

imagine Parks



*A long-term vision of Calgary's
public parks and open space*



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Context of The City of Calgary



88 per cent
of Calgarians state the overall quality of life in Calgary is good or very good



90 per cent
of Calgarians agree that Calgary is on the right track to being a better city



95 per cent
of Calgarians rate the overall state of Calgary's environment as good or very good



96 per cent
of Calgarians are satisfied with Calgary's pathway system



97 per cent
of Calgarians state that Calgary parks and other open spaces are an important city program or service



95 per cent
of Calgarians are satisfied with Calgary parks and other open spaces



CANADA

CALGARY

The median age of Calgarians is 37 years (2011)



1.2 million residents



5,600
public park sites



7,821 ha
are managed by Parks,
53 per cent
are natural parks



150
off-leash areas



2,280
participants in the 2014
Pathway and River Clean Up



+800 km
of pathways

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Letter from the Director

Why *imagineParks*?

Parks are an essential part of quality urban living and parks and pathways have a special place in the hearts of Calgarians. We value our parks, actively using them for sports, festivals and exercise as well as for quiet respite and enjoyment of nature. Great parks contribute to healthy communities and a high quality of life in Calgary.

The *imagineParks* vision serves as a foundation for the future of City parks. It helps us re-imagine our public open spaces so that they have optimal benefits and value in the future. Undertaking a 30-year vision document pushes us to think in decades rather than years. Over the last 10 years alone, we have seen the global population shift to where more people live in cities than in rural environments. We have seen the increase in extreme weather events and the word resilience has become part of our common language. Across the world in parks, we see the emerging research around the strong correlation of urban parks and health; both physical and mental. Parks will also be an increasingly important part of insuring cities sustain acceptable biodiversity with healthy air, water, flora and fauna.

In 2010, The City of Calgary Parks celebrated our 100th anniversary. It was a time to celebrate our public open spaces and appreciate how much we've grown and accomplished as a city. It spurred us to more fully revere and celebrate our historic parks and cultural landscapes but it was also a time to look forward and imagine the future. We posed the question – should we re-imagine the future? This *imagineParks* document came out of asking that question.

What is important moving forward at this point in 2014, is the visionary thoughts and ideas that Calgarians have brought to the table, their passion, their support and their concern that parks continue to be an integral part of living a great life in Calgary.

We thank every Calgarian that participated with us in our many conversations about the future of Calgary parks. We trust we have captured your thoughts and ideas.



Anne Charlton
Parks Director
The City of Calgary





imagineParks Alignment



IMAGINEPARKS ALIGNMENT

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imagineParks

***imagineParks* is a 30-year vision that sets the overall strategic direction for the development and management of public parks and open space in Calgary.**

Our vision nests with *imagineCALGARY*, a long-range urban sustainability plan for Calgary, and the Municipal Development Plan, which addresses future land uses, services and transportation systems within the city. The Municipal Development Plan (MDP) envisions Calgary within a 60-year timeframe. *imagineParks* is our vision of where we would like to be half way to MDP targets.

imagineParks commits us to action. As stewards of Calgary parks and open spaces, *imagineParks* serves as the foundation for 10-year strategic action plans, four-year business plans and budgets, and one-year performance objectives.

The plan recognizes the need for flexibility and to adapt to the changing needs of citizens and evolving organizational structures. Collaboration will also be vital to implementing our vision.



Vision

Calgary's parks and open space are cherished places that connect us to nature, our heritage and one another.

Mission

We enable, contribute and sustain dynamic communities through great parks and open space.



Guiding Principles

Our guiding principles reflect the values identified by Calgarians through our *imagineParks* engagement process and are the foundation for our vision of Calgary's parks and open space.



Be accountable and responsive

We are accountable for efficient, effective and responsive management of public open space and consider economic, social, environmental, smart growth, organizational and financial sustainability objectives. We are aligned with best practices and research, and strive to exceed all federal, provincial and municipal guidelines.

Make people a priority

We ensure a variety of public open spaces are accessible to all regardless of age, income, gender, culture or ability. These spaces provide opportunities for rest and relaxation, social interaction, community vitality and a range of recreational, cultural and educational experiences.



Conserve biodiversity and the natural environment

We aim to conserve biodiversity in the city and recognize healthy, functioning ecosystems are essential to our personal, community and economic well-being.



Be adaptable and resilient

We are structured to function cohesively and efficiently. We systematically adapt to and respond to changing needs, climate and major events. We are able to continually deliver the programs and services that Calgarians need.



Our Plan at a Glance

Below illustrates the framework that outlines our vision and goals of *imagineParks*.



We recognize that to achieve the vision for Calgary's parks and open space our actions in each category will require being highly cooperative and dependent on each element's success.

Focus on People

Intended Outcomes

The direct link between human wellness and access to high-quality open space is understood and acted upon. A diversity of public parks, pathways and natural areas are enjoyed, resulting in personal and community well-being. Community stewardship and cultural preservation demonstrate value for, and ownership of our parks and open space.



Goal 1.1 Responsive to Citizens

Parks enables and responds to changing citizen needs with diverse and equitable programs, events and amenities.

Goal 1.2 Individual and Community Well-being

Parks and programs support healthy lifestyle choices.

Goal 1.3 Stewardship and Ecological Literacy

Parks creates stewards of the environment in our communities by collaborating with citizens and strategic partners.

Current work

- ▶ Collaborate with practitioners, researchers, community organizations and businesses to improve park design and service delivery.
- ▶ Facilitate volunteer work in parks and open space.
- ▶ Deliver outcome-based programming that links activities in natural environments to stewardship.
- ▶ Ensure a range of facilities, amenities and park types and sizes are accessible to all and reflect citizen expectations.

Next steps

- ▶ Launch a city-wide customer level of service model.
- ▶ Deliver park programs and initiatives that contribute to a sense of community.
- ▶ Implement guidelines to allow for the allocation of recreational open space in business parks.
- ▶ Implement guidelines to determine appropriate allocation of “Wi-Fi hotspots” in parks and open space.
- ▶ Implement a score to measure if park design and services are providing intergenerational, economic and gender equity and security and are adaptive to changing community demographics.
- ▶ Develop educational curriculum and provide experiential learning for staff, volunteers and Calgarians.
- ▶ Regularly evaluate the operation and programming of parks and park facilities to ensure alignment with emerging trends and that community needs are being met.



Skating on Elbow River circa 1910s



Skating on Bowness Lagoon

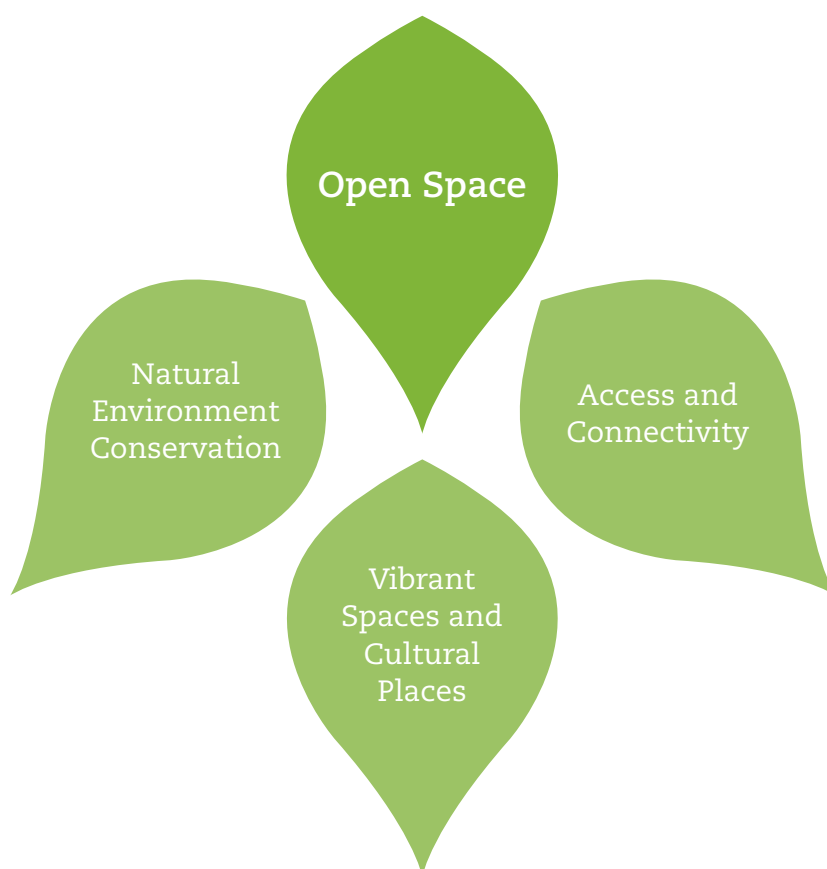


All year round skating rink

Focus on Open Space

Intended Outcomes

Conserving the natural environment results in personal, social, economic and environmental benefits. Parks, open space and biodiversity are recognized as critical to quality of life as Calgary develops. Accessible, connected, healthy, diverse, beautiful and vibrant places define Calgary's parks and open space.



Goal 2.1 Natural Environment Conservation

Calgary's natural environment is conserved through stewardship, planning and management.

Goal 2.2 Vibrant Spaces and Cultural Places

Our parks are valued pieces of Calgary's heritage, natural history and identity.

Goal 2.3 Access and Connectivity

Communities grow and renew in a way that supports access to connectivity of open space.

Current work

- ▶ Develop and implement a strategy to conserve and advance land and aquatic biodiversity in Calgary.
- ▶ Implement the Cultural Landscapes Strategic Plan, the Urban Forestry Strategic Plan, the Cemeteries Strategic Plan and Water Management Strategic Plan.
- ▶ Provide educational and interpretive components in parks and open space to enhance user experiences with respect to landscapes of ecological, cultural and archeological significance.

Next steps

- ▶ Implement an open space acquisition and disposition strategy to more effectively manage land and service delivery.
- ▶ Identify future regional park location sectors and ensure a timely funding and acquisition process.
- ▶ Monitor land and water health to better understand the impacts of development and to act accordingly.
- ▶ Implement construction guidelines to minimize the impacts on soil, protected vegetation and habitat.
- ▶ Collaborate on planning a pilot community that contributes to ecosystem services such as clean air and water, waste break down and replenishment of ecological processes.
- ▶ Implement storm water management guidelines for new and redeveloped parks and open space.
- ▶ Implement an alternative energy production strategy for parks and open space, for example composting, animal waste, wind power, solar energy, etc.
- ▶ Implement an integrated waste strategy for parks and open space.
- ▶ Implement a public art and culture guideline for parks and open space.
- ▶ Establish strategies so mowed turf becomes a choice not a default.



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Street trees

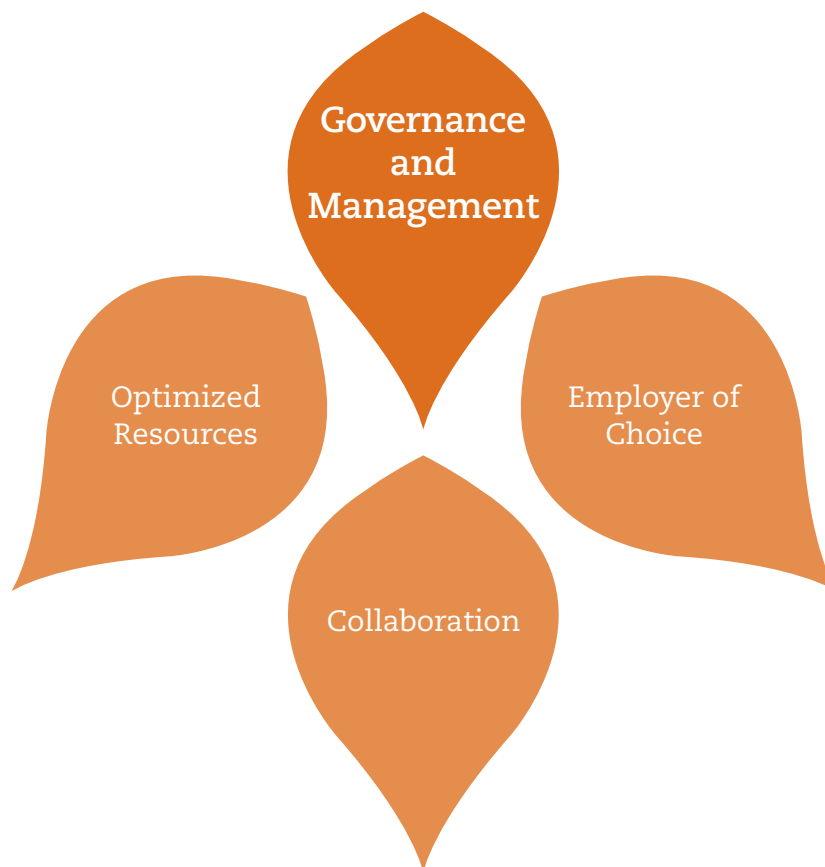


Playfield

Focus on Governance and Management

Intended Outcomes

Calgary's parks and open space contribute to the city's economic well-being through efficient management of resources: human, financial and technical. Collaboration with citizens, wellness and educational institutes and the private sector fosters the provision of high-quality parks and open space.



Goal 3.1 Optimized Resources

Sound management of parks and programs contributes to Calgary's economic, environmental and social sustainability.

Goal 3.2 Collaboration

People contribute to and collaborate in decisions that advance Calgary's high-quality park system.

Goal 3.3 Employer of Choice

Parks' work environment attracts and retains quality employees dedicated to serving citizens.

Current work

- ▶ Continue to refine and utilize the Parks Asset Reporting & Information System (PARIS) to improve service delivery.
- ▶ Advance strategies to meaningfully engage stakeholders in Parks initiatives, programming and design.
- ▶ Provide communications to engage a diverse set of communities.
- ▶ Establish guidelines for local retail and commercial activities in parks and open space.
- ▶ Advance collaborative relationships with specialists interested in advancing parks and open space initiatives.
- ▶ Advance employee recruitment and retention strategies.
- ▶ Recognize the economic, environmental and social value of parks and open space in growth management and capital project spending decisions.
- ▶ Advance a city-wide park asset management plan.

Next steps

- ▶ Implement an *imagineParks* score to measure progress towards the vision for Calgary parks and open space.
- ▶ Embed resiliency into the planning and operating of parks and open space to minimize the impact of major disruptive events.
- ▶ Develop guidelines to formalize a process to seek alternative sources of funding for initiatives and programming in parks and open space.
- ▶ Implement career-long learning and training programs including opportunities for career cross-training and ongoing growth and development for staff.
- ▶ Develop post-secondary student orientation programs that attract arborists, biologists, hydrologists, wildlife experts, soil specialists, facility management, education and other professionals to Parks.



Small booths in parks that sell food

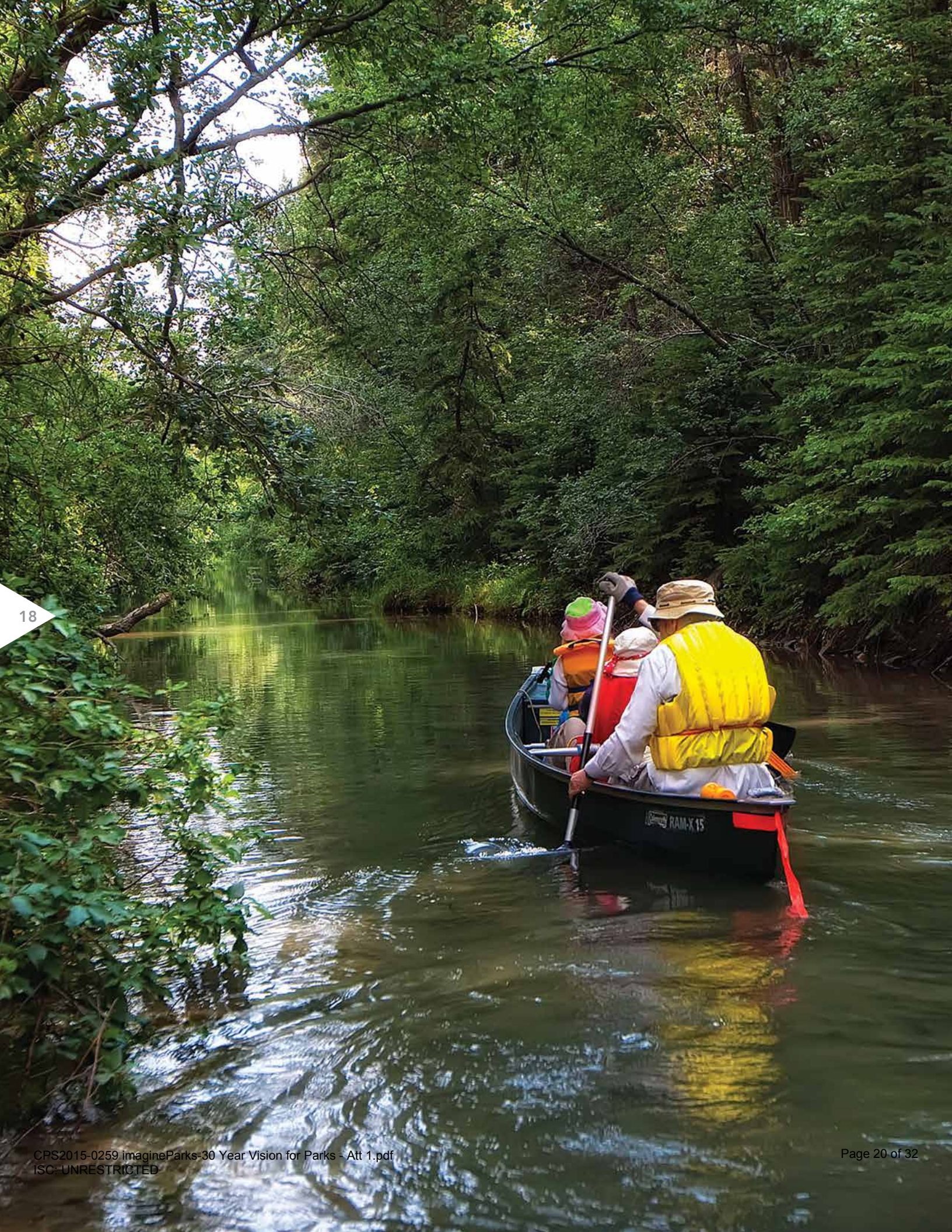


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Brentwood community garden



River Café



Measuring Success

How will we know we are successful?

Establishing an *imagineParks* score will help us monitor our progress towards our vision. Measuring indicators of success in each of the nine goal areas will identify where we are performing well and where we need to adjust strategies.

Our 10-year strategic plans will be indicators of how well we are moving towards the 30-year vision. Performance measures developed for these plans will be our indicators of success.



How We Arrived Here

Process

Today, The City of Calgary Parks maintains, manages and/or stewards approximately 12 per cent of all land within the city. As the steward of parks and open space, The City of Calgary Parks facilitated the development of *imagineParks*, engaging Calgarians, community organizations, practitioners and other levels of government; researching best practices, science and trends; and ensuring alignment with related plans and legislation.

Our engagement included receiving more than 1,600 detailed responses from citizens who participated in qualitative focus groups, workshops and online and telephone surveys. We collected input from stakeholder groups, City staff, subject matter experts and citizens, including frequent and infrequent park users.

We consistently heard that Calgarians enjoy the quality of the city's parks, but recognized the related costs and challenges given the increasing number of user groups, societal changes and ongoing funding requirements for our parks and open space system in Calgary. *imagineParks* was developed recognizing the often competing challenges in high-quality parks and open space planning and management.

Wellness

In developing this plan we reviewed studies and were fascinated by the advancing research revealing the important roles public access to parks have in our wellbeing. For example, researchers are informing that by providing a view of nature helps speed patient recovery time, lessen the amount of prescribed pain medications and have fewer post-op complications.

We learned that there appears to be a correlation between low levels of access to nature and a decrease in attention spans, whereas views to nature improve cognitive function, impulse control and resilience to stressful life events. We also discovered that simply spending time in a park improves our ability to concentrate.

Other interesting research indicated communities that provide visually accessible rich vegetation have lower reported anxiety disorders among citizens. These settings help induce a greater sense of community, generosity, trust and civic-mindedness. As a result, loneliness, aggression and crime decrease.

This snapshot of the research broadly indicates that we need to have physical ties to nature. Parks can have a key role in preventative health care and wellness as well as provide us with a context for a larger understanding and appreciation of life.

Public parks provide meeting spaces with few social barriers. They give us a sense of place, of meaning, imprints on our collective memory, and are a fundamental structure in creating connections in both ourselves and the greater community. In summary, having access to – and spending time in – beautiful, healthy parks correlates with our social and personal well-being.





2007 advertising campaign

Nature

Other avenues of research showed that recently the natural world is being understood through a lens of ecosystem services: parks and open space provide us with quantitative goods and services. The United Nations Environment Programme has synthesized these services into four main categories by. They are:

- ▶ **Provisioning services:** freshwater, energy (especially the emerging issues around biofuel production) and capture fisheries.
- ▶ **Regulating services:** climate, water, natural hazard and disease regulation, water purification and waste treatment, which are often strongly affected by the overuse of provisioning services.
- ▶ **Cultural services:** recreation and ecotourism service.
- ▶ **Supporting services:** nutrient cycling and primary production, which underlie the delivery of all the other services, but are not directly accessible to people.

Researchers have begun to illuminate the direct and indirect economic value of these ecosystem services. For example, strictly as a function of geography, properties near green space tend to have higher prices; unique and beautiful parks are often associated with tourism; local businesses operating in or near a park can attract additional customers. Through this lens parks provide spaces for the exchange of goods and services and thus aiding commerce.

Focus areas

Our research and engagement with citizens indicated a broadening of what parks are. Simply, parks can provide a sense of community, encourage health, aid recreation, increase civic beauty, attach us to history and provide an array of ecological functions. We synthesized the numerous values provided by parks into three focus areas. They are:

- ▶ **People**
- ▶ **Open Space**
- ▶ **Governance and Management**

We recognize that these focus areas are not mutually exclusive but rather help us categorize our goals and actions to manage and help us realize the vision for Calgary's parks and open space.

imagineParks establishes a foundation to work toward the type of city Calgarians envision. This foundation is a clear direction for our strategic action plans, business plans and annual objectives.

Through *imagineParks*, The City of Calgary Parks begins another chapter in serving this great city to ensure our parks and open space continue to contribute to Calgary's high quality of life.

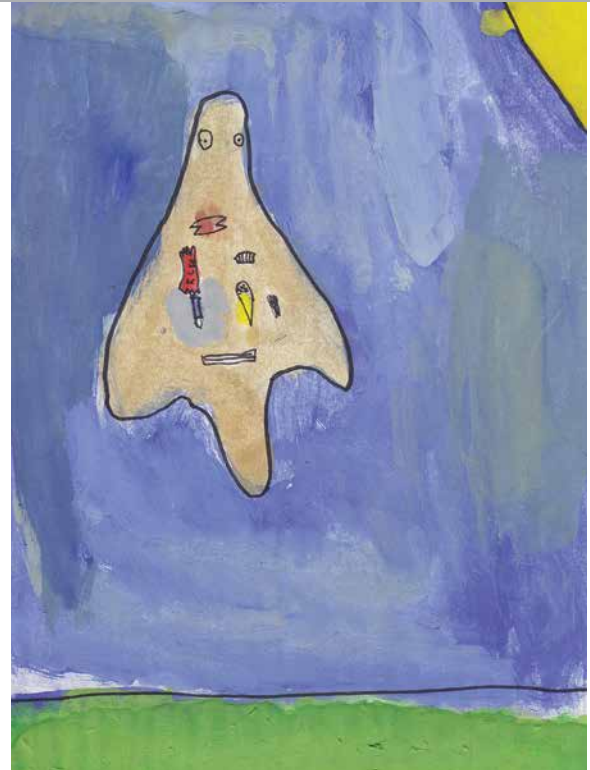


Imagine

Imagine a park. What do you see? Close your eyes. What do you hear? How do you feel? Does one park come to mind? Are you exercising, relaxing, nature watching?

By imaging we begin to see what our parks mean to us. By telling the story about what we imagine we begin to create a heritage, a place that help roots us, tells us where we've been, and where we'd like to go. By listening to others' stories we learn about their heritage, where they've been. By communicating and listening, collectively we can begin to share a vision of how we see our parks in the future. Asking Calgarians about their parks, how they enjoyed them, and how parks might change in the future, began the process for developing our long-term vision for parks.

We asked the next generation to draw:



Robot vending machines in parks



Heated trails that automatically melt snow



Re-imagine

What do our stories help reveal? Parks have long been associated with recreation and nature. Parks were where we went to exercise or experience an urban oasis. Parks were the “lungs” of the city, where people went to breathe fresh air and to have a respite from the busyness of city life.

New stories are starting to be told. Calgarians, researchers and experts in their field are telling new stories about parks. We’ve begun to nuance the recreational and natural value of parks. Recognizing that parks have been and will continue to be an essential component of Calgary, our 30-year vision continues the trajectory of excellence based on the stories we heard.



Barb Scott Park (before)



Barb Scott Park (after)



A playground inside a nature park



Animal translators



Automatic snow removal on slides



Stakeholder Engagement Summary

The City of Calgary Parks conducted a comprehensive engagement process that focused on collecting qualitative information from citizens and stakeholders firsthand. Face to face opportunities for dialogue were supplemented by statistically relevant survey information. More than 1,600 detailed responses were received from citizens from all walks of life, including frequent and infrequent park users, stakeholder groups, subject matter experts, City staff and the general public.

Intensive public engagement activities:

- ▶ Four focus groups with a total of 36 randomly selected citizens (including one youth focus group).
- ▶ Nine stakeholder visioning workshops with 149 participants.
- ▶ Group discussions with 180 children from grades 2 to 12.
- ▶ A telephone survey with a random sample of 506 citizens.
- ▶ A public online survey with 742 respondents.

Key findings of engagement:

- ▶ Calgarians deeply value their public parks and open space.
- ▶ Calgarians primarily use parks for recreational activities.
- ▶ Stakeholders view parks and open space as an opportunity to create public gathering spaces that create a sense of belonging and community.
- ▶ Citizens consistently expressed:
 - ▶ A direction for The City of Calgary to maintain and enhance current features, services and amenities in parks.
 - ▶ Concern for potential deterioration of public safety and maintenance in our parks.
 - ▶ Concern for weakened natural environments and biodiversity.
 - ▶ Concerns centered on The City of Calgary's challenges of paying for the level of maintenance, diversity and specialization of parks that Calgarians expect now and in the future.

- ▶ Calgarians recognize there are increased pressures on our parks and open space (e.g. more user groups and the need for more funding sources, community involvement and public education).
- ▶ When asked, most citizens favoured increased taxes to maintain or expand parks, rather than service cuts. This result was consistent with findings from 2011 public consultations on The City's 2012 – 2014 budget process.
- ▶ There was consistent public support during the consultations for securing new funding from corporate sponsorships and donations to maintain and enhance parks. Most participants rejected the notion of park user fees as a funding source.
- ▶ There is a desire to maintain focus on providing a wide range of types of park activities and features, such as multi-purpose parks (e.g. sport fields, playgrounds, etc.), off-leash areas, community gardens, natural areas, festival spaces, pathways, etc.
- ▶ Participants' ideas for the future typically focused on adding new or expanded features to our parks. The public strongly values basic infrastructure in parks that support park cleanliness, user safety and comfort (e.g. washrooms, benches, lighting and garbage bins).



Explanation of terms used in this plan

Biodiversity

The variability among living organisms from all sources including, inter alia, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are a part. Biodiversity includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems (Convention on Biological Diversity).

Cultural landscape

A land area that has been deemed historically significant based on paleontological, archaeological, prehistoric, historic, cultural, natural, scientific or aesthetic interest.

Ecosystem

A community of living organisms (plants, animals and microbes) in conjunction with the non-living components of their environment (e.g. air, water, minerals and soil), interacting as a system.

Ecosystem services

Generally understood as nature's ability to provide clean water and air, break down waste, replenish resources, provide a cultural and spiritual service, and provide a sustainable source of human and non-human resources such as food and materials for shelter.

Equitable

The absence of difference in health between groups that otherwise have different social qualities such as income, education, etc. In terms of parks, open space and facilities, equity ensures the same access to services regardless of social status.

Goals

Goals set an organization on the track to attaining desired outcomes.

Mission

A mission statement is a short and concise statement describing what an organization is, who it serves, what it does and how it does it.

Open space

Open space includes all land and water areas, either publically owned or offering public access, current and future parks, pathways, roadway greens, land for parks and recreation facilities, cemeteries and other types of alternative use open space.

Outcomes

Outcomes define the key results an organization ultimately wants to achieve.

Park

A specific-use open space area that is managed to provide opportunities for recreation, education, cultural or aesthetic use. A park is normally associated with significant amounts of vegetation, but may include sites with more hard-surfacing typically called a park plaza.

Stewardship

Individuals or groups feel a sense of ownership, connection or attachment to parks and open space that result in behaviours and actions, which maintain, protect and preserve that open space.

Watershed

An area of land that captures precipitation and drains it to a specific point such as a marsh, lake, stream or river. A watershed can be made up of a number of sub-watersheds that contribute to the overall drainage of the watershed.

Well-being

A state in which an individual, group, or organization realizes their potential, can cope with normal stresses, can be productive, and is able to make a contribution to the community.

Wellness

A condition of complete health including social, emotional, physical, mental, financial and/or environmental health.

Vision statement

A statement that describes the preferred future state and is written in the present tense. It is a short inspirational statement that motivates people to work towards a common outcome.

Vibrant parks

Beautiful, healthy, safe and active public spaces.



VIBRANT & CULTURAL SPACES & PLACES

OPTIMIZED RESOURCES

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION

INDIVIDUAL & COMMUNITY WELL-BEING



