

Operational Services Report to
Infrastructure and Planning Committee
2026 April 15

ISC: UNRESTRICTED
IP2026-0034

Playground Sites Levels of Service

PURPOSE

To seek Council direction on establishing a citywide, level of service for Parks and Open Spaces' playground sites to inform the 2027-2030 Service Plans and Budgets.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL DIRECTION

No previous direction

RECOMMENDATION(S):

That the Infrastructure and Planning Committee recommend that Council:

1. Direct Administration to implement the Option 4 service level (100% of playground sites renewed) for the maintenance and renewal for all of Calgary's current playground sites;
2. Direct Administration to consider the required operating and capital investments needed to enable the Council directed level of service for playground sites in the prioritization of investments for the 2027-2030 Service Plans and Budgets; and
3. Direct Administration to return no later than Q2 of 2027 with a Playground Site Implementation Plan for the approved level of service (2027-2030 Business Plans and Budgets).

RECOMMENDATION OF THE INFRASTRUCTURE AND PLANNING COMMITTEE, 2026 APRIL 15:

That Council:

1. Direct Administration to implement the Option 4 service level (100% of playground sites renewed) for the maintenance and renewal for all of Calgary's current playground sites;
2. Direct Administration to consider the required operating and capital investments needed to enable the Council directed level of service for playground sites in the prioritization of investments for the 2027-2030 Service Plans and Budgets; and
3. Direct Administration to return no later than Q2 of 2027 with a Playground Site Implementation Plan for the approved level of service (2027-2030 Business Plans and Budgets).

CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER/GENERAL MANAGER COMMENTS

The General Manager of Operational Services concurs with this report.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Year-over-year, Calgarians continue to provide feedback on how important and impactful our city's public parks are to them and their families. Playground sites within these parks are key focal points for community enjoyment.
- This report is in alignment with Council's 2027-2030 Strategic Priorities, specifically the focus areas of: Reliable & Sustainable Infrastructure; Community Livability & Well-being; and Trusted & Collaborative Government; and guided by what matters to Calgarians - extensive public engagement was undertaken through [Connect: Calgary's Parks Plan](#) (detailing the

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planning, development and management decisions for Calgary's park system over the next 20 years), which directs a shift to a 'city of great play' emphasizing quality, equitable access and long-term sustainability.

- More than 54 per cent of The City's playgrounds are over 20 years old and nearing end of life. As assets age, safety risks increase, equipment failures become more frequent, replacement parts become unavailable and closures become inevitable.
- Parks and Open Spaces currently manage 1,172 [playgrounds](#) citywide, with more coming into our asset base every year.
- If current funding levels remain unchanged, by 2036 approximately 960 playgrounds – representing 82 per cent of Calgary's existing inventory – are projected to close.
- Administration recommends a customer-experience driven service level, supported by an annual investment of \$1.5 million in operating and \$19 million in capital funding to extend lifespan through increased maintenance and address the bow-wave of upcoming playground site renewals.

DISCUSSION

Year-over-year, Calgarians continue to tell us (through corporate surveys, research and engagement) how important and impactful our city's public parks are to them and their families. The City's objective is to provide safe, high-quality park spaces that reflect both current and future community needs. This is in alignment with Council's 2027-2030 Strategic Priorities focus areas, which emphasize: well maintained and reliable City assets, facilities and parks; and measurable progress in reducing the current infrastructure deficit by renewing, upgrading and right-sizing aging infrastructure. In addition, through an extensive public engagement process [Connect: Calgary's Parks Plan](#) captures what Calgarians value about their park system and directs The City to focus on quality, equitable access and long-term sustainability – providing the right amenity, in the right place, at the right time for all Calgarians.

The City's playground network, managed by Parks and Open, currently includes 1,172 playgrounds. Historically, playground services have been funded to renew 10 to 12 playground sites annually, representing approximately \$1.2 million dollars per year (Attachment 1). This investment rate supports less than 20 per cent of the renewal required for the current playground network. Moving into 2026, due to inflationary costs, the annual playground renewal is decreasing to 6 to 8 playground sites. Currently, more than 54 per cent of City playgrounds are over 20 years old and rated in "Fair" condition. As these assets continue to age, condition ratings decrease and safety risks increase.

The City manages risks through regular inspections and timely repairs. When a playground can no longer be safely maintained, it must be removed, renewed, or reimagined with different park amenities. The playground network faces a significant infrastructure deficit and a rapid decline in service levels at the current investment rate. By 2036 a high failure rate is anticipated, with the majority of City playgrounds (approximately 960) requiring removal.

Over the past decade, Calgarians have enjoyed a playground inventory that has grown by approximately 25 per cent, largely through developer-built playgrounds. Calgary has more playgrounds per 1,000 children than any comparable municipality. Administration receives significant concern from communities when playgrounds are required to be removed due to age and/or very poor condition rating.

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To address the playground infrastructure deficit and subsequent decline in service level, Administration evaluated several service options, ensuring strategic alignment, while taking into consideration overall cost, impacts to Calgarians and their communities, opportunities to expand access to multifunctional park spaces and overall industry capacity. For details on the level of service options, see Attachment 2.

Administration recommends the service level within **Option 4**, which ensures all current playground sites will remain functional by investing in these sites and targeting a 90 to 95 per cent State of Good Repair for site amenities including playgrounds. This investment will enable the renewal and reimagining of playground and park amenities based on community input. It requires an annual investment of \$1.5 million for operating and \$19 million for capital beginning in 2027. This option aligns with Council's 2027-2030 Strategic Priorities and the operational actions within [Connect: Calgary's Parks Plan](#) by prioritizing quality, equitable access and multifunctional park spaces, while managing financial risk and reflecting what the playground industry can realistically deliver.

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 |

The [2025 Spring Survey of Calgarians](#) reported that 98 per cent of Calgarians listed parks and open spaces as either "very important" (79 per cent) or "somewhat important" (19 per cent) and thought The City should either invest more (50 per cent) or the same amount (48 per cent) in parks and open spaces.

In addition, Parks and Open Spaces conducts an annual [Pulse on Parks Survey](#) (2021 – present) to better understand Calgarians' usage and perception of City parks. Data collection includes the frequency of usage in different seasons, usage of different amenities within parks, attitudes regarding park experiences and feedback on Customer Levels of Service measures providing the following insights:

- Overall, park visitation remains consistent (from the Pulse on Parks research conducted from 2021-2025) with 93 per cent of respondents having visited a park at least once within the past year.
- Parks receive high scores on most customer satisfaction metrics; seven-in-ten (72 per cent) offer high ratings on park furniture, equipment and structures being in good condition.
- High-quality park maintenance is the most desired improvement to parks. Specifically, when asked about the most important thing The City can do to improve park spaces to make them more enjoyable, maintenance, cleanliness and landscaping are rated highest (19 per cent), followed by having more amenities and facilities (16 per cent).

Further research and analysis – including an environmental scan of playground provision of similar jurisdictions worldwide and a review of available peer-reviewed playground research – was conducted to inform this report and its recommendations.

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IMPLICATIONS

Social

Parks serve as important community gathering spaces that foster social connection and strengthen neighbourhoods. Consistent with the goals of *Connect*, addressing asset disparities supports more equitable access to play opportunities and helps build stronger, more connected communities across Calgary.

Environmental

Calgary's parks system is a critical network of living infrastructure that supports biodiversity, climate resilience and environmental health. Investing in appropriate operations and renewal, specifically to playground sites, supports maintaining healthy, functional park 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. In alignment with *Connect*, the growth and redevelopment of Calgary's Park System through the goal of multifunctionality aims to allocate resources and investments across the park system more effectively, so that all Calgarians experience consistent parks standards.

Service and Financial Implications

Other:

Investment decisions over time will impact the ability to achieve the recommended level of service target for playground site quality. Any changes to funding levels will directly affect the target level of service in the stated time frame.

RISK

At current funding levels, Calgary's playground network is projected to experience significant deterioration and substantial decline in service levels, with the State of Good Repair projected to fail to approximately 27 per cent by 2031 and 19 per cent by 2036. The result is the playground network will experience a severe consequence of failure by 2036 requiring the removal of approximately 960 playgrounds due to safety concerns, significantly reducing playground availability across the city. It is important to note that an increased capital investment of \$3.9M is required to achieve this outcome as the removal and site rehabilitation of this volume of playgrounds is currently unfunded.

Industry may not immediately be capable of delivering the increased level of service recommended within this report. Implementation of this option requires deliberate and sustained efforts over the coming years to increase both internal capacity and overall industry capacity to meet the associated service requirements.

There are reputational risks, particularly related to public confidence and satisfaction, associated with the removal of playground assets. However, the risks posed by safety-related

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incidents – specifically injuries to children – are significantly greater if aging playgrounds are not addressed through timely removal or renewal.

ATTACHMENT(S)

1. Attachment 1 – Background Report
2. Attachment 2 – Playground Sites Level of Service Options Chart
3. Attachment 3 – Map of City of Calgary Playgrounds and School Board Playgrounds
4. Attachment 4 – Map of City of Calgary Playgrounds
5. Attachment 5 – Playground Sites Levels of Service Presentation

Department Circulation

General Manager/Director	Department	Approve/Consult/Inform
Doug Morgan	Operational Services	Approve
Michael Thompson	Infrastructure Services	Inform
Les Tochor	Chief Financial Officer & CPFS	Inform
Debra Hamilton	Planning and Development Services	Inform
Kyle Ripley	Parks and Open Spaces	Approve
Kathy Davies Murphy	City & Regional Planning	Consult
Teresa Goldstein	Community Planning	Consult
Kerensa Fromherz	Public Spaces Delivery	Consult

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