

# PARKS MASTER PLAN

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### INTRODUCTION

The City of Lethbridge is defined by a comprehensive parks system including two regional parks and a river valley park system. Quality of life is often measured by the amenities found in a city that make that location a desirable place to work, play and raise families. Proximity, connectivity, accessibility, variety and number and type of amenities all play a significant role in defining a sense of place in open spaces, and attracting local residents and visitors. Parks are a city's most flexible asset and can easily be modified to meet immediate needs and adapted to meet changing trends in recreation. Citizen satisfaction surveys indicate a strong support for the city's park system and public feedback confirmed the value of the system and the need for improvements and additions. The results show that residents appreciate what they have and are supportive of measures to reinforce and expand the open space system.

The city's natural topography and dramatic river valley has created unique opportunities for a variety of open spaces that provide an array of active and passive recreation activities including trail use, bird watching, playgrounds, picnic areas, quiet enjoyment, natural enjoyment, interpretive centres, walking, cycling, commuting – an endless list of possibilities that continues to expand as the public finds new ways to enjoy their leisure time.

Alberta's recent economic prosperity has impacted all Alberta municipalities in varying degrees with each urban centre formulating plans to effectively manage the impacts. With a growing list of infrastructure priorities resulting from growth and competing for the same limited base of tax dollars, municipalities are examining alternative models to deliver those amenities that mean most to their residents in new ways. The City of Lethbridge however, has historically demonstrated foresight in planning for infrastructure and is well positioned to develop thoughtful and creative strategies that demonstrate the City's visionary leadership and commitment to build a city of excellence.

### THE MASTER PLAN

The City of Lethbridge is guided by the vision, "To be a healthy, attractive and economically viable city," as articulated in its Strategic Plan. The City has recognized and seized the opportunity to proactively develop a Master Plan to strategically guide future park development, protect natural assets, increase accessibility and re-develop to meet current and future needs. Integral to the Master Plan process was a



# PARKS MASTER PLAN

fully integrated public consultation process that actively engaged the community voices in decision making and planning.

## THE PROCESS & RATIONALE

A Community Needs Assessment gathered citizen opinions and attitudes about the existing parks system as well as a list of their needs and wants. All were measured against the principles that would guide decision-making— accessibility, connectivity, diversity and adaptability, sustainability, safety and security and identity and character. Priorities were identified and measured against these principles as well as within a triple bottom line framework that recognizes an interconnection between societal, economic and environmental decisions. The results of the Community Needs Assessment and an analysis of recreation trends also served to create a classification system and define priorities and recommendations.

## THE PRIORITIES

Priorities were categorized according to open space development in new communities, open space development and upgrading in existing communities, preservation areas, and open space acquisition strategies. Within those categories emerged common themes that emphasized the need for more open spaces in close proximity to communities, linkages that extend recreation and commuting opportunities to a larger system, the need for improved access and multi-use and special use facilities to accommodate new uses that include trick bike, skate park, outdoor fitness equipment and large gathering facilities such as an amphitheatre and venues to host festival events. There is a strong desire to protect natural spaces that provide habitats for wildlife species and native and rare plants and an agreement that human interaction must be carefully balanced for these special places to thrive. Areas were identified for future parkland acquisition to ensure that the city's parks system continues to thrive and provide benefits for future generations.

## THE RECOMMENDATIONS

The Parks Master Plan is a comprehensive document designed to assist the City in facilitating a strategic expansion and retooling of the parks system. The plan is inherently flexible and can be readily adapted to changing trends and user expectations. It has been developed as a visionary long term strategic plan, incorporating both short and mid term priorities for development.

Specific recommendations have been put forward to guide new development at the Area Structure Plan stage, make key parkland acquisitions, upgrade existing parks, create special use areas, preserve natural parks and heritage features, and demonstrate leadership.

# PARKS MASTER PLAN

Included for consideration is a discussion of funding programs and strategies. The City must allocate funds to implement the plan however there are a number of sources of public and non-government dollars to assist, and shortfalls can be achieved through implementing strategic communications, leveraging opportunities, partnerships, and engaging the community to support specific goals.

Adopting a parks classification system will set minimum requirements for a “Made-in-Lethbridge” parks system. The classifications evolved by qualifying the open spaces that are heavily used, are unique to Lethbridge, or are highly valued, evaluating a rationale for parks with different functions and then developing criteria to ensure open space needs are met at the neighbourhood, community and city wide levels. The hierarchy of parks will ensure access to nature and recreation close to home and with the development of the pathway system to link the open space network, provide experiential opportunities further from home.

The description of the various classes of parks includes suggestions for uses and space requirements for active and passive recreation. The examples do not describe the specific character of the landscape. Each park must be designed to have its own unique landscape character. Diversity in design should be encouraged by the planners and designers, to create a unique sense of place for the neighbourhood and to continually expand diversity in the landscape. As the parks system landscape evolves and develops over time, the identity of Lethbridge will be further reinforced and increasingly appreciated by its citizens and visitors.