

PARKS MASTER PLAN

4.0 PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT GUIDELINES

4.1A VISION FOR LETHBRIDGE PARKS

The Master Plan Vision Statement was developed at the July 12, 2006 stakeholder roundtable discussion. Participants worked in two groups, one focused on parks and the other on pathways. Collectively, the following Vision Statement emerged:

The parks and pathways of Lethbridge are key to the quality of life and the health of citizens of all ages and abilities.

The Master Plans will guide the development of an integrated system that responds to the needs of current and future generations of users.

Through continuous promotion and education, the system will be safe, accessible to all and sustainable for the long term.

The key indicator of success will be the implementation of a 'made in Lethbridge' strategy; a parks system that reinforces identity, that preserves our natural assets and that tells the stories of the unique cultural, social and natural landscapes of the City.

4.2 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Public and stakeholder comments about the existing parks system – what is working, what is not, what improvements should be made, and what an ideal parks system would look like – were captured in workshops, stakeholder meetings and Open Houses. This input reflected participant values and ideals and was transformed into a Vision Statement.

The Vision Statement led to the development of guiding principles that would achieve those ideals. These are the high level precepts that guide the Plan in order to realize the vision. Feedback, specific suggestions and visionary ideals all fall under one or more of the following guiding principles.

The Guiding Principles statements are universal and general, capturing the big idea. Each statement is followed by a discussion of the implications to the recommendations contained in the Master Plan.

4.2.1 Accessibility

Open spaces should be accessible to all age groups and physical abilities and should be barrier-free.



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Once people arrive at their destination park, the amenities and conveniences provided will encourage them to stay. Amenities can range from basic shelter, shade and seating, to public washrooms and other conveniences.

Portions of the river valleys, coulees, and riverbanks restrict accessibility; however opportunities to improve access should be continuously reviewed.

The pathway system and public transit are desirable methods to access parks. Some unique parks and special use areas however, are remote and pose a challenge to access utilizing these modes and therefore require adequate road access and parking, including access for the disabled.

Signage improvements will assist in identifying public parks, uses and restrictions.

4.2.2 Connectivity

Lethbridge has a variety of park experiences and special use parks. Parks should be connected to each other and to residential areas by the pathway system.

The linear parks and pathways of Lethbridge provide a high level of connectivity. Park planning in future communities should include linear parks for their universal appeal as attractive connectors. The pathways and open space network must be considered as one system, linked and interdependent.

4.2.3 Diversity and Adaptability

Diversity is essential to quality of life and health. Parks can provide a dramatically diverse range of experiences; therefore a variety of landscapes should be encouraged.

There is an expressed desire for additional special-use facilities within the open space system. Examples include:

- West Lethbridge skateboard park
- North regional park
- Mountain bike park
- Public washrooms and drinking fountains
- Off-leash dog park
- Additional boat (canoe) launches
- Spray parks
- Amphitheatres and staging areas for concerts and outdoor events
- Festival park

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Additionally, a range of experiences could be included in parks within walking proximity to home including manicured turf and treed parks for passive and active recreation, constructed naturalized landscapes, forests with soft surfaced pathways and for observing wildlife, active tot lots with play equipment and seating for parents, secluded seating areas, water play, and spaces that encourage social interaction. Not all experiences are feasible and depending on park size and space available, one or two experiences together with related amenities could be incorporated.

Bio-diversity is key to reducing long-term maintenance costs, increasing habitat area and quality while improving opportunities for direct contact with nature.

4.2.4 Sustainability

The open space system including public parks, natural areas, river bottom lands and future developed parks are valuable natural assets that require innovative strategies, new design directions, and comprehensive management in order to be sustainable in the long term.

There are two guiding principles related to sustainability. The first principle relates to the role of parks in sustainable planning. Interconnected parks and pathways create healthy communities.

The second principle relates to long term parks sustainability. Ongoing maintenance of existing parks inventory with decreased municipal funding has become a significant challenge. Incorporating a variety of landscapes in the parks system by providing a balance of manicured and naturalized landscapes is a more sustainable approach to addressing long term maintenance issues. As an example, constructed natural landscapes require far less maintenance and irrigation after the initial establishment period.

Several Canadian municipalities have adopted pesticide-free maintenance practices and others are developing expertise and best practices in Integrated Pest Management. Naturalized park landscapes can reduce dependency on pesticides through bio-diversity principles. Multi-use parks designed to include attractive wetlands or ponds have become highly sought-after community amenities and provide added value by contributing to surface and ground water quality. The 10% dedication for parks in new developments is insufficient to provide both quality parkland and stormwater management facilities. Environmental regulations are moving toward pollutant removal beyond the current Total Suspended Solids (TSS) reductions, and are a consideration for sustainable park planning. Parkland dedication for stormwater facilities

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must be reviewed so that park facilities are not compromised.

Natural areas prone to erosion and vegetation damage from over-use require protection from inappropriate activity in order to be sustainable for future generations,

Lastly, special landscapes such as unique habitats, natural areas and heritage landscapes require on-going, proactive protection and management for future sustainability.

4.2.5 Safety and Security

Safety and security for all users of the open space system are important considerations in the design, implementation and management of the plan.

Incorporating Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) strategies in parks planning aims to reduce fear and the incidence of crime. Research indicates that by changing or managing the physical environment to produce a behavioral effect that will reduce the incidence and fear of crime, inappropriate behavior is reduced. Incorporating design principles that make it more difficult to carry out inappropriate behavior can be achieved through a number of strategies that include fostering resident/user interaction, vigilance and control over their neighborhood; maximizing the ability to spot suspicious people and activities; encouraging the intended use of public space by residents; identifying ownership by delineating private space from public space, using physical barriers, etc to restrict entry; designing an environment that takes into account the surrounding environment and minimizes the use of space by conflicting groups; and ensuring that buildings and areas are clean, well-maintained, and graffiti-free. CPTED strategies can be applied to all park and amenity spaces including river valley parks.

4.3.6 Identity and Character

Special parks such as Henderson Lake and Nicolas Sheran have helped to establish a unique identity for the city.

Parks play a vital role in contributing to visual aesthetics, a sense of place, and quality of life. A “Made-in-Lethbridge” open space development plan should build on these excellent local examples, and be guided by the principles of accessibility, connectivity, diversity, sustainability and safety and security