

Parks & Open Spaces

Led by: Director of Parks & Open Spaces

Description

Calgary's parks and open spaces are cherished places that connect Calgarians with nature, our heritage and each other. The citywide parks system provides Calgarians with safe, inclusive, active-living opportunities. The system includes regional and neighbourhood parks, natural areas and the river valleys. The service maintains and stewards almost 8,700 hectares of public spaces (the equivalent of 11,000 football fields spread out citywide over 5,200 parcels of land). Parks and Open Spaces conserves and promotes biodiverse ecosystems and cultural landscapes. It supports park stewardship among Calgarians through volunteer and education programs.

Value and benefits

The parks and open spaces system enhances Calgary's quality of life. Calgarians can relax, be physically active, have fun, experience nature and gather together in safe, well maintained public spaces. An ever-increasing amount of scientific evidence shows there are mental and physical health benefits from accessing and being close to parks, trees, greenery and nature. Calgarians receive free and/or low-cost access to nature, recreation, culture and park stewardship opportunities. The service's environmental stewardship work benefits current and future generations, contributing to climate resilience and biodiversity. Parks are within a walkable distance from Calgarians' homes, supporting strong communities and social equity. The City provides a wide variety of parks and open space amenities to help meet the diverse recreation and leisure interests of Calgarians.

Customers

This service benefits Calgarians (children, youth, adults and seniors); sport, nature, cultural and recreational groups; festival/event attendees and organizers; tourists; and the environment (for 'mother nature' and future generations of Calgarians).

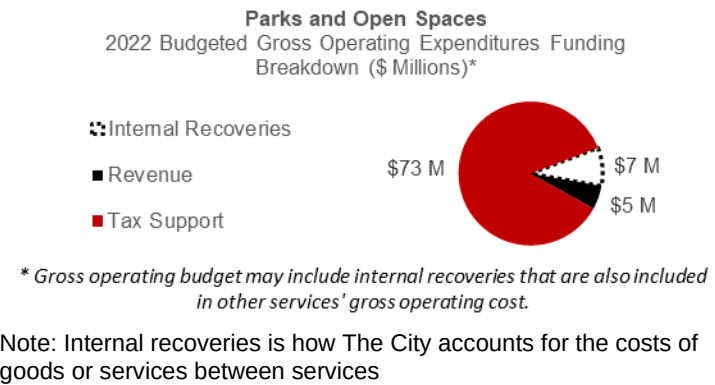
What we deliver

This service delivers accessible leisure and recreation opportunities for all Calgarians. Work the service carries out includes: mowing and turf management; park litter pickup; festival and event support; park snow removal; environmental conservation; park amenity inspections and repairs; park volunteer and stewardship programs; pest management (e.g., weeds, mosquitoes, etc.); and, much more.

Partners

This service works with: Parks Foundation Calgary (a capital fundraising agent and project delivery partner), sponsors/donors and developers who invest in new and/or upgraded parks; other City services, the province and school boards on shared policy and interests; community, sport, nature and festival organizations; horticulture and education institutions on best practices; and park vendors.

87%	Citizens using parks in summer
75%	Citizens using parks in winter
93%	Citizen satisfaction
92%	Park users staying 20-or-more minutes



Key assets

The City has almost 8,700 hectares of maintained parkland, 1,137 playgrounds, 989 community sport fields, 159 off-leash areas and many other amenities reflecting Calgarians' vast leisure interests (ranging from cricket pitches, to outdoor skating ponds, picnic sites, natural areas, park benches, etc.).

What we have heard & what we are watching

What we have heard

Citizen satisfaction scores have been consistently high for Calgary's parks and open spaces for the past two decades, including 93 per cent in 2021 (and 94 per cent in the Spring 2022 survey). Satisfaction was also consistently high among Calgarians grouped by gender, income, age, visible minority, immigrant and disability status. Additional surveying in 2021 shows Calgarians who are frequent parks users are more likely to rate their quality of life in Calgary as high. Recent engagement confirms the public's desire for clean, well-maintained, safe and environmentally healthy parks and open spaces. To improve the service, park users cite better washroom access and seating areas as leading factors that would increase their time spent in a park. Key value dimensions for Calgarians are ranked 1) Environmental 2) Availability 3) Sustainability 4) Safety and 5) Wellbeing.

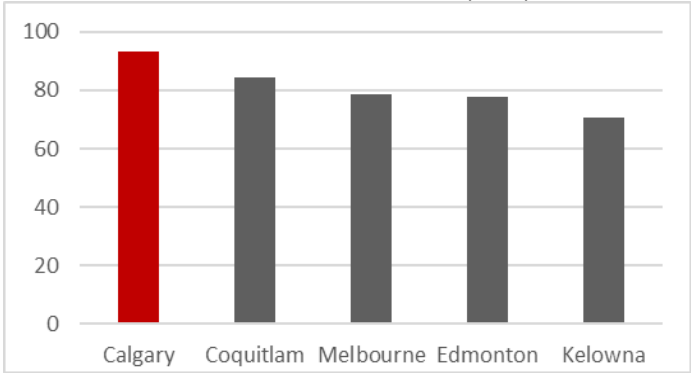
What Council has directed

This service contributes to Climate Resilience by actively supporting biodiversity and healthy ecosystems. Social Resilience and Global Positioning and Reputation are supported by citywide access to parks and public spaces that contribute to Calgary's high quality of life (and the mental and physical health of Calgarians). The development of Medicine Hills regional park and maintaining parks as vibrant and festival-friendly, year-round destinations support Hosting and Hospitality. Economic Resilience is supported by improving opportunities for park vendors to enhance the park user experience. Downtown Revitalization is supported through maintained service levels, events and attractions in our centre city parks. Modernizing Government is supported by regularly engaging Calgarians on the service (with the goal of continuous improvement) along with updating a citywide parks asset management system and introducing new software applications to work more efficiently and effectively.

What we are watching

Key trends include the digital shift, specifically increasing and improving the use of technology for optimizing service routes, tracking completed work and mapping park assets and their condition ratings. Key risks impacting service delivery include: environmental resilience (invasive weeds, human-wildlife conflicts, etc.); safety (and perceptions of safety) in downtown parks; severe weather events (flooding, droughts, etc.) and aging park infrastructure. Opportunities for the service include continually exploring partnerships and leveraged funding opportunities (e.g., funding for accessible playgrounds, Parks Foundation Calgary projects, etc.). As well, the increased naturalization of roadsides and improving the health of urban natural areas are opportunities for improved sustainability and climate adaptation.

Best Practices Score for Parks and Open Spaces



Yardstick Global Parks Benchmarks Report 2021

Comparing our service

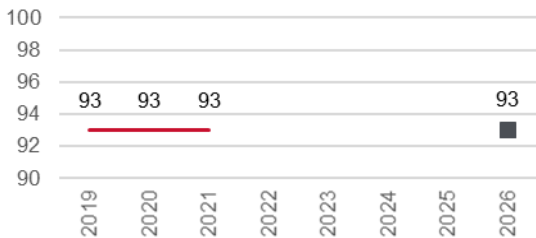
The Yardstick overall best practice percentage is an aggregate score of a participating city's performance in terms of park operational excellence, asset management, strategic planning, environmental sustainability, and community engagement. Yardstick is supported by an international partnership between private sector and industry associations. The City of Calgary has been a strong leader in this score in past years and this Service Plan will support maintaining and implementing the necessary processes in this business cycle to sustain performance and help continue to drive improvement.

Measuring performance & where we want to go

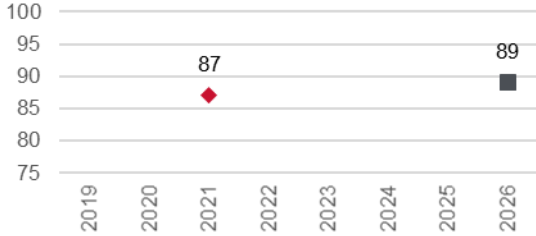
For Council Approval

Actuals Expected Future Performance

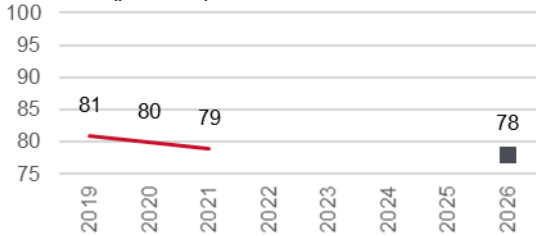
PM1: Calgarians' Satisfaction with Parks, Playgrounds and Open Spaces (per cent)



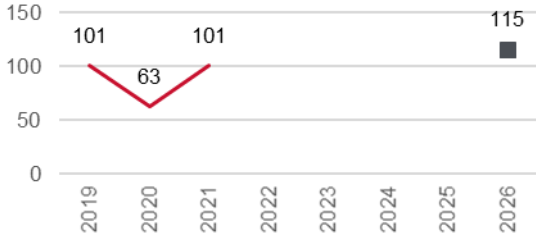
PM2: Calgarians Using Parks (per cent)



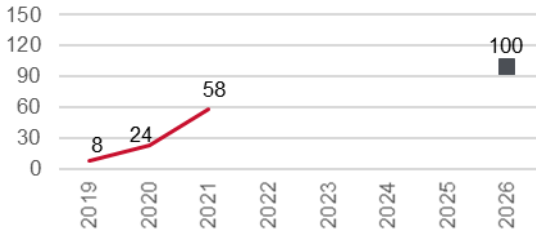
PM3: Park Assets in Acceptable, Good or Excellent Condition (per cent)



PM4: Hectares of New Parkland Added



PM5: Hectares of Park Habitat Restoration



Story behind the curve

Calgary's parks have consistently scored high since the introduction of the annual citizen satisfaction survey. In the past four years, the score has not dropped, despite aging infrastructure and no growth funding (which led to lower park maintenance service levels citywide). For 2023-26, Parks and Open Spaces should be able to maintain citizen satisfaction with requested funding to maintain current service levels (with annual growth funding) and lifecycle capital funding for repairs and replacements of aging park amenities.

Parks and Open Spaces launched an annual survey in 2021 to gain feedback from Calgarians. The inaugural Pulse on Parks survey shows Calgarians who reported using parks was high during the pandemic. The usage peaked at 87 per cent in the months without snow (while in months with snow usage was still strong at 75 per cent). Connecting more Calgarians with the park system will be a strong focus for the service in 2023-26, with the continuation of attractions such as winter amenities (skating, cross-country ski trails, firepits, etc.). The service's long-term target is 90 per cent usage by 2030.

This performance measure captures the percentage of our municipal park infrastructure rated as in 'acceptable', 'good' or 'excellent' condition (as opposed to park infrastructure in need of repairs or replacement and rated as 'poor' or 'failing'). As park assets decline with age, the scores are also expected to decline. For 2023-26, Parks and Open Spaces prioritized lifecycle funding as part of its capital requests (and has tentatively received partial funding) to help mitigate the declining condition of park assets.

As Calgary grows, The City adds new parkland from developers, land acquisitions, etc. Since 2017, 372 hectares of new maintained parkland was added to the municipal parks system (about 1.5 per cent growth per year). However, total funding per hectare has decreased by \$873 per hectare in that timeframe. In other words, the service is increasingly absorbing growth. While growth drives efficiencies, the impacts also include lower park maintenance levels (e.g., longer grass). For 2023-26, Parks and Open Spaces is slated to receive growth and inflation funding to help maintain 2022 service levels.

Park habitat restoration improves Calgary's ecological health and climate resilience. Due to capital funding constraints and no capital funding for this work in 2019-22, habitat restoration will only reach approximately 36 per cent of The City of Calgary's target to restore 20 per cent of open space by 2025. The proposed 2023-26 capital budget will help improve progress towards City of Calgary targets. Parks and Open Spaces plans to restore approximately 100 hectares of priority parks to improve climate adaptation, biodiversity, watershed health and more.

What we plan to do

Result for 2023-2026

Parks and Open Spaces will focus on maintaining Calgary’s municipal park system through efficient operations, best practices, contributing to Council priorities and optimizing the benefits of a healthy and vibrant parks system for Calgarians and the environment.

How we are going to get there

Enhance the quality of life of Calgarians by providing safe, inclusive, vibrant and accessible parks and open spaces.

Support climate resilience, focusing on improving the health of the ecological network, through the development and implementation of Habitat Management Plans.

Assist and encourage commercial activities in City parks by continuing to improve processes for interested businesses and citizens who can enhance the park user experience.

Support downtown revitalization to increase community safety and enhance Calgarians' experiences in our downtown parks and open spaces by working with our partners, including public sector, private sector and non-government organizations.

Improve the sustainability and resiliency of Calgary's parks and open spaces system by updating the Parks Open Space Plan which is the overarching policy that governs use, provision and preservation of our municipal parks system.

Maintain community connections and Calgarians' wellness by providing year-round amenities and activities, including winter activities and new attractions as opportunities arise.

Celebrate Calgary's past and strengthen The City's commitment to Truth and Reconciliation by continuing to maintain and celebrate Calgary's historic and cultural landscapes.

To maintain Calgary's high-quality parks and open space system, Parks and Open Spaces will continue exploring new funding mechanisms and partnerships that can provide value and benefits for Calgarians.

Connect more Calgarians with their parks and open spaces system by developing and implementing a marketing and communications strategy to engage Calgarians on the value and benefits of using parks and accessing nature in the city.

Support continuous improvement of the service by exploring more data and technology options to improve decision making, sustainability and service delivery.

Provide a safe and healthy environment for park users, employees, contractors and volunteers by strengthening commitments to safety and wellbeing.

Operating budget needed to achieve results

For Council Approval

Breakdown of net operating budget (\$000s)

	2023		2024		2025		2026	
	Base	One-time	Base	One-time	Base	One-time	Base	One-time
Previous Year's Net Budget	70,504	-	71,953	-	76,161	-	78,683	-
Previously approved One-time budget		-		-		-		-
2022 One-time carry forward		-		-		-		-
Revenue Changes	(51)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Internal Recoveries Changes	(613)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Inflation	376	-	572	-	685	-	613	-
Operating Impact of Previously Approved Capital	-	440	-	880	-	1,320	-	1,760
Operating Impact of New Capital (Incremental)	13	-	114	-	483	-	59	-
Service Reductions	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Service Increases	1,111	375	3,522	375	1,354	375	2,285	375
S&W Realignment Expenditure Offset	613							
Total net budget*	71,953	815	76,161	1,255	78,683	1,695	81,640	2,135

*The previous year's One-time Budget is not carried forward to the following year.

Operating Grants to Civic Partners ('000)

Civic Partner	Budget as of April 30, 2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Parks Foundation Calgary**	193	576	583	591	598

**Includes one-time budget of \$375 thousand each year in 2023-2026.

Total Operating Budget (\$000s) for Approval

	2022 Budget	2023			2024			2025			2026		
	At April 30	Base	One-Time	Total	Base	One-Time	Total	Base	One-Time	Total	Base	One-Time	Total
Expenditure	85,162	84,479	815	85,294	88,687	1,255	89,942	91,209	1,695	92,904	94,166	2,135	96,301
Recoveries	(7,352)	(7,965)	-	(7,965)	(7,965)	-	(7,965)	(7,965)	-	(7,965)	(7,965)	-	(7,965)
Revenue	(4,510)	(4,561)	-	(4,561)	(4,561)	-	(4,561)	(4,561)	-	(4,561)	(4,561)	-	(4,561)
Net	73,300	71,953	815	72,768	76,161	1,255	77,416	78,683	1,695	80,378	81,640	2,135	83,775
Base	70,504												
One-time	2,796												

Note: Figures may not add up due to rounding.

Capital budget needed to deliver service

For Council Approval

Activity	Investment Name	2023 Request (\$000s)	2024 Request (\$000s)	2025 Request (\$000s)	2026 Request (\$000s)	2027+ Request (\$000s)	Total Request (\$000s)
Annual Investment Program(s)							
420185	Park Infrastructure Lifecycle	6,519	6,783	4,514	4,583	-	22,399
425200	Habitat Restoration	2,200	2,200	2,200	2,080	-	8,680
Program(s)							
420300	Park Delivery 2 - Upgrade	2,000	8,360	7,500	7,500	-	25,360
420220	Park Delivery 1 - Development	11,140	11,000	10,500	5,700	-	38,340
419700	Parks Project Development Program	1,000	500	-	-	-	1,500
Projects(s)							
		-	-	-	-	-	-
Sub-Total (New Budget Requests)		22,859	28,843	24,714	19,863	-	96,279
Previously Approved Budget Remaining		31,689	10,000	18,900	-	-	60,589
Total Capital Investment		54,548	38,843	43,614	19,863	-	156,868

Explanation of capital budget requests

Annual Investment Program(s)

Activity 420185: Park Infrastructure Lifecycle

Replace or upgrade Parks infrastructure assets as they reach the end of their life. This includes playgrounds, sports fields, tennis courts, etc. Well-maintained parks improve Calgary's quality of life, making it an attractive place to live and thus encouraging economic activity.

Funding From: Municipal Sustainability Initiative (\$21,279 thousand) Pay-As-You-Go (\$261 thousand) Reserve for Future Capital (\$859 thousand)

Contributing Services: None

Operating Impact: None

Activity 425200: Habitat Restoration

Improving the ecological network supports Calgary's climate resilience, reputation and quality of life. Improving the ecological network supports Calgary's climate resilience, reputation and quality of life.

Funding From: Lifecycle Maintenance & Upgrade Reserve (\$8,680 thousand)

Contributing Services: Urban Forestry

Operating Impact: This request requires \$11 thousand base funding of operating costs starting in 2023, 2024, 2025 and 2026.

Program(s)

Activity 420300: Park Delivery 2 - Upgrade

Upgrade and redevelopment of existing parks. The timely implementation of completed park masterplans is critical to maximize project benefits for citizens.

Funding From: Capital Reserves (\$25,360 thousand)

Contributing Services: None

Operating Impact: This request requires \$97 thousand base funding of operating costs starting in 2024, \$466 thousand base funding of operating costs starting in 2025, and \$42 thousand base funding of operating costs starting in 2026.

Activity 420220: Park Delivery 1 - Development

Development and acquisition of new regional parks and major green spaces to provide new regional parks in areas of the city that is underserved. The timely implementation of completed park masterplans is critical to maximize project benefits for citizens.

Funding From: Capital Reserves (\$38,340 thousand)

Contributing Services: None

Operating Impact: This request requires \$2 thousand base funding of operating costs starting in 2023, \$6 thousand base funding of operating costs starting in 2024, 2025, and 2026.

Activity 419700: Parks Project Development Program

Optimize future investments by identifying service needs and gaps, potential collaborations and financial leveraging opportunities.

Funding From: Capital Reserves (\$1,500 thousand)

Contributing Services: None

Operating Impact: None