

“There is no question that individuals of all ages and all walks of life see Edmonton’s park system as a prized asset that generates enormous pride.”

Integrated Stakeholder Consultation Plan,
the Dagny Partnership

SECTION
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INTRODUCTION

Edmonton has prepared the Urban Parks Management Plan (UPMP) to guide the future acquisition, design, construction, maintenance and animation (use) of City parks, river valley and natural areas.

Alberta’s capital city is a growing, vibrant and culturally rich centre of 700,000 people. Residents enjoy a lush diversity of parks, natural areas, trees, trails and recreation facilities that help shape individuals, neighbourhoods and the city as a whole. This green infrastructure makes Edmonton an appealing place to live throughout the year and enhances the ecological integrity of the region.

In 2005, Edmonton Parks, with an operating budget of \$30,181,000, provided residents, guests and tourists with a wealth of recreation and leisure opportunities/options.

Inventory	2005 Actuals
Flowers planted (sq. meters)	10,530
Outdoor ice (sq. meters)	130,750
Turf (hectares)	4,631
Playgrounds	321
Sportsfields (bookable)	1,735
Outputs	2005 Actuals
Flower maintenance (sq. meters)	111,074
Outdoor ice maintained (sq. meters)	4,985,000
Turf mowing (hectares)	41,110
Playground utility visits	7,608
Sportsfield bookings (hours)	111,351

The 48 – kilometre – long, city stretch of the North Saskatchewan River has 22 major parks. No wonder it has become known as the Ribbon of Green!



Heritage Festival at Hawrelak Park

1.1 Why Parks?

Parks are complex elements of a city. Well-planned, well-maintained parks benefit a community in many, many ways. Quite often people view parks as simply “play” places. While play remains important, parks offer many other benefits.

Social capital is created in parks. Social capital refers to the relationships people create when they interact with one another and build community from a social perspective. Parks provide a place to meet, to interact in a shared environment, to celebrate differences and to enjoy the company of family and friends. In other words, they provide a place for social capital to grow. Parks development is one of the quickest and most effective ways to build a sense of community and improve quality of life. This is especially important in Edmonton at this time as we become a more culturally, economically and socially diverse community.

A well-planned park system contributes to healthier citizens. In North America, rates of obesity and chronic diseases such as type II diabetes and heart disease are increasing at alarming rates. Improper diet, a sedentary lifestyle and a lack of exercise contribute to these increases. Accessible, diverse parks play a role in encouraging people to become more active. They breathe life into a city. Open spaces for playing catch or frisbee, trails for running,

walking or riding bikes, off-leash areas for playing with dogs—these are just a few examples of how parks provide active-living opportunities. Of course, parks alone will not reduce long-term health care costs, but creative urban design can make a difference.

Natural capital is preserved in parks. Wildlife habitats and unique landforms are preserved inside and outside the river valley. Positive outcomes such as river bank stability are a result of a well-planned park and public open space system. Parks preserve a lasting natural legacy that enhances a community’s awareness and appreciation of the natural world. They give people a place to connect with nature and provide respite from busy lives.

Edmontonians place a high value on natural areas for their intrinsic value: for their scenic beauty, for wildlife viewing opportunities and for the experience of nature as part of the community quality of life. Now, more than ever, a “green infrastructure” will contribute to the healthy and efficient functioning of Edmonton. A vision for the future park system ensures that the City will benefit from the rich, green legacy that Edmontonians require and enjoy.



Parks provide positive economic benefits.

Parks enhance property values, increase municipal revenues, and attract home buyers and retirees. Real property values are enhanced in areas that are adjacent to parks and open space, particularly passive parks. Increased property values go hand-in-hand with increased municipal tax revenues. As well, festivals and special events held in recreation facilities like Commonwealth Stadium provide economic benefits to businesses. (For example, the 2005 World Master Games contributed \$36.4 million to the City and \$70.3 million to the Canadian economy as a whole.) Finally, companies and workers are attracted to cities with a high quality of life. Parks, open spaces and urban natural capital help define that quality of life.

Parks improve the image and character of a community. Parks can stem the downturn of a commercial area, support the stabilization of faltering neighbourhoods and provide a landmark element and point of pride in a community. When working in concert with other issues such as reducing crime, eliminating graffiti, or managing traffic, park development and improvement offer quick and tangible actions that help redefine a neighbourhood. They revitalize individuals and communities.

1.2 Scope of Urban Parks Management Plan

The City of Edmonton's *Urban Parks Management Plan: 2006-2016* (UPMP) provides strategic direction for the acquisition, design, construction, maintenance, preservation and animation (or use) of parks. The Plan spans ten years and provides direction for community, City and school facility land planning. The strategic direction also outlines parkland management principles for the City and its development partners (both not-for-profit, community-based organizations and for-profit developers). This policy document will drive future park decision-making.

***P**ublic parks are seen as
undeniably a core
public service that should
remain in the public
domain.”*

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1.3 Mandate and Context

In 2000, the City of Edmonton's Community Services Department identified the need for a comprehensive review of park management (the first since 1989). The UPMP is the response to that need. It is a non-statutory plan (i.e., provides policy direction) and is approved by City Council. The UPMP builds on, reinforces and provides the framework for a number of other City plans. These include:

Edmonton Municipal Development Plan: This Municipal Development Plan guides the future growth and development of many aspects of the City, including recreation, the environment and other factors relevant to parks management.

Integrated Services Strategy: This plan was developed by the Community Services Department and identified the need for a comprehensive review of park management in Edmonton. The Plan was approved by City Council in 2000.

Ribbon of Green Master Plan: This document was developed by the City and focuses on the River Valley and Ravine Parks. It provides more specific details than the UPMP. Site specific master plans provide an even more in-depth look at the River Valley and Ravine Parks (e.g., Terwillegar Park Master Plan, Louise McKinney Master Plan, etc.).

Table Lands Plans: A number of different plans focus on the parkland outside of the River Valley. These include Area and Neighbourhood Structure Plans, Area Redevelopment Plans and Servicing Concept Design Briefs to name a few. Site specific master plans provide an even more in-depth look at the Table Land parks (e.g., Airway Park Site Development Master Plan, Matt Berry School and Park Site Master Plan, etc.).

The Recreation Facility Master Plan (2005-2015), approved in 2004, provides strategic direction for major recreation facilities (e.g., arenas, pools, recreation centres, etc.). The Urban Parks Management Plan addresses land considerations for larger facilities with bricks and mortar (e.g., Clareview Recreation Centre, Commonwealth Stadium, outdoor pools, etc.) or open space with controlled access (e.g., golf courses, ski hills, etc.). However, community league facilities are part of UPMP. School facility construction must meet City Zoning Bylaws, but school facility planning is the responsibility of the boards in consultation with the City.



Parks Business Plan 2006 - 2008: The parks program described in this plan balances efforts regarding sustainable parks maintenance and operations, environmental integrity and the creation of an attractive city for residents and visitors. The business plan describes the branch accomplishments in 2005 and defines specific direction for 2006 and beyond through descriptions of key strategic initiatives at the corporate, department and branch level.

The Urban Parks Management Plan: 2006-2016: is a comprehensive, corporate plan with implications for a number of City departments, including:

- Community Services: park programmers, community development workers, social workers, recreational facility planners, emergency reponse staff and field booking staff.
- Asset Management and Public Works: land planners, land managers, park designers, park construction staff, park operation staff and drainage engineers.
- Planning and Development: urban design and planning staff.
- Transportation department: Transportation engineers.
- Corporate Services: accountants.

While the Plan has its origins in the Community Services Department, recent reorganization means the plan functions as an Asset Management and Public Works plan. Since the plan reflects the implications of park planning, development and operation on all corporate entities, this shift in “residence” will not impair implementation of the Plan.

1.4 Goals

The *Urban Parks Management Plan: 2006-2016* has three specific goals:

1. To provide a vision specific to Edmonton’s park system;
2. To develop strategic direction (e.g., service themes, policies, etc.) that will guide decision making; and
3. To develop park management instructions (e.g., guidelines, standards, etc.) that support the vision, service themes and policies and ensure consistency in implementation.



Westridge Neighbourhood Park

1.5 UPMP Development Process

In 2002, a project team was put in place to lead the development of the *Urban Parks Management Plan: 2006-2016* (UPMP). From the onset, two advisory teams provided guidance to the project team. An internal advisory team (Project Matrix Team) included representation from Community Services, Planning and Development, Transportation, Corporate Services, the Edmonton Public School Board and Edmonton Catholic School Board. An external advisory team (Urban Parks Advisory Group) included representation from the community and academia, and included individuals with expertise in public policy, environmental planning, park planning, arts, culture and community activism.

The development of the UPMP consisted of four distinct phases.

Phase I (February 2002—November 2004): This initial phase focused on identifying need, conducting research and consulting with a broad cross section of the community. Specific tasks included:

- A community needs assessment (the results of this needs assessment are published in the *Integrated Stakeholder Consultation Plan*).
- A review of past and projected recreation, leisure and other relevant trends.
- A literature review, including internet-based research.
- A review of the provincial legislation concerning park system acquisition and development.
- A standards review to determine the effectiveness of City acquisition and design practices.
- A municipal practices review to look at how other municipalities have planned for parks and natural areas (e.g., parkland classification systems, etc.).
- A review of key strategic corporate documents (e.g., *Edmonton Municipal Development Plan, Future Schools Site Study, Smart Choices, Walkable Edmonton, Wetlands Conservation Strategy, etc.*).

This research was conducted primarily in-house by or for the project team with the exception of the *Integrated Stakeholder Consultation Plan*.



Of these tasks, the community needs assessment provided the project team with its most significant piece of research, the *Integrated Stakeholder Consultation Plan*. This document:

- Summarizes and analyzes the workshops and focus groups held with key internal and external stakeholder (e.g., other City departments, Aboriginal Peoples, sportsfields users and umbrella groups like the Urban Development Institute, the Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues and both school boards).
- Reports on the one-day Parks Summit that included representatives from community leagues, festival groups, environmental groups, sport groups, etc.
- Synthesizes the feedback received in a 600-person telephone survey of the general public.

Phase II (December 2004 - June 2005): The second phase used the research gathered in Phase I to develop a draft version of UPMP for community review. The draft plan aimed to reflect the needs of the public, as well as meet administrative requirements to ensure its effectiveness as a park planning and management tool.

Phase III (July 2005 - October 2005): During the third phase, internal and external stakeholders were invited to provide feedback on the draft plan. Approximately 450 hard copies of the draft plan were distributed to stakeholders, who were invited to share their thoughts by letter, by email or by completing a survey. As well, the general public was invited to view the draft document on the internet and at public libraries and provide feedback. Three public open houses and one with Parks Summit participants were held to discuss the draft plan with users and stakeholders. The verbal input received at these open houses was recorded by the project team to include in a revised version of the document.

A broad range of stakeholders provided input/feedback, including City administration, the general public, user groups and umbrella groups like the Urban Development Institute and Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues.

Phase IV (November 2005 - March 2006): In the final phase, the input received in Phase III was used to revise the draft version of Urban Parks Management Plan into a final report. The Plan was then reviewed and approved by the City's Senior Management Team and forwarded to City Council for approval.