Community Parks Framework

edmonton.ca/**CommunityParksFramework**

TERRITORIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The lands on which Edmonton sits and the North Saskatchewan River that runs through it have been the sites of natural abundance, ceremony and culture, travel and rest, relationship building, making and trading for Indigenous peoples since time immemorial.

Edmonton is located within Treaty 6 Territory and within the homelands of the Métis Nation. We acknowledge this land as the traditional territories of many First Nations such as the Nehiyaw (Cree), Nakota Sioux (Stoney), Anishinaabe (Saulteaux/Ojibway), Niitsitapi (Blackfoot) and Dene peoples. The City of Edmonton owes its strength and vibrancy to these lands and the diverse Indigenous peoples whose ancestors' footsteps have marked this territory for centuries, as well as settlers from around the world who continue to be welcomed here and call Edmonton home. Together we call upon all our collective honoured traditions and spirits to work in building a great city for today and future generations.

THANK YOU

The Community Parks Framework was developed with the goal of improving access to community park amenities for all Edmontonians. Through this process the project team was able to witness the passion and dedication that so many people have for Edmonton's parks.

Thank you to the many groups at the City who supported the development of this framework, including Neighbourhood Services, Planning and Environment Services, Financial Services, Communications and Engagement, Infrastructure Planning and Design and Building Great Neighbourhoods.

Thank you to the Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues, and to the community league representatives that attended workshops, submitted questions and provided feedback. Thank you to the Edmonton Catholic School Board, the Edmonton Public School Board and the Conseil scolaire Centre-Nord for your support in the development of the framework. Thank you to the City of Calgary, the City of St. Albert and Strathcona County for sharing your knowledge.

Finally, thank you to every community member that has played a role in park development in Edmonton. Through the 40 years of the Neighbourhood Park Development Program, volunteers have dedicated countless hours to improving their community parks. During engagement for the framework we heard that there is still a strong desire for communities to come together on park projects. We are grateful for your contributions and look forward to all of the future opportunities to connect, share and learn from one another.

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INTRODUCTION

The Community Parks Framework is the City of Edmonton's approach to the prioritization of development and renewal of amenities within community parks. It is a tool the City will use to ensure important social, financial and community factors are considered when planning for renewal or development of community park amenities. The framework works to ensure there is a transparent and consistent approach to project prioritization.

The framework builds off of learnings from the Neighbourhood Park Development Program (NPDP), which will be phased out starting at the end of 2022. It reflects City strategic plans and policies, including ConnectEdmonton, City Plan and Breathe.

The framework recognizes the importance of providing all Edmontonians with access to quality park amenities, bringing people together and contributing to vibrant, diverse and sustainable communities.

BACKGROUND

Community Parks

Community parks are part of Edmonton's network of public open space. They are one of six types of parks defined in Breathe: Edmonton's Green Network Strategy.

Metropolitan Park	District Park	Community Park
Large feature parks intended to provide value to residents and visitors throughout Edmonton. Examples: Hawrelak Park Terwillegar Park Rundle Park	Large parks designed to meet the needs of multiple communities. High schools, arenas and leisure centres are often located on district parks. Examples: Callingwood Park Castledowns Park Mill Woods Park	Parks located within almost every neighbourhood. Community league licensed land and elementary schools are often located on community parks. Examples: Ermineskin Park Kitchener Park Cumberland Park
Pocket Park	**Greenway**	**Ecological**
Small open spaces to serve the nearby neighbourhood and may contain only one amenity. Examples: Otto Leslie Park Peace Garden Park Kainai Park	Linear, publicly accessible open spaces that are large enough to operate as parkland. Examples: Edmonton Grads Park Ribbon of Steel Park Hazeldean Greenway	Public areas intended to protect an area of land or water or both dominated by native vegetation in naturally occurring patterns. Examples: Clover Bar Natural Area Poplar Lake

Community Park Development

Previously, community park amenities were primarily delivered through the Neighbourhood Park Development Program (NPDP). With the NPDP, community groups initiated the development and renewal of amenities within community parks. The City provided a portion of the required funding for those projects and the community groups provided the remainder.

The program is nearly 40 years old and has undergone periodic reviews resulting in minor adjustments. Most recently, an audit of the NPDP was conducted in 2018. Changes were made by the City to address the audit recommendations and improve the NPDP. However; actions resulting from the audit did not address some fundamental challenges with the program.

Inequity and Inaccessibility

Under the NPDP, the development and renewal of community park amenities was initiated by community groups. Community groups were active participants working with City staff through all phases of the project and were also financial partners. This approach relied on community capacity, including significant time, effort and fundraising.

As a result, the NPDP has had the unintended consequence of creating inequity. In a review of data from 2009 to 2021, it is apparent that across the city there are a number of neighbourhoods that have not accessed the NPDP. In that same 12-year period, other neighbourhoods have accessed the program multiple times. This has resulted in areas of the city that have several new playgrounds and a variety of other community park amenities, while others do not provide the same level of service.

NPDP Funding Accessed per Neighbourhood (2009 - 2020)
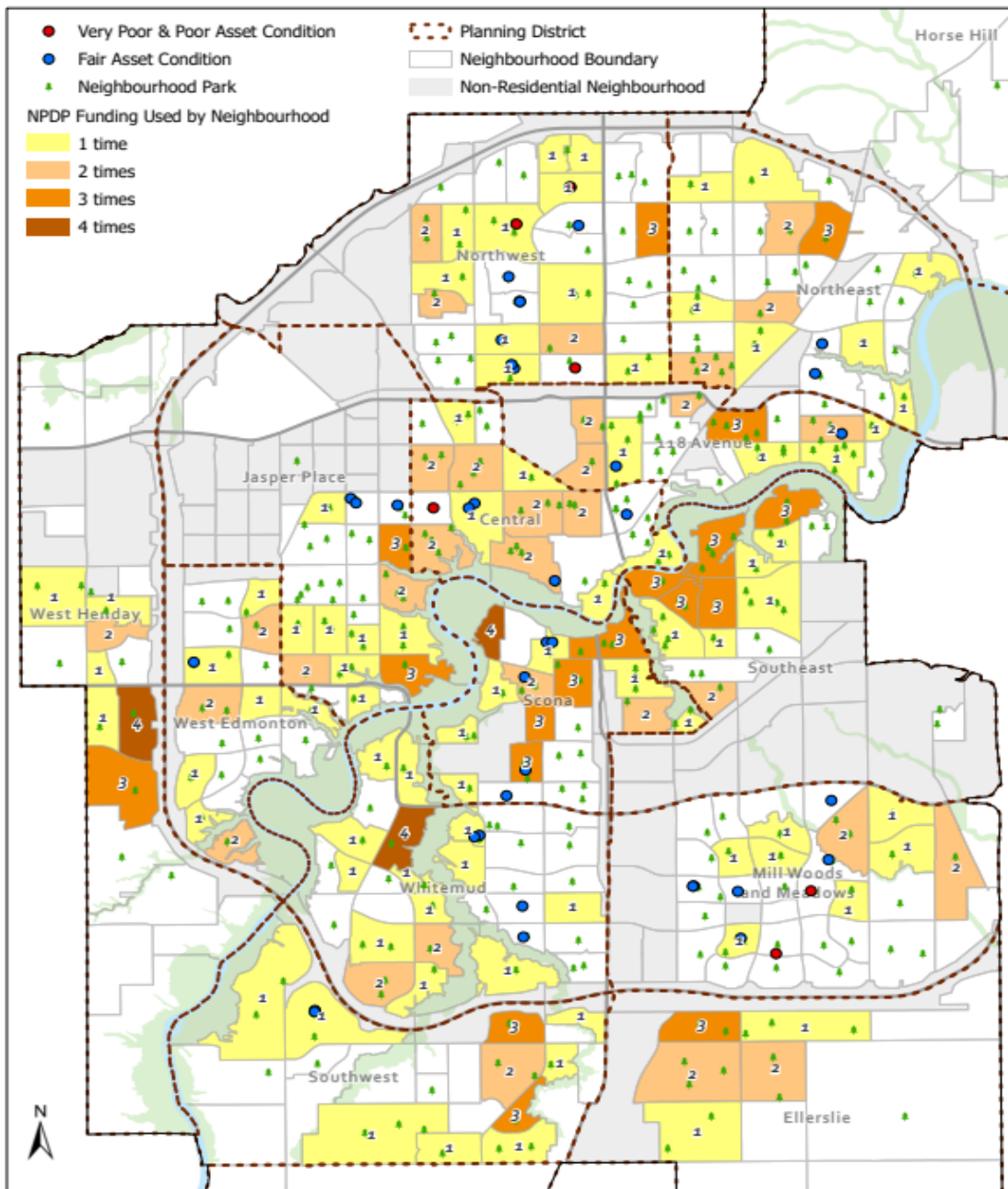
Asset Management Challenges

Because the NPDP relied on community initiation and funding, there were challenges aligning with best practices for asset management. Some amenities were renewed earlier than necessary while other amenities were not renewed when they reached the end of their lifecycle.

The City needs to manage the number of assets overall, and the cost for maintaining assets, as well as balance the investment in renewal and growth amenities. Doing this contributes to equity, as amenity renewal typically occurs in mature neighbourhoods while amenity growth typically occurs in new neighbourhoods.

Neighbourhood vs. District Approach

NPDP funding was allocated on a neighbourhood-level. Community groups were required to complete a needs assessment and undertake engagement specific to their neighbourhood. Projects were undertaken without regard for the overall distribution of amenities across the city. As a result, access to park amenities is often inconsistent across the city and there is a wide range in the frequency and distribution of different types of amenities.

A NEW APPROACH

The framework is intended to improve equity and access, to allow for efficient asset management and to ensure a more strategic approach is taken to community park development.

The framework will no longer require community initiation or cost sharing for the majority of community park amenities. With the framework, the City will initiate community park development and will develop and renew amenities in line with available funding.

The framework will use a data-driven approach to prioritize the development and renewal of park amenities. Park amenities will be built where they are needed and reflect the population and uniqueness of the community they serve.

DEVELOPING THE COMMUNITY PARKS FRAMEWORK

The Community Parks Framework was developed through analysis, reviews and engagement including:

- Current state analysis to map park amenities across the city including the quantity and distribution, as well as an assessment of the age and condition of each amenity.
- Environmental scanning to gain insight on how other municipalities across North America build and renew their park amenities. This scan focused on Calgary, Vancouver, Winnipeg, New York, Coquitlam and Markham.
- Plan and policy review of current City documents to identify opportunities for better alignment.
- Financial analysis to understand the capital impact and financial viability of the framework.
- Engagement:
  - Internal stakeholder engagement with City staff involved in community park development.
  - External engagement with the Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues, Community Leagues, School Boards, the Community Services Advisory Board and the public. Findings are detailed in the [What We Heard Report July 2022](#).

Alignment to City Policies and Plans

ConnectEdmonton

ConnectEdmonton is Edmonton's Strategic Plan. It identifies four strategic goals that are the focus areas for transformational change in the next ten years to achieve our vision for Edmonton in 2050. The strategic goals are Healthy City, Urban Places, Regional Prosperity and Climate Resilience. The framework strives to improve personal and community wellness through access to quality park amenities. By taking a city-wide, strategic approach to prioritization of park amenities, equity will be improved, contributing to the ConnectEdmonton goal: Edmonton is a neighbourly city with community and personal wellness that embodies and promotes equity for all Edmontonians.

The City Plan

The **City Plan** charts out how we will get to a future city - moving towards two million people. One of the "Big City Moves" in the City Plan is a Community of Communities - defined by a feeling of "living in a distinct community where you feel at home and connected." Community parks drive connection within neighbourhoods, ensure easy access to nature and public spaces, and play an important role in making a community feel like home. The framework will set amenity provision levels based on the district planning principle - ensuring needed park amenities are provided in each of the 15 districts, and supporting residents with improved local access to diverse recreation opportunities.

Breathe

Breathe is the Green Network Strategy to ensure that, as the city grows, each neighbourhood will be supported by a network of open space. The development of the framework took direction from the 10 guiding principles of Breathe. The framework uses the Breathe definition of community parks and draws on the provision strategies to guide prioritization of community park amenity development and renewal.

Urban Parks Management Plan

The Urban Parks Management Plan (UPMP) guides the acquisition, development, maintenance, preservation and use of parkland. UPMP notes shared-level development for parks. Through UPMP, community groups cost-share development of certain amenities on parks such as playgrounds, spray decks, walkways, and shade shelters. The framework will not align with UPMP as it will remove the cost-share requirement for core and secondary amenities. The need for an update to UPMP has been identified. The provision levels in the framework can be updated, as required, to accommodate changes to the UPMP.

Vision and Guiding Principles

Vision
Edmonton's community parks will foster the well-being of individuals by enabling all to engage in meaningful, equitable, safe, accessible outdoor experiences and activities.

Guiding Principles

Planning

Ensure every citizen has access to quality community park amenities.

Align planning with the City's strategic vision and the City Plan.

Partnering

Develop and renew community parks in collaboration with the community.

Strengthen existing relationships and build new connections with community members.

Placemaking

Create community parks that support vibrant, dynamic and diverse experiences year-round.

Create community parks that are multi-functional to support social, mental and physical well-being.

Preserving

Design park amenities that align with environmental, ecological and sustainability principles.

Build community parks that are robust, durable and safe.

THE FRAMEWORK

The framework is a tool to prioritize the development and renewal of amenities in the City's nearly 400 community parks. Amenities have been grouped into categories and targets have been identified for the optimal quantity and distribution of each type of amenity. Areas where there are gaps in amenities will be ranked using a prioritization process that will allow the City to effectively plan and deliver needed infrastructure. In addition to gaps, other considerations, like the park's proximity to an elementary school or the population density of a neighbourhood, will be used to identify the highest priority areas and amenities.

Project prioritization will be completed by the City each four-year capital budget cycle, consistent with how other City assets are managed. When determining how resources will be allocated, consideration will be given to the initial financial investment, ongoing maintenance costs and the cost to renew the amenity at the end of its lifecycle. Cost-saving efficiencies will be explored, such as grouping projects together or coordinating with other projects such as Neighbourhood Renewal.

Amenity Categories

Community park amenities have been grouped into four categories which define what amenities can be expected in community parks. The categories also define the role of other organizations in the provision of these amenities.

Core Amenities

Core amenities are the highest priority for the City to provide and are generally recommended in each community park as funding allows. Examples of core amenities are playgrounds and gathering spaces (e.g. shade shelters and/or picnic tables), pathways, park signage and site furnishings.

Core amenities are provided by the City and complement what is provided by schools and land developers.

Secondary Amenities

Secondary amenities are valued amenities that should be accessible across the city but will not necessarily be provided in every community park. The location of secondary amenities is proposed to follow the City Plan Districts and should be found, at minimum, within each of the 15 City Districts. Secondary amenities could include spray parks, bike bumps, basketball courts, skatepark elements and exercise equipment.

Secondary amenities are provided by the City and complement what is provided by schools and land developers.

Speciality Amenities

The framework does not guide the distribution of speciality amenities. The provision of speciality amenities is guided by existing City policies or strategies, for example dog-off leash areas. Speciality amenities include things that are more unique and will be considered on a case-by-case basis. In some cases the City will deliver these amenities and in other

cases they will be provided in partnership with other organizations. Examples include wildlife gardens, interpretive signage, wayfinding signage and art elements.

Community-Led Amenities

Community-led amenities are located predominantly on City-owned land (that is subject to an agreement with the City) such as a lease, license or maintenance agreement. Examples of these amenities are community halls, ice rinks, community gardens and changeable copy signs. Community-led amenities are delivered through a separate process. The framework will not set distribution and quality targets for community-led amenities. These amenities are planned, funded and operated by other organizations with the City providing approvals, guidance and project management support.

Provision Targets

To identify priorities, the framework establishes distribution and quality provision targets. These targets allow the City to measure and evaluate success. Achieving the provision targets will be a long-term process. To ensure progress, the City will develop a sustainable funding model for capital that responds to operational requirements and local needs *(Breathe, 4.10 Sustainable Funding)*.

Distribution

Distribution refers to how frequently amenities will be found in community parks across the city and, as a result, how accessible they are for Edmontonians. This is based on the four amenity categories (core, secondary, speciality and community-led) described above.

Quality

Quality refers to the age, condition, experience value and safety of community park amenities.

Age

Amenities typically have a defined lifecycle and older amenities need to be replaced or removed as their condition deteriorates. This lifecycle helps to ensure amenities reflect modern design and safety requirements, respond to changing community needs and reduce costly maintenance of aging amenities.

The age of community parks amenities in Edmonton varies substantially, and there is an ongoing need to budget for replacement.

Condition

The condition of each amenity in a Community Park is assessed on predetermined frequencies and classified as Very Good, Good, Fair, Poor or Very Poor (or unknown, in the case of unassessed amenities). The City will take action to prevent assets from existing in 'Very Poor' condition as damaged equipment is replaced or removed.

Experience Value

An assessment of an amenity based on its intended functionality, accessibility and overall experience. Amenities should generate diverse opportunities and experiences, which may include accessible or culturally relevant features, that suit various user's needs, interests and abilities.

Existing amenities differ based on their size, age and equipment, and may not deliver the experience users expect from that amenity type.

Emerging Issues

Park amenity design, installation and operation is regulated by internal City standards and national safety standards. The City monitors amenities to ensure that safe conditions are maintained. Occasionally, safety or operational issues arise that may be best addressed through renewal.

Targets

Amenity Category	Examples	Distribution Target	Quality Target
Core amenities	Playgrounds, gathering spaces (shade shelters and/or picnic tables) and supportive amenities.	Generally found in every Community Park.	Within the assets typical life expectancy, in good or fair condition, within the target for experience value and meeting safety standards.
Secondary amenities	Basketball courts, spray decks, fitness equipment, skateboard elements, bike bumps.*	Minimum of one of each type of secondary amenity in every City Plan District, once a certain population threshold has been reached.	
Specialty amenities	Art elements, wayfinding signage, wildlife gardens, dog-off leash areas.	No minimum target. Provided on an opportunity basis OR Guided by other City strategies, policies and operational capacity.	
Community led amenities	Community halls, ice rinks, community gardens, changeable copy signs.	Not set by the Community Parks Framework.	

*For secondary amenities, the minimum target is one of each type of amenity per City Plan District. The target will differ based on the type of amenity, and will be based on City strategies, policies and operational capacity.

The provision targets outlined above will allow for the identification of gaps in the distribution and quality of community park amenities across the city. Community park amenities that do not meet distribution or quality provisions will be identified for prioritization. Once this is complete, the City will look at other considerations to refine the list of priority projects.

Other Considerations

Consideration	Description
Elementary School Proximity	The co-location of amenities with elementary schools.
Access to Similar Amenities	The ease or difficulty of accessing a similar amenity that meets the quality target.
Population Density	The number of people living in the area served by the amenity.
Demographics (primarily age)	Primary age groups of the population living in the area served by the amenity.
Social Vulnerability Index	An Alberta Government metric that identifies neighbourhoods whose socioeconomic conditions and demographic profile make them more susceptible to poverty and, as a result, limit opportunities for recreation and leisure.
Planned Growth	Additional approved growth in a neighbourhood or district, identified through area structure plans (ASP) area redevelopment plans (ARP) and the City Plan Growth Management Framework.
Coordination with other projects	The potential to increase efficiency by coordinating community park development or renewal with other City or on site school board projects.
Site Specific Considerations	Park site specific requirements, constraints or opportunities.

IMPLEMENTATION

Delivering Community Parks

The framework guides the prioritization of community park amenities for development and renewal. Once priorities have been identified and funding has been secured, projects will proceed by following City processes for design and construction. The City will lead the funding and building of community park amenities with collaboration from the community.

Funding

Funding requests for community park projects will be advanced by City administration for consideration during each Capital Budget cycle. These requests will be based on the number of priority projects identified through the framework.

The City will work with other levels of government and partner groups within the City to identify opportunities for accessing grants to supplement funding allocated within Capital Budgets.

Collaborating

After identifying priorities and securing funding, the City will move forward on initiating community park projects. Community engagement will continue to be a vital component of each project to ensure community parks meet the needs and reflect the uniqueness of each area. The community will be engaged on design elements such as themes and equipment types. Following the City's Public Engagement Framework, the City will develop inclusive public engagement plans that provide an opportunity for all voices to be heard.

Building

In alignment with policy C591 Capital Project Governance, community park projects will be implemented following the Project Development and Delivery Model .

The Project Development and Delivery Model is the approach the Integrated Infrastructure Services Department will take to enhance capital infrastructure project oversight. This process involves structured reviews of projects at key points throughout the IIS project lifecycle.

This model operates within a develop/deliver approach where teams work together through all stages of the project. This will ensure further reliability, accuracy, and transparency in estimates of budget and schedule for projects.

MEASURING SUCCESS

The Community Parks Framework will be implemented in 2023 and will be applied throughout the 2023 - 2026 capital budget cycle. The framework will be evaluated prior to the 2027 - 2030 capital budget. Applicable City policies and strategies will be assessed to determine if the categories of amenities, provision targets or the other considerations need to be adjusted.