

PRAIRIE WINDS PARK DESIGN DEVELOPMENT PLAN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The *Prairie Winds Park Design Development Plan* (DDP) is a conscientiously crafted regional park plan based on research, analysis, public and stakeholder input and park planning expertise that will guide park redevelopment. This plan considers the changing and local needs of the community, increased usage in the park, enhanced and diversified visitors' experience, and improving the park's environmental health. It also identifies much needed lifecycle upgrades and replacements. The goal is to ensure the park remains valuable and enjoyable for park users today and into the future.

ADMINISTRATION RECOMMENDATION(S)

That the SPC on Community and Protective Services recommends that Council:

1. Receive for information the *Prairie Winds Park Design Development Plan* report (Attachment 1); and
2. Approve the *Prairie Winds Park Preferred Concept Plan* (Attachment 2).

PREVIOUS COUNCIL DIRECTION / POLICY

At the 2013 May 27 meeting, Council approved LPC 2013-0429; verbal update on Legacy Parks Program Funding, directing \$300,000 towards the Prairie Winds Design Development Plan. At the 2014 November 04 meeting, Council approved LPC2014-0823; Proposed Phase 3 Enmax Legacy Parks Projects, directing the amount of \$11.6 million towards park construction.

BACKGROUND

Located in Calgary's Westwinds/Castleridge communities, Prairie Winds Park opened in September 1990, as Calgary's first major regional park in the northeast quadrant of the city. Over the past 25 years, the site has evolved from a new park within a relatively undeveloped area, to one of the most well used parks in the city surrounded by diverse residential communities. With the completion of the LRT expansion to Westwinds, the park has become even more accessible to visitors city-wide and continues to serve a rapidly growing population.

The northeast quadrant of the city is home to a large multicultural population with strong cultural traditions, values and customs and diverse socio-economic communities. The park hosts numerous cultural events and is anticipated as a hub for an increasing number of special events ranging from small family picnics to larger cultural and art festivals in the future.

Existing park facilities include: a man-made toboggan hill; artificial creek water feature (no longer operational); large wading pool; a public amenities building with washrooms, first aid, meeting room and small concession; new spray park (redeveloped in 2014); baseball diamond; tennis courts (4); soccer field; seasonal winter skating rink; informal cross country skiing; playgrounds (2); internal pathway circulation system; bookable picnic shelter; gazebo; large bookable events space; parking lots (2) and a Parks maintenance depot. The park also features numerous mature trees including a dedicated Grant MacEwan Grove (dedication grove of trees planted to honour the 90th birthday of Grant MacEwan, a former City Councillor).

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After 25 years of use, much of the park's infrastructure is at or nearing the end of its lifecycle. Changing demographics and park use also support the need for redevelopment and upgrade of the park.

INVESTIGATION: ALTERNATIVES AND ANALYSIS

In 2014 February, Administration initiated the project by retaining a qualified design consulting firm through a competitive request for proposal (RFP) process. Scope for this initial phase of work was to establish a Design Development Plan for the park to guide future redevelopment.

The planning process involved a step by step approach:

- First: community and user input, suggestions and comments were gathered. This helped to inform how people and key user groups use the space. It also helped identify community priorities for improvement.
- Next: site and regional data information was analyzed along with the input from the public for appropriateness, feasibility, and suitability to determine what would be incorporated into the redevelopment plan.
- Finally: a vision/mission and guiding principles along with three concept plans were developed and presented for public feedback. This input was then used to select and refine the final preferred concept.

Through this conscientiously crafted public and stakeholder engagement and design process, a clear and well supported vision and mission for the park emerged which states that ***"Prairie Winds is a well-loved, family-oriented destination park that is both a celebration of community spirit and a recreational centrepiece in northeast Calgary. It is a place that invites visitors to play, be active, recharge, and connect with their environment."***

The following five specific guiding principals were developed and used to guide design alternatives for the park:

- **Welcome all ages, cultures and abilities.** The pathways in the park are extremely popular, but are not all accessible; do not connect to all areas of the park, and some have flooding issues. The wading pool is extremely popular but there is a strong demand for greater appeal for a wider range of ages. The Design Development Plan upgrades the pathway network, provides improved and new entry points, rebuilds the wading pool, and expands the opportunities for water play to a wider range of ages.
- **Provide a range of spaces for year-round activities.** Several areas within the park are under-utilized and lack functionality. The Design Development Plan proposes to reclaim the space occupied by the decommissioned creek, rebuild the tennis courts in a better location with potential winter hockey rink use, and modernize the existing park centre building for more year-round use.
- **Protect and enhance the park's unique character.** The existing hill and large open spaces are important well-loved features of the park. There are currently several opportunities to enjoy the views both from the top of the hill in all directions and of the scenery within the park. The

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Design Development Plan retains these vital features and improves the viewpoint at the top of the hill, reconfigures existing seating and adds new seating to take advantage of the scenery throughout the park, retains the characteristic open green spaces and topography, and introduces more types of trees and shrubs in the park to add more colour, texture and seasonal interest.

• **Include spaces for families and communities to gather and celebrate.** The park's popularity for family picnics, community gatherings, and large public events pushes the limits of the current facilities. The Design Development Plan includes more bookable picnic shelters and adds water and power outlets to serve events and concerts, creating flexible spaces that allow for a range of activities from individual, to family, to large gatherings and festivals.

• **Provide places to play, learn and grow.** Since its creation, Prairie Winds Park was intended to be "a passive, family-oriented park that emphasizes extensive recreational opportunities". Although still popular, the existing play facilities are aging and are designed only for active play. The renewal of the park provides an opportunity to create a substantial new play destination with something for everyone that welcomes children of a wide range of ages to play, learn and grow. It also strives to incorporate other important types of play including exploratory, nature-based and imaginative play.

These principles and the vision/mission statement were reflected in the final design and in the significant support (over 90 per cent) received for the preferred plan. The *Prairie Winds Park Design Development Plan* (Attachment 1) builds on existing City plans, policies and initiatives; identifies public needs and priorities for the park; provides direction for environmental enhancement; and accommodates an engaging mix of civic, cultural and recreational uses appropriate to the area.

The preferred plan balances a mix of new amenities and activities such as the new cricket pitch, basketball courts, hilltop lookout and seasonal hockey rink with upgrades, to well-loved features such as improvements to the wading pool, pathways/circulation, play area, and park centre building. It also retains the significant characteristics of the park including the popular toboggan hill, park vegetation, soccer field and large open spaces for events and festivities. The move to relocate the tennis courts and main playground area also help to make the park more legible and welcoming while providing a great sense of place and arrival. These key features along with other proposed recommendations are captured on the Preferred Concept overview plan (Attachment 2).

With the completion of the Design Development Plan, the project moves into detailed design, approvals, and tendering for the implementation and construction of the plan. This work is expected to occur through the remainder of 2015, with phased construction anticipated to start in 2016 and finish in 2017.

Stakeholder Engagement, Research and Communication

The *Prairie Winds Park Design Development Plan* (Attachment 1) process included extensive research and analysis as well as public and stakeholder engagement to inform the planning and

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design process. Numerous external stakeholders groups as well as The City of Calgary business units and the general public were consulted through an iterative three-phased engagement strategy.

Parks reached out to a wide range external stakeholders for engagement, including: 11 community associations, local churches, social, cultural and youth groups, sports associations, recreation centres, the Calgary International Airport Authority, and the local MLA.

The three phases of engagement included: Phase 1: Your Park, Your Say (2014 July 14 – August 8); Phase 2: You Talked! We Listened (2014 October 27 – December 2); and Phase 3: Preferred Plan (2015 January 31 – February 14). A detailed summary of the engagement process and input received can be found in the Design Development Plan report (Attachment 1: Chapter 3 – page 51, Chapter 6 – page 67, and Chapter 8 – page 105).

Overall support for the Preferred Concept Plan (Attachment 2) was high with over 90 per cent (21.2 per cent agree; 69.4 per cent strongly agree) of respondents saying they felt the concept plan meets their vision for Prairie Winds Park.

Strategic Alignment

Several Council-approved planning and policy documents helped guide the planning process, including: *Action Plan 2015-2018*, *Municipal Development Plan (2009)*, *ImagineCalgary (2006)*, *2020 Sustainability Direction*, *Calgary Biodiversity Strategic Plan (2015)*, *Sustainable Building Policy (2004)*, *Urban Park Master Plan (1994)*, *Calgary Open Space Plan (2003)*, and other related administrative policy and strategic documents.

Social, Environmental, Economic (External)

Social

The redevelopment of this important regional park will allow better use of space and an opportunity to accommodate increased diversity and range of users, attracting residents of the adjacent communities as well as park users from across the city. The site specific design approach and response to local community needs provides a park that will play a significant role in the quality of life and recreation for a wide variety of citizens.

Environmental

The plan provides an opportunity to improve the biodiversity of plant material within the park, improving the health of the local urban forest and offers a possibility to introduce naturalized areas in this fully manicured site thereby reducing the area of intensively maintained green space in the park.

Economic (External)

Proper management of the park's assets promotes a sense of community ownership and pride. High quality park space favourably impacts both the park's image and property values within Calgary and provides an attraction for visitors and migrants to the city. An improved park environment may attract additional use and increase opportunities for large scale events and festivities generating economic benefits for The City and surrounding businesses.

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Financial Capacity

Current and Future Operating Budget

As the proposed capital improvements are implemented, impacts to operations will result out of additional park assets and increased usage. A preliminary analysis of current and anticipated operation impacts has been summarized in the Design Development Plan report (Attachment 1: Chapter 9.2 - page 118). Initial estimates indicate a 26.7 per cent (\$117,700) increase in operational costs per annum. Upon further analysis and closer to the completion of park construction (estimated 2017), Administration will bring forward a funding request through the budget process.

Current and Future Capital Budget

In 2013 May 27, partial funding to initiate the Design Development Plan was approved by Council in the amount of \$300,000. Furthermore, in 2014 November 04, full funding for the planning, design and redevelopment of Prairie Winds Park was approved by Council in the amount of \$11.6 million for a total approved amount of \$11.9 million for the project. This project is fully funded for capital construction through the Enmax Legacy Parks Program 499.

Risk Assessment

There are no significant risks associated with this issue and operational and project risks which have been identified are being managed.

REASON(S) FOR RECOMMENDATION(S):

A recommendation to approve the Prairie Winds Park Preferred Concept plan is supported by the substantial public and stakeholder endorsement for the plan. A thorough and transparent engagement process was undertaken to gain this support. Due to importance of this regional park site for northeast Calgary, redevelopment of the park will be vital to ensure its long term sustainability and value as open space for the numerous park users it serves.

ATTACHMENT(S)

1. Prairie Winds Park Design Development Plan report
2. Prairie Winds Park – Preferred Concept Plan