



Community engagement summary

Background

Guelph is growing and the way people use parks is changing. It's important to plan Guelph's park system to provide optimal services as its population evolves. As part of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan, we are currently developing a Park Plan that will help assess the current park system and determine future land needs as Guelph grows.

A Park Plan is needed to ensure we have an optimal level of service for parks— the level and types of service that meet community needs and preferences, are accessible to all residents and are sustainable, affordable and realistic. We also need a Park Plan to update our policies and priorities in line with the City's Strategic Plan and to take advantage of new approaches, legislation, trends and guidelines in park planning and development.

The following is summary of what we heard prepared in collaboration with Sage Solutions, consultant for the Park Plan engagement.

Engagement purpose

Our Park Plan engagement activities validated what we heard in our first and second round of listening for the [Parks and Recreation Master Plan](#) (PRMP).

We focused on understanding key themes specific to the Park Plan to help create strategic directions. Using feedback we received through the PRMP and the Parkland Dedication Bylaw review in 2018, we asked new questions that dug a little deeper and touched on themes relating to parkland planning and the impact of COVID-19 on future parkland needs. Residents were encouraged to consider and share:

- If park needs changed during the COVID-19 pandemic and as Guelph grows.
- How parkland can be used more efficiently or reshaped to meet new park needs.
- Ideas about how or where the City could grow its park system.
- Other questions or advice as the Park Plan related to the larger PRMP.

What we did

To ensure the Park Plan reflects the needs of the community, we invited residents to share their thoughts and opinions through an online survey on the City's [Have Your Say](#) page. The City also engaged Dr. Rebecca Sutherns, a local Certified Professional Facilitator and collaborative strategist, to facilitate two community focus groups and one focus group for the development community. This summary report provides the highlights from the key themes that emerged from these engagement activities.

Specifically for the Park Plan, we invited feedback through:

- An online survey on the City's Have Your Say webpage
- Two community focus groups facilitated by Dr. Rebecca Sutherns
- One developer specific focus group facilitated by Dr. Rebecca Sutherns
- Individual meetings with Grand River Conservation Authority, Upper Grand District School Board, Wellington Catholic District School Board, Six Nations of the Grand River
- Internal stakeholder meetings and engagement with other departments
- Email correspondence from people in our councils and treaty partners
- Correspondence with Indigenous governments
- Virtual Indigenous Sharing Circle as part of an ongoing relationship building initiative with community members of First Nation, Inuit, Métis and mixed Indigenous ancestry – themed conversation around park and outdoor spaces

In earlier engagement activities specifically for the Parks and Recreation Master Plan, we shared information through various platforms (2018-2020) and over the course of the project 1,100 people engaged with us and 700 people reviewed the information but chose not to engage. Engagement included 16 different opportunities to share feedback throughout public events, stakeholder meetings, advisory committees of Council, intercept polling, online engagement, and direct email correspondence.

Park Plan Engagement Participation

- A total of 67 people attended one of the two public focus group sessions held on January 12 and 13, 2022. One individual attended both public sessions and two individuals also attended the session for developers.
- 25 stakeholders attended the focus groups for the development community on January 13, 2022.
- 334 people completed the online survey on Have Your Say Guelph over a two-week period (January 6-20) and another 484 people were informed on the project by chose not to engage.
- 9 people attended the Virtual Indigenous Sharing Circle on January 19

What we heard

Park use/experience

A series of questions to gauge people's current experiences with City parks was included in the online survey and the Mentimeter polls used during the community focus groups.

- The majority of survey and focus group participants:
 - use a park at least twice per month. (Survey: 82percent; Focus groups: 96percent)
 - have access to a private green space (Survey: 82percent; Focus groups: 74percent)
 - have a park within a 10-minute walk from where they live (Survey: 92percent; Focus groups: 85percent)
 - do not have people under the age of 18 in their household (Survey: 62percent; Focus groups: 63percent)
 - want to see more parks in Guelph (Survey: 72percent; Focus groups: 98percent)
- When asked if there was enough variety of things to do in parks, 60percent of focus group participants said yes. 31percent of survey respondents agreed there was a good variety, with 50percent wanting to have more variety of things to do in City parks.
- 78percent of focus group participants want to see more parks in their neighbourhood. Survey responses were more narrowly split with 27percent wanting more parks in their neighbourhoods and 26percent feeling there are enough parks in their neighbourhood.
- When asked if they would rather walk/bike/use a mobility device to get to a small park nearby or drive/use transit to visit a larger park further away, 60percent of survey respondents said both options are important; 36percent of survey respondents would rather walk/bike/use a mobility device to get to a small park nearby. Focus group responses were more narrowly split with 52percent preferring to walk/bike/use a mobility device to get to a small park and 48percent preferring both options. Reasons for preferring a small park nearby included ease of access and community building, and people like the variety of amenities and features at larger parks.

Park development goals

Participants were asked to rank park development goals for Guelph over the next 10 years. Participants responded:

- Protecting parks and creating new parks were the top ranked park development goals for Guelph over the next 10 years, by survey and focus group participants.

- Upgrading parks was the third highest ranking goal from the survey; focus group participants chose adding new park features in existing parks.
- “Plan activities in parks” was the lowest ranking goal by survey and focus group participants.

Improvement priorities within existing parks

Participants were asked to rank park improvement priorities within existing parks. Participants responded:

- Planting more trees and pollinator-friendly plants, improving connections between parks and natural areas, and adding more walking paths or trails within parks were the top three improvement priorities from survey and focus group participants, although the order of these three priorities varied.
- Adding new equipment and amenities and preserving open areas for activities ranked the lowest.

Priorities for locating new parks

- Areas with high population density, areas of high socioeconomic need and areas with few parks were the top three ranked priorities for locating new parks by participants at both focus group sessions. (This question was not included in the online survey)

Locations to add/not add new parks

- Survey and focus group participants indicated where in the city they would or would not like to see new parks, as well as where they didn't want to see any parks. The map used by survey participants can be viewed [here](#). Detailed written comments and map results from Mentimeter will also be used by City staff to inform the Park Plan.

Preferred ways for the City to acquire more parks

Participants were asked to rank their preferred ways for the City to acquire more parks. Participants responded:

- Parkland dedication (land or cash in lieu to buy parks) from developers and home builders was the preferred way for the City to acquire more parks, with an emphasis on acquiring land. Repurposing existing City land was the second preferred option.
- Leasing land and purchasing land with tax dollars were the two lowest ranking methods.

How recent changes due to COVID etc. might affect the City's plans for parks

- Parks became extremely important to residents during the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in increased need and usage of parks, trails and greenspaces.
- Having easy access to a park was extremely important to ensure they were able to get outside every day.
- Many noted that increased usage also means that parks and trails need to be well-maintained.
- Having year-round access to washrooms and hand washing stations is important for residents. It was noted that washrooms not only need to be built/provided but also kept unlocked and clean.
- More benches, picnic tables and sheltered areas to accommodate outdoor gatherings were requested.
- More/different amenities and park features to offer variety for park users are valued.
- Areas for passive recreation activities and space to enjoy the quiet and calm of the outdoors are also important.
- Wider paths to allow for safe distancing and spacing out play structures and other features to avoid overcrowding in areas emerged as suggestions.
- Several survey participants noted that park planning is long-term and that recent changes should have no impact.

Creative possibilities to keep parks accessible to and enjoyed by Guelph's future residents

- There was a wide range of specific amenities and features that the community would love to see in Guelph parks, including:
 - Disc golf courses, pickleball courts and other sport-specific features;
 - Chess boards, ping pong tables and other areas for people to sit and play games outdoors;
 - Outdoor exercise equipment and areas to participate in outdoor exercise activities (i.e. yoga, tai chi);
 - Pizza ovens and barbecues for public use, as well as food carts/trucks and water refill stations;
 - More seating and sheltered areas;
 - Community gardens and pollinator gardens;
 - Nature education and heritage features;
 - Art installations; and
 - Water features, such as natural ponds, splashpads and fountains.
- People want parks to be accessible for all members of the community. This includes having parks accessible via bus routes, as well as appropriate surfaces

and equipment, particularly for those using wheelchairs or other mobility devices, including strollers.

- Attract people and visitors to parks by hosting events — markets, craft fairs, concerts, movies etc.
- People want to see trails and parks linked throughout the city.
- Creative financing tools and legacy contributions were identified as possible ways to acquire more parkland.

Developer focus group feedback

Developers also had a range of creative suggestions for Guelph parks:

- Urban squares are a unique way to provide recreational opportunities in an urban setting.
- Parks could be built on top of stormwater management tanks, allowing the land to be used for dual purposes.
- Incorporate trails and vistas around stormwater ponds.
- Use utility corridors for trail connections and recreation opportunities
- Incorporate heritage of the site to tell the history of the city (buildings, signage and trail markers, sculptures).
- Use technology to enhance the experience (i.e. guided tours, connecting trails)

Other feedback

Participants provided an extensive amount of feedback and suggestions for the Park Plan which has been included in the detailed feedback reports. A few frequently repeated themes include developing the Yorklands property in ways that showcase large, accessible parks and ensuring that the needs of the aging demographic are reflected in in park planning.

Specific technical questions related to property development also generated a range of responses that the City will consider as the Park Plan is finalized. A summary of the questions and responses is below.

Indigenous Sharing Circle feedback

As part of the City of Guelph's work to improve the way we engage with and include Indigenous members of our community in policy and decision making, City staff started a relationship building initiative called "Indigenous Sharing Circles."

These are quarterly gatherings (virtual for now) that bring Indigenous community members and knowledge keepers together to get to know each other and members of City staff, and to share with us their needs and aspirations for Guelph.

The goal of the gatherings is to learn, improve relationships and ultimately improve services based on what we learn.

We heard from the Indigenous community that their preferred way to engage with the City of Guelph is to have a conversation where everyone is equal, with no agenda, with space for ceremony and storytelling, and a focus on growing relationships and our understanding of Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

In the first gathering, we heard some things that relate to the Parks and Recreation Master Plan including:

- Importance of preservation, enhancement and conservation of ecosystems is very important
- Creating indoor and outdoor spaces for Indigenous celebration and gathering; and
- Recognizing or reinterpreting cultural landmarks and inclusion of art by Indigenous artists in public spaces.

We heard many other things during this gathering, but we thought it was important to highlight some things we heard that relate to the Parks and Recreation Master Plan.

How we're using your feedback

Community feedback is one factor in creating a guiding plan for recreation and parks in the future. As we prepare the master plan we will also consider:

- Alignment with other plans and strategies (e.g. Community Plan, Strategic Plan)
- Overall community benefit
- Environmental sustainability
- Future trends and population changes
- Technical considerations and operating impacts
- Financial sustainability

It is important to note that survey or community feedback data is only one source of information that helps paint one picture, but we check this data against other

statistically valid sources like our citizen satisfaction survey, public health data and demographic information.

Next steps

We will take this feedback into consideration, along with staff and consultant expertise and best practices to inform the draft Park Plan that will be presented to Council in April 2022.

Engagement for the Parks and Recreation Master Plan will take place later in 2022. Timing and engagement activities are currently being planned, so sign up at haveyoursay.guelph.ca to be notified of upcoming engagement activities and participate in our online engagement community.

All opportunities for engagement will be shared with the community via our social media channels (Twitter and Facebook), online and in the City News pages of the Guelph Mercury Tribune.



Questions and answers from January 12 and 13 virtual focus group

In the focus group meetings, City staff took time to respond to the questions. Here are the questions asked and the answers provided. Some responses have been expanded on from what was provided in the meeting.

1. Does the definition [of parkland] being used by the City include "indoor recreational space"? The definition used by the 2018 Parkland Dedication Bylaw update included indoor recreational spaces.

The City defines parks as outdoor space that can contain buildings (e.g. washrooms). Indoor recreational spaces are not parks. Through the Parks and Recreation Master Plan and Park Plan engagement, the City will update definitions to make them clearer.

2. Is the University of Guelph Arboretum considered a park-function area?

No. The arboretum is private land owned by the University of Guelph. The City is working on a way to recognize other private spaces that have recreation value in the city through the Park Plan.

3. How does the Park Plan defend parkland in Guelph from developers, that would rather build than provide greenspace?

The Park Plan is a strategy that helps set a community-approved intention to improve and build upon the City's park system. While privately-owned land can and does get developed, the City relies on the development review process to get more parkland in the city. The [Parkland Dedication Bylaw](#) and [Official Plan policies](#) allowed by [the Ontario Planning Act](#) require planning and development applications to transfer land to us for parks and public recreation or provide cash-in-lieu of parkland so parks or recreational spaces can be purchased. While it represents just one way of accessing land or funds to purchase land, it does mean that each development contributes to new parks in Guelph.

Park Plan



Our Natural Heritage System policies protect natural heritage areas and features to ensure we have intact ecosystems for future generations.

The City uses [Official Plan policies](#) to determine if there is a need for a park based on access, neighbourhood population, parkland provision targets, recreation needs and demographic information.

Related questions

- What is being done to REDUCE building sites?
- Is land in Guelph prioritized for development instead of THE SAME LAND available for parks?

4. We had a lot of conflict last year about dog parks. Are you planning more off-leash dog parks?

The City will address the need for additional leash-free areas as part of the next phase of work for the Parks and Recreation Master Plan. There will be another opportunity for community engagement about recreation facilities and needs later in 2022 or early 2023.

5. What consideration is being given to ensuring that low-income neighbourhoods are appropriately served with parks? With my kids I have visited many park playgrounds around the city, and it is very apparent that the nicest parks are in the wealthy neighbourhoods. Can staff comment if this is being considered?

Equity and inclusion is an important part of the Park Plan that helps to make sure the City builds infrastructure where it's needed most.

Staff are looking at strategic funding models to fund improvements to existing parks in existing areas, such as better ways to use the City's [City Building Investment](#), a tax-supported funding strategy.

6. Does the Grand River Conservation Authority (GRCA) own parkland within its constituent cities, and would they comprise a suitable partner for developing more parks?

The GRCA owns land within the City of Guelph. Some of these properties are considered parkland as the City manages the land through maintenance agreements. One example is Silvercreek Park where the skatepark is located.

The GRCA is already a partner for developing parks and there may be opportunities for the City to work with the GRCA to develop future parks.



7. I've attended a couple of neighbourhood information sessions by condo builders. How can we know if the plans suggested by the builders for green space open to the public is actually happening?

Information provided by condo builders can be confirmed by the City. The City posts information about [current development applications](#) on the City's website. Developers must provide private green space as part of developments, often in the form of common amenity space, which is not parkland. Please contact planning@guelph.ca with any questions.

8. Has the City approached wealthy people to leave a legacy of supporting parkland contribution?

City staff do not approach private citizens to donate parkland. Should citizens wish to donate land to the City for a park, staff review each application against City policies and determine how best to do this on a case-by-case basis.

9. Could you please make sure that developer input on all of these processes is reported separately from citizen input? Developers have a pecuniary conflict of interest in this matter. Minimizing parkland maximizes profit for developers, although it minimizes quality of life for citizens.

City staff are meeting with the development community separately to understand their perspective on parkland. Summaries will be provided on the project webpage alongside those for public engagement.

10. Who manages the habitat for urban wildlife?

The City manages Natural Heritage Systems on City property, which contains habitat for urban wildlife. Our Official Plan policies set out objectives for protecting the Natural Heritage System and water resources. We use a system-based approach to help protect, manage and ensure the long-term health of the natural environment.

The City's [Natural Heritage Action Plan](#) (NHAP) presents a mission, principles and actions for supporting objectives for the natural heritage system and water resources as established in the City's Official Plan. Several specific recommended actions in the Natural Heritage Plan are related to habitat and wildlife management planning including Action 3, 8 and 11.

City staff have very limited capacity to undertake wildlife management activities in parks and natural areas, and currently intervene to actively manage wildlife only when deemed absolutely necessary because of the nature of a human wildlife conflict situation (e.g., protecting sensitive turtle eggs or limiting goose conflict). The goal of natural areas management is to preserve and enhance habitat for urban wildlife.



City staff do not generally provide animal control. The Guelph Humane Society and their staff do provide animal control and education to residents about living in harmony with wildlife and will assist in injured wildlife situations they can be contacted at 519-824-3091. More information can be found on the [City's webpage](#).

11. Are staff planning to discuss the parkland bylaw at this meeting and if not WHEN will the public be asked for input to the new bylaw that has to be in place? I have questions on the bylaw so shall I save them for experienter public meet?

Community meetings to refresh the [Parkland Dedication Bylaw](#) will begin in February 2022.

12. Is parkland and parks the same thing? Please define parkland in terms of parks, other green spaces, NHS etc.

Park and parkland are the same and the terms are used interchangeably. Parks are defined areas that primarily support active recreation.

Our Natural Heritage System (NHS) is not considered parkland since its primary function is to protect, maintain and enhance the City's biological, hydrological and geological functions and to sustain local biodiversity. Our NHS policies limit passive recreation opportunities and human use. Some parks have natural heritage features or areas in them as they are part of existing parks and our policies and criteria for parkland have evolved over time.

13. Can you also please review what is currently classified as "recreation"?

There is a broad definition of recreation in our [presentation](#). Recreation is the experience that results from freely chosen participation in physical, social, intellectual, creative and spiritual pursuits that enhance individual and community wellbeing.

14. How will you reach out to the many people in Guelph who are NOT able to participate via technology due to cost, access, language, etc.?

There have been numerous other points of contact with the public through other/related engagement activities as part of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan, Community Plan and Strategic Plan.

Prior to COVID-19, we were able to collect information from harder to reach groups through intercept surveying in parks, farmer's market, downtown, recreation centres, with school groups and Evergreen Senior's Centre.

We also use other data sources and information interviews with specific groups to help us understand our community needs like using data from Public Health,



demographic information, Guelph Community Foundation and many other sources of information.

All communications about this project includes contact information for staff. Anyone with limited access or knowledge of technology is encouraged to email or give staff a call so their feedback can be captured that way.

15. With regard to animating parks with a variety of activities, has the City piloted using portable equipment/infrastructure?

We will address this as part of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan. We currently have [Activation Stations](#) in some of our parks that run free programming for families. We also have used portable skateboard equipment in the past.

16. Are there plans to pave more trails to make them accessible for people on scooters, roller skates etc.?

The City is always looking at ways to continually improve our trail system. The recently completed [Trails Master Plan](#) provides information about trail design standards and approach.

17. How do we currently prioritize where to place new parks?

The City relies on the development review process to help get more parkland in the city. The [Parkland Dedication Bylaw](#) and [Official Plan policies](#), allowed by [the Ontario Planning Act](#), require planning and development applications to transfer land to us for parks and public recreation or provide cash-in-lieu of parkland so parks or recreational spaces can be purchased.

[Official Plan policies](#) determine if there is a need for a park based on access, neighbourhood population, parkland provision targets, recreation needs and demographic information.

18. Do existing policies outline a minimum number and types of amenities for density of population?

Our previous Parks, Recreation and Culture Master Plans in 1997 and 2009 outline existing and proposed service levels for recreation facilities. This is typically shown as number of facilities for a specific number of residents. (e.g., one tennis court per 2,500 residents). The City will review service levels for recreation facilities in the next stage of work for the Parks and Recreation Master Plan.

19. I heard there was plan for a park along the river (Gordon and Wyndham, currently a strip mall). What's happened to that?

A future park was identified as part of the [Downtown Secondary Plan](#). The City is working on strategies to acquire that land. The City must buy land at market rates and needs to build up the resources to do so.



20. Why don't we have developers to finance parks? After all, we pay for roads, water etc. that allows them to sell their developments at higher prices.

There are rules and regulations as to how much a municipality can require of a developer and the City must follow these rules. Developers pay [Development Charges](#) and are required to provide parkland dedication (land) or cash in lieu of land.

As part the development review process, City staff review applications and determine if land or cash in lieu is required for the development. Any cash in lieu that is received is put in a parkland dedication reserve fund. This money can only be used for the acquisition of land for park or other recreational purposes; erection, improvement or repair of buildings; or the acquisition of machinery for park or other public recreational purposes.

Related questions

- We pay and pay for roads, water, all that with taxpayer money, that benefits development but we can't ask them to give land for citizens enjoyment?
- What is the City's expectation from developers? Are the developers mandated to create park space or pay in lieu? And if they choose to pay in lieu, is the City mandated to use that money toward parks or does it just get absorbed into the coffers?

21. The Lee St. Park is basically the Winegard Public School yard now. Is it part of City parks or school board property?

Lee Street Park is a City-owned park. We are not aware of any official arrangements with the school board. Many parks are adjacent to schools and often property lines are not delineated by obvious infrastructure such as a fence or natural area.

City staff are meeting with the school board to discuss the Park Plan and identify opportunities to work together (i.e. dual use). If the property is owned by the school board then they make the rules, but if it is City-owned, it is a public park and can be used by everyone.

22. As far as I am aware, the City never took advantage of the bonusing allowed for higher density under section 37 of the Planning Act. Instead, we have allowed higher density in some developments. I don't believe we ever passed a bylaw that would have allowed bonusing. Now there is a community benefit charge allowed under section 37 allows 4 percent of the value of the land. Is this a tool we could use to get more parkland? Would this 4 percent allow us to buy more parkland



The [Community Benefits Charge](#) (CBC) is a new development-related revenue tool, which was introduced in the past year through legislative changes by the provincial government. This revenue tool is aimed to support capital costs related to intensification as the legislation limits the CBC only apply to developments of certain density criteria.

To impose this new CBC charge, the City is required to complete a background study like the DC Study to support the charge. This work is currently underway and is expected to be presented to Council in Q3 of 2022.

This tool could be used to develop parkland and will be explored as part of the background study currently underway.