



2.0 PLANNING CONTEXT

2.1. A HISTORY OF PARKS IN LETHBRIDGE

The Lethbridge town plan was created in 1885 by Elliot T. Galt. In the tradition of urban planning of the era, exemplified by Central Park in New York, a land parcel was set aside to be ultimately designated as a central feature for public gatherings and recreational activities. “The Square,” as it was first named, is known today as Galt Gardens. Tree planting in the park commenced in 1906, followed by the development of a cinder pathway in 1910. The City of Lethbridge acquired the park in 1910, and by 1930 it contained mature, picturesque plant species. Galt Gardens has evolved into a downtown civic square, and is identified as a downtown community core park.

Henderson Park was developed in 1909 in preparation for the 1912 7th International Dry Farming Congress. Today the 47 hectare regional park boasts many active and passive recreation activities including trail use, lawn bowling and picnic shelters. The 24 hectare man-made lake provides recreational fishing and light boating opportunities. Henderson Park has become a destination park, centrally located and in close proximity to Nikka Yuko Japanese Gardens, Henderson Outdoor Pool, Henderson Lake Golf Course, Henderson Stadium, Henderson Campground, Henderson Tennis Courts, Henderson Ice Centre, and Exhibition Park.

Parkland acquisition in the Oldman Valley began in the 1950’s and by 1960, Indian Battle Park was developed. In 1975, the Lethbridge River Valley Development By-Law was enacted followed by the Alberta Government’s Urban Parks for the Future initiative in 1980 that established the Lethbridge’s Community Services Department Urban Parks Program. Key river valley property was acquired for park development, resulting in the creation of Popson, Pavan, Alexander Wilderness, Peenaquim and Cottonwood Parks.

Located in the center of West Lethbridge, Nicholas Sheran Park was developed in 1974 to facilitate larger events. It is similar in concept and size to Henderson Park. In many ways these two regional parks are unique to Lethbridge and define the character of the city. Today, the 42 hectare park provides active and passive recreation activities including trail use, bird watching, recreational fishing and includes large playgrounds, picnic shelters and an 18-hole disc golf course, known as Frisbee Golf.

With an inventory of over 30,000 trees located in parks and boulevards,

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the open space system reflects the values of the City's residents.

2.2. PARKS PLANNING PRECEDENTS

The City's River Valley Development Bylaw enacted in 1975, the Alberta Government's Urban Parks for the Future initiative in 1980, and a 1976 City Bylaw to regulate public recreation facilities have collectively contributed to the health and vibrancy of the city resulting in highly valued parks, open space, recreational and cultural facilities. The 2005 Lethbridge Citizen Satisfaction Research Report indicates that 96% of residents were strongly satisfied with their local urban parks. Of those, 58% indicated they were "very satisfied."

The "Urban Parks Master Plan" was completed in 1983 to guide planning, parks management, and long range development. A parkland inventory was completed as well as recommendations made in the areas of environmental protection and education, heritage conservation and education, river valley access, linkage to major urban parks, and recreational opportunities. A parks concept plan was developed incorporating the principles of nodal development, linkage of facility nodes with one of three themed areas – historic, natural resource, and water based recreation. Improvements were identified for Indian Battle Park, The Galt Museum, Fort Whoop-Up Country, Nature Reserve, Henderson Park, River Valley Golf Course, Riverine Park and Valley Ponds, Southwest Valley Park, Table Lands, commercial and private recreation opportunities, secondary nodes, trail concepts, and motorcycle and off-road vehicles. The City of Lethbridge utilized \$8.6 million from the Provincial Urban Park Program to complete these projects from 1983 to 1986.

With the growth of West Lethbridge in the 1970's and public support favoring a geographically centralized river valley area, The River Valley Area Redevelopment Plan was completed in 1986 to provide direction and guide the development of the Oldman River Valley area, a dominant element of the Lethbridge landscape. The River Valley Corridor Recreational Development Plan Bylaw was enacted in 1970 that empowered the Minister to endorse or reject approvals. In 1980, the Bylaw was repealed and the Lethbridge General Municipal Plan was enacted to provide the City of Lethbridge with authority in land use matters.

The River Valley Redevelopment Plan focused on public protection, resource protection and land use management to address bank stability. Alberta Land Conservation Guidelines were used to establish appropriate bank setbacks for urban development and provide appropriate natural recreational and educational opportunities in the valley.

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The goals of the “Urban Parks Master Plan” and the River Valley Redevelopment Plan included:

- Downtown as a People Place;
- New open spaces;
- Protection of the river valley and multi-function open space corridors.

Based on the principle that parks should be planned by the people, for the people,” the “Nicholas Sheran Park Master Plan” was created in 1998 incorporating extensive public consultation and a citizen steering committee. Accessibility for the disabled and adaptability to meet the needs of future users were also incorporated. Information stations and signage were developed to minimize user conflicts. Further revisions to the Municipal Development Plan in 1995 and again in 2005 acknowledged the City’s commitment to collaborate with the public in decision-making.”

The 2003 report, “On the Road to Sustainability”: Creating Direction for Environmental Management identified the need for corporate policy, capacity building and the City (as a corporate entity) to demonstrate leadership as a steward of the environment to effectively address the increase in per capita energy and resource use, harmful air emissions and water pollution.

With changing demographics, growth, and the need to provide infrastructure with limited budgets to address competing priorities, cities everywhere are concerned with providing development that is sustainable. For example, new residential areas must focus on maximizing use, accessibility and aesthetic appeal while minimizing land requirements, park systems must focus on function and reduced maintenance, and a mix of open space must address changing community demographics.

In order to determine the City’s level of park facilities and amenities relative to other similar Western Canadian municipalities, a questionnaire was distributed to the cities of Medicine Hat, Red Deer, Airdrie, Strathcona County, St. Albert, Grand Prairie, Kelowna, Saskatoon, Regina and Brandon. This information will be useful for comparative purposes in analyzing its current inventory and for determining and considering future directions. Refer to **Appendix 1: Community Comparison Chart.**

Evergreen is a national organization supporting and facilitating urban greening across Canada. In 2004 Evergreen released Green Space Acquisition and Stewardship in Canada’s Urban Municipalities: Results

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of a Nation-Wide Survey which documented a need for green space acquisition and stewardship in Canada. Adopting Smart Growth principles which recognize connections between development and quality of life will contribute to sustainable and livable communities and serve to protect open space.

Municipal parkland dedications vary across Canada ranging from 2% to 10% of the net developed area. In Alberta, park inventory has increased province-wide with a 10% deduction as required by the Municipal Government Act. In contrast, Vancouver and Toronto are intensifying rather than expanding, resulting in 5% dedication for parkland and 2% dedication for commercial or industrial development. Land availability and high real estate costs are barriers to developing new green space in these urban centres.

The challenge is trying to do more with smaller capital and operating budgets. Aside from simply purchasing parkland to increase inventories, municipalities are now looking at partnerships and zoning tools as alternative mechanisms to increase green space development. Partnerships are a “new way of doing business” by leveraging tax dollars with private funds to acquire parkland or through contributions to parkland maintenance and stewardship by community groups and non-profit organizations. “Smart growth” is a planning concept that leverages new growth to improve communities and the zoning tools created by implementing Smart growth principles (including walkable communities, distinctive communities with a sense of place that respond to community values such as expanded transportation and housing choices, integrated mixed land uses in communities, and preservation of open space) provide additional opportunities to increase community open spaces.

“Many of the benefits that a community can expect from the development of green infrastructure have, at their core, the ability of a person to make a trip by non-motorized means. These benefits will not materialize unless the appropriate land use and infrastructure are present.” Hugh Morris, 2003

2.3 SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONTEXT

Lethbridge is experiencing demographic trends, needs and value shifts similar to many other Canadian municipalities. Studies indicate one-third of Canadian children are overweight and the economic disparity between the rich and poor in our cities is increasing. Lack of time in hectic daily schedules has become a major barrier to active participation for adults, youth and children. There continues to be an increasing emphasis on individual, self-driven recreation activities made to fit personal schedules rather than long-term, scheduled programs.

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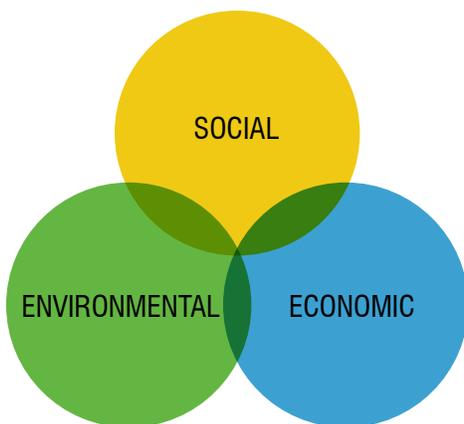
Conversely, participation in organized sports has remained relatively stable. Nation-wide, there continues to be heightened media focus on Canadians' sedentary and unhealthy lifestyles.

The +55 age group is the fastest growing segment of the population and will continue to go for the next 10-15 years. This age group demands fewer costly programs and facilities and tends to be more engaged in walking and other nature-related activities. The urban green space system will therefore play a significant role in contributing to the quality of life and health of the city for all ages and incomes.

The "2004 Evergreen Common Grounds National Survey" states "municipalities recognize that urban parkland is not only a vital community asset, but also serves to define a healthy, vibrant city-on that attracts and retains investment as well as a variety of social amenities." Exceptional and memorable cities are defined by their exceptional parks.

Traditional and non-traditional land use planning tools and tax funding are often utilized to deliver quality green spaces, however municipal budgets are continuously strained by competing needs. Increasingly, municipalities are considering innovative partnerships with corporations, institutions, and community organizations to meet their capital and operational budget needs.

Parks are the City's most flexible asset, easily modified and adaptable to meet changing recreation trends and able to provide numerous diverse destination points for a range of events. River valley parks serve as a favorite destination for local residents to enjoy nature through unprogrammed activities and define Lethbridge as a special place. As a regional destination, park development will continue to garner economic benefits from visitors and tourism.



2.3.1 Triple Bottom Line Benefits

The Triple Bottom Line approach to decision making considers and addresses the social, economic, and environmental impacts of that decision in a comprehensive, systematic and integrated manner. Approaching decisions from this multi-faceted perspective recognizes the interconnectivity and interdependence of decisions and is a departure from basing decisions solely on financial considerations. The Triple Bottom Line is a holistic approach that seeks to create economic, social and environmental value in achieving sustainable development.

Social and Community

- Encourages community involvement, shared input and

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management; contributes to civic pride, responsibility and community vitality.

- Participation in the development of recreation facilities creates leadership development opportunities that build social capital, strong communities and social cohesiveness.
- Open space creates quality communities; accessibility becomes a valid measure of quality of life.
- Recreation and social activities in parks and open spaces links neighborhoods, promotes ethnic and cultural harmony, and reduces alienation and loneliness.

Economic

- Analysts confirm that quality of life, measured in part by urban green spaces, is a determining factor in real estate values and economic vitality.
- A park-enhanced environment attracts tax-paying business to locate, relocate and expand in a community while acting as a catalyst for tourism and its spin-off returns.
- Urban parks and functional open spaces support outdoor recreation, one of the economy's most vigorous growth areas.

Environmental

- Parks, open spaces and protected areas perform an essential life-sustaining role, contributing to the critical environmental health of the city and the well being of individuals.
- Parks, open spaces and natural areas serve a strong and growing desire for natural, environmental-based recreation, nature interpretation and education.
- Preserving natural lands is recognized as a wise investment and an essential component of integrated landscape management required for long range environmental future.

2.4 RECREATION TRENDS ANALYSIS

2.4.1 Purpose

Recreation evolution responds to an increased complexity of lifestyle and the fusion of technology into sport and recreation equipment. As daily routines become increasingly complex, recreation tendencies co-evolve.

An analysis of recreation trends suggests that a high proportion of Albertans are physically active. In many cases, the residents of Lethbridge are slightly more active than the provincial averages suggest. Further, of those who are physically active, there is both a high rate of activity and an increasing tendency towards self propelled outdoor pursuits (SPOP), including running, hiking, mountain biking, cross

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country skiing and inline skating. The trends also indicate a declining participation in team sports, and consequently a reduced demand for traditional sport facilities such as ball diamonds or tennis courts.

This emerging trend suggests a significant and timely opportunity for the City of Lethbridge and their partners to build on traditional recreational and leisure pursuits and to align parks and pathways master planning with the growing trends and interpretations of a contemporary active lifestyle.

2.4.2 Recreation Trends Analysis

Recreation and leisure is dynamic and evolving, with a societal shift occurring in both perception of and participation in leisure activities that is anticipated to continue. The ability to understand and analyze current preferences and future trends will allow the City to better manage change in order to effectively deliver excellent recreation facilities in both the parks and pathway system.

There are 3 generally accepted factors that are believed to contribute to a shift in recreation trends:

- An increasing interest in personal health and well-being that increases overall participation;
- Family participation and home economics can influence participation in less expensive, individual and group activities such as walking, running, cycling or soccer; and
- The ability to engage in activities that offer flexible schedules or can be accommodated in multi-use facilities can satisfy the desire to participate, and accommodate shift schedules.

Although these factors identify possible reasons for shifts in recreation trends, they do not address the evolution of new activities. These may be attributed to:

- The increasing complexity in lifestyle and the ‘speed’ at which people live and work;
- Rapid advancements in sporting equipment technology such as bike frames, running gear, hydration equipment, and clothing, and the introduction of personal electronics such as GPS and multi-function computers;
- Access to guidebooks and internet resources that fuel an increase in self-propelled outdoor pursuits; and
- Recreation tendencies co-evolve in an attempt to maintain a work-play balance.

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2.4.3 Trends in Recreation: The Alberta Example

The Government of Alberta conducts a province-wide recreation survey every four years; seven such surveys have been completed since 1981. As a comprehensive source of information and an indicator of trends within the Province, the Alberta Recreation Survey (ARS) tracks recreation:

- participation rates and frequencies;
- barriers to participation;
- favorite activities;
- perceived benefits of parks and recreation facilities; and
- demographic profiles.

An overview of the results of these surveys suggests that Lethbridge is comparable to the provincial tabulations, with one positive difference -- Lethbridge residents participate slightly more in “most active” and “passive” recreation categories, especially outdoor activities oriented towards parks and trails.

Other items of interest for Lethbridge residents include:

1. There is a slightly lower participation rate for walking or cycle commuting in Lethbridge. Given the size of the city as compared to other major cities in Alberta, the topography, lack of infrastructure, and other barriers may contribute to this discrepancy. Climate may also play a role in the windy city.
2. Participation in pathway activities for recreational use are generally higher in Lethbridge. Good access and connectivity are contributing factors.
3. Off-road vehicles and dirt bike use is higher than the provincial average. This may be a result of access to large tracts of land within short distances from the city and the ideal topography of southern Alberta. The survey does not however, identify the distances traveled for this activity, and does not suggest this occurs in the city. Rather, the figures simply suggest mechanized recreation is a desirable activity for Lethbridge residents.
4. Mountain biking and BMX participation is slightly higher than the provincial average. Modern mountain biking can be considered an evolution of dirt biking, which could explain the popularity. There is also an international trend suggesting the sport of mountain biking is growing rapidly.
5. The perceived benefit and value of parks is perceived to be very high, with respect to quality of life, fitness, family time and preservation of unique landscapes, plants and animals. In each of these categories, more than 69% of respondents indicated parks are important to very important for the above noted categories.

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6. Golf is an important and growing leisure activity for Lethbridge residents.
7. Water based activities such as canoeing and kayaking are unique to Lethbridge residents.

Based on the 2004 survey and a review of 1981 to 2000 survey results suggest the following overall trends:

1. With respect to favorite activity, there is an overall increasing trend towards exercise-oriented activities, with a 54% increase from 1981 to 2000. Exercise-oriented, or self-propelled recreation activities include, walking, swimming, running and soccer.
2. Team sports show a decline of approximately 40% from 1981 to 2000. Notable declines in this category include:
 - Baseball/ softball: 42% to 22%
 - Football: 24% to 9%
 - Ice hockey: 28% to 18%

The trends in the ARS suggest that the focus of typical recreation facilities, school grounds, and municipal recreation programming in Alberta will require a paradigm shift if these trends continue. Recreation in Alberta is moving towards self-propelled, exercise-oriented activities where participation is relatively individual as compared to team sports, and not necessarily connected to traditional sports facilities, leagues or time constraints.

Drawing from the current participation trends and desired activities noted in the ARS, common elements include:

- Flexible and adaptable park spaces with infrastructure that supports a range of activities is preferred to single use facilities;
- Trail systems that can accommodate a range of users and provide for a range of experience without unnecessary user conflict will become increasingly important; and
- A retooling of existing recreation infrastructure to accommodate a shift in participation is required to achieve a triple bottom line of social, economic and environmental sustainability.

2.4.4 Trend Analysis through Consumer Habits

In addition to the ARS, Mountain Equipment Co-op (MEC), a wilderness-oriented recreation cooperative, provides insight into the outdoor recreation preferences of their members. Through membership surveys both online and in-store, and analysis of retail spending, MEC has noted the following trends:

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- Over the past four years, there is a notable increase in self-propelled outdoor activities. Most noteworthy include an increase in snowshoeing (72%), trail running (32%), mountain biking (22%), rock climbing (17%);
- While some activities continue to grow, MEC members suggest they will do less backcountry hiking, camping and road cycling over the next two years;
- There is an increasing trend towards more intensive and frequent day trips based from home, rather than longer duration trips; and
- The 40-45 year old demographic is the largest single age group engaged in outdoor recreation, with the 20-30 demographic being the most active.

The MEC data is generally consistent with the trends identified in the ARS, and suggests the shifting trend towards self-propelled outdoor recreation pursuits identified are similar across the country. Although the trends appear to be shifting on a broad, national scale, the specific modes of self-propelled recreation will vary based on regional access, recreational resources and local recreational trends.

2.4.5 What are the Impacts of Shifting Trends?

As the trends continue to shift, balancing recreational needs within infrastructure budgets, tourism strategies and destination recreation facilities will continue to evolve. One particular trend that may serve as a model to evaluate the opportunities and trends is the evolving sport of mountain biking.

Mountain biking is at an interesting precipice in the world of recreation. As a sport, mountain biking is surging in popularity relative to other activities. Internal to the sport of mountain biking, the evolution is driven by rider skills, technological advancements in bikes and protective equipment, and cross-over from other sports. One sub-category in the sport, downhill mountain biking, derives some of its style from motocross or dirt biking. This could account for the popularity of both in Lethbridge.

There is another important force at play in the emerging recreation field. The private sector, through resort and pay-per-use facilities, has developed a set of heightened expectations in the public eye. These expectations, although not necessarily warranted, are real and increase pressures on public land managers to continually manage their facilities to a higher level of service. Again, the sport of mountain biking is an excellent example.

2.4.6 What are the Risks of Failing to Adapt Parks and Pathways?

The risks of ignoring the evolution of recreation and managing the status quo in recreation are significant. There are three specific trends whose cumulative impacts need to be managed:

- As there is a shift from specialized or highly programmed facilities into the urban fringes and natural parks within the city. Adaptive and conflicting uses require prompt decisions to effectively manage and adapt to shifting trends. Appropriate adaptations may include retooling of facilities, closure of areas for specific use, and the construction of new facilities.
- There is a need to evaluate budgets allocations and funding for extensive repairs to aging parks and pathway infrastructure. Based on current trends, some facilities may not necessarily play a role in future recreation.
- Increasing numbers of users combined with an increasing range of year-round use, requires a comprehensive understanding of user needs and expectations to plan, develop and manage appropriate facilities.

These emerging trends suggest a significant opportunity for the City and its partners to build on traditional recreational and leisure pursuits and to align park and pathway master planning with the growing trends and interpretations of a contemporary active lifestyle.

2.4.7 The Challenge

The Master Plan team faces an important challenge. The face of recreation has evolved and thus land development and parks and pathway management has changed significantly in response to the needs of the current generation of users, reflecting a significant, evolving and rapidly growing facet of community and lifestyle. Building a recreation legacy through appropriate and timely land acquisition, effective land planning and management of natural and recreational resources, the successful recognition of trends and facility adaptations to accommodate change will have positive impacts within Lethbridge.

2.5 COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS AND PRECEDENT

The following documents have been reviewed in the development of this Master Plan. Where possible, concepts, strategies, and issues that relate specifically to park development in Lethbridge have been incorporated into the Parks Master Plan.

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Open Space Development Guidelines

Town of Canmore – Canmore, Alberta

May 24, 2005

The function, character and special attributes of open space are the determining factors in park classifications. This approach to classification reflects the need and allows for a diverse range of public space typologies within the open space system. Furthermore, factors such as natural landform, connectivity and adjacent land use of open spaces are a determining factor in their categorization.

2004 Future Directions For Recreation & Parks

City of Mississauga – Mississauga, Ontario

June 2004

This document was produced, in part, by considering emerging leisure trends across North America and comparing this data to the existing conditions of the public open space of Mississauga. By expanding on the concepts presented by the American nonprofit agency, “The Trust for Public Land,” measures of excellence, mandates, guiding principles and program standards for the City of Mississauga was established.

City of Saskatoon – Administrative Policy

Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

June 2002

Park classification is based on a hierarchy that corresponds to the land use adjacent to the open space. Saskatoon’s neighbourhoods are considered the central core of the hierarchy, radiating to larger units and specialized use. The park classification is based on the intended function of the park and the size of these park typologies are proportioned to neighbourhood sizes.

Parks Master Plan

Township of Lake of the Bays – Ontario

February 2006

Analysis of existing parks and leisure facilities in the Township of Lake of the Bays, public consultations and the examination of emerging leisure trends for the Province of Ontario provide the basis for this Parks Master Plan. The study provides recommendations for the delivery of sustainable leisure-based services and cohesive open space development throughout the Township.