacement or removal, playground closures will continue to increase under current investment, driving reactive maintenance, operational strain and a higher risk of unscheduled playground removals, due to safety concerns.

Reputation: Safety-related incidents, particularly injuries to children, pose reputational and legal risks to The City. Ongoing unplanned removals, rising maintenance costs for aging assets, and reduced investment in replacements may also result in decreased playground use, diminishing community benefit, and lower public satisfaction.

Resident Dissatisfaction: Deteriorating playgrounds can create a perception of poor asset management and neglect of public infrastructure. This may reduce public confidence and make the city less attractive to residents, investors, businesses, and visitors who prioritize well-maintained amenities.

Funding: Stagnant funding has resulted in rising maintenance costs, increased risks of playground removals, and deferred replacement needs that compound the long-term infrastructure deficit. Over the past decade, operations and maintenance funding have remained unchanged, while annual investment in playground renewal has been fixed at \$1.2 million. Current funding levels do not account for the growing number of aging playgrounds or the ongoing acceptance of new, developer-built playgrounds. As a result, the playground inventory faces a significant infrastructure deficit and an increased risk of severe consequences in the event of asset failure. Although the per-playground replacement will increase to \$150,000 in 2026, this will further limit the total number of playground replacements that can be completed each year.

Operational: An aging playground inventory increases operational risk by placing additional demands on staff capacity and specialized expertise. Playground inspection is highly technical and can require up to one year for new inspectors to independently assess playground conditions accurately. Staff turnover, therefore, poses a significant risk to inspection quality and The City’s ability to manage a growing and aging playground inventory.

Social Inequity: Significant disparities exist in playground distribution at the ward and community levels, resulting in uneven access to safe, modern play spaces—particularly in underserved areas. Addressing these gaps aligns with [Connect: Calgary’s Parks Plan](#) by supporting equitable access to multifunctional play spaces, promoting child development and physical activity, and advancing livable, family-friendly communities.

Appendix A

Top 5 Canadian Municipalities: Playgrounds per 1,000 Children						
Rank	City	Playgrounds (2024 Data) ³	Population (2021 Census)	Child Population (2021 Census)	Playgrounds per 1000 population	Playgrounds per 1000 children
#1	Calgary	1,162	1,306,784 ⁴	235,855	0.89	4.93
#2	Ottawa	781	1,017,449	166,920	0.77	4.68
#3	Montreal	969	1,762,949	270,430	0.55	3.58
#4	Toronto	908	2,794,356	384,295	0.32	2.36
#5	Edmonton	424	1,010,899	184,115	0.42	2.30

Top 10 U.S. Municipalities: Playgrounds per 1,000 Children						
Rank	City	Playgrounds (2025 Data)	Population (2025 Estimate)	Child Population (2025 Estimate 18%)	Playgrounds per 1000 population	Playgrounds per 1000 children
	Calgary	1,172	1,562,595 ⁵	268,700	0.75	4.36
#1	Chicago, IL	1,033	2,672,258	563,461	0.39	1.83
#2	Dallas, TX	381	1,313,550	320,888	0.29	1.19
#3	New York, NY	1,926	8,562,125	1,792,356	0.22	1.07
#4	Austin, TX	217	1,017,092	215,818	0.21	1.01
#5	Jacksonville, FL	236	1,000,696	236,926	0.24	1.00
#6	Houston, TX	502	2,283,151	571,580	0.22	0.88
#7	San Diego, CA	222	1,389,772	287,763	0.16	0.77
#8	Philadelphia, PA	275	1,599,611	357,734	0.17	0.77
#9	Charlotte-Mecklenburg County, NC	195	1,190,061	291,091	0.16	0.67
#10	Honolulu County, HI	147	1,014,704	220,570	0.14	0.67

Top 5 European Municipalities: Playgrounds per 1,000 Children						
Rank	City	Playgrounds	Population (2025 Estimates)	Child Population (2025 Estimates)	Playgrounds per 1000 population	Playgrounds per 1000 children
	Calgary	1,172	1,562,595 ⁶	268,700	0.75	4.36
#1	Barcelona, Spain	900	1,702,547	N/A	0.53	NA
#2	Berlin, Germany	1,858	3,897,145	N/A	0.48	NA
#3	Vienna, Austria	700	2,032,739	N/A	0.34	NA
#4	Helsinki, Finland	200	687,441	N/A	0.29	NA
#5	Marseille, France	132	877,215	N/A	0.15	NA

³ [2024 Canadian City Parks Report, Park People](#)

⁴ [2021 Statistics Canada Population Data](#)

⁵ [Calgary and Region Economic Outlook 2025-2030](#)

⁶ [Calgary and Region Economic Outlook 2025-2030](#)