

Executive Summary


If one word could summarize what Calgarians said during the imagineParks public consultation process, it's *more*.

In terms of how Calgary's parks have evolved, citizens generally recognize that there are more pressures on our parks and open spaces, such as more user groups, more activities and more features. Looking to the future, citizens generally envision more existing park features, infrastructure and maintenance. However, to realize this vision, Calgarians also recognize the need for more funding, more funding sources, more community involvement and more public education and communication.

In terms of blue-sky, futuristic ideas or paradigm shifts for Calgary's park system, surprisingly very little input was received despite encouragement from moderators (notably in the focus groups and stakeholder workshops). As well, participants were encouraged to provide input on what they would change looking towards the future.

Overwhelmingly, there was a clear direction from citizens for The City of Calgary to maintain and/or enhance current park features, services and/or amenities. This current satisfaction with parks and pathways is consistent with results from the [Ipsos Reid Citizen Satisfaction Surveys](#). Over 90% of citizens participating in these annual surveys have consistently reported satisfaction with both of Calgary's parks and other open spaces and the pathway system since 2006.

During the imagineParks consultations, participants' ideas for the future typically focused on new or expanded park features, such as adding cross-country ski and BMX bike trails, bike/boat rentals, skateboard parks, rooftop parks, Wi-Fi access, solar lighting and increased interconnectivity of parks.



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At the same time, Calgarians generally understand there is a price to maintaining and expanding what they currently enjoy and value. For example, when asked in the online and telephone surveys, most citizens said they would support increased taxes to maintain or expand parks as opposed to service cuts. As well, there was consistent public support for both more volunteerism and more corporate sponsorships/donations to maintain or enhance public parks.

Other common, re-occurring themes heard during the imagineParks public engagement process included:

- An emphasis on providing and maintaining basic infrastructure in parks that support park cleanliness, user safety and comfort (such as garbage and recycling bins, benches, washrooms and lighting).

- Calgarians primarily value and use parks for recreation activities. Less frequently cited reasons for using parks and pathways were relaxation, social interaction, nature enjoyment and transportation (i.e. pathway commuting).
- Citizen concerns for the future consistently included fears centered on the potential deterioration of public safety and maintenance in our parks as well as weakened natural environments and biodiversity.
- There is a desire to maintain focus on providing a wide diversity of types of park activities and features, such as multi-purpose parks (sport fields, playgrounds, etc.), off-leash areas, community gardens, natural areas, festival spaces, pathways, etc.

Consultation Overview

The public, local stakeholder groups and City staff were consulted from May to July 2012. Engagement activities consisted of:

- four focus groups with a total of 36 randomly selected citizens,
- nine stakeholder visioning workshops with 149 participants,
- a telephone survey with a random sample of 506 citizens, and;
- a public online survey with 742 respondents.

Below is a summary of each of these engagement activities as well as links to more detailed findings.

Focus Groups:

Four focus groups with 36 randomly selected citizens were conducted by Leger Marketing in May. There were two focus groups of frequent park users (who used parks at least once per week), one group of occasional park users (less than once per week) and one group of teenagers.

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Results of the focus groups, helped shape questions on the online and telephone surveys that were conducted in June and July.

Overall, unprompted descriptions of Calgary's parks by participants were predominantly positive. Interestingly, parks maintenance attracted a variety of positive, neutral and negative comments.

In the future, participants felt Calgarians would seek increased interconnectivity between parks and pathways and more multi-functional and 'destination' parks (for example, regional parks such as Bowness Park, Stanley Park, Sandy Beach or Prince's Island).

In addition to listing several existing park features as important for the future, participants identified new (or uncommon) desired features such as: skateboard parks and BMX trails, play structures for adults and older youth, massive slides on hillsides and bike, cross-country ski trails and canoe/kayak rentals. Future expectations also included additional amenities for our parks, including 'green' initiatives (rooftop parks, solar-powered lighting) or electronic infrastructure (free Wi-Fi, video games and movie screens in parks).

Many participants also mentioned the need for parks to be more all-season to accommodate both summer and winter recreational activities such as skating, cross-country skiing and tobogganing. Other future desires expressed in the focus groups included clean, safe, well-maintained parks and parks serving community hubs for recreation and cultural activities and events.

Future concerns identified included: less park space, less maintenance, less funding, less public awareness of parks and activities, the privatization of parks, wildlife and natural area degradation and challenges to encouraging community stewardship.

[Leger Marketing's focus group report](#)

Stakeholder Workshops:

From mid-May to early June, The City of Calgary Parks gathered stakeholder input from nine workshops facilitated by Joe Pavelka of Planvision Consulting Ltd. The nine sessions consisted of:

- three workshops with a total of 43 City of Calgary Parks employees
- one with 26 employees from other City of Calgary business units
- four with 49 representatives from 120 community, recreation and business groups that were invited to take part in the workshops
- one with 29 citizens via the Calgary Foundation's Vital Conversation series

Overall, the workshop results clearly indicated that stakeholders were generally happy with the status quo, notwithstanding relatively minor tweaks and changes. However, as noted in Planvision's full report, rather than blue-sky aspirations for the future of parks, stakeholders were more likely to express concerns centred 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.

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Specific key themes emerging from the nine stakeholder workshops included:

- Calgary's parks and parks system is highly valued and considered an important part of our daily life.
- Our park system has changed in subtle and dramatic ways over the past two decades. This change is most characterized by increases in size and scope, complexity and diversity.
- Some people believe that our park system has taken on a more utilitarian focus, such as pathways for commuting or community gardens.
- In the future, we should expect to see continued demand for parks, along with the related complexity and diversity we have seen in the past.
- As we look to the future, there is consensus to enhance continuity of parks and open spaces. As well, there is strong support for smaller parks and open spaces amenable to a variety of activities and uses.
- There is a need for a major 'destination park' in the northeast, such as a Bowness Park in the northwest.
- Parks need to be valued for the way they enhance our social cohesion (in terms of providing important social and health functions in our society).
- There is a concern that some stakeholders possess too much influence in parks planning and operations.
- Enhanced communication in the form of education and market research will be critical to the future success of Calgary's park system, including efforts focused on customers, the public and elected officials.

[Planvision Consulting Ltd.'s workshop results and data](#)

Telephone Survey:

In terms of what citizens value: big natural areas and quiet green spaces top the list, followed by maintenance and security, park access and a variety of parks to choose from.

From June 13-26, Leger Marketing conducted a telephone survey with 506 randomly selected citizens (stratified by age, quadrant of city and gender). The overall margin of error for the survey was +/- 4.4%.

Recreation was identified as the primary motivator for Calgarians' park use, followed by social interaction and relaxation. A majority of respondents reported using pathways, local community parks and green spaces. Further, almost half are using sport fields, natural areas and playgrounds on a monthly basis.

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areas and quiet green spaces top the list, followed by maintenance and security, park access and a variety of parks to choose from.

Looking to the future, citizens felt increasing the number of parks in the city, improving the maintenance and security and ensuring ease of access to parks (such as park proximity and adequate parking) were the most important factors for The City of Calgary to consider.

Proximity to a park is a significant factor in a citizen's park use. For example, to use larger multipurpose parks, most citizens are likely to undertake a modest commute, with 61% likely to drive or take transit up to 10 minutes from their home. When asked if they would drive or take transit to go to a park up to 20 minutes away, 42% said they were willing.

There was no clear direction in terms of suggested park changes in the future. The items most frequently mentioned were: more maintenance/security, more parks, ease of access, more trees/plants and more existing features. Almost one quarter of respondents didn't know what they would change.

More than half of citizens could not identify any additional funding options for parks in the future. However, of those who could, fundraising and donations were the most frequent answer. When asked about their support for fundraising/corporate sponsorships for parks, eight-in-10 citizens were supportive. Conversely, two-thirds of respondents opposed applying user fees to help fund park amenities or programs.

When given four options of: 1) increase taxes to expand parks services 2) increase taxes to maintain parks at current service levels 3) cut parks services to maintain current tax levels or 4) cut parks services to reduce taxes, two-thirds of respondents prefer to increase taxes versus cut park services.

Of the 23% of citizens who answered that parks services should be cut versus increased taxes, there was no consensus on areas that could be cut and no one feature stood out in terms of importance. Further, six-in-10 respondents could not identify which services could be cut. Areas that were mentioned included: landscaping of small plants and flowers, staff numbers, lawn mowing, off-leash areas, paved areas, small parks and sport fields.

Calgarians place a high importance on current park amenities. The most important features relate to comfort and cleanliness: garbage cans, benches, washrooms. Recreation amenities such as play structures, sport fields, skating areas and expanded pathways are also key amenities. Among amenities ranking in the mid-tier were: play structures for youth and adults, river access, BBQ areas and flower beds. In terms of important future park elements, the

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following were mentioned: bike/canoe/kyak rentals, skateboard parks, BMX bike trails, public art, free Wi-Fi and boat launch areas.

Citizens' concerns for the future include: park cleanliness, urban forest growth, municipal funding, public safety in parks and strong biodiversity.

[Leger Marketing's telephone survey report](#)

Online Survey:

A public online survey developed by Leger Marketing attracted 742 voluntary responses from June 13 until July 10.

Findings from the online survey were generally similar to the telephone survey. The main differences included more support for natural areas and biodiversity in Calgary from online survey participants. This is reflected in online respondents reporting a stronger use of (and desire for and concerns about) natural areas and biodiversity than the telephone survey respondents.

As well, online respondents are heavier users of almost all types of parks than telephone respondents. Also, because they were less likely to have children than telephone respondents, online respondents used playgrounds and sport fields less.

Looking to the future, concerns identified were park cleanliness, adequate funding for parks maintenance, the size of the urban forest, strong biodiversity, safety and the potential of user fees.

Online respondents were more aware of park offerings than telephone respondents (86% versus 74%).

Online respondents suggested a variety of changes for parks in the future. More natural areas were cited as paramount.

Along with maintenance and security being identified as key factors for Parks to consider in the future, online respondents showed more support for biodiversity as a key factor than the telephone survey responses.

Online respondents showed more support than telephone respondents for the preference to increase taxes versus cut parks services. In total, 76% favoured tax increases versus 9% who favoured parks service cuts (15% did not know what they would choose). Similar to the telephone survey, there was strong online support for corporate sponsorships as a funding option for parks and very little support for user fees.

Looking to the future, concerns identified were park cleanliness, adequate funding for parks maintenance, the size of the urban forest, strong biodiversity, safety and the potential of user fees. There was also strong recognition of: the value of parks to the next generation's quality of life, the importance of park and pathway connectivity, the role of parks in bringing communities together and the need for more park volunteerism.

As with the telephone survey, two-thirds of citizens would remain living in Calgary if family or job status were not factors. Factors that would help encourage them to stay in Calgary included: more and better maintained parks and green spaces, natural areas, pathways, festivals, sport fields and dog runs.

[Leger Marketing's online survey report](#)

Next Steps

The input gathered during the imagineParks public engagement phase will be used to guide a draft 30-year plan for The City of Calgary Parks.

In addition to the public engagement results, the draft imagineParks plan will also be guided by research, best practices from other municipalities and legislative requirements.

The draft plan will also build upon and align with previous Council approved long-term planning and policy initiatives including: imagineCALGARY, 2020 Sustainability Direction, Municipal Development Plan, Calgary Transportation Plan and the Open Space Plan (2002).

The first draft imagineParks plan will be posted on the project website for public review and online feedback in November. A second draft plan will be presented to Council for approval in spring 2013.

