



**imagineParks**  
Focus Group Report  
June 2012



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## imagineParks

### *Focus Group Report*

We are proud to present you with this research report, which was produced under the stringent quality standards of our company and those of the Marketing Research and Intelligence Association (MRIA). We are confident that this report will address your concerns and we hope to have the privilege of serving you again in the near future.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jean-Marc Léger". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jean-Marc Léger  
President

# CONTEXT AND OBJECTIVES



# CONTEXT AND OBJECTIVES



Parks play an integral role in our local communities and help shape the neighbourhoods in which we live. As the population of Calgary has grown, so has the need to plan for future generations of Calgary parks users.

Proactively, The City of Calgary is developing a visionary 30-year plan for a sustainable, efficient and effective open space system. This imagineParks Plan will serve as the foundation for future planning policy and development.

As one tool among many, to assist in the development of the Parks 2040 Plan, The City of Calgary commissioned focus groups with parks users and youth to understand the public's vision of Calgary's parks in future and identify priorities for Calgary's open spaces over the next 30 years. The focus group feedback will also serve to inform the development of the subsequent survey phase of research.



# RESEARCH METHODS

A series of four focus groups were conducted for this phase of research.

Group Type	Date/Time	# of Participants
Parks frequent adult users	May 14 <sup>th</sup> : 5:30-7:30pm	10
Parks frequent adult users	May 14 <sup>th</sup> : 7:30-9:30pm	9
Parks less frequent adult users	May 13 <sup>th</sup> : 6:30-8:30pm	9
Youth aged 15 to 17 years	May 13 <sup>th</sup> : 4:30-6:30pm	8
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4 GROUPS</b>	<b>36</b>

- **Frequent users** = use parks at least once/week.
- **Less frequent users** = use parks less than once/week
- **Parks** = pathways, natural areas, wetlands, cemeteries, sports fields, off-leash areas, community gardens, playgrounds and local, community and regional parks.

## RECRUITMENT

- A recruitment screening questionnaire was used according to Market Research Intelligence Association (MRIA) standards.
- Parental consent was obtained for youth participation.
- Adult participants were provided with a \$75 cash honorarium.
- Youth participants were provided with a \$50 cash honorarium.
- A good mix of age, gender, communities of residence and parks usage were obtained.

## GROUP FACILITATION

- All groups were moderated by the same senior Leger facilitator.
- Groups were held in professional focus group facilities in downtown Calgary.
- A moderator's guide of discussion themes was developed with The City's project team.
- Individual and group exercises were incorporated.
- City project team members viewed all four sessions from behind the one-way mirrored room.



**STRATEGIC  
CONCLUSIONS**

## Parks Usage and Current Descriptions of Parks

- Participants explain that they use parks for 5 key purposes: recreation; relaxation; education; social interaction; and transportation.
- Unprompted descriptions of Calgary's parks are predominantly positive. Most participants greatly appreciate what parks bring to their quality of life.
- Certain participants hold either neutral or negative views towards Calgary's parks, most commonly associated with maintenance issues.

## Looking Back at How Parks Have Changed

- Participants' perceptions regarding how parks have changed over time focus on societal evolutions, changes to the types of parks offered, modifications to the materials used to build parks and playgrounds, and for some, the purpose or motivation behind parks usage has also changed over time.

## Parks Preferences 10 Years From Now

- Participants' preferences are concentrated on an increased inter-connectivity of park spaces throughout The City, on an increase in multi-functional destination-style parks, and on specific features and amenities.

## The Future of Parks 20 Years From Now

- Key trends for societal evolutions are noted for the need for convenience, the dependence upon technology and growing safety concerns.
- Common expectations for types of parks refer to larger multi-purpose parks, more rooftops and increased pathway usage.
- Focus group participants additionally point out specific features and amenities they would expect to see in Calgary's parks 20 years from now, such as solar powered lighting, Wi-Fi and covered areas.

## Projective Exercises to Identify Future Parks Concepts

- Adult focus group participants' hopes and dreams for parks are vast ranging from references to safety, accessibility and health, among others.
- When thinking about how citizens should view and treat their parks, adult focus group participants' often refer to pride, gathering places and respect.
- Adult focus group participants also identify a variety of amenities they hope parks will bring to communities.

## Future Concerns for Parks

- Participants commonly hypothesize that there will be less park space, less maintenance and less funding.
- Some participants believe that there will be more municipal expansion, more garbage in parks, more tree disease, more user fees and/or park sponsorship.
- Public stewardship of parks is also noted as a challenge facing parks.

## Key Park Concepts

- Consistently, focus group participants seek multi-purpose, multi-generational park spaces that offer something for everyone.
- Many participants also spontaneously refer to improving the inter-connectivity of parks spaces throughout The City.
- Certain participants believe that in order to encourage parks usage in future, The City will need to integrate nature and technology.
- Along with the physical preferred concepts for parks in Calgary, emerges a common expectation for a synchronized communications strategy.

## Key Trade-Offs

- A common trade-off for any service offering relates to quality vs. quantity, and is also commonplace with participants thinking about the future of parks' services.
- Participants also weigh their personal wants and needs versus what would most benefit the entire Calgary community and the environment.

2005	25%
2006	35%
2007	36%
2008	48%
2009	55%
2010	80%
2011	85%



+40%

+10%

## DETAILED ANALYSIS OF RESULTS



**PARKS USAGE  
AND  
CURRENT  
DESCRIPTIONS OF  
PARKS**

# MOTIVATION FOR PARKS USAGE

Participants explain that they use parks for five key purposes:

**Recreation**

*“I play soccer a lot.”*  
*“I use parks for biking and running.”*

**Relaxation**

*“I enjoy the scenery.”*  
*“Parks help relieve daily stresses.”*

**Education**

*“I like to learn about the natural areas.”*  
*“I use them for bird watching.”*

**Social Interaction**

*“We like to have BBQs with family and friends.”*  
*“I meet my friends in the park for coffee.”*

**Transportation**

*“It’s safer on the paths than on the roads.”*  
*“I bike to get to work and get around.”*

Unprompted descriptions of Calgary's parks are predominantly positive. Most participants greatly appreciate what parks bring to their quality of life.

*“They’re impressive all around with the upkeep and the variety and the amount of green space.”*

*“They offer a family environment where everyone has something they like.”*

*“They’re easy to navigate because the pathways are connected.”*

## Positive Comments

- Convenient, easy to access
- Clean, kept-up
- Variety of activities
- Many of them, plenty, vast
- Green, grass, trees
- Relaxing
- Fun, well-developed
- Family environment
- Easy to navigate, connected
- Nature has been preserved
- Outstanding, awesome
- Safe
- Impressive
- Best pathways

# DESCRIPTIONS OF CALGARY'S PARKS TODAY

Certain participants hold either neutral or negative views towards Calgary's parks, most commonly associated with maintenance issues.

*"They're empty. There's no children in them except on weekends a bit."*

*"They're boring. There's not enough amenities or activities, no bike rentals, food vendors, art or fairs."*

*"They're dangerous. The pathways are busy and frost in the winter plays a role."*

*"They're inconsistent. Some are worn down and some are luxurious."*

## Neutral Comments

- Inconsistent maintenance
- Some are busy, some are not
- Some are green, others are not
- Assorted use is offered, but could always use more
- Some don't have enough knowledge about parks
- Need more trees
- Need better parking

## Negative Comments

- Not safe
- Not updated
- Problems with signage
- Dangerous pathways
- Maintenance issues
- Hard to get to bigger parks
- Getting hurt
- Boring
- Empty



LOOKING BACK AT  
HOW PARKS HAVE  
CHANGED

# HOW PARKS HAVE CHANGED OVER TIME

Participants' perceptions regarding how parks have changed over time focus on four key areas:

Society has changed.

The types of parks available have changed.

Materials used in parks has changed.

For some, the purpose of using parks has changed.

# HOW PARKS HAVE CHANGED OVER TIME: Society has changed.

Most participants believe that societal evolutions have impacted parks usage over time.

*“Parks haven’t changed. Society has.”*

*“Kids don’t go out as much. There’s other things you need to do.”*

*“Parents are more reserved to send their kids to a park now. They worry more.”*



- People are more safety-oriented today
- Parents worry more about letting their kids go out
- There is less citizen stewardship of parks
- There are fewer neighbourhood interactions in community parks
- Recycling bins are more common
- There is a greater dependency on technology
- There are more two-working-parent families
- Families are busier with extra-curricular activities

## HOW PARKS HAVE CHANGED OVER TIME: The types of parks available have changed.

Most participants acknowledge that an array of different types of parks is available in Calgary and that the types of parks offerings have evolved over time.

*“I was blown away that they had off-leash areas when I first moved here. It’s a great concept.”*

*“There’s more community gardens now. Even schools are planting gardens with the students.”*

*“There’s more water parks now like at South Glenmore Park.”*

Comments relate to there being:

- More off-leash parks
- More pathways
- More water parks
- Pathways and playgrounds in new communities
- A growing number of community gardens
- Sports fields and arenas which are overbooked
- Disconnected parks, although improved



## HOW PARKS HAVE CHANGED OVER TIME: Materials used in parks have changed.

Many participants point out that materials used in building playgrounds and parks have changed over time to respond to evolving safety concerns.

*“Aesthetics play more of a role in building parks today.”*

*“Landmark items are disappearing like the cannon in Confederation Park. People jumped off and some got hurt and they took it away.”*

*“We don’t get splinters now, but the play structures are not as high.”*

- Gravel being replaced by black rubber turf
- Less metal used
- More plastic used
- Pathways are now paved
- Fewer swings and slides
- There used to be ‘spinners’

Youth are more likely to feel that safety issues may have been taken to an extreme: *“Too much safety is too much.”*



## HOW PARKS HAVE CHANGED OVER TIME: The purpose for using parks has changed.

Some participants report noticing a change in the purpose or motivation behind parks usage.

*“Community-centred sports have disappeared. Parents now take their kids to recreation centres.”*

*“We played in the parks all the time. Kids were there all the time. Now they’re not.”*

- People are not using parks as meeting places as much as in the past
- There are more festivals in parks today
- More people are biking to commute to work
- More multi-purpose recreational facilities are available which compete with parks usage





**PARKS  
PREFERENCES  
10 YEARS FROM  
NOW**

# PREFERENCES FOR PARKS: 10 YEARS FROM NOW

Focus group participants' preferences for parks in Calgary 10 years from now are concentrated on three major themes:

An increased interconnectivity of parks throughout The City

An increase in multi-functional destination parks

Specific features and amenities

# PREFERENCES FOR PARKS: 10 YEARS FROM NOW

## Increased Interconnectivity

Most focus group participants agree that they would like to see Calgary's parks and pathways interconnected to a greater degree in future.

*"I'd like to see pathways cross highways and major routes and take you through the entire city."*

*"I want to be able to ride on the pathways without being scared."*

*"I don't want to walk on the street in-between the paths."*

This notion includes:

- Creating pathways to traverse major roadways and connect all quadrants of The City
- Creating sizeable pathways to safely accommodate traffic flow
- Not having to walk or bike on the roads in-between parks/pathway systems
- Walking to the local park

## PREFERENCES FOR PARKS: 10 YEARS FROM NOW

### Increase in Multi-Functional Destination Parks

Many focus group participants' preferences for parks in Calgary 10 years from now focus on the need for additional multi-functional "destination-style" parks that suit the needs of an entire family.

*"They should bring arts and culture into the parks making it a true destination with so many activities and so much fun."*

*"It should offer more than one activity. It should have a lot to do. People have multiple kids at multiple ages."*

Suggestions include:

- Offer a variety of activities for all ages, including children, parents and seniors
- Provide a space for people to meet, young and old
- Have a lot of activities to do for people of multiple ages, including adult exercise areas while they watch their children play
- Present an off-leash area so the dog can be with families at the park

## PREFERENCES FOR PARKS: 10 YEARS FROM NOW

### Features and Amenities

Preferred features and amenities for Calgary parks 10 years from now are vast, including:

- Benches and rest areas
- BBQ areas, fire pits and rest areas
- More washrooms and washrooms open longer in the season
- More skateboarding parks and BMX trails, especially among youth
- Greener sports fields
- Larger and taller play structures for older youth and adults to use
- Rentals: bikes, canoes, kayaks
- More outdoor rinks
- Affordable golf courses
- More water fountains
- More entertainment, buskers
- More water features, spray parks
- More parking
- More arts and culture
- Expanded pathway lanes
- More flowers
- More wetlands
- More off-leash areas
- Cleanliness
- Safety and security

**THE FUTURE OF  
PARKS**

**20 YEARS FROM  
NOW**

# THE FUTURE OF PARKS: 20 YEARS FROM NOW

In all focus group workshops, participants present their perspective on:

Societal projections 20 years from now

Expectations for the types of parks 20 years from now

Anticipated features and amenities in parks 20 years from now

# THE FUTURE OF PARKS 20 YEARS FROM NOW

## Societal Projections

What will life be like 20 years from now? How does society differ in future? Key trends are noted for the need for convenience, the dependence upon technology and growing safety concerns.

*“The pace of life will be even faster.”*

*“Technology is going to get even crazier. We’ll have to go where the technology goes.”*

All participants offer theories which include:

- The population becoming more dense, more condos/apartment buildings
- Increased desire for convenience, one-stop shopping
- Less driving, more biking and more mass transit
- Decrease in population trends with an aging population and fewer children
- Greater dependence on technology
- Citizens becoming more concerned about safety

# THE FUTURE OF PARKS 20 YEARS FROM NOW

## Expectations for Types of Parks

Focus group participants also hypothesize about what types of parks they would expect to see 20 years from now. Common expectations refer to larger multi-purpose parks, more rooftops and increased pathway usage.

*“We need more bicycle training parks, similar to the Millenium skate park. It would be good for The City.”*

*“Cemeteries are disappearing. It’s prime real estate.”*

*“I prefer big parks. They’re more attractive.”*

Expectations include:

- More rooftop outdoor spaces
- More biking opportunities
- More cross-country skiing options
- More separation of bike and pedestrian pathways
- More sports fields with an international flavour, such as cricket fields
- More all-season parks
- Bigger parks, such as Stanley Park in Vancouver
- Less park space in general

# THE FUTURE OF PARKS 20 YEARS FROM NOW

## Anticipated Features and Amenities

Focus group participants additionally point out specific features and amenities they would expect to see in Calgary's parks 20 years from now, such as solar powered lighting, Wi-Fi and covered areas.

*"Make taller and bigger structures. I'd still play 'grounders' today."*

*"I want playgrounds for my grandkids."*

*"The City can't do all of that. We don't have the money to keep up now."*

Suggested features and amenities include:

- Solar powered lighting for parks and pathways (one participant even mentions solar powered heating for pathways)
- The integration of nature and technology with free Wi-Fi in parks for people to play games or watch movies at parks
- Emergency stations in parks/pathways
- More maps in parks and pathways
- Some covered areas in parks (i.e. gazebos or huts to protect people from the elements)
- Vending machines with healthy beverages and snacks
- Benches for adults in playgrounds for kids



**PROJECTIVE  
EXERCISES TO  
IDENTIFY FUTURE  
PARKS CONCEPTS**

## BIRTH ANNOUNCEMENT EXERCISE

Adult focus group participants offer birth announcement messages for parks in Calgary as a projective exercise to identify what they hope parks will bring to the community over time. This exercise brings information related to participants':

Hopes and dreams for parks

Desires for preferred citizen outlooks toward parks

Favoured amenities

# BIRTH ANNOUNCEMENT EXERCISE

## Hopes and Dreams for Parks

Adult focus group participants' hopes and dreams for parks are vast ranging from references to safety, accessibility and health, among others.

*"I hope that parks can further define Calgary's vibe and change the world's perspective of Calgary as a 'cowboy' city."*

*"We need to be able to spend a day in the parks and not just 15 mins."*

*"They'll be a place to celebrate, to relax."*

*"We need our parks to be a place to encourage people to develop healthy habits."*

Hopes and dreams include parks being:

- Clean and well-maintained
- Safe
- Well used by all ages
- Accessible to citizens of all ages
- The main hub of activity in the community
- Designed to allow for future growth
- Encouraging for people to live active and healthy lifestyles
- Able to incorporate work, play and location of residence
- A place to play, relax and celebrate
- Attractive to people from all countries
- A place to spend the entire day

# BIRTH ANNOUNCEMENT EXERCISE

## Desires for Preferred Citizen Outlooks Towards Parks

When thinking about how citizens should view and treat their parks, adult focus group participants' often refer to pride, gathering places and respect.

*“Parks users will feel like owners, of their parks, not clients.”*

*“They’re well-used by all ages. There’s a variety of parks, something for everyone.*

*We respect our parks and value their worth in society.”*

*“I want them to be beautiful places that inspire community pride.”*

Citizen outlooks for parks should include:

- A strong sense of community pride
- A gathering place for the neighbourhood to bring the community together
- A place for the entire family to have fun and/or entertain
- A spirit of volunteerism to help maintain and improve parks
- Respect for parks, valuing their worth in society
- Community engagement and interaction

# BIRTH ANNOUNCEMENT EXERCISE

## Favoured Amenities for Parks

Adult focus group participants also identify a variety of amenities they hope parks will bring to communities.

*“They’ll be more fitness-oriented, keeping in mind that the space will become more of a premium. . . People will need communal outdoor spaces for things like BBQs and even reading.”*

*“A place that appeals to young and old people to enjoy a walk, a date, a day working outside, a local talent. A place where families can enjoy a picnic with their family and pet at the same place. A park that attracts people from all cultures.”*

Favoured amenities include:

- A wide variety of sporting and recreational needs
- Multi-functional spaces with mixed usage
- Expansive and safe pathways
- Community gardens
- Durable well-lit playgrounds
- Emergency stations in parks and pathways
- Artwork and integrated cultural aspects
- All-year round activities
- Fitness equipment for all ages
- Technology-based features such as free Wi-Fi or TV screens

# YOUTH SOCIAL MEDIA EXERCISE: TWITTER

Youth focus group participants creatively hypothesize what they may expect other young adults to “tweet” about parks.



OMG. So much trash at Prince’s Island Park. #dirtyCalgary #boring parks.

The park got a new biking zone. Pretty cool!

No quiet places here #overcrowded #bowness.

Bonfire at futuristic park #bethere.

Stamps throwing the ball at the parks with fans! #comejoin.

The main themes of the tweets relate to:

- What teens are doing in the parks, how they are using park spaces (hanging out, bonfires, growing tomatoes, rafting)
- Sharing information about new park features (new pathway lighting, biking zones)
- Commenting on the state of the parks (maintenance, garbage)

# YOUTH SOCIAL MEDIA EXERCISE: FACEBOOK

Youth focus group participants also creatively envisage what they may expect Calgary Parks Facebook page posts to contain, and who its “friends” might be.

Parks’ Facebook friends may be:

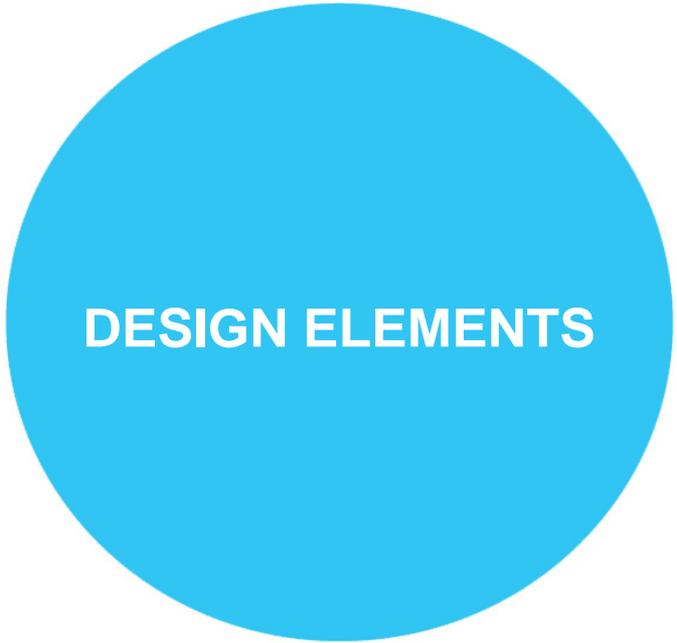
- Calgary Transit
- Different programs in The City that help get Calgarians active
- People who care about the environment

*“Friends with Transit because Transit drops you off at parks.”*



Potential posts relate to:

- Updates on new park amenities and improvements
- Upcoming events/daily activities
- Park facts
- Plans for future parks
- Pictures of parks’ offerings,
- Videos of people enjoying themselves, recycling, tending to the community gardens



# DESIGN ELEMENTS

# DESIGN ELEMENTS FOR PARKS 30 YEARS FROM NOW

## Types of Parks

All participants worked diligently together in smaller groups to identify the key design elements and priorities for parks 30 years from now. This group work pinpoints possible priorities for types of parks and their features and amenities.

### Types of Parks:

- More/larger community gardens
- More rooftop usage
- Indoor parks for options in winter
- Outdoor swimming, water parks
- More bike paths
- Skateboarding, graffiti boards
- Massive slides on hills
- Cross-country skiing areas
- Fewer cemeteries
- More destination-style parks, even within each quadrant
- Multi-functional parks with a variety of activities
- Central hubs for communities
- TV screen parks
- Ball hockey parks
- Tennis courts
- Adult exercise zones
- More off-leash areas

# DESIGN ELEMENTS FOR PARKS 30 YEARS FROM NOW

## Features of Parks

Priority features and amenities for parks that participants would like to see in future include:

- More washrooms
- More recycling bins
- Use of solar power
- Artificial turf for sports fields
- More local, indigenous plants
- No commercial vendors, some coffee
- More water fountains, dog fountains
- More picnic and BBQ areas
- More artwork, aesthetics, flowers
- Obstacle courses for adults
- Memorial benches in cemeteries
- More festivals
- Security patrols, safety
- Wi-Fi, TV screens
- More information and signage
- Dual pathways, heated pathways
- Cleanliness
- Easy access
- Parking
- Big swings for adults in playgrounds

# YOUTH PARK DESIGN ELEMENTS

including the following design elements:

Youth participants offer additional insight into potential key draws for teens usage of parks 30 years from now.

*“Use tree obstacles like in Kananaskis with zip-line ropes.”*

*“Have more concerts or bands or festivals. Even if there are a lot, we don’t know about them.”*

*“Bring back outdoor drive-in movie theatres or outdoor park theatres.”*

*“I just don’t feel like there’s anywhere for us to go.”*

Youth suggest:

- Build large play structures and obstacle courses
- Include water features
- Install a TV screen or projector to watch movies outside
- Bring in festivals and concerts
- Set up tree zip-line ropes
- Have fire pits for BBQs
- Build a beach on school campuses
- Allow for large green open spaces for sports
- Incorporate outdoor sit-down areas
- Create a lively atmosphere
- Put in a dive tank

Regularly, participants suggest that parks need to accommodate both summer and winter recreational activities.

*“I’d like to have exercise equipment that we could use in winter.”*

*“We should have wading pools or outdoor pools that can be easily converted to skating areas in winter.”*

*“Calgary has a long winter. We need to remember that.”*

Participants share the following ideas on how to create an all-season efficiency:

- Turn wading pools or outdoor swimming pools into skating areas
- Turn ball hockey arenas into skating areas
- Turn some pathways into frozen lanes for skating
- Designate certain hills as tobogganing areas
- Turn more golf courses into cross-country skiing trails
- Consider playground equipment that is suited to winter and snow



FUTURE  
CONCERNS FOR  
PARKS

# FUTURE CONCERNS FOR PARKS

Looking to possible future concerns for parks in Calgary, focus group participants commonly hypothesize that there will be **less**:

*“The kids won’t have anywhere to go and will go to a mall and get into trouble.”*

*“They won’t keep their appeal with every generation.”*

*“That The City will spend money on parks that people won’t use.”*

- Parks space in general
- Options available for all ages
- Maintenance
- Money to maintain parks
- Focus on the upkeep of parks versus adding new parks
- Green space in general
- Communication regarding what is happening with parks
- Natural areas and wildlife
- Focus on parks regulations/legislation

In addition, looking to possible future concerns for parks in Calgary, focus group participants also feel that there will be **more**:

*“I don’t want to see a hotdog vendor, but a coffee truck would be great.”*

*“That parks will get more dull and boring or ‘super safe’. Safety is good, but you can’t push it too far in parks.”*

*“Those who clean for profit don’t care as much.”*

Youth fear seeing more:

- Garbage
- Privatization of cleaning parks
- Commercialization of parks sponsorship
- City expansion impacting natural areas such as the Weaselhead
- Wildlife such as coyotes or raccoons
- Tree disease and infections
- User fees/additional taxes for parks
- Money spent on parks which people will not frequently use
- Focus on safe equipment versus “fun” equipment, making playgrounds more “boring”

# WHAT IF PARKS DISAPPEARED?

**When some participants are asked how they would feel and how life would change if there were no parks at all, strong emotions emerge:**



- Sadness
- Anger
- Unhappiness
- Confusion
- Loneliness
- Depression
- Disappointment
- Sense of loss
- Mad at The City

**Participants mention that day-to-day activities would be impacted:**

- There would be nowhere to go to relax and get away
- They would feel confined
- People would not be as active
- People would become disconnected with nature
- Family activities would decrease
- People would travel to destination parks outside of Calgary
- Some would move out of Calgary
- One individual predicts going to bars more often to seek human interaction

# WHAT IF PARKS DISAPPEARED?

## Verbatim Comments

*“Unimaginable.”*

*“No one will know their neighbours.  
The City becomes dirty.”*

*“The environment would be suffocating because there’s no fresh air. There would be a feeling of over-crowding. The quality of life would drop. Children won’t have places to play. There’d be no spaces to relax, no exercising, no soccer in the summer.”*

*“If Calgary had no open spaces or parks within The City, the quality of life would be completely unsatisfactory. People couldn’t enjoy the outdoors and it could perhaps increase depression and create more angry people.”*

*“I’d feel all cramped up. Not a lot of space to do anything. Sick of looking at the buildings and cars driving by. No peace. No place to relax and get away. I don’t think it would be a very nice quality of life.”*

Public stewardship of parks is also noted as a challenge by focus group participants.

*“Use it as a leadership example at High Schools.”*

*“People just don’t talk over the fence anymore.”*

*“We all have a vested interest.”*

*“Work with teams or clubs to make a game out of parks clean-up.”*

Participants comment that:

- It’s too much commitment to volunteer to keep it up [parks, outdoor arenas]
- Communities need to make it more attractive to volunteer via fundraisers and potlucks or a draw for children to use the centre free of charge
- People put their volunteer hours into locations they are using which competes with park stewardship
- It has to be done; make people understand that it is a necessity
- An environment needs to be created to entice people to help: signs, advertising, offer volunteer hours to teens, free access to a City recreational facility, outreach with teams, clubs or local churches
- A Park “steward of the month” public recognition program could help encourage people to help



KEY PARKS  
CONCEPTS  
AND  
TRADE-OFFS

# KEY PARKS CONCEPTS AND TRADE-OFFS



# CONCEPT: PARKS FOR ALL AGES AND SEASONS

Consistently, focus group participants seek multi-purpose, multi-generational parks spaces that offer something for everyone.

This concept underscores participants' societal projections 20 years from now that identify that people will be seeking convenience in their hectic lifestyles.

Multi-purpose parks respond to the vision of parks being a conduit to bring communities, families and friends together at all times of the year.

Parks for all ages and seasons also satisfies all reported motivations for using parks, and responds to the vast array of desired features and amenities being sought.

## CONCEPT: INTER-CONNECTIVITY

Many participants spontaneously refer to improving the inter-connectivity of parks spaces throughout The City.

Feedback suggests that connecting Calgary's parks to an even greater degree will allow for increased bike and pedestrian commuter activity, which in turn, has a positive impact on the environment.

Inter-connectivity also emphasizes participants' notion that parks bring communities together – not just as individuals, but as entire neighbourhoods.

Further, group input suggests that inter-connectivity is also a manner in which to improve bike and pedestrian safety, removing non-motorized people from roadways.

# CONCEPT: INTEGRATION OF NATURE AND TECHNOLOGY

Certain participants believe that in order to encourage parks usage in future, The City will need to integrate nature and technology.

Some participants feel that free Wi-Fi should be available for people to enjoy parks for either work or play given the perceived growing societal dependency upon technology.

Others believe that opportunities exist to use technology in parks to bring people together, whether it be watching an NHL game on a big screen, partaking in a music event, or playing outdoor Wii.

Select participants additionally encourage a greater use of technology via touch-screen stations for educational or informative purposes in park spaces.

# CONCEPT: COMMUNICATIONS WITH CITIZENS

Along with the physical preferred concepts for parks in Calgary, emerges a common expectation for a synchronized communications strategy.

Many participants admit they are not fully aware of what Calgary parks have to offer and would welcome an opportunity to learn more. Lack of awareness can equate to lack of usage.

Feedback indicates that communications related to events, upgrades, new developments and more can encourage citizens to come together and use park spaces.

Participants note that with projected busier lifestyles, citizens will not likely seek information about parks and may simply want to wait for The City to provide information and communications.

## TRADE-OFF: QUALITY VS. QUANTITY

A common trade-off for any service offering relates to quality vs. quantity, and is also commonplace with participants thinking about the future of parks' services.

### Quality:

Participants have a lengthy wish list for the future of parks, but question if they want more parks or better parks? Because some feel that specific park spaces are underutilized, they would prefer to spend parks dollars to improve existing parks instead of spending money on spaces infrequently used.

**Ultimately, most participants want a good balance of both.**

### Quantity:

Participants want to be able to walk to their local park and, therefore, new parks are required in new developments. Further, participants want increased connectivity of parks in The City, which infers 'more' integrated park space. The convenience factor plays a role in support of focusing on quantity over quality.

## TRADE-OFF: PERSONAL USE VS. COMMUNITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS

Participants also weigh their personal wants and needs versus what would most benefit the entire Calgary community and the environment.

### **Personal Use:**

Some participants are avid soccer players, others are not. Some enjoy educational outings to natural areas, others are less interested. Some have dogs, others do not. Each participant has a personal vested interest in the types of parks and their possible features. Personal use strongly informs visioning for parks in future.

**In the end, all needs are important.**

### **Community & Environment:**

As Calgary expands, some participants fear that population growth will infringe upon park spaces. Even if not often used by participants personally, there is a value shared by participants in having a healthy amount of parks which contribute to a healthy environment in which to live.



**TABULATION OF  
VERBATIM ADVICE  
PROVIDED**

# ADVICE FOR THE CITY OF CALGARY

## Adult Frequent Parks Users

**What is the last advice you would give to The City of Calgary as they continue to prepare the long-term vision for parks in our great City?**

*“Please, please do something to the fence which prevents accessing the Bearspaw area! Integration of nature, preserving it along with amenities and features for people. Keeping parks clean. Growing park areas proportionately with developing new areas for living.”*

*“Keep it simple. Parks are for the people to use and enjoy - making memories with their children and friends. Just think, “What would I like to do with my family at the park?”*

*“More split paths for bikes vs. pedestrians. More public swimming areas. Keep investing in making parks look modern. Keep up the great work!”*

*“I would love to be able to send my kids to a park and know there is a lot to do (for example, safety awareness, educational aspects, environmentally friendly elements). I want to know that there are many options available when it comes to deciding on a day of fun for the whole family, whether I have to drive, bike or walk to the destination. Thanks for the opportunity.”*

# ADVICE FOR THE CITY OF CALGARY

## Adult Frequent Parks Users

**What is the last advice you would give to The City of Calgary as they continue to prepare the long-term vision for parks in our great City?**

*“To use green spaces as much as possible. Community gardens can be put in a lot of city-owned lots. Even areas that are slated for development can be used as gardens in the meantime. Keep our parks clean and safe. Don’t outsource services.”*

*“Allow Calgarians’ input into how they want to see their parks. Don’t spend money on a useless bridge design. A basic bridge is great. Allow us to help you design and incorporate what we need in the parks and communities. Keep feasibility studies to a limit. Quit wasting our tax dollars.”*

*“Public art and planned spaces would be ideal for the downtown core. If more money was spent creating gardens, art, sports facilities and other public spaces, it could help build a sense of community in The City and that would be ideal!”*

*“Large parks that offer fun activities for all ages. Festivals. Entertainment for large groups to gather and enjoy a sense of community. Smaller community parks for neighbours and friends with quiet spaces, playgrounds, green spaces for games, baseball diamonds and skating in the winter.”*

# ADVICE FOR THE CITY OF CALGARY

## Adult Frequent Parks Users

**What is the last advice you would give to The City of Calgary as they continue to prepare the long-term vision for parks in our great City?**

*“Public gardens. Aesthetically appealing. User-friendly. Regular maintenance. Safety facilities such as enhanced cameras and emergency phone stands.”*

*“Parks should be making people healthier and happier.”*

*“I believe that everyone enjoys a beautiful park to stay in and enjoy. Calgary does have an abundance of parks that are quite diverse. However, keeping the parks we already have updated, clean and maintained will be more noticed by current and future Calgarians than new parks.”*

*“I think decisions for the future of parks should be based on statistical data of what people use parks for and what kind of parks plans have worked best in other cities, particularly cities that are further along in the development path that Calgary is likely taking. Though I think things like focus groups have a purpose, I’m afraid what people say they want from parks and what they actually want from parks might be very different.”*

*“Protect green spaces and wetlands. Don’t go overboard on expenditures and dreams. Set a budget, approve it and stick to it.”*

## ADVICE FOR THE CITY OF CALGARY

### Adult Frequent Parks Users

**What is the last advice you would give to The City of Calgary as they continue to prepare the long-term vision for parks in our great City?**

*“If you want us to drive less in our cars, please ensure other modes of transportation (pathways) are accessible in the suburbs and that it will take you everywhere. Keep parks free [of charge and/or user fees]. Keep parks a priority. I’m not sure where they are now, but they really matter to our quality of life.”*

*“Make parks the background people would dream of having: clean; multi-functional; comfortable; interesting; accessible; eco-friendly; friend/family-friendly.”*

*“Interact with the community. Use available communications tools in parks planning instead of centralized data-driven analysis.”*

*“Look at the big picture. Try to connect them [pathways]. Have more than one use for parks, such as a wading pool that could be a skating rink in the winter. Make it a place to gather.”*

*“More focus groups to voice peoples’ opinions. Please more water fountains and washrooms, especially near sports fields. Well-maintained grounds in sports fields, like turf fields. More ponds or lakes, sprinkle pools or outdoor pools.”*

# ADVICE FOR THE CITY OF CALGARY

## Less Frequent Adult Parks Users

**What is the last advice you would give to The City of Calgary as they continue to prepare the long-term vision for parks in our great City?**

*“Integration with technology would be great: Wi-Fi; advertising through social media. Hold concerts and events such as a fringe festival. Have bigger parks that can cater to concerts and events. Have more trees and more BBQ spaces. Maybe one very large park that Calgary would be known for that would cater to the above [festivals, events, BBQs], but is also serene and peaceful with wildlife. More short-term things like keeping parks well-maintained.”*

*“Control the budget on not only maintaining the parks, but also with advertising what’s going on in the parks. Bring more functions and activities so that if a family or person can really stay there for a longer time and enjoy the facilities. Look at bike path connections not only on the inside of the parks, but also on the surrounding boundaries of the parks. Focus on the design of the usage of the parks during winter time, not only in the summer since Calgary has a longer winter.”*

*“Spend time and resources on higher profile parks with potential. Please get decent outdoor rinks. Focus on quality over quantity. Make better parks and pathways not more useless ones. Wi-Fi would be nice too.”*

# ADVICE FOR THE CITY OF CALGARY

## Less Frequent Adult Parks Users

**What is the last advice you would give to The City of Calgary as they continue to prepare the long-term vision for parks in our great City?**

*“Move to a model of bigger parks that are all-inclusive with a variety of activities. Create wifi zones in the parks to draw the home-bound Calgarians outside. Consider demographics in planning parks facilities. Keep up with trends in the world. NHL playoffs in the park on the big screen. Advertise on Twitter and Facebook.”*

*“Keep them clean and secure and update them regularly. Advertise what is going on. Ask for community input as to what they would like to see happen in THEIR parks. Get sponsors from the private sector to help provide ‘extras’ like coffee cafes or internet venues.”*

*“Organize more events, concerts and singles events. With ecology, there should be more trees, flowers and plants to attract more wildlife. Increase the presence of culture and history with statues and art pieces which would attract more visitors and tourists. Create a major attraction that could be the symbol of Calgary, similar to Stanley Park in Vancouver. Add new features: ponds with fish; small bridges; Wi-Fi, petting zoo; water fountains; public washrooms; benches and tables for picnics.”*

# ADVICE FOR THE CITY OF CALGARY

## Less Frequent Adult Parks Users

### What is the last advice you would give to The City of Calgary as they continue to prepare the long-term vision for parks in our great City?

*“Assess which little parks are being used and which are not. Keep the green space but get rid of the equipment and create something new such as flower gardens or sitting areas. Be proactive rather than reactive. Move as technology moves. We came up with the Peace Bridge as a tourism draw; we should be able to come up with a magnificent design for a park of all ages. Look to some of the famous parks for ideas. Get the word out! I was born and raised here but really don’t know what Calgary parks have to offer.”*

*“Advertising to the public is huge. A lot of individuals are not aware of all of the amenities or current festivals/fairs that are going on. Using social media can help with advertising. There’s a need for culture in parks (i.e. arts, music, food vendors of various cultures). Use big parks such as Stanley Park or Nosehill Park for large summer festivals. Have The City bring in big names (musicians) to draw people to the parks and also increase tourism (i.e. Coachella Festival in Los Angeles). Have everyday music and arts in parks to draw people in and add free Wi-Fi for people to work in parks.”*

*“Have one user-friendly website where you can find information on all parks and events. Consider all ages in planning. Protect our wildlife. Keep it green. Put more money into green instead of concrete. Look at the parks that have been busy for the last 20 years and keep doing it.”*

*“Move to a model of bigger parks that are all-inclusive with a variety of activities. Create Wi-Fi zones.”*

# ADVICE FOR THE CITY OF CALGARY

## Youth



**What is the last advice you would give to The City of Calgary as they continue to prepare the long-term vision for parks in our great City?**

*“Try to stop the needless lawsuit revolution and make legislation that makes people legally responsible for their own actions and possible injuries. Keep it safe, but not too safe.”*

*“I would love to see more bike paths and cross-country skiing areas since they are very rare currently. More community gardens would be beneficial in so many ways. It is also important to keep big parks big, especially NOT making Fish Creek smaller because of wanting to build into it. Just keeping parks abundant in general, and if possible, more bathrooms and water fountains in parks.”*

*“Keep the parks clean and try to stay up to date with the teens and good luck.”*

*“Keep the parks alive! Build more parks and keep them clean. Put new leisure activities in parks, new monuments. Make the parks close to all communities and provide the opportunity to be active for all citizens. Cater to the needs of all types of Calgarians: dog owners; bikers; environmentalists; children; seniors; teenagers, etc.”*

# ADVICE FOR THE CITY OF CALGARY

## Youth

**What is the last advice you would give to The City of Calgary as they continue to prepare the long-term vision for parks in our great City?**

*“A Have lots of fire pits. Put in more play structures. Have a walk-in movie projector for the summer time.”*

*“Well I know the last thing people want to do is to use tax money. The City of Calgary could find some way to make our parks more beautiful, like create an organization that people can donate to so it's not being forced. That's just the money though. People should be going to clean up parks. People could vote on ideas for larger parks and playgrounds, etc. so people have a choice in what they want for their future.”*

*“More bathrooms and fountains! Teenager-aimed parks. More gardens and trees. The more green space, the better. Public theatres. Remind people they [parks] exist.”*

*“Bring parks in that will engage youth/adult lessons. Keep the park environmentally healthy. Bring attention to the public about new parks and goals for the future. Keep parks public!”*

# CITY OF CALGARY PARKS





**imagineParks**

Focus Group Report

June 2012

**Detached Appendices:**

Recruitment Screening Questionnaire

Moderator's Guide and Handouts

DVD Recordings

