

2019

The Canadian City Parks Report



Highlighting the trends, challenges, and leading practices in 23 Canadian cities to inspire action, shared learning, and track progress in city parks across the country.

park people
amis des parcs

FOREWORD

The W. Garfield Weston Foundation is pleased to support this inaugural Canadian City Parks Report — a snapshot of the state of parks at 23 municipalities across the country.

With more than 80% of Canadians living in urban areas, city parks play an increasingly important role in the lives of so many of us. They have the power to bring communities together, and revitalize our relationship with nature.

When our Foundation launched the Weston Family Parks Challenge in 2013, we were delighted to discover so many creative, community-driven initiatives that were brewing in neighbourhoods across Toronto. From outdoor tandoori ovens to turtle pond restoration to hydro corridor gardens, the innovative ideas for revitalizing and animating city parks were endless.

We were also reminded of the critical role that park staff play in building community engagement and support for city-run greenspaces. We saw firsthand some of the challenges they faced in a densely populated city, with budget and space restrictions. But likewise,

we saw inspiring examples of how city staff and local volunteers cooperated to meet the needs of their diverse communities.

When Park People approached us with the idea to create a national report about city parks, we knew it was a project we wanted to support, to build on the successes of the Weston Family Parks Challenge. As one of the largest environmental funders in Canada, we had learned about a multitude of interesting projects across the country and we immediately saw the need for a forum to share stories and best practices.

Thank you to Park People for leading this initiative, and for its continued commitment to improving Canadians' relationships with their parks. They have been a valuable partner in helping our Foundation realize its goals of restoring ecosystems, connecting Canadians to nature, and using data to inform decisions about our greenspaces.

I would like to also recognize and thank the dozens of municipal staff who took the time out of already busy schedules to help Park

People create this report. We hope you find it a valuable and useful tool to understand what other municipalities are doing, and we hope it is the beginning of a long collaboration for the betterment of parks in every city across the country.

Tamara Rebanks

Chair - The W. Garfield Weston Foundation

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

What we learned	1
Common challenges and trends in Canadian cities:	2
Why City Parks Matter	3
City overview	6
	7

THEMES

NATURE

Building resilience through parks	8
Is it a park or flood protection infrastructure? Both.	9
Biodiversity buzz spreading across Canada	14
Bringing nature back to the city	16
	18
	20

GROWTH

Planning for the future by making connections	22
New measurement tools for park use, access, and quality	28
	30

COLLABORATION

Strengthening parks through partnerships	33
Building partnerships in unexpected spaces	39
Locals know best	41
	42

ACTIVATION

Take it to the park	45
Brrrrrrring people out in winter	51
Urban forests that also feed	53
	54

INCLUSION

Reflecting on the role of parks in reconciliation	57
Parks as places of arrival	61
Getting pumped up about age-friendly fitness	64
	66

GET IN TOUCH

CITY PROFILES

METHODOLOGY

Needs Assessment	69
Methodology and Considerations	70
Challenges and Learnings	117
Definitions	118
	119
	120
	121

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A vibrant illustration at the top of the page shows stylized figures in a park setting. On the left, a person with curly hair in a yellow shirt is partially visible. In the center, a person in a red shirt is seen from the back. On the right, a person in a red hoodie and dark pants is running towards the right. The background is a solid green color with some abstract shapes and lines suggesting trees and movement.

What this report is

INTRODUCTION

The Canadian City Parks Report takes a close look at the trends, challenges, and opportunities facing city parks, tracked annually through key indicators and stories. Its goal is to inform and inspire city staff, community members, professionals, politicians, and non-profits by highlighting leading-edge Canadian practices and tracking the pulse of city parks.



We hope this report helps you to:

Track & monitor progress on key issues

Make better, informed decisions through concrete examples

Become inspired about new ideas from other cities

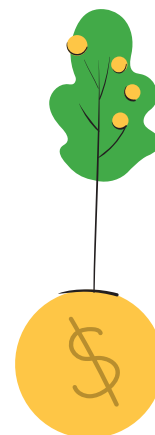
Advocate for change within your own city

By speaking with Canadian cities, it was clear there was a gap in sharing information about city park data and practices. This report seeks to fill that gap through the discussion and monitoring of city parks in key thematic areas. It's not intended to be an all-encompassing encyclopedia of city parks in Canada. Nor is it designed to measure operational efficiencies or management practices (see [Yardstick](#) and the [Municipal Benchmarking Network Canada](#)).

As the first edition, this year is both a pilot and temperature check. While new trends will emerge every year, in this first report we're establishing baselines that we will track annually. We're also testing our methodology—did we ask the right questions in the right way? Did we focus on the right stories? We'll be asking for your feedback to help us make this report better each year.

What we learned

The number one challenge facing cities is budget pressure, which impacts in multiple ways.



Canada is a large, diverse country with a mix of climates, topographies, and cultural communities. Our park systems reflect this fact. However, despite these particularities, we found—through our inaugural survey of 23 cities—many common challenges and trends.



Canada is an urban nation, with over 80% of people living in cities. Many cities are experiencing fast growth in population and density. This growth is putting rising pressure on park systems to deliver more and better programming, new and upgraded parks, and more services.

At the same time, cities aren't seeing the necessary increases in parks budgets to address these needs. This puts many cities, both small and large, in the difficult position of being asked to do more with less each year.

This pressure has the most impact on park operating budgets—the money to maintain parks and pay for the programming communities depend on. Some cities told us this squeeze has meant reducing park design standards. Others noted it requires tough trade-offs about which parks get more resources.

This squeeze is coming at the same time cities said that people are looking for more to do in their parks: more opportunities to be active, to connect with nature, to experience cultural programming, and to just hang out with friends and family.

In this context, cities find it challenging to develop new parks to meet growing demand. Land acquisition and construction of new parks becomes more difficult in dense cities as land is gobbled up by development.

Aging infrastructure is also in need of revitalization and expensive repairs. In their [2016 infrastructure report card](#), the Federation of Canadian Municipalities scored Canada's recreation infrastructure the lowest among measured categories, with nearly 20% in very poor condition.

Adding to this pressure is increasing damage from extreme weather and the effects of climate change, which is requiring cities to rethink how parks can be resilient infrastructure as well as places for people.

Without a doubt these demands are a critical challenge facing cities across Canada- but it's not all grim.

This report is about monitoring and highlighting the common challenges and trends. But it's also about spotlighting solutions and opportunities.

Despite the challenges we face, Canadian cities can lead the way forward. We just have to learn from each other.

Common challenges and trends in Canadian cities:

- 
- Inadequate funding levels, especially operating budgets
(e.g., park maintenance and programming)
 - Difficulty acquiring and developing new parks, especially in dense areas
 - Aging infrastructure requiring costly repairs
 - Increasing damage from extreme weather
 - Rising use of parks as alternative housing by people experiencing homelessness
 - Growing demand for walking trails and off-leash dog parks
 - Greater demands for unstructured gathering spaces and places for spontaneous play
 - Increased demand for naturalized spaces in parks and nature play opportunities for children
 - Changing demographics, such as an aging population, requiring new programming and designs
(e.g., better accessibility, more culturally specific programming)



Common challenges and trends in Canadian cities:

NATURE

We look at some of the leading practices and strategies in Vancouver and Calgary to mitigate the effects of extreme weather damage from climate change and create new, beautiful parks that protect against floods.

However, more proactive planning work needs to be done to ensure these practices become standard. Most cities are experimenting by piloting green infrastructure in parks, such as bioswales and rain gardens.

However, just 48% have citywide green infrastructure strategies in place that include directions for parks.

We also profile cities that are leading the way in the preservation and rehabilitation of natural habitats, particularly for endangered wildlife. And highlight how some cities are buzzing with new projects to support pollinators and biodiversity.

GROWTH

Cities need forward-thinking Park System

Master Plans to help prioritize action to meet growing populations and density.

We found that 70% of cities had one of these plans approved or in development.

We profile leading work in park planning, such as Halifax and Toronto, where the focus is on building connections, assessing park quality, and making better use of underused land. This helps build connections between and within parks, creating corridors for the movement of both people and wildlife.

We also highlight how Waterloo came up with a creative solution to take a growing challenge—the amount of dog poop in city parks—and turn it into an energy source.



Common challenges and trends in Canadian cities:

COLLABORATION

With cities facing increasing demands for new amenities, we found many are turning to partnerships with non-profits and community groups to bring local expertise, new programming, and new funding.

We found 74% of cities had at least one programming or operational partnership with a non-profit and 52% have a formal program for community groups to get involved in their park.

We profile multiple scales of partnerships to learn what makes a successful made-in-Canada collaboration tick, including Montreal's [Les Amis de Montagne](#), Quebec City's [Societe de la Riviere St-Charles](#), and Edmonton's [RiverValley Alliance](#).

ACTIVATION

There is a growing desire for innovative programming and space for unstructured activities in Canadian cities. We found this has inspired creative programming that leverages parks as platforms for issues such as improved mental health, enhanced food security, and increased access to the arts.

We profile examples including Vancouver's work to enliven parks through arts, a partnership in Victoria that offers free nature-based therapy for youth, and the edible forests of Kingston, Victoria, and Charlottetown.



INCLUSION

We found cities are striving to be more inclusive, recognize different cultural identities, and reckon with past erasures and abuses—but that doing so requires deep explorations of park policy, planning, and governance.

With the release of the [Truth and Reconciliation](#) report, a heightened awareness of the responsibility to work with First Nations across the country is a growing area of work in many cities—one that will require time, uncomfortable conversations, and potentially radically new ways of thinking about how parks operate. Here we profile work being done in Vancouver, where a “colonial audit” of the Vancouver Park Board’s work is currently underway, led by the Park Board’s first Reconciliation Planner.

We also look at the work happening to welcome newcomers and refugees into cities through parks, including the multi-city [Welcome to this Place](#) project.

Why City Parks Matter

Understanding and being able to communicate the impacts of parks is critical in advocating for sustained investment in parks. To aid in this, we round-up key research.

ENVIRONMENTAL

A [2014 study](#) found that Toronto's urban forest sequestered 46,000 tons of carbon each year, the equivalent of emissions from 31,000 cars. This helps combat climate change, but also improves air quality.

A [study in Lethbridge](#) found public trees helped divert 331,000 cubic metres of rainfall from entering the stormwater system—and that parks helped improve water quality by filtering run-off before entering rivers and lakes.

Parks can also act as nature's air conditioners and [reduce energy use](#), combating the urban heat island effect caused by the sun's heat being absorbed by hard surfaces like asphalt.

SOCIAL

Our 2017 [Sparkling Change report](#) found that engagement and programming are critical to unlocking the social benefits of parks, including building civic engagement, developing leadership skills, and widening social support networks.

A 2018 study into the state of social capital in Toronto by the [Toronto Foundation](#) found that knowing your neighbours was the number one variable linked to a higher sense of trust, strong social networks, and belonging.

Our [research review](#) found that so-called "weak ties"—the nod hello to a neighbour in a park—contributes to feelings of greater safety, social support, and reduced feelings of isolation.

While there is limited research in Canada related to the links between parks and issues of race, ethnicity, and income, a new study from the [University of British Columbia](#) of major U.S. cities found that marginalized communities often had less access to green space.

ECONOMIC

Parks can increase land value in surrounding areas, with one [U.S. study](#) finding that homes adjacent to parks received price premiums of 20% to 30% relative to homes that were 300 to 800 metres away.

The same study also found more value was created by smaller parks or linear parks than a single large park of equal area because it allowed more people to live closer to its edge.

The economic effects of parks on housing has raised questions around equity, which has [led](#)

[to resources](#) on how parks can support affordable housing.

A [2014 study](#) by TD Economics found that for every dollar invested into the urban forest the return was between \$1.35 and \$3.25 in benefits and cost-savings in stormwater management, air quality, energy savings from shade, and carbon sequestration.

HEALTH

Immersing in greenery can boost levels of [cancer-fighting proteins](#) and [calm our heart rate](#), resulting in lower stress and anxiety.

A [2019 study](#) found that adults were 55% less likely to develop mental health disorders if they had grown up near green spaces.

A [recent study](#) found visiting parks boosts happiness, after just 20 minutes of use, even if people aren't partaking in exercise.

A 2017 study of [U.S. neighbourhood parks](#) found that parks were twice as likely to be empty if they didn't have walking loops—and that the presence of these loops generated the most activity by seniors.

The same study found that parks that offered programming for different ages saw a 37% increase in activity by local residents. Better marketing, signage, and bulletin boards letting people know what was going on resulted in 63% more activity in parks.

City overview



PARTICIPATING CITIES:

Twenty-three cities participated in this first year of the report. We hope to expand our reach across Canada in subsequent years.

If you would like to see your city in the report, please let us know.

To learn more about each participating city, please refer to its City Profile (70)

Delta, BC

Victoria, BC

Vancouver, BC

Langley, BC

Prince George, BC

Lethbridge, AB

Calgary, AB

Edmonton, AB

Red Deer, AB

Saskatoon, SK

Waterloo, ON

Guelph, ON

Richmond Hill, ON

Mississauga, ON

Oakville, ON

Hamilton, ON

Toronto, ON

Kingston, ON

Montreal, QC

Quebec City, QC

Gatineau, QC

Halifax, NS

Charlottetown, PEI

Themes

- ① Nature, ② Growth, ③ Collaboration,
④ Activation, and ⑤ Inclusion



Through five different themes we dove deep into the numbers & stories to paint a picture of what's happening in city parks across Canada.



THEMES



Nature

VISION:

Parks improve resiliency and contribute to the ecological integrity of our environment, creating opportunities for people to connect with urban nature.

Nature



Close your eyes and think of a park. What do you see? Chances are it's green. Parks are, above all else, urban natural spaces—and there's a growing desire from residents for even more naturalized experiences.

KEY CHALLENGES

As our environment shifts from climate change and urbanization, parks are thrust to the forefront of building more resilient cities, and ensuring the ecological integrity of the systems we depend on for food, clean air, water, and moderate temperatures.

A 2019 report from Environment and Climate Change Canada found that Canada is warming faster than the global average—twice as fast. We can expect weather to become even more

extreme, with more instances of heavy rainfall and heat waves. Sea levels will rise on all coasts, especially in Atlantic Canada.

Effects of this are already being felt in park systems across the country, from flooding to fires. Calgary's devastating 2013 floods caused over \$400 million in damage, flooded waterfront parks in Oakville cost nearly \$4 million in 2017, and the same year Toronto shut down its popular Toronto Islands due to flooding.

In the spring of 2019, we saw major floods across Quebec and Ontario.

Key challenges lie ahead in protecting biodiversity and safeguarding our communities from the ravages of extreme weather. This is putting increasing pressure on already stretched budgets. The good news? We have examples of how cities are investing in new parks to mitigate these effects, restore habitat, and protect biodiversity.

Nature



KEY INSIGHTS

1. Cities are grappling with rising incidences of extreme weather damage in parks, such as flooding and droughts. These effects impact tight operating budgets and will become more frequent due to climate change.
2. New parks can be designed as flood protection infrastructure. This requires diverse expertise and close collaboration between city engineering, parks, transportation, and water departments.
3. While many cities are experimenting with small, green infrastructure pilot projects (i.e. rain gardens), there's a need for comprehensive strategies to scale and become standard practice.
4. Increasing biodiversity in our cities is critical for the health of natural systems and wildlife. More work to restore habitats and create connectivity within park systems is required.

Nature

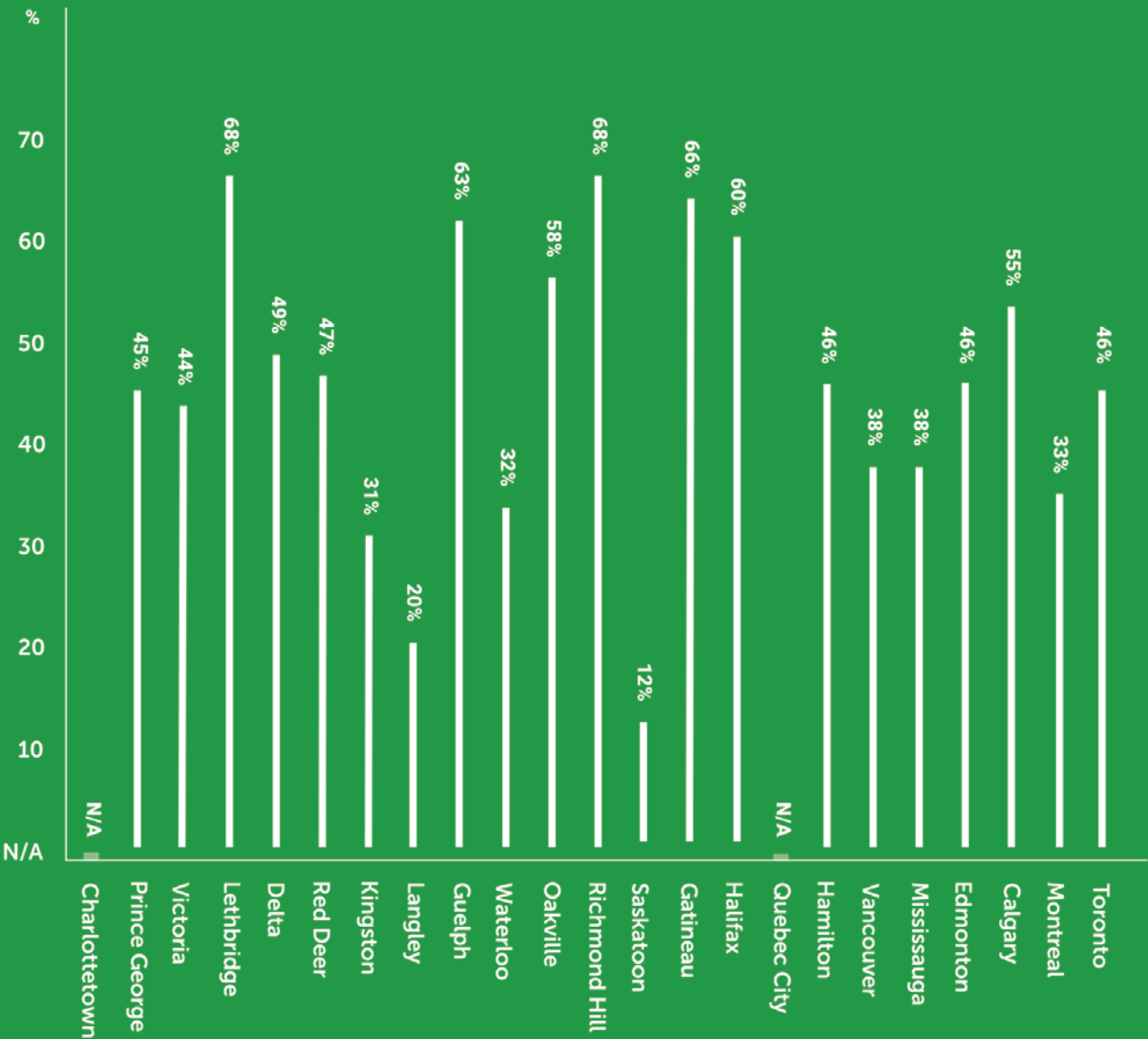
KEY INDICATORS

48% of cities have a city-wide green infrastructure strategy that includes parks

87% of cities offer natural stewardship programming

83% of cities have a biodiversity strategy

% of parkland that is natural area



Natural areas are those that receive a lower level of maintenance and support naturalized vegetation as opposed to more maintained parkland, which contain lawns, sports fields, and other amenities.

Edit: Edmonton's natural parkland numbers updated

*Arranged by population size

Building resilience through parks

Designing parks as sponges that soak up rainwater helps mitigate the damaging impacts of extreme weather—and creates new, beautiful green spaces.

Green infrastructure is a key element of building more resilient cities through parks.

Green infrastructure includes engineering natural spaces, like bioswales and rain gardens, that better capture, soak up, and treat rainwater where it falls as opposed to whisking it away into grey infrastructure, like pipes. This helps reduce the flooding associated with heavy rain events, but also improve water quality.

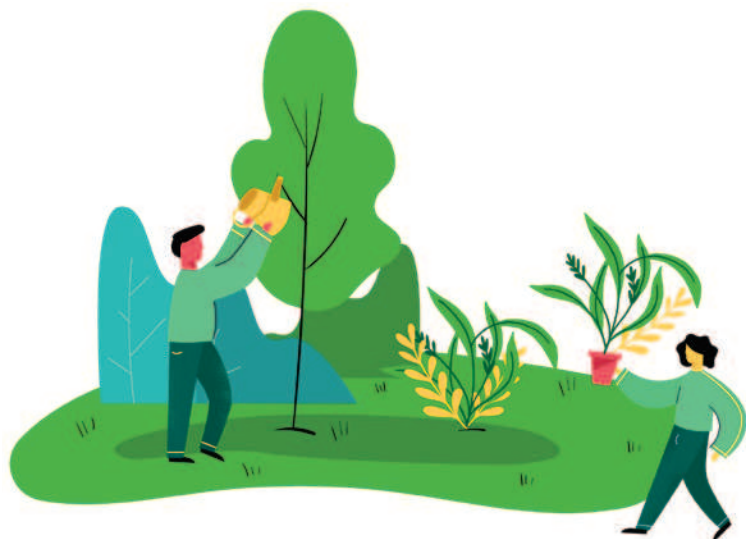
While we found cities across Canada are experimenting with green infrastructure in parks, only 48% of cities we surveyed have a citywide strategy for integrating this into park planning at a systems scale. As we reported in our 2017 [Resilient Parks, Resilient](#)

[Cities](#) report, an integrated strategy is critical for making green infrastructure standard practice.

As a city that is forecasted to experience increasingly heavy rainfall due to climate change, Vancouver leads the way with its citywide green infrastructure strategy. The strategy includes plans for streets, trees, parks, developments, and the City's maintenance practices. Staff [reported](#) that "without comprehensive policy, green infrastructure projects have mainly been staff-led pilot initiatives...rather than as an integral part of City capital programs."

Approved in 2016, the [Rain City Strategy](#) pushes Vancouver to evolve beyond pilots, using an ecosystem approach to integrate green infrastructure citywide and treat rainwater as a resource. According to the City, over half of Vancouver is made up of impervious surfaces that cannot absorb water. The strategy's target is to divert 90% of rainfall before it meets waterways.

The plan's implementation is a partnership between City departments, including Planning, Engineering, and the Vancouver Park Board. Cameron Owen, who works in the Engineering Department's Green Infrastructure Branch, said that the sweet spot



is when a project can help meet water management, biodiversity, and park access goals in one.

Two recent examples:

- The 63rd and Yukon Street [green infrastructure plaza](#). The plaza creates a green amenity that also captures run-off from a surrounding 1,170 square metres of impervious surface through bioretention systems, like rain gardens.
- The [Tatlow and Volunteer Parks](#) daylighting project. A buried stream is being brought to the surface, allowing stormwater to more naturally filter through plants before reaching the ocean.

The department's hope is that this green infrastructure work can also help connect existing parks together by creating more park-like experiences along streets, contributing to an overall better green network in the city.

There are lots of co-learning opportunities between the Park Board and Engineering, Cameron said, adding that it's the diversity of knowledge within the department and its ability to work closely with Park Board colleagues that leads to innovative solutions.

The Green Infrastructure Branch includes landscape architects, planners, green infrastructure engineers, water engineers, and more. "When we start looking at how to solve a problem, some people are detail-focused and some are systems-focused," Cameron said. "Which really led us in a different direction than if we had just been a group of landscape architects or engineers to solve the problem."

Other highlights:

- Saskatoon is creating a [green infrastructure strategy](#). Work to date includes a [baseline inventory](#) of all of the city's green spaces and their functions, including areas of impervious surfaces. The final strategy will be released in 2020.
- Toronto piloted green infrastructure in [Fairford Parkette](#) and created the [Green Streets Technical Guidelines](#), which includes a tool to select the right type of green infrastructure for a project.
- Delta works in partnership with the volunteer-based [Cougar Creek Streamkeepers](#) to install rain gardens, including a 500 square foot garden built in a hydro corridor that will filter more than 2 million litres of rainwater in the Blake Creek watershed area. As Deborah Jones, Rain Gardens Coordinator with the Streamkeepers, told the [Peace Arch News](#): "Rainwater that seeps underground from a rain garden to a salmon stream is cool and clean, whereas rainwater that's piped directly from pavements and roofs into that same stream is warm and polluted."
- The Township of Langley's work in integrating green infrastructure into neighbourhood and green space development was featured in a [2017 case study](#), including the establishment of a Green Infrastructure Services department.
- Charlottetown has piloted [bioswales alongside Simmons Arena](#) as part of the [Atlantic Stormwater Initiative](#).
- Hamilton is building rain gardens into a new downtown park, [John Rebecca Park](#), with a goal of infiltrating 90% of stormwater onsite.



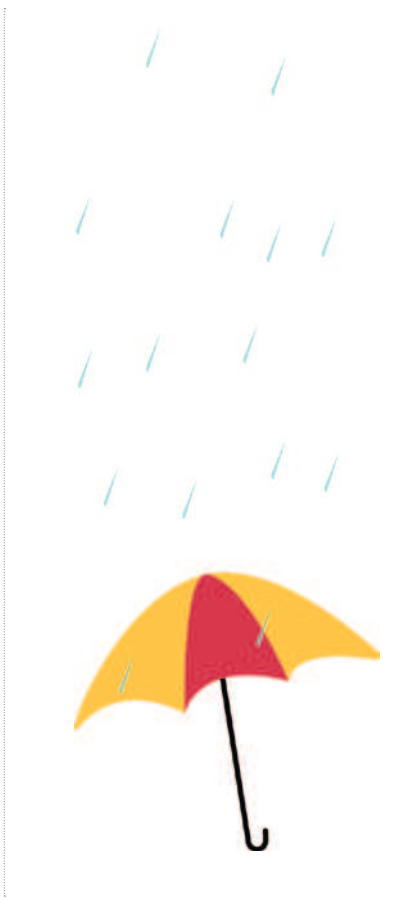
Is it a park or flood protection infrastructure? Both.

Calgary future-proofs itself from floods by designing the stunning West Eau Claire Park along the Bow River.

Ever since a devastating flood in 2013 caused over \$400 million in damage and the evacuation of thousands of people, Calgary has been working on ways to better protect itself.

Following those floods, the City approved a [Flood Resilience Plan](#), which included both upstream and community-level risk mitigation measures along the Bow and Elbow Rivers, which run through the city. One of those community-level projects, West Eau Claire Park, completed its first phase in 2018.

West Eau Claire Park is a revitalized linear waterfront park along the



Bow River. The \$10.6 million project puts 30% of those costs towards flood mitigation elements.

Daniel England, Project Manager within Parks, Planning, and Development at the City of Calgary said that the project was an exercise in “how to change design to protect the downtown” from floods.

“We want to make sure people embrace the waterfront,” he said, providing an accessible promenade and maintaining as many mature trees as possible, but at the same time build infrastructure to protect from major floods. Elements couldn’t be included within the design, for example, that could be lifted up and damaged by rising water.

The park is designed to protect against a 200-year flood, which exceeds what occurred back in 2013 by about 35%.

It achieves this not by building huge retaining walls, but by nestling flood mitigation infrastructure into the design so that it becomes a part of a new public amenity, rather than a barrier to the riverfront. A second phase, funded by the Province of Alberta, will extend the project to Reconciliation Bridge.

The park's design includes an earthen berm to raise land to protect against high waters and cement walls with benches where raising land wasn't feasible. It also includes systems built into the river's edge that conceal panels that can be dropped into place during a potential flood.

As well as acting as a barrier, the park itself is a sponge, with bioswales located to catch run-off.

"We wanted to make sure any of the water that drained off the hard surfaces was collected and utilized onsite," Daniel said.

West Eau Claire Park, City of Calgary



Biodiversity buzz spreading across Canada

Protecting biodiversity and ecosystem health is a national challenge, but city parks have an important role to play.

A new report by the Canadian [Biodiversity Action Council](#) sounds the alarm on biodiversity loss, arguing that the

“three critical drivers augmenting biodiversity loss are our disconnected relationship to the land, over consumption and habitat loss.”

Their calls to action include setting concrete conservation targets, dealing with landscape and parks connectivity, collaborating with Indigenous peoples, integrating biodiversity strategies with community planning practices, and repositioning conservation as an urban initiative.

We found that 83% of cities have a biodiversity strategy, but that many are engaging in small-scale efforts to increase biodiversity and, in particular, habitat for pollinators.

- Recognizing the need for more



Piper Creek Pollinator Hotel, City of Red Deer

information to communicate and stimulate action, Ontario's Biodiversity Council produced resources in 2017 on how to talk about [biodiversity and climate change](#) and the links between [biodiversity and public health](#).

- The work of the Ontario Biodiversity Council helps form the foundation of more local plans, such as Oakville's 2018 [Biodiversity Strategy](#). The strategy includes tips on mitigating the impacts of off-leash dogs and outdoor

cats and decreasing the impacts of light pollution on wildlife.

- Vancouver approved its [Biodiversity Strategy](#) in 2016, which includes, importantly, metrics for evaluating the success of the strategy. One goal is to restore 25 hectares of natural habitat by 2020, including the restoration of the salt marshes at New Brighton Park in 2018, which resulted in the reintroduction of wild salmon.
- In Delta, it's all about the birds. The City's [Birds and Biodiversity](#)

Conservation Strategy was approved in 2016. Delta is home to over 275 species of birds, and millions of migratory birds that use the Fraser River Estuary and Delta as a stopover, making it one of Canada's Important Bird Areas. The strategy includes a strong focus on strengthening partnerships with local organizations, such as the Delta Naturalists, a local group that offers birding walks.

Pollinators have been a particular area of focus within biodiversity work. The use of pesticides, loss of habitat from urbanization, and threats from invasive species have resulted in urgent calls for action from experts about the ongoing health of pollinators like bees and butterflies.

Canadian researchers recently sounded alarm bells about possible extinction for certain bee species, leading to "cascading impacts" across Canada.

Approximately three-quarters of food crops rely on pollinators.

- Toronto approved its Pollinator Strategy in 2018. It includes directions to increase community partnerships, educational opportunities, and incentivize the creation of habitat corridors. In early 2019, the City launched its PollinateTO grants of \$5,000 to assist residents in planting pollinator gardens.
- Guelph became a certified Bee City in 2018. A 45-hectare former landfill is being transformed into a pollinator park, with the help of local charity Pollination Guelph. Currently the group has planted 3 hectares and has "documented several at-risk birds, bees, and butterflies on the site," said Victoria Macphail, co-chair of the group. The group also runs art projects and education walks.
- In Waterloo, another 2018 Bee City inductee, a pollinator working group was struck that includes community volunteers who will help find ways to promote pollinators and educate the public through events and activities. Check out the

group's terms of reference.

- In 2015, Red Deer designated four pollinator parks, which were meant to protect and attract birds, bees, and bats. The City doesn't use pesticides in these parks and weeds are hand-picked. As told to CBC, the City hoped that it would spur ideas for how residents could "turn their own yards into an oasis for essential players in the ecosystem." The City also created a large "pollinator hotel" within the Piper Creek area that allows bees to nest.



Bringing nature back to the city

Restoring habitat, particularly for endangered species, and creating great parks in the process.

As our cities grow and develop, it's not just homes for humans that we need to think about, but the natural habitats of the wildlife that live alongside us. Unfortunately, urban development continues to remove and degrade natural habitat, leaving some species in our urban areas endangered.



The following park projects involve creativity, partnerships, and foresight in restoring wildlife habitat in the city.

Turtles in Kingston's Douglas Fluhrer Park

In Kingston, the volunteer group Friends of Kingston Inner Harbour has been working with the City since 2016 to protect turtle habitat in the 7-acre Douglas Fluhrer Park. In 2018, the group received a grant to expand their work mapping turtle nesting sites with GPS technology and hosting community events.

Salamanders in Richmond Hill's Jefferson Salamander Park

Completed in early 2019, Jefferson Salamander Park is adjacent to an "amphibian crossing" that allows the Jefferson Salamander, whose habitat has been severely impacted by urbanization, to safely cross to a nearby pond. The park design builds the story of the salamander into its pathways and

features, providing an educational opportunities for park goers.

Eels in Oakville's Harbour West Shoreline

Set for construction in Spring 2019, Oakville is improving 500 metres along its west shore as aquatic habitat. The project includes special accommodations in the design for the American Eel, which is an endangered species.

Salmon in Vancouver's New Brighton Park salt marshes

Completed in 2017, the City of Vancouver created a new salt marsh habitat in New Brighton Park, reconstructing what was once there before urban development filled in the tidal area. Even before the project's completion, the City observed juvenile salmon using the new marsh area. The \$3.5 million project was a partnership with the Port of Vancouver, which owns the land, and Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations.

MORE STORIES

A greener way to cut the green in Edmonton

Edmonton piloted two self-driving, electric lawn mowers in Coronation Park in 2018. The \$9,000 units could help the City meet its carbon neutral goals, if deployed at a larger scale.

While the project raised concerns from unionized staff, the City maintained it won't be replacing any jobs, but cutting grass where it's currently dangerous to do so, such as river banks and ravines. The project also piqued community interest, with one curious resident walking off with one of the lawnmowers (City staff later rescued it).

A cuter way to manage weeds in Albertan cities



Ever since the City of Red Deer began a pilot project using goats to manage weeds in the environmentally sensitive Piper Creek area, the Mayor of Red Deer now finds herself attending popular “Meet n’ Bleeats” where residents can meet the goats—& the Mayor.

The pilot's aim was to create an economical, non-chemical way to manage invasive weeds, such as Canada thistle. The goats were so efficient that they demolished an acre of thistle in one day, rather than the projected four, so the City extended the pilot.

Using goats is beneficial for pollinators and nearby water bodies, which won't have to contend with chemical weed control. But just as importantly the goats have created a fun, family-friendly event where residents can chat with City staff and learn about the importance of environmental sustainability in Piper Creek.

Neighbouring cities like Lethbridge have also experimented with goats in parks. A pilot project in fall 2018 saw a herd of 200 goats—accompanied by a squad of canine companions trained to protect them—introduced into Cottonwood Park to manage trail-side vegetation that was difficult to reach using mechanized equipment. Lethbridge, too, has extended its pilot.

From felled tree to furniture in Montreal

Following the massive loss of ash trees due to the effects of the Emerald Ash Borer—an issue facing many cities in Canada—the Borough of Rosemont-La Petite Patrie decided to do something a little creative. It commissioned a local entrepreneur to find a way to re-use the wood from felled ash trees. Rather than discarding the wood by burning it, the newly created Bois Public

organization used it to create street furniture, transforming a challenge into an opportunity.



THEMES



② Growth

VISION:

Parks across Canada keep pace with population growth and community needs with budgets that support a well-maintained park system.

Growth



A key challenge for Canadian cities is ensuring park systems keep up with growth and changing demands. Budgets are tight. Demographics are shifting. Infrastructure needs costly repairs. And it's becoming harder to find space for new parks.

To keep up, we need to ensure we're planning for the future.

Leading park system master plans employ a "network" lens, with cities not just looking to acquire new parkland, but connect existing parks together. Building these networks is important for the health and happiness of people and wildlife, and increases the accessibility of the entire park system.

It isn't only park acquisition that growing cities find challenging. It's also ensuring that parks meet user demand as demographics shift and trends in park use shift with them.

To make the right programming and design decisions, more data is needed about actual park use and satisfaction—a gap identified in conversations with city staff throughout Canada.

Collecting this data is often expensive and challenging, so cities are mostly relying on permits and occasional surveys to understand use. There's a big opportunity to learn from cities using exciting techniques to improve how we measure park use.

Growth



KEY INSIGHTS

1. A critical challenge facing cities is a lack of operating dollars for programming and maintenance, with budgets not keeping pace with growth as demand increases. This leaves many parks departments tasked with doing more with less each year.
2. Cities would like to better measure and track park use to inform planning, design, and programming—especially as demographics and use shift—but doing so can be challenging and expensive, leaving a data gap for many cities.
3. As cities grow and become more built out, proactive park planning becomes even more important to get ahead. New Park System Master Plans are focusing on connectivity within the system—for both wildlife and people—as much as acquiring new parkland.
4. With space at a premium, cities are exploring opportunities to integrate streets through green connections or flexible spaces to expand public space, particularly in dense areas.



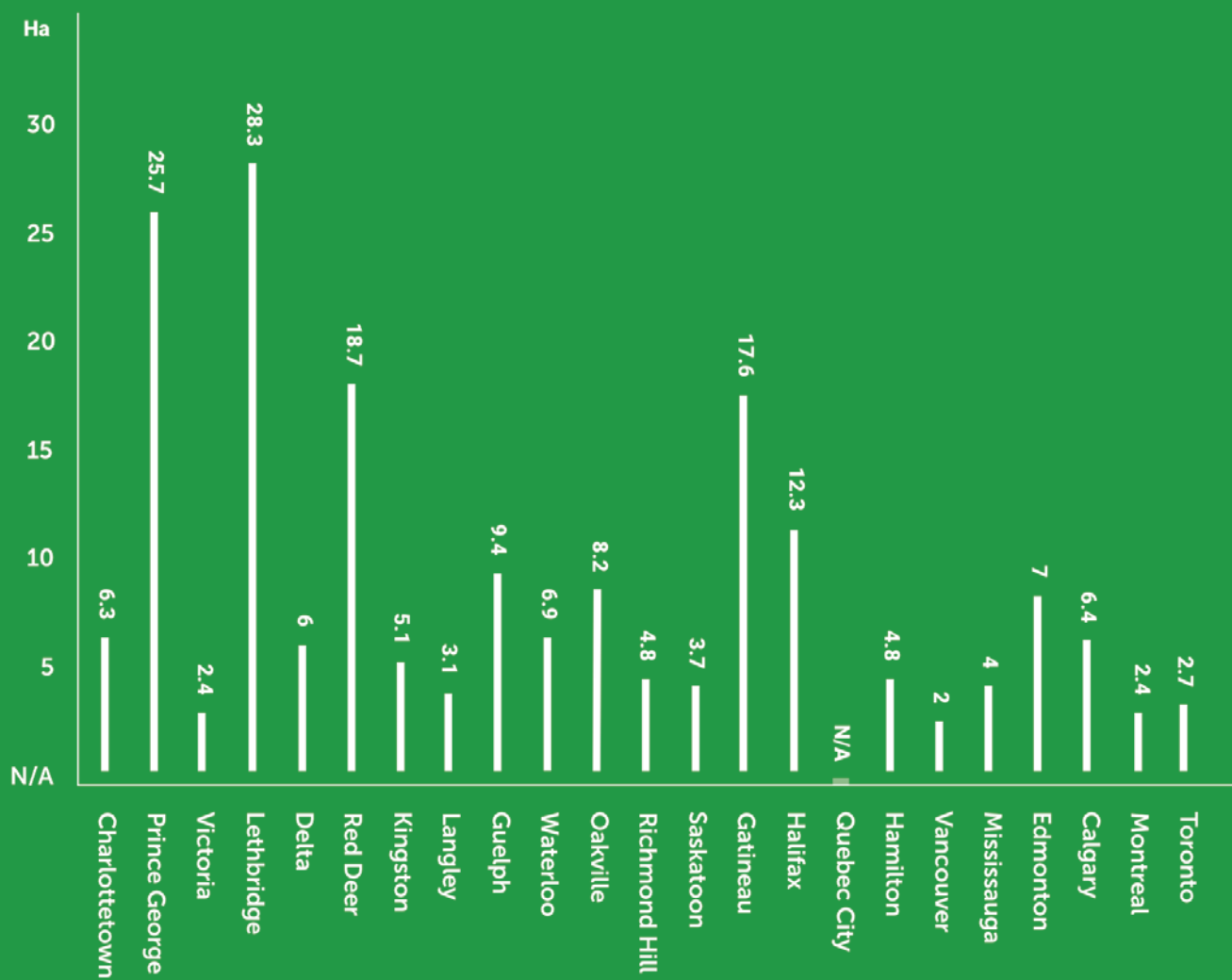
KEY INDICATORS

70% of cities have park system plans updated within the last 10 years or in development.

17% of cities have completed an observational study of park use.



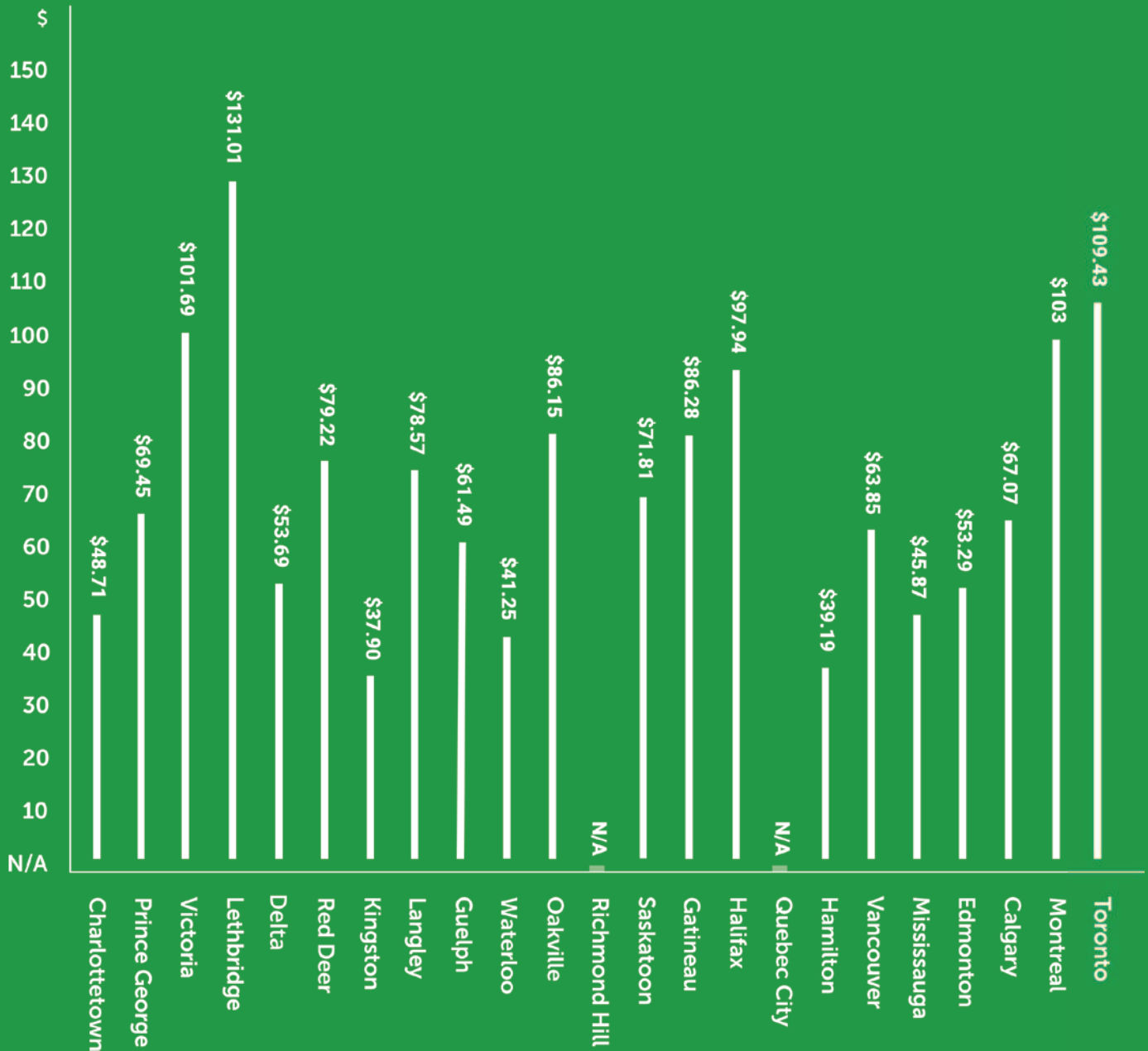
Ha of parkland/1000 people



This shows the amount of total parkland, including natural areas, per 1000 people. It illustrates that our larger, more dense cities have a harder time providing parkland. Tracking this over time will illustrate how cities are keeping pace with growth.

*Arranged by population size

\$ of parks operating budget per person



*Arranged by
population size

This shows the amount each city spends per person on parks operations, which includes maintenance. Amounts vary depending on local contexts, but the average spend is \$75 per person. Tracking this over time will illustrate budget pressure.

Edit: Vancouver operating
budget number updated
July 2019

Planning for the future by making connections

New park system master plans are focusing on building out a network of green spaces by looking for opportunities to strengthen connectivity—for both people and animals.

When you create a park system master plan for a city with a variety of natural environments that is bigger than Prince Edward Island, you're bound to get something unique.

Halifax's [Green Network Plan](#), approved in 2018, is a "combination of a regional planning document and also a municipal open space document," said Richard Harvey, Manager of Policy and Planning for Parks in Halifax. While his department deals with master plans for city parks, Richard said, "we are also involved with the acquisition of large areas of open space that in many ways shape the city."

Indeed, an entire section of the plan involves city shaping, where the green space system is seen as a tool for directing development to appropriate locations and ensuring there are clear neighbourhood boundaries.



Berczy Park, City of Toronto (Industryous Photography)

As the name suggests, the Green Network Plan brings a systems-level approach to thinking about the network of parks and open spaces within the city and their ecological and cultural integrity. As part of the plan, the City created a multi-layered Green Network Database that will allow staff and the public to understand how a site-specific proposal impacts the city's larger ecological context.

The plan promotes this focus on network connectivity by breaking

down the city into edges, wedges, patches, and corridors:

- Edges form boundaries around communities (like a shoreline)
- Wedges are green spaces that insert into communities from edges, connecting them into the larger green space system.
- Patches are the distinct open spaces found within a community, such as parks and plazas.
- Corridors are linear green



Toronto lower Don Trail

spaces that also serve as active transportation routes, like trails and greenways.

Richard said that “ecological connectivity” drives much of the City’s thinking, but by making sure lands are connected to facilitate wildlife movement and create habitat corridors, “you’re also creating opportunities for human interaction” with that natural landscape.

This focus on connectivity extends to the neighbourhood-scale.

When thinking of planning neighbourhood parks, Richard argued it’s important to think about offering a diversity of experiences within a system of nearby parks. Even if your local park may not offer the amenity or activity you’re looking for, another within walking distance will. This includes prioritizing “the ability even along streets to place an emphasis on

green connections,” Richard said, using bike lanes, larger sidewalks, and improving street trees.

Toronto finds inspiration in connectivity in its new downtown park master plan

Toronto took a similar network approach in developing its [TO-core Parks](#) and Public Realm Plan, approved in 2018 as part of its overall downtown plan.

The plan grapples with the challenge of an increasingly dense and rapidly growing population within a relatively small area that contains few opportunities for acquiring land for new parks. In areas where there is land, it’s often prohibitively expensive—just an acre of land can cost around \$60 million.

TOcore approaches this challenge through working at a variety of scales—from site-specific to

larger natural systems—all fitting together into a connected network. The plan also looked beyond parks to open spaces such as privately-owned public spaces, streets, and laneways to maximize public space opportunities.

Reminiscent of Halifax’s edges and wedges, TOcore includes a “core circle” that knits together existing and proposed parks and public spaces in a ring around downtown. At the neighbourhood scale, the plan highlights “park districts” as well as “portal parks” which act as linkages between neighbourhood park districts and the wider city park system.

The plan also proposed several big ideas, such as decking over a downtown rail corridor to create a new 21-acre park, dubbed Rail Deck Park. Another is realigning the median of park space down the centre of University Avenue to one side, tripling the amount of open space available by stitching it with the street edge.

New measurement tools for park use, access, and quality

Spurred by urban development, changing demographics, and tight budgets, cities are developing innovative methods for measuring park access, use, and quality.



Vancouver measured actual walking distance to parks

Walking distance to a park is a common measure of park provision, but it's not as simple as drawing a direct 10-minute radius around a park—unless you're a bird.

Vancouver's [VanPlay Park Provision Study](#)—part of its ongoing VanPlay Master Plan—developed a clever method to account for topography, off-street routes, and traffic conditions (like crossing times) to determine walking distance.

This information was combined with data around current and future residential and employment populations to provide an in-depth snapshot of park access and provision across the entire city.

Prince George evaluated park quality through scorecards and an interactive app

Understanding where new parks are needed is one thing, but understanding the quality of existing parks is another.

As part of its parks master plan in 2017, Prince George undertook the process of creating individual park scorecards to rate the quality of parks under a number of criteria including neighbourhood context, infrastructure, safety, and environment. Overall, 109 parks were evaluated and posted publicly on the City's website.

The City also released an interactive app that allowed residents to access different layers of information, such as playgrounds slated as revitalization priorities.

Toronto undertook a massive downtown public life study

In 2016, Toronto completed the City's first public life study to inform the City's downtown master plan, to understand the who, what and how of downtown park use.

Based on methodology from Gehl Studio and managed by Park People, the study included over 100 volunteers using behavioural observation techniques to collect information about park users such as age, gender, and activity.

The study was coupled with an intercept survey, where volunteers randomly approached park users to complete a questionnaire including demographic information. The [results](#) provide a snapshot in time of park use and can help inform decision-making about design or planning changes.

Cities using sensors to track park use

With no turnstiles at the entrances and exits, it's notoriously hard to measure how many people use a park or trail—which is why some cities are experimenting with sensors.

Following a pilot project in 2016, Montreal began using new technology to measure use of its seven nature parks by installing 59 infrared sensors. Data collected helps the City get a more accurate measure of the use of these parks and informs where investments can be directed in the future. Mississauga, Calgary, Guelph, Saskatoon, Victoria, and Lethbridge also use sensors to monitor users, such as pedestrians and cyclists, in parks and along trails.

MORE STORIES

Montreal invests in parks over three years

In February 2019, Montreal committed to [investing \\$75 million](#) in parks and shorelines. The new program will use a set of equity criteria to direct investments to areas in most need, including family size, population density, and the poverty index of the neighbourhood.

The plan, which provides funding directly to boroughs, requires each of the 19 boroughs to renovate at least one park per year for three years, for a total of 57 renovated parks. In 2018, the City noted it [spends more per hectare on parks](#) than other Canadian cities because it has less green space per capita. This means more people use the parks that exist, causing higher maintenance costs.

Turning streets into parks in Toronto and Kingston



As cities look for more space to create and expand parks, they're turning to the land they already own in the form of streets, which can make up about a quarter of a city's land area.

Opened in 2017, Toronto's

revitalization of Berczy Park, a small downtown park, included the redesign of adjacent Scott Street to integrate the street with the park, allowing the street to be used as a continuation of the park when needed. This is the first instance in Toronto of connecting street and park design in this holistic manner.

And in Kingston, an expansion of Churchill Park is being made possible by turning adjacent [Napier Street into parkland](#), potentially hosting basketball courts and other hard-surface amenities, and connecting the park to St. Mary's Schoolyard.

Poop power: Waterloo turns dog waste into energy

As the populations of our cities grow, so too does another population—that of our four-legged barking friends. And where there are dogs, there's dog poop. Lots of it.

In fact, Waterloo determined that between 40% and 80% of garbage in park litter bins was actually dog poop, so they decided to do something about it. Turn that poop into power!

Through a [pilot that began in 2017](#) in three city parks, the City ships dog poop to a nearby plant where it undergoes a process that captures gases and creates fertilizer out of what's left. The pilot reportedly diverted nearly eight tons of dog poop, converting it into enough energy to power 18 homes. The City is now [expanding the pilot](#) to four more parks.

A friendly game of pickleball, anyone?

As populations age, parks departments are fielding requests for new recreational activities like pickleball. Played with a wiffle ball and paddle, pickleball is easy to learn and doesn't require the same sweat-inducing effort as other games like tennis.

With [more and more people](#) taking up pickleball, many cities are looking for ways to provide space for it, including converting tennis courts as Waterloo is doing. Prioritizing finesse over speed and power, pickleball is a way to offer older adults the benefits of regular exercise. Oh, and that name? It comes from a dog named Pickles, who kept stealing the wiffle ball from the first folks who played the game back in 1965.

One plan to rule them all. (Quebec City's rivers that is)

Quebec City is developing a river plan called [Rêvons nos Rivières](#) (dreaming up our rivers) to create a single master plan for the main rivers within its borders, including the St-Charles and Du Berger, Montmorency, Beauport and Du Cap Rouge.

The plan aims to raise awareness of the rivers, imagine how they can be animated, reinforce connections to neighbourhoods, and ensure they're planned as a signature feature of the city. The work will be conducted at three levels: the city, neighbourhoods, and river banks.

Led by the Planning, Development and Environment Department, the project was initiated in 2017 with an [international competition of ideas](#), which helped inspire and guide the project. In parallel with these steps, the City led a series of public consultations, including the creation of an interactive mobile exhibition called the Rivièro-scope. The plan is expected to be completed by the end of 2019.

Dive in! Kingston opens an urban swimming pier

A once-polluted stretch of Lake Ontario is now open for Kingstonians to dive in. Opened in 2018, the Gord Edgar Downie Pier and upgraded Breakwater Park transformed an area with a [history of sewage contamination issues](#) into a vibrant waterfront where people can get into the water without leaving the city.

Upgrades to Breakwater Park have included a new promenade, accessibility improvements, and a pedestrian bridge to the pier. The redevelopment supports the [Kingston Waterfront Master Plan](#) and is paving the way for other Canadian cities to re-think how their waterfronts might accommodate more active uses. Swim Drink Fish Canada already has its [eyes on Toronto's Ontario Place](#) as a site where a similar pier might be replicated.

THEMES



③ Collaboration

VISION:

Cities engage partners to bring fresh ideas, new models, and alternative funding to support well-maintained, programmed, and inclusive parks.

Collaboration



Canadian cities haven't seen the explosive growth in park conservancies that has taken place across the United States. Largely because, while Canadian budgets are tight, there haven't been the same major budget cuts faced by many U.S. cities.

There is, however, a growing desire to help address challenges facing city parks by seeking out collaborative partnerships and new governance models to program, operate, and raise funds.

Many cities have forged relationships with non-profit and community-led organizations to bring in local expertise and renewed focus. These arrangements add

value but aren't a replacement for the city, which remains a crucial funding and governance partner.

While a call for partnerships was included in a few of the parks plans surveyed, overall this area is underdeveloped in terms of actions and policies. There's a need to better understand how to pursue and manage these partnerships in Canadian cities.

There is no 'one-size-fits-all' strategy. Partnerships exist at a variety of scales and span an extensive combinations of roles, responsibilities, and funding models.

We can learn how to draw our own roadmap for effective partnerships in Canada from successful existing partnerships and burgeoning new ones.

Collaboration



KEY INSIGHTS

1. Strong partnerships leverage the ability of non-profits to access new funding and be nimble in responding to local programming needs, while recognizing the importance of maintaining public funding and core services.
2. Partnerships are exercises in trust, with time needed to test ways of working together through governance pilots and guidelines for roles, allowing relationships to evolve over time.
3. Community-led groups can lead to unique local programming and meaningful engagement, but these groups need city support, and can face barriers related to permits and permissions.



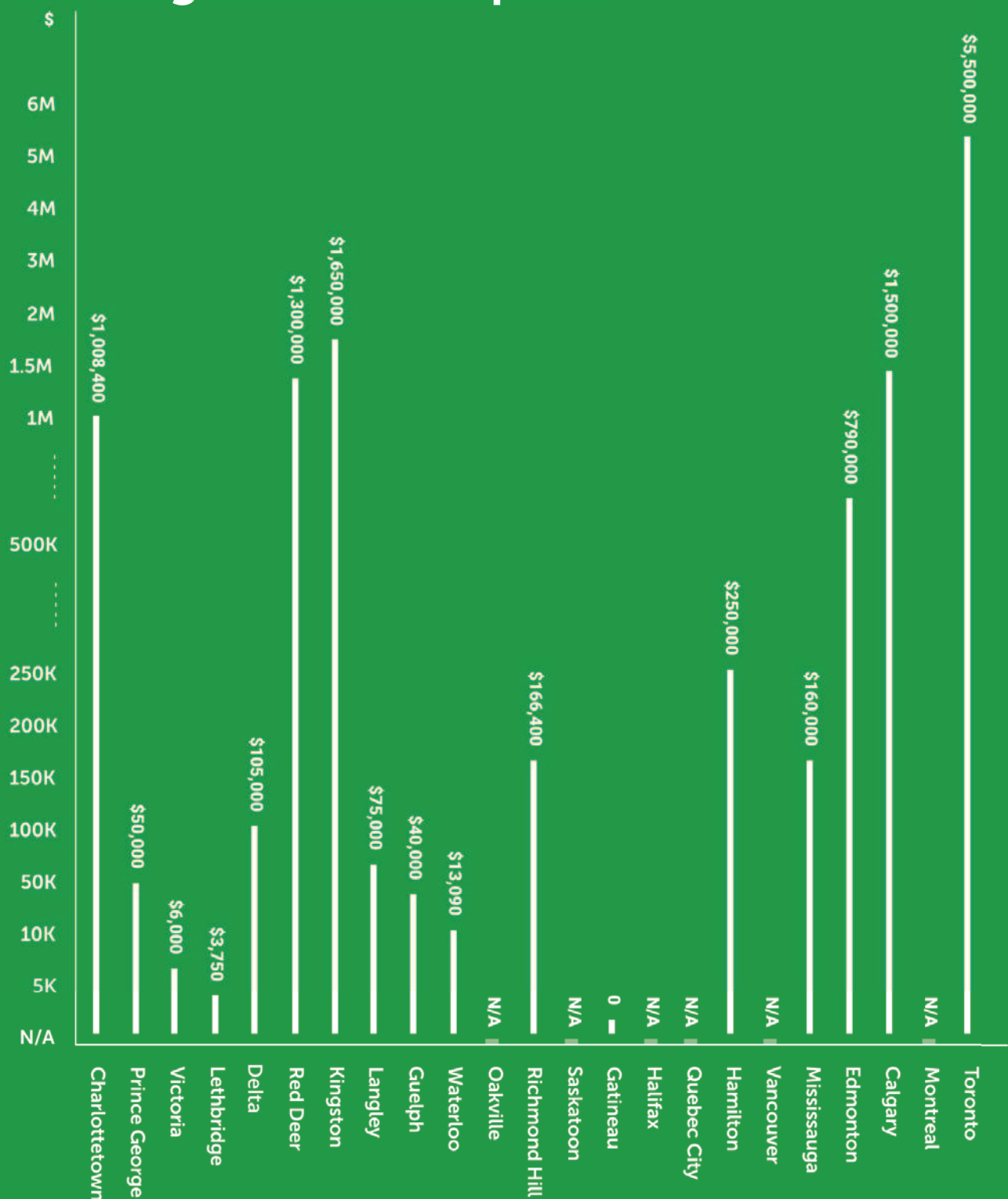
KEY INDICATORS

74% of cities said they had a partnership with a non-profit that includes programming, education, and/or maintenance.

52% of cities have a formal community program for people to get involved in their local park, such as an adopt-a-park program.



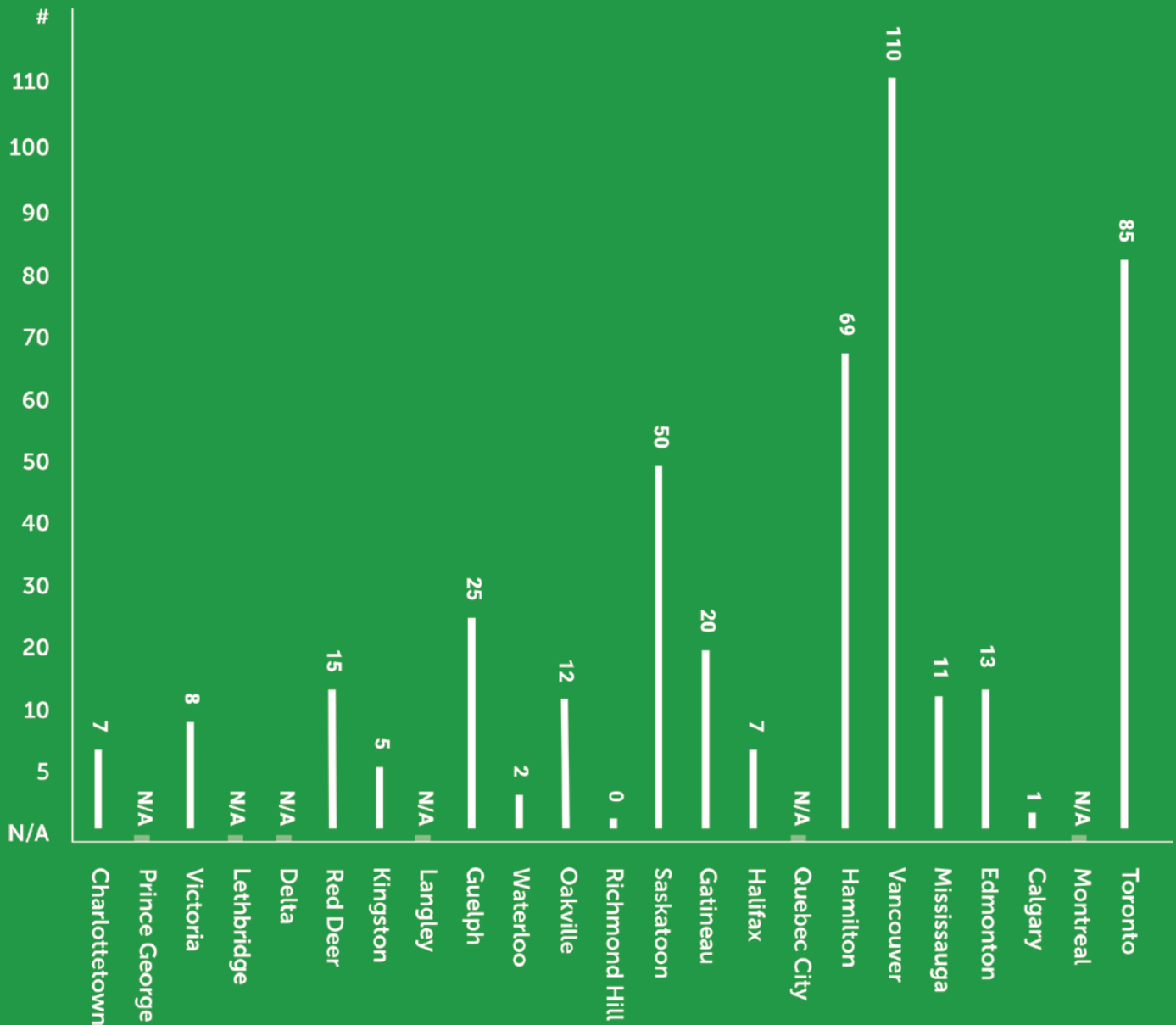
\$ in philanthropic and sponsorship funding in 2018 for parks



This represents the amount of outside funding cities raised for park projects, largely towards built features like new parks or playgrounds. Tracking this over time will help illustrate how cities fundraise for park improvements.

*Arranged by population size

of community park groups per city



*Arranged by population size

This represents the number of community groups working with the city in parks. Tracking this over time will help illustrate community collaboration and resident involvement.

Edit: Vancouver park-focused community group number updated July 2019

Strengthening parks through partnerships



Mont Royal, City of Montreal

Collaborations with non-profits are helping expand services and sharpen focus on particular places, but cities still support with public funding.

Quebec City has built collaboration into the very way it operates its parks, signing various agreements with non-profit organizations for maintenance, natural protection, and programming.

This includes agreements with organizations that were formed to steward the natural riverfront parks in the city, such as the [Société de la Rivière St-Charles](#), the [Conseil de bassin de la rivière du Cap Rouge](#), and the [Conseil de bassin de la rivière Beauport](#).

The Société de la Rivière St-Charles was formed with a mission to animate, protect, and raise awareness about the St. Charles River.

While a popular recreational amenity now, the river was once housed within a garbage-strewn concrete channel. After a renaturalization effort in 2008, there were concerns about how the newly revitalized river would be maintained, which sparked the formation of the Société.

Starting small, the group obtained initial contracts with the City to provide employment opportunities to marginalized youth to maintain trails. Contracts expanded to include waste management, horticultural, and winter maintenance

services as well as programs like cross-country skiing.

The group's main source of funding is through direct contracts with the City. However, they're also able to access other sources of funding, such as donations and grants.

As the group's Director of Operations, [Guillaume Auclair](#), has said, "With time, the trust between the two entities increased. The Société de la Rivière St-Charles maintained its position as a group of action, collaborating with the City and focused on the river, as opposed to a political pressure group."

Leveraging community energy and expertise

Montreal also has experienced success through partnerships, entering into agreements with local non-profits for the programming and maintenance of parks, both large and small.

For example, the City works with organizations through the [Re-groupement des Éco-Quartier de Montréal](#) for the management of 20 Éco-Quartiers across the city. These groups are responsible for projects that support community involvement and environmental education, like [green alleys](#). And in Mile End an [innovative co-management agreement](#) for Champ des Possibles Park was recently signed with the resident-led non-profit [Les Amis du Champ des Possibles](#).

One of Montreal's more established partnerships is with the non-profit [Les Amis de Montagne](#), which is dedicated to the protection and enhancement of Mont Royal—a park that draws over 5 million people to its 230 hectares in the heart of the city.

The group leads community engagement, conservation activities, and fundraisers to support the park. Their activities range from cross-country skiing to summer day camps to providing nature programs for students.

Les Amis de Montagne works under a formal agreement with the City of Montreal, which includes contributions towards its operating budget and in-kind space. Les Amis de Montagne runs gift shops and winter sports equipment

rentals, with revenues reinvested back into the park.

As a result, 63% of its \$4 million operating budget in 2017/18 was from programs and services offered to park users.

The City maintains a strong role in the park. In 2015, the City hired a full-time Mont Royal Park Ranger whose job is to liaise between various City departments and the park's many stakeholders, including Les Amis de Montagne. The City of Montreal's former division head for the Bureau de Mont-Royal, [Pierre-Paul Savignac](#), has said that the partnership results in better stewardship of the park overall, noting that with good partnerships "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts."

Using partnerships to focus operations

Sometimes park partnerships are created to sharpen attention on a space that otherwise might be planned in a fragmented way. That's the case with the [RiverValley Alliance](#). It was formed in 2003 to focus on knitting the North Saskatchewan River, which flows through Edmonton as well as seven other Alberta cities, into a protected and connected trail system.

The group has a unique tri-governmental funding model and leads planning and construction projects along the river. Member cities take on maintenance and

operations. In Edmonton, projects have included creating boat access points and the construction of a funicular to ensure barrier-free access to the river valley.

In Toronto, a new partnership is blooming in Edwards Gardens between the City and the Toronto Botanical Gardens.

A [management plan](#) was approved for the 14-hectare park in 2018. Currently, the TBG has a lease for only 1.6 hectares of parkland, including an indoor facility with event space. The new plan will see its mandate expanded to the entire park.

The new management plan works to "create a seamless boundary between Edwards Gardens and the Toronto Botanical Gardens," as opposed to splitting management responsibilities in the park.

The goal of the partnership is to elevate the park's gardens to the level of other globally-acclaimed gardens, while also ensuring fiscal and ecological sustainability. The master plan includes a \$50 million capital fundraising campaign to be led by the TBG. The City will maintain its level of investment in operations.

Building partnerships in unexpected spaces

While not officially parks, Vancouver and Toronto have tested new governance models for streets-turned-plazas and a linear public space beneath an expressway.

The City of Toronto approved the creation of The Bentway Conservancy—a non-profit that operates, maintains, and programs a new linear public space created underneath a portion of the Gardiner Expressway.

The project was spurred by a \$25-million private donation.

An existing non-profit, Artscape, helped incubate the nascent Bentway Conservancy, providing expertise to get the group off the ground. Now in its second year, The Bentway has successfully hosted a skating trail, pop-up events that include beer gardens and music,

internationally renowned artists, and local activities through a community incubation grant.

In Vancouver, the City is developing a Plaza Stewardship Strategy, which seeks to strike agreements with non-profit organizations to assist in operating and programming plazas.

One pilot is a partnership with the West End Business Improvement Area in Jim Deva Plaza—a downtown plaza created out of street space. Both partners bring funding to support the plaza's operations and programming, which now hosts many community events and includes movable seating and, of course, giant Jenga.



Jim Deva Plaza - Vancouver

Locals know best

Resident-led groups are sparking change, bringing community energy, and tapping into local expertise.

Calgary's Friends of Reader Rock Garden

The [Friends of Reader Rock Garden](#) is a volunteer-led group that works with the City of Calgary to steward the unique Reader Rock Garden, which was designated as a national historic site in 2018. The garden is located on a hillside that was originally planted by former Calgary park superintendent William Reader in the early 20th century.

The group leads walks, plant sales, garden shows, and runs volunteer programs, such as working in partnership with the City and the Calgary Horticultural Society to have Master Gardeners volunteer in the gardens.

Hamilton's Pipeline Trail

To spur the creation of a connected trail along a Hamilton water pipeline route, the resident-led group Pipeline Trail Hamilton worked with neighbours, non-profits, and the City to raise awareness, excitement, and ultimately create a master plan.

Group member [Elizabeth Seidl](#) has said that forming partnerships

with "like-minded organizations" with a long track record of work in the city helps give smaller, newer groups, like hers, credibility. To spur interest, the group hosts events and walks, tends pollinator gardens, and leads art installations like lanterns that light the route up at night.

Delta's Cougar Creek Streamkeepers

The [Cougar Creek Streamkeepers](#) is a self-described "informal group of volunteers" working towards restoring and maintaining the health of Cougar Creek, a salmon stream that flows through Delta.

To accomplish their work, the group partners with schools and the City on projects such as rain gardens, salmon rearing and releasing, and invasive removals. Their goal is to use projects large and small to "nickel and dime the creek back to good health."

Their work has paid off with a [strong turnout](#) for salmon in late 2018, according to a count done by group volunteers.

Toronto's Thorncliffe Park Women's Committee

In Toronto's high-rise Thorncliffe Park neighbourhood, a landing pad for new immigrants, the [Thorncliffe Park Women's Committee](#) has been

instrumental in bringing new ideas to R.V. Burgess Park.

The group started small, advocating for improvements like more garbage cans and better playground equipment, and then [took on larger initiatives](#) like starting up a summer market where locals sell handmade goods and food. This required patience and work with the City to figure out the park permits to make this unique program possible.

With financial support from the City, the group also spearheaded the installation and management of the first tandoori oven in a park and now runs a shipping container park cafe.

Gatineau's dog owners mobilize

In 2017, Gatineau's Recreation Department began reviewing a by-law concerning the presence of dogs in parks, which banned dog walking in more than 93% of the city's 353 parks.

The [Aylmer Canine Club](#) has more than 1,200 members and has an agreement with the City to run a fenced dog area in Paul Pelletier Park. The club mobilized to convince the borough councillor to act, ultimately resulting in new regulations that now allow on-leash dog walking in 71% of city parks.

MORE STORIES

Toronto's Meadoway turning a hydro corridor into a linear park



Spurred by a \$25 million funding commitment from The W. Garfield Weston Foundation (WGWF), [The Meadoway](#) is a seven-year project that will transform a 16km stretch of hydro corridor in Scarborough into a linear park and trail complete with naturalized meadow habitat for pollinators. The project is led by the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, [in partnership with the City of Toronto](#) and community stakeholders along the route.

It builds on the success of a pilot project, The Scarborough Butterfly Trail, in a section of the hydro corridor that created a 50-hectare butterfly meadow planted through a grant to the TRCA as part of the Weston Family Parks Challenge. What was once hectares of barren mown grass became a thriving natural meadow habitat that is now well-used and loved by the community.

With hydro corridors taking up so much land in cities they're ripe for use as linear parks. We found 52% of cities reported having a partnership in place with a hydro authority.

Halifax partners on a wilderness park

In order to create a [wilderness park](#) just 5km from downtown Halifax, the City is working to purchase 154 hectares of land from a developer. The Nature Conservancy of Canada will then pay the municipality \$2.5 million to acquire a conservation easement, which places limitations on the use of the lands and maintains them in their natural state. The Province of Nova Scotia also kicked in an [additional \\$1 million](#) in funding in 2018.

The [NCC is now fundraising](#) to acquire this easement—which may include donor recognition in the park and naming rights on some features—kicking off its [Keep Halifax Wild](#) campaign in 2018. A long-term management plan for the park will be developed by the City, NCC, and community partners.

Hamilton marshals community energy

You won't find this extreme makeover program on TV, but on the ground in Hamilton's parks. Over a dozen parks in Hamilton have received "extreme makeovers" through a City-led program that brings municipal staff, local residents, and community groups together for a few days of fun-filled, hands-on projects that add up to a transformation of a neighbourhood park.

With the help of donations from charitable organizations like the [Elly4Kids Foundation](#) and the Rotary Club, past extreme makeovers have seen parks upgraded with

features like new play structures, soccer pitches, community-created murals, seating areas, and pollinator patches. The makeover activities often culminate with a park reopening and "Canadian Tailgate Party" to celebrate the community's new favourite place.

Township of Langley's arboretum built through partnerships

Resembling a cozy log cabin, a new interpretive centre is going up in Langley Township's Derek Doubleday Arboretum. The centre is the result of a partnership between the Town and Langley Rotary Club, which funded half of the \$500,000 budget. The project also [relied on volunteer hours](#) and donated construction materials.

Once complete, the centre will offer information about the gardens, but also become the nucleus for community stewardship and educational programming, such as the [Langley Environmental Partners Society](#).



Mississauga One Million Trees makes tree-planting a team effort

As the name suggests, this initiative sets the ambitious goal of planting one million trees in the city over a 20-year period. Residents, community groups, businesses, and schools are all called upon to get their hands dirty.

To get involved, Mississaugans can visit the [One Million Trees website](#) to find an upcoming event, or simply plant a tree on their property and [submit it to the City to be counted](#). The program, which supports the 'Living Green' pillar of the City's [Strategic Plan](#), will see the city's tree count increase by nearly 50%. With the program wrapping up in 2032, the City is right on track—[over a third of the way](#) to its goal.



④ Activation

VISION:

Parks are platforms for people to come together through community engagement and programming that invites diverse participants to get involved.

Activation



As public spaces, parks act as platforms for many things. The multiple benefits of a good, animated park system for our mental and physical health, sense of community, local economies, and environmental strength are well proven. However, with tight budgets, support for programming in Canadian cities varies.

As research has shown, the existence of a park is often not enough to realize social and health benefits. It requires investment in programming and engagement to connect people. A 2016 study of neighbourhood parks in the U.S. found that each additional supervised activity in a park increased its use by 48%.

While there are great examples of creative programs being run by cities and their partners across Canada, there's room for more supports for residents to get involved in their local parks. For example by easing permit barriers and costs, or providing funding support for local community initiatives.

No one wants over-programmed spaces either. A recent American Scholar article stated that we all need idle time in parks. This is on trend with Canadians desiring more unstructured spaces for spontaneous use. Many of us just want a place to hang out.

It's all about balance.

Activation



KEY INSIGHTS

1. Park use is shifting across Canada, with cities reporting growing desire for parks that support unstructured, spontaneous uses as opposed to more organized activities, challenging many cities to keep up with new demands.
2. Programming is often a mix of city, non-profit, and community-led, but some cities offer more supports for residents to get involved through adopt-a-park programs, grants, or permit fee waivers.
3. Providing dedicated community engagement workers in city parks varies widely across the country, with some cities employing relatively large amounts of city staff to engage residents relative to their size, and others relatively few.
4. Cities are tapping into organizations and partners, like arts groups, who may already have programs developed that can be brought to parks.



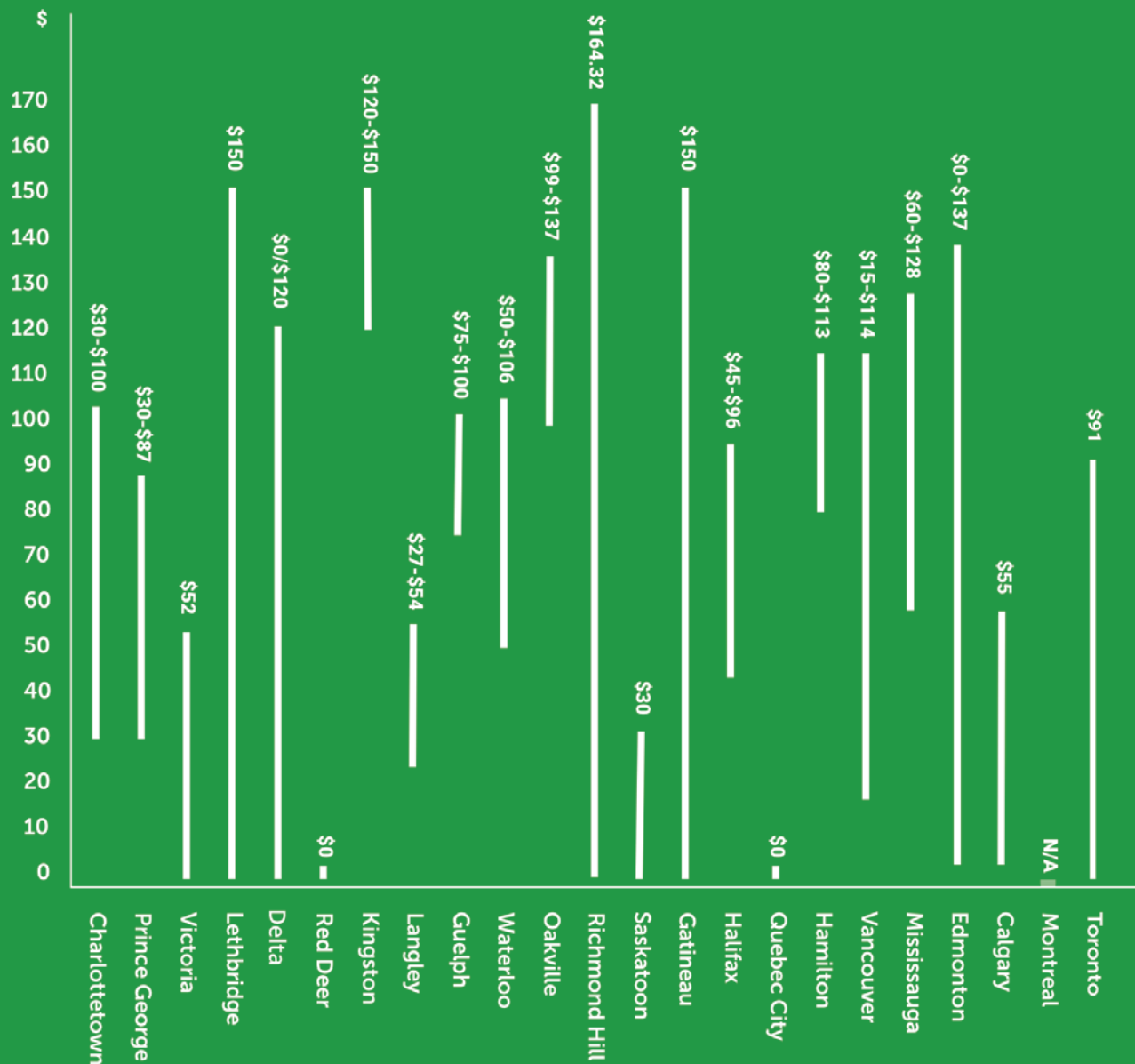
KEY INDICATORS

61% of cities have a community grant program that can be used for park projects

43% of cities have a policy to waive or reduce permit fees



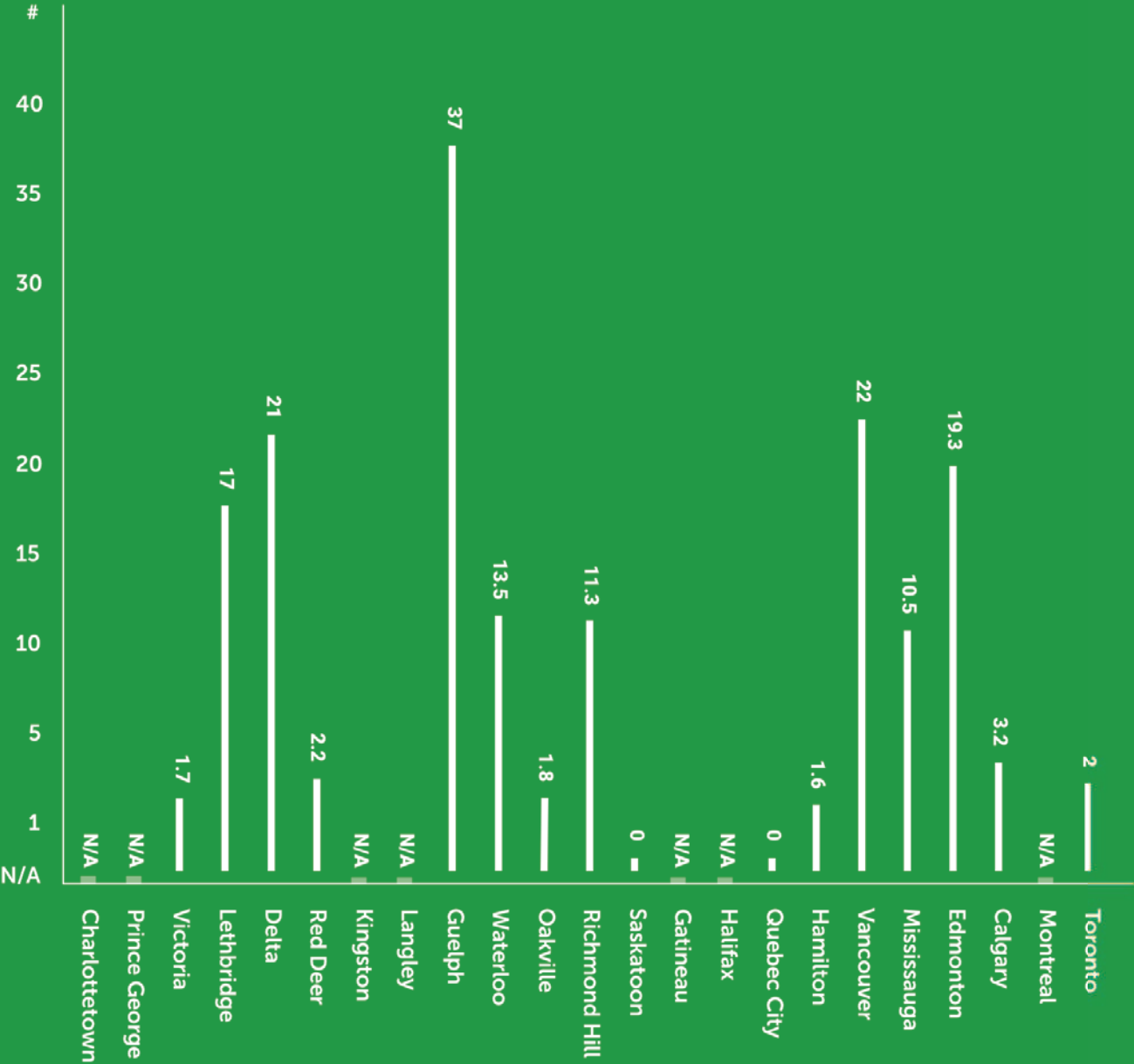
Average park permit cost



Many cities charge permits to community groups hosting park activities. We standardized data to represent the approximate cost of a four hour or half day event for each city. Of the cities that charge for permits, 43% have a policy to reduce or waive fees for financial need.

*Arranged by population size

of volunteers/ 1000 people



Controlled for population size, tracking number of volunteers helps show the level of participation in parks in each city.

*Arranged by population size

Take it to the park

New, creative programming brings arts, food, and mental health therapy to city parks.

Go to a park a take a deep breath. Feel better? You're not alone. Research has established strong links between spending time in nature and improved mental health. A partnership between the City of Victoria and Human Nature Counselling builds on that with a program called [New Roots](#).

The program brings youth out into city parks for nature-based therapy that targets anxiety and negative thinking. Participants take part in a variety of solo and group activities such as mindfulness, journaling, hiking, and nature play. It helps "them to slow down and dip into their senses and connect them to the natural world," said Katy Rose from Human Nature Counselling.

Running the program in city parks is an important part of its success because youth "want to be there," Katy said. Other mental health programs are indoors, which can be uncomfortable for some people. "It's just so much easier to build community outside," she said, adding that youth are also building connections to their local parks.



City of Victoria

The City is a crucial champion of the program, helping to find funding and making connections to specific parks. The afterschool program, fully funded by Island Health in 2018, is open to youth in middle and high school.

Staff also provide youth with service projects, such as pulling invasive English ivy, which is then dried and woven. Katy said this helps show youth how so-called negatives can be translated into positives by using the invasive species as a metaphor.

One of the program's key champions is Shelley Brown, a City Parks and Recreation Programmer. She had been working with students on a meadow restoration program and "saw how quickly the youth became passionate about parks and natural spaces," she said.

Shelley said a big part of her job is to help find funding to keep New Roots free. "Because this program is fairly new and quite different to what people think of when they think therapy, we wanted as few barriers as possible," she said.

The role of nature in positive mental health outcomes is also key to another partnership, this time in Guelph. There, the City hosts a registered charity that runs the [Enabling Garden](#) in Riverside Park, offering therapeutic experiences through horticulture in an accessible garden space.

"The therapeutic garden provides both a soothing and engaging atmosphere that allows individuals, with the assistance of the Registered Horticultural Therapist, to connect creatively in their community and share stories that encourage wellness and ease suffering," said Anna Kroetsch, a Horticultural Therapist at the garden.

The garden is specifically designed for those of all ages and abilities. "With a low-glare, wide accessible pathway, Braille signs, and raised garden beds, people that may not usually be able to access nature are able to comfortably engage with the natural world's smells, textures, and tastes no matter their ability," Anna said.



Building community through arts in the parks

Vancouver is turning would-be empty park buildings into hotspots of arts and culture in its inventive Fieldhouse Activation Program.

In a you-scratch-my-back-I'll-scratch-yours partnership, the City connects community groups with vacant park buildings that used to be caretaker's suites, providing rent-free space in exchange for 350 hours of community animation.

Running since 2011, it now operates in 22 parks and accepts applications from groups working in arts, sport, environment, local food, or social engagement to host three-year residencies.

For the next residency, [which started in 2019](#), programs include Indigenous food, intergenerational activities, girls rock camps, seed swaps, eco-film workshops, and more.

In Toronto, the city is heading into the third year of its popular Arts in the Parks program, which is run by the Toronto Arts Council. As TAC Director Claire Hopkins said in a [2018 blog](#), the idea came from the fact there were few venues for artists to present their work outside the downtown.

She also noticed that many artists were having difficulty getting park permits and permissions. As Claire put it: "Taxpayer dollars are going to fund arts organizations to make art, and they're forced to spend most of their money on permits and marketing for a free public event."

The program isn't meant to parachute arts into neighbourhoods, so a lot of attention is dedicated

to working with local community groups to make sure the art is appropriate and locally-responsive.

In 2018, the program saw 282 events in 36 parks across the city, with the majority of those happening outside the downtown.

A 2019 [toolkit](#) provides more information for those wanting to create similar programs, with information on funding, partnerships, outreach, and evaluation.

The City of Waterloo operates a smaller scale program with their [Artist in Residence](#). An initiative of the City's Culture Plan, this program provides "opportunities for artists to partner with the City to deliver community art projects to citizens of all ages, abilities, and experience." In 2018 the program showcased the work of artists Denise St Marie and Timothy Walker in Waterloo Park, including word walks, storytelling activities, and treasure hunts.

Brrrrrrrrring people out in winter

Face it, Canada is a winter nation. These initiatives help residents suit up and get outside into parks during the colder months.

Though the impression from outsiders of Canada as an always cold, frozen country is a myth, it's impossible to deny that for many months our cities are chilly, snow-covered places.

Some Canadian cities have embraced their wintery-ness, celebrating it as a time to get outside and enjoy parks rather than hunker down indoors with a cup of tea.

Edmonton leads the pack with its WinterCity Strategy and organizing of the inaugural [Winter Cities Shake-Up](#) conference in 2017. Saskatoon, which hosted the Winter Cities Shake-Up in 2019 is working on its own [WintercityXYE Strategy](#).

Edmonton actively promotes and runs a variety of winter programming—from snowshoeing to winter picnicking—to invite people outdoors.

A recent survey by the City found 44% of residents said they had a more positive perception of winter since the program began.

The City also expanded its popular [Green Shack Program](#)—where City staff help program parks with recreational amenities housed in a green shack—to [all year round in a 2017 pilot](#). The \$120,000 pilot included eight green shacks that rotated through parks between September and June. Attendance was on par with summertime programming.

But it's not just Edmonton that's having fun in the snow.

Another Canadian city that truly embraces winter creatively is Montreal. In January 2018, a group of collaborators including [La Pépinière Espaces Collectifs](#), [Rues Principales](#) and [Vivre en Ville](#) launched the [Winter Laboratory](#). The project aims to reclaim winter

through fun activities, starting with the publication of an active winter public spaces [guidebook](#).

Boasting the largest fleet of artificial outdoor ice rinks in the world, Toronto worked in partnership with Montreal-based Le Pepiniere to kick off its [Rink Social Program](#) in early 2019. The program animated outdoor rinks with fireplaces, food and beverages, social gathering spaces, and skate lending. The City also hosts training sessions for residents that want to create [natural ice rinks in parks](#), including a handy [tip sheet](#) for would-be ice makers.

Both Halifax and Charlottetown have found creative ways to get people outside and moving around in winter.

At Halifax's Emera Oval, one of the largest skating rinks in Canada, you'll find movie and DJ nights and artist-inspired warming huts. And Charlottetown hosts [Winter-lovePEI](#) every February, which is put on by a grassroots organization that promotes cold-loving events like "snoga in the park."

Urban forests that also feed

From coast to coast, edible forests are sprouting up, providing opportunities for enhanced food security, community building, and neighbourhood greenery.

Kingston's Community Orchard and Edible Forest Policy

In Kingston, the [Community Orchard and Edible Forest Policy](#) supports community-led efforts to plant and steward food-bearing trees on City land. Through a stewardship agreement, community groups take on the maintenance and harvesting of produce, while the City provides support with elements such as determining appropriate sites and species, providing start-up grants, and navigating the development and consultation process.

Victoria's Food Tree Stewardship Program

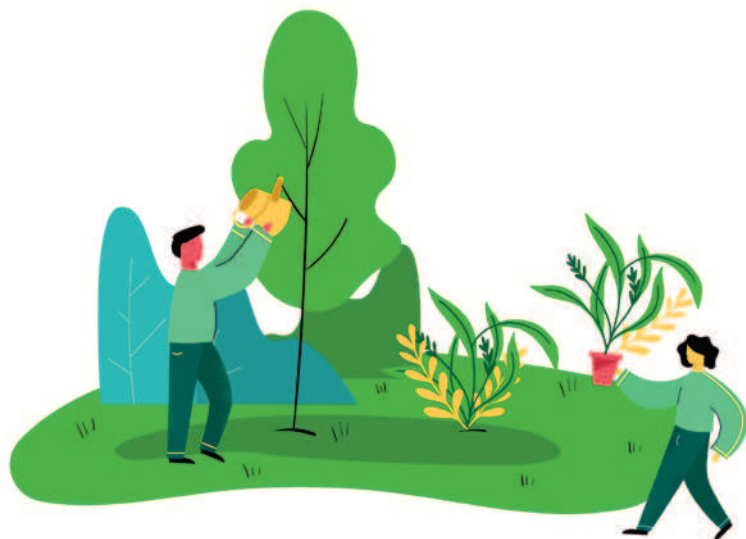
In Victoria, a pilot [Urban Food Tree Stewardship Program](#) allows residents to partner with community organizations to plant and maintain mini-forests of

up to five fruit and nut trees in parks. The pilot was launched in 2016 as part of the larger [Growing in the City](#) program that introduced updated policies to support urban agriculture more broadly.

Charlottetown's Edible Orchards and Foraging Wall

Charlottetown is bringing edible growing projects to neighbourhoods in need of improved food access. In 2017, [orchards were planted in two parks](#) in parts of the city where many residents

live on lower incomes, have recently arrived in Canada, or are young families. Beyond the benefits of enhanced food security and community building, these projects are a key opportunity to strengthen the City's relationships with residents, community groups, and newcomer associations. Additionally, the City worked with local residents in 2018 to create a "foraging wall" of 150 food-bearing trees and plants that will re-naturalize an area of a local park and provide a source of produce for Charlottetonians.



MORE STORIES

Bored? Go play in the park

In order to spur creativity, self-empowerment, and agency, some cities are experimenting with non-standard playgrounds that favour nature and adventure play over the catalogue-issued slide, swings, and jungle gym. In these parks, so-called loose parts, such as tires and cardboard boxes, allow kids to use their own imaginations to play.

Some cities are leading the charge, such as Delta, which offers a free drop-in activity throughout the summer, with 3,700 visits in 2017. And Calgary operates seasonal mobile adventure playgrounds, rotating all summer between six different parks. [EarthDay Canada](#) is also a big proponent of the model, providing pop-up adventure play parks in different cities and training staff to continue the work on their own.

Taking a slightly different approach, Lethbridge opened the [first challenge course in Canada](#) at Legacy Park. The outdoor obstacle course is meant to engage the whole family in competitive fun and features a professional-grade timing system and a scoreboard so that people can see how they stack up against their neighbours.

And in 2015, Richmond Hill brought the iconic board game, Snakes and Ladders, to life-size format in a park of the same name. An innovative way to bring fun and whimsy that also encourages intergenerational play, this park takes the more typically found life-size chess set to a new level.



*Snakes and Ladders Park—
City of Richmond Hill*

Permits, permits, permits

Permits are necessary to help manage park use—but boy do they ever cause headaches for both city staff and community members.

Through our survey, we found a huge variation in permit processes, permissions, and costs across Canadian cities with some charging as much as \$164 and some as little as nothing to local groups putting on park events. Of those that do charge, just 43% percent have a policy to waive or reduce fees for financial need.

In 2017, Toronto made things easier for residents to animate parks through arts, music, and movies through [new permit categories](#) for these activities. With some restrictions (specifically around food sales), these free permits are a much easier process than special event permits, which cost at least \$100 and must be submitted eight weeks in advance.

Mississauga's Danville Park has arrived

Call it a creative departure—one of Mississauga's newest parks celebrates all things aviation. In response to the site's unique topography and proximity to Toronto Pearson International Airport, Danville Park's main attraction is at the highest point in the city: a platform with a view of planes taking off.

The park, Final Approach Danville Terminal, was created through a donation from the Greater Toronto Airports Authority. The park features an airplane sculpture, windsocks, a runway, high-powered binoculars, and limestone from the former Avro Arrow building donated by the GTAA. It also features a cricket pitch, tobogganing hill, and accessible pathway to the viewing platform.

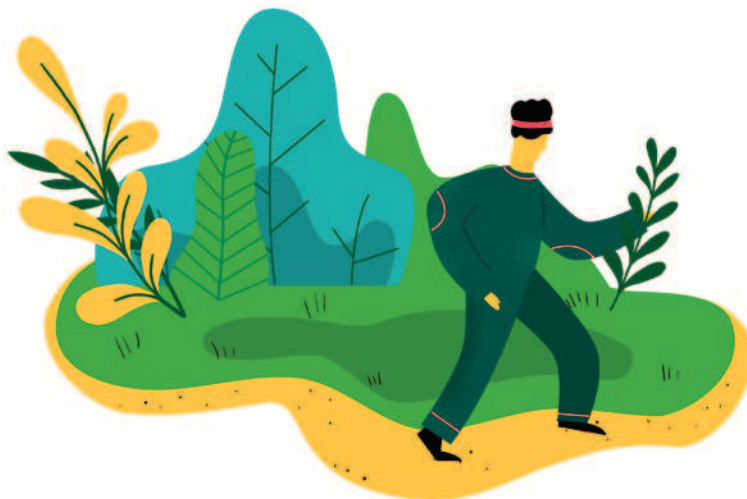
Making getting involved in parks official

While many cities offer opportunities for residents to volunteer at events like park clean-ups or tree-plantings, only 52% have a formal park program for community groups.

These programs differ from event-based volunteering by providing the opportunity for community members to self-organize and take on responsibility for a park in an ongoing way—whether through stewardship or programming.

Some of these groups are adopt-a-park groups, while others are focused on a specific feature, like Delta's [adopt-a-rain garden](#) program. Generally, these programs allow volunteers to sign up directly online and may require volunteers to commit to a formal policy or agreement that outlines roles and responsibilities for both city and group (for example, Mississauga's [Community Group Registry Program](#)).

The group may also benefit from the support of a city staff liaison or access to special grants and permit discounts. If your city runs a program like this, you can find a link to it in the City Profiles.





⑤ Inclusion

VISION:

Parks welcome people of all ages, abilities, identities, and backgrounds, and foster connections that nurture learning, respect, and relationships across differences.

Inclusion



At a time when growing political, social, and economic divides are posing challenges for cities worldwide, parks are helping bring Canadians closer to one another.

This starts when everyone feels welcome, has comfortable access, and is able to find the amenities that speak to them—whether it's wheelchair-accessible exercise equipment, picnic shelters for large families, or gender-inclusive washrooms.

Parks can also be fertile ground for place-making and programming that fosters a deeper understanding of our relationships and

responsibilities to one another and the land.

In the spirit of our national goals of **truth and reconciliation**, parks can help bring visibility to the continuum of Indigenous presence in Canada. Some cities have started to build partnerships with Indigenous communities to highlight this history and culture through public art while others, like Vancouver, are forging a deeper level of work through examining

systemic colonial impacts related to park policies and governance.

And as people from around the world continue to make Canadian cities their home, parks play a key role in many newcomer settlement journeys. Creative programming transforms parks into footholds for new immigrants and refugees by providing a platform for connection and memory-making, and helping ground the process of adjusting to a new place.

Inclusion



KEY INSIGHTS

1. Indigenous-focused projects and celebrations in parks can help to raise awareness and provoke reflection around truth and reconciliation, but deeper opportunities for change exist in examining park policy, operations, and governance.
2. While cities recognize the importance of providing accessible park spaces, particularly as populations age, many also reported budget pressures in meeting these requirements as infrastructure ages and updates are required.
3. Effective engagement, particularly for newcomers, requires partnerships with organizations like community centres, religious institutions, settlement organizations, and temporary housing providers, as well as specialized expertise, like speaking another language or having lived experience of migration.
4. Age-inclusive fitness programs in parks can provide opportunities for social connection that are just as important as the physical activity for older adults



KEY INDICATORS

83% of cities have an accessibility plan or guidelines for parks in place

70% of cities have a seniors plan or strategy that includes parks



Reflecting on the role of parks in reconciliation

Cities are working with Indigenous communities to celebrate Indigenous culture, strengthen relationships, and reckon with the ongoing colonial entanglements of parks systems.

In Vancouver, the Park Board has begun unprecedented work to acknowledge an uncomfortable truth about Canadian parks: their existence is rooted in colonial dispossession.

In July 2018, the Park Board initiated a “colonial audit” that entails looking inward at its own “core acts of colonialism” to begin a process of learning and reflecting that aims to advance the truth-telling phase of reconciliation.

The initiative comes at a time when the Park Board is grappling with a critical question that will likely resonate across Canadian city parks departments: “how does our commitment to spaces for ‘the people’ sit alongside recognition of Aboriginal rights and title?” a Park Board [staff report](#) asked.

The audit, currently underway, will trace colonial histories into the present to unpack the ways in which colonialism continues to shape the Park Board’s work—from strategic planning to everyday operations. It comes



Lheidli T'enneh Memorial Park Pavilion - City of Prince George

after the City of Vancouver declared itself a City of Reconciliation in 2014, and adopted the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2016.

The audit’s truth-telling purpose is informed by a [staff report](#) which outlines findings from consultations with Indigenous people and organizations to learn about their experiences and challenges working with city government. A key learning is that, for many people, “reconciliation” is problematic as a concept—the “re-” implies a return to an imagined past state

of being “conciled” which has never been possible under colonialism—and far-off as a reality.

The first step in moving forward, the Park Board learned, is to meaningfully understand the actions, practices, and systems embedded in the Park Board’s past and present that have inflicted injustice upon the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations, upon whose unceded territory the City of Vancouver sits.

The Park Board’s first Reconciliation Planner, Rena



Lheidli T'enneh Memorial Park Pavilion - City of Prince George

Soutar, is leading the audit.

"For over 100 years, the Park Board was the narrator and curator of cultural narrative in Vancouver's parks. This has long contributed to the erasure of the local First Nations," Rena said. "We are now in a prime position to correct these situations and demonstrate what a decolonization process within a Reconciliation framework can look like in a public institution."

Initial research for the audit identified four areas of colonial impacts: dispossession, archaeology, culture, and prioritizing non-Indigenous ways of knowing.

A collaborative project forges relationships

In Prince George, B.C., a partnership at the city's flagship downtown park has allowed for renewed relationship-building between the City and the Lheidli T'enneh First Nation.

A key moment in the partnership came in 2015, when the park was renamed to Lheidli T'enneh Memorial Park to acknowledge the site's history as a First Nation village and burial ground, but also the continuing presence of Lheidli T'enneh in Prince George. This laid the groundwork for further collaboration on the development of an award-nominated park pavilion, which opened summer 2018.

The pavilion is centred on the theme of confluence. It's situated at the meeting of the Fraser and Nechako Rivers, a culturally significant place for Lheidli T'enneh people, but it's also "a real physical expression of a relationship between the City, the community, and the Lheidli T'enneh," said Rob van Adrichem, Director of External Relations at the City of Prince George.

The pavilion offers programming to celebrate intercultural learning and displays that include photographs of youth and elders. The projects is meant to honour

the land it's on, as Lheidli T'enneh Chief Dominic Frederick told *Prince George Daily News*, but "we also wanted to honour our youth and our elders."

Featuring the logos of both the City and the Lheidli T'enneh, Rob noted that it's "the first joint facility in the community."

"This is about a relationship... it's not just about the pavilion, it's not just about some events that occur, this is about every day," Rob said, while also acknowledging that working in partnership is "not always easy, because of different organizational and administrative and governance realities."

City staff are mindful of the inherent tensions and limitations of working on Indigenous initiatives on unceded parklands.

"It's very easy to look at these issues and be overwhelmed... and say 'it's too complicated, we're just going to leave that for now.' I think it's really about trying and not letting complexity or protocol or fear trump our behaviour, and it's just going to be that where we don't know, we just ask. And that's hard—that's hard in government," Rob said.

"We're used to sort of having jurisdiction—if you work in utilities, that water main is ours, and when it breaks, we go and fix it... I think we've taken the approach that we'll fail, but we'll get better and we'll continue to try."

Other highlights:

- In 2018, a new park called ᐃᓂᓂ (ĪNĪW) River Lot 11ᐃ, opened in Edmonton on the site of Indigenous ancestral lands. A



Lheidli T'enneh Memorial Park Pavilion - City of Prince George

collaboration between Confederacy of Treaty 6 First Nations, Métis Nation of Alberta, Edmonton Arts Council, and the City, the park showcases permanent art installations created by six Indigenous artists who were asked to “tell the story of this place.” The resulting artworks, viewable [here](#), include pehon-an by Tiffany Shaw Collinge, an amphitheatre-style gathering space meant for teaching, performance, and storytelling.

- In Montreal, the [Roundhouse Cafe](#) located in Cabot Square is an Indigenous-operated cafe. This project’s mission is to promote social diversity and empowerment of Indigenous people. A [report about the learnings](#) from the project was carried out by the [Montreal Urban Aboriginal Strategy Network](#) in collaboration with the borough of Ville-Marie.

- In 2016, Gatineau opened Abinan Square, which means “People were here” in Anishinabe. The project included art by the Anishinabe artist [Simon Brascoupé](#), Birch Bark Basket, which is the first piece of Indigenous art to be incorporated into the Municipal Public Art Collection. The park was done in collaboration with the Algonquin community of Kitigan Zibi, whose Chief, Jean-Guy Whiteduck, said in a press release he hoped the square would “better publicize the history of our ancestors and this territory.”

Parks as places of arrival

Canadian cities are finding creative ways to bring parks into the settlement experience for newcomers and vice versa.

For newcomers to Canadian cities, local parks can be sites that help ground the disorienting process of adjusting to a new home.

But getting acquainted with the park system isn't always a simple experience. Many newcomers [face challenges](#) related to a lack of familiarity with neighbourhood parks and programs, a busy schedule, linguistic and cultural barriers, and experience with discrimination.

Last summer a new initiative launched in five Canadian cities to transform local parks into vibrant and inviting “places of arrival.”

[Welcome to this Place](#), led by arts organization [MABELLEarts](#) and supported by many partners, brought newcomers and refugees together with long-term Canadian residents and Indigenous peoples to celebrate and connect with local parks—and each other—through art.

Drawing on local partnerships with artists and organizations, [Welcome to This Place](#) saw parks in Toronto, Montreal, Halifax, Vancouver, and Winnipeg come alive with activities like dance, music, cooking, and storytelling.

As MABELLEarts' Artistic Director Leah Houston explained, the program was conceived to address “an essential part of the settlement process and story that we were identifying was being missed.”

People coming to Canada “were often fleeing violence and war, and they were getting a lot of their needs met,” Leah said. “But what they weren't getting was the opportunity to meet other people, including more established Canadians, and they weren't getting the chance to just have fun. And so we really saw that as an opportunity.”

Some of the program's participants had only been in the country for a week. In this context, it's easy to see how engagement could require different strategies and skills. In Toronto, Leah credits the community leaders MABELLEarts works with in the Mabelle neighbourhood as playing an invaluable role in the success of the events.

“[They] have developed a lot of really good facilitation skills by being a part of our project,” Leah said, “but also this added super-power of a), speaking Arabic,

and b), having the lived experience of themselves being new to Canada, to really be the most incredible welcomers for these refugees that we were meeting.”

To share the insights gained, MABELLEarts has created [Placing Parks](#)—a resource on hosting art-based park events with newcomers in mind. It includes policy points to help guide cities and funders in supporting this type of work and a toolkit for fostering active inclusion and partnerships.

Engaging newcomers in park redevelopment

In addition to welcoming newcomers into existing parks, cities like Calgary are recognizing a need to re-think the way parks are designed, and how people are engaged in that process. Parks staff [work closely](#) with the Calgary Neighbourhoods Unit to draw

on existing community-based research and partnerships.

Through this collaboration, Parks staff review community profiles to better understand the demographics of the park's potential users and receive training on how to effectively and respectfully work with specific groups. This helps staff better tailor their engagement strategies to reach local residents.

For example, in Calgary's [Prairie Winds Park](#), staff spread the word about an upcoming park re-development through local mosques, temples, and a Punjabi radio station. The engagement resulted in a culturally responsive park design that includes a tandoori oven, cricket pitch, and picnic shelters to accommodate large family gatherings.

Highlighting parks at newcomer orientations

Charlottetown has found that a starting point to welcome newcomers into parks is simply ensure they know where to find them. Each fall, the City runs a series of [newcomer welcome events](#) to introduce newly-arrived immigrants to the city and includes a bus tour of the city's parks.

Likewise, representatives from Mississauga's Forestry Department attend the City's '[newcomer roadshow](#)' to invite people to participate in tree-planting events as part of the City's [One Million Trees](#) program. Such initiatives are simple ways to open the door for the city's newest residents to get involved in parks.

Getting pumped up about age-friendly fitness

Thoughtfully designed park programs and amenities are helping older adults stay active—physically and socially.

Whether playing a sport, walking along a trail, or frolicking in a splashpad, parks are key places to get the blood pumping. But the way we exercise in parks often changes over the course of a lifetime.

A key challenge is ensuring parks are accessible and programming is appropriate for an aging population. A [2018 study of U.S. neighbourhood parks](#) found that while seniors made up 20% of the population, they only made up 4% of park users.

Age-friendly fitness initiatives demonstrate that it's all about instilling confidence, accommodating different physical abilities, and, of course, making it fun!

Toronto's Walk in the Park Program

In 2018, Park People's Walk in the Park program trained 25 community leaders above the age of 55 to organize walking clubs in their local parks. Key to the program was developing partnerships with community centres and social service agencies, including in three underserved neighbourhoods.

In an end-of-program survey of 265 participants—about 4 in 5 of whom were older adults—99.6% said that they plan to continue walking regularly for exercise. But it's not just about the exercise—the number of participants who indicated they feel a [strong connection to their local community](#) more than doubled from the start of the program, demonstrating that the pairing of physical and social activities can be especially meaningful for older adults.

Calgary's mobile fitness pop-ups

Over the summer of 2018, Calgary launched a pilot program bringing mobile fitness equipment to parks and animating five new and existing outdoor gyms with a rotating schedule of free fitness instruction.

The programming, designed specifically for people above the age of 65, aimed to boost people's comfort and confidence using the equipment, and promote physical and social activity among older adults who are at greater risk of social isolation.

In the Southwood neighbourhood, the [pop-up](#) was placed next to a library and a playground, making it convenient for people to access and allowing parents or

grandparents to enjoy their own workout while their kids play.

Saskatoon's River Landing Outdoor Adult Fitness Circuit

Saskatonians can enjoy a workout with a view at the [River Landing Outdoor Fitness Circuit](#) where exercisers can find 16 stations including elliptical machines, rowing machines, and agility track—all overlooking the South Saskatchewan River. The age-friendly circuit features wheelchair-accessible equipment and instructional plaques to help beginners get started.

Prince George's "Try-it" Community Sport Discovery events

Pickleball, tai chi, and "learning to run" are just a few of the activities adults over 40 have had the chance to try out through Prince George's ["Try-It"](#) events. A partnership between Engage Sport North, local community associations, and the City, Try-It events allow residents to experiment with new activities in an encouraging and judgment-free setting. While some Try-It events are open to all ages, a grant from the Union of BC Municipalities created a special series for those over 40.

MORE STORIES

Vancouver's Trans, Gender Diverse, and Two-Spirit Advisory Committee

Whether washrooms and recreational programs are inclusive of diverse gender identities can mean the difference between comfort and exclusion for some park users. However, we found few examples of specific strategies developed with LGBTQ+ communities to address these different experiences.

The Vancouver Park Board's Trans, Gender Diverse, and Two-Spirit (TGD2S) Inclusion Advisory Committee is working to address the unique barriers to access that members of the trans and gender-variant community face.

Formed in 2014, the Committee's work to date includes universal



signage on single-stall park washrooms and change rooms, hosting an outdoor "comic jam" and BBQ for TGD2S families to connect, and facilitating awareness workshops to train Park Board staff on working with TGD2S communities.

More recently, the Park Board approved \$35,000 for TGD2S arts and cultural initiatives in parks and community centres as part of the Queer Arts Festival this

summer. The TGD2S Inclusion Advisory Committee's work has been so successful that in 2016 the City of Vancouver modelled their own citywide policy for trans, gender-diverse and two-spirit inclusion after the Park Board's.

Edmonton's Funicular: where 'fun' meets accessibility

Edmontonians of all ages and abilities can now enjoy easy access to the city's largest green space thanks to a new funicular that takes people on a free, 48-second scenic ride from street level to river valley.

Since opening in December 2017, the 100 Street Funicular hasn't only become a destination, but also a key part of people's everyday lives, with on-site surveys indicating 22% of riders use it as part of their workday commute.

The funicular is part of the larger Mechanized River Valley Access Project that has brought new infrastructure including stairs, a pedestrian bridge, and an elevator to the site. In its first year of operation, the funicular made 114,038 trips—sometimes up to 28 trips an hour.

Rick Hansen Foundation certification helps improve and celebrate accessible places

In 2017, the Rick Hansen Foundation launched Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification™ to help businesses, organizations, and municipalities—including parks and trails—become universally accessible.

This is part of their mission to empower individuals with disabilities so they can participate in the community and live life to the fullest.



Park accessibility - Rick Hansen Foundation

"Trails and parks are a fundamental part of community," said Brad McCannell, the Foundation's VP of Access and Inclusion. "They represent the thread that binds families and allows them to participate in outdoor activities together. If parks and trails are not accessible—if a parent with a disability can't take their kids to the park or a grandmother can't take her grandchildren for a walk because the trail is too narrow—then that thread breaks. Municipalities are on the frontline of creating meaningful access."

The certification process includes a site evaluation and, if accessibility requirements are met, certification. The Foundation points out that a major benefit to getting rated is the recommendations provided by an RHFAC Professional, with the scorecard acting as a blueprint for improving accessibility. You can find accessibility resources for playgrounds and trails on the Foundation's website.

Eating together, outdoors

In Quebec City, a new development in a public square in the Orsainville District of the Charlesbourg Borough will invite residents to gather around shared food. The Recreation Department, in collaboration with the local councillor, initiated the construction of a public outdoor kitchen in the square, which is in an underserved neighbourhood. Adjacent to a community garden, the square is intended to serve as a gathering place for sharing food for those living in the surrounding high-rise buildings. The project, which was initiated in 2018, involves multiple partners focused on youth and family programming and will be completed in 2021.

GET IN TOUCH

Park People is a Canadian charity that supports and mobilizes people to help them activate the power of parks to improve the quality of life in cities across Canada.

We support a national network of park group volunteers and community organizers, non-profits, park professionals, and funders across Canada, through networking events, grants, tool-kits, research, resources, and professional services.



Founded in 2011, [Park People](#) has since helped community park groups undertake more than 3,000

events supported by 23,000 volunteers. Thanks to our generous donors, we have directed investments of more than \$6 million in parks and park programming.

Through support from The W. Garfield Weston Foundation, we're able to bring you this first edition of our annual Canadian City Parks Report. The report tracks challenges, trends, and opportunities in Canadian city parks both through numbers and the stories that inspire action, progress, and shared learning. Read more about what this report is (and what's it's not) here.

Whether you're a city staff person, elected official, non-profit or park group leader, funder, or a community member that loves parks, we hope that you will help us make this report the most valuable it can be.

We want to hear your suggestions for future stories, questions to ask, challenges to address and fun tidbits to share. [Please fill out this short survey.](#)

Don't see your city reflected in this report? We invited over 60 across the country to participate this year, resulting in the 23 cities in this report. We hope to grow the number of cities included each year. [Get in touch](#) with us to learn how to participate next year.

Are you a park person?
There are lots of ways to get involved:

- [Sign up for our Newsletter](#)
- [Join the Park People Network](#)
- [Use our Research and Resources](#) to help you make awesome things happen in your park

City Profiles



Continued from (pg 7)

Delta

103,000

Total Population

618

Hectares of parkland

2,198

Volunteers

6
Hectares Parkland
/ 1000 People
304 / 49%
Hectares of natural
area/ percent of park-
land that is natural area
N/A
Community
Engagement Staff
6 HA / 1000

Parkland Provision Goal

18,370 / 3%
Hectares of total city land
/ percent of city is parkland
N/A
Park focused
Community Groups
\$5,528,000

Total Operating Budget

\$105,000
Donations, Sponsor-
ships, Philanthropy
YES
Park levy or legislative
tool to fund new parks
\$1,550,000

Total Capital Budget

YES
Policy to waive permit fee
for groups with financial need?
**Historical estimations
of past parks**
Formula to adjust park
budgets based on new park
development?
\$0-120

Average cost of a permit

Key Plans & Strategies

BIODIVERSITY PLAN/ STRATEGY

Birds and Biodiversity Con-
servation Strategy 2018

Invasive Species Manage-
ment Strategy 2016

INCLUSION PLANS/ STRATEGIES

Social Action Plan 2018:
Healthy Communities Project

COMMUNITY PARK GROUP PROGRAMS

Adopt-a-Rain-Garden

COMMUNITY GRANT PROGRAMS

Community cost-sharing pro-
gram with a budget of \$200,00

BRITISH COLUMBIA

Victoria

85,792

Total Population

207

Hectares of parkland

148

Volunteers

2.4

Hectares Parkland
/ 1000 People

91 / 44%

Hectares of natural
area/ percent of park-
land that is natural area

3

Community
Engagement Staff

400m

Parkland Provision Goal

1,947 / 11%

Hectares of total city land
/ percent of city is parkland

8

Park focused
Community Groups

\$8,724,120

Total Operating Budget

\$6,000

Donations, Sponsor-
ships, Philanthropy

**5% of development sites
or cash-in-lieu**

Park levy or legislative
tool to fund new parks

\$4,610,000

Total Capital Budget

N/A

Policy to waive permit fee
for groups with financial need?

N/A

Formula to adjust park
budgets based on new park
development?

\$52

Average cost of a permit

Key Plans & Strategies

PARK SYSTEM MASTER PLAN

[Parks & Open Space
Master Plan 2017](#)

URBAN FOREST MANAGEMENT PLAN

[Urban Forest Master Plan 2013](#)

COMMUNITY PARK GROUP PROGRAMS

[My Great Neighbour-
hood Grants](#)

Vancouver

641,600

Total Population

1,262

Hectares of parkland

14,000

Volunteers

2
Hectares Parkland
/ 1000 People
482 / 38%
Hectares of natural
area/ percent of park-
land that is natural area
14
Community
Engagement Staff
**1.1 HA / 1000
5 min walk**

Parkland Provision Goal

11,497 / 11%
Hectares of total city land
/ percent of city is parkland
110*
Park focused
Community Groups
\$40,969,000*

Total Operating Budget

N/A
Donations, Sponsor-
ships, Philanthropy
**5% of development site
or cash-in-lieu**
Park levy or legislative
tool to fund new parks
\$62,256,829

Total Capital Budget

N/A
Policy to waive permit fee
for groups with financial need?
N/A
Formula to adjust park
budgets based on new park
development?
\$15-114

Average cost of a permit

*Edit: Operating budget and park-focused community
group numbers updated July 2019

The City of Vancouver is the only city in Canada and one of only a few in North America that operates with an elected Park Board where Park Commissioners are elected every four years.

Key Plans & Strategies

PARK SYSTEM MASTER PLAN

[VanPlay Master Plan for
Parks & Recreation 2019](#)

[People, Parks, & Dogs 2018](#)

BIODIVERSITY PLAN/ STRATEGY

[Bird Strategy 2015](#)

[Biodiversity Strategy 2016](#)

RESILIENCY & GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN/STRATEGY

[Climate Change Adap-
tation Strategy 2012](#)

[Rain City Strategy 2017](#)

URBAN FOREST MANAGEMENT PLAN

[Urban Forest Strategy 2018](#)

COMMUNITY GRANT PROGRAMS

[Neighbourhood Matching Fund](#)

Township of Langley

126,000

Total Population

386

Hectares of parkland

N/A

Volunteers

3.1

Hectares Parkland
/ 1000 People

76 / 20%

Hectares of natural
area/ percent of park-
land that is natural area

2

Community
Engagement Staff

3.4 HA /1000

Parkland Provision Goal

31,600 / 1%

Hectares of total city land
/ percent of city is parkland

N/A

Park focused
Community Groups

\$9,900,000

Total Operating Budget

\$75,000

Donations, Sponsor-
ships, Philanthropy

**5% of development area
or cash-in-lieu**

Park levy or legislative
tool to fund new parks

\$9,000,000

Total Capital Budget

N/A

Policy to waive permit fee
for groups with financial need?

**A standard set of annually
reviewed rates is used for
new parks and park ele-
ments (e.g., x\$ / linear feet
of trail).**

Formula to adjust park
budgets based on new park
development?

\$27-54

Average cost of a permit

Key Plans & Strategies

PARK SYSTEM MASTER PLAN

[Parks, Recreation & Cul-
ture Master Plan 2013](#)

BIODIVERSITY PLAN/ STRATEGY

[Wildlife Habitat Conser-
vation Policy 2008](#)

[Japanese Knotweed
Control Strategy](#)

RESILIENCY & GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN/STRATEGY

[Greenway Amenity Policy 2015](#)

[Connecting the Dots: Re-
gional Green Infrastruc-
ture Network Guide](#)

INCLUSION PLANS/ STRATEGIES

[Age-Friendly Strategy 2014](#)

COMMUNITY PARK GROUP PROGRAMS

[Adopt-a-Park Program](#)

COMMUNITY GRANT PROGRAMS

[Neighbourhood Ini-
tiative Program](#)

Prince George

74,003

Total Population

1,900

Hectares of parkland

N/A

Volunteers

25.7
Hectares Parkland
/ 1000 People
850 / 45%
Hectares of natural
area/ percent of park-
land that is natural area
6
Community
Engagement Staff
N/A

Parkland Provision Goal

31,826 / 6%
Hectares of total city land
/ percent of city is parkland
N/A
Park focused
Community Groups
\$5,139,203

Total Operating Budget

\$50,000
Donations, Sponsor-
ships, Philanthropy
N/A
Park levy or legislative
tool to fund new parks
\$1,111,000

Total Capital Budget

YES
Policy to waive permit fee
for groups with financial need?
N/A
Formula to adjust park
budgets based on new park
development?
\$30-87

Average cost of a permit

Key Plans & Strategies

PARK SYSTEM MASTER PLAN

Park Strategy 2017

URBAN FOREST MANAGEMENT PLAN

Community Forest Man-
agement Plan 2006

INCLUSION PLANS/ STRATEGIES

Age-Friendly Action Plan 2017

Lheidli T'enneh First Nations
Government & Reconciliation

COMMUNITY PARK GROUP PROGRAMS

Various Community Grants

Lethbridge

99,769

Total Population

2,827

Hectares of parkland

1,696

Volunteers

28.3

Hectares Parkland
/ 1000 People

1,918 / 68%

Hectares of natural
area/ percent of park-
land that is natural area

5

Community
Engagement Staff

N/A

Parkland Provision Goal

12,400 / 23%

Hectares of total city land
/ percent of city is parkland

N/A

Park focused
Community Groups

\$13,070,811

Total Operating Budget

\$3,750

Donations, Sponsor-
ships, Philanthropy

**10% of development site
or cash-in-lieu**

Park levy or legislative
tool to fund new parks

\$7,550,000

Total Capital Budget

N/A

Policy to waive permit fee
for groups with financial need?

**Cost of work multiplied by
the units (e.g., area, length)
of new growth**

Formula to adjust park
budgets based on new park
development?

\$150

Average cost of a permit

Key Plans & Strategies

URBAN FOREST MANAGEMENT PLAN

[Urban Forestry Strategy 2019](#)

[Integrated Pest Man-
agement Plan](#)

COMMUNITY PARK GROUP PROGRAMS

[Adopt-A-Park](#)

ALBERTA

Calgary

1,267,344

Total Population

8,121

Hectares of parkland

4,000

Volunteers

6.4

Hectares Parkland
/ 1000 People

4,472 / 55%

Hectares of natural
area/ percent of park-
land that is natural area

60

Community
Engagement Staff

450m

5 minute walk
2 HA / 1000

Parkland Provision Goal

84,820 / 10%

Hectares of total city land
/ percent of city is parkland

1

Park focused
Community Groups

\$85,000,000*

Total Operating Budget

\$1,500,000

Donations, Sponsor-
ships, Philanthropy

**10% of development site
or cash-in-lieu**

Park levy or legislative
tool to fund new parks

\$49,000,000

Total Capital Budget

YES

Policy to waive permit fee
for groups with financial need?

N/A

Formula to adjust park
budgets based on new park
development?

\$55

Average cost of a permit

*Operating budget includes urban street trees, pathways, and cemeteries

Key Plans & Strategies

PARK SYSTEM MASTER PLAN

[Open Space Plan 2002](#)

BIODIVERSITY PLAN/ STRATEGY

[Our BiodiverCity 2015-2025](#)

[Integrated Pest Management](#)

RESILIENCY & GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN/STRATEGY

[Climate Resilience Plan 2018](#)

URBAN FOREST MANAGEMENT PLAN

[Urban Forestry Strategy 2019](#)

INCLUSION PLANS/ STRATEGIES

[Parks Inclusive Play 2018](#)

[Cultural Landscape Policy 2012](#)

COMMUNITY PARK GROUP PROGRAMS

[Green Leaders](#)

Edmonton

932,546

Total Population

6,535

Hectares of parkland

18,000

Volunteers

7.00

Hectares Parkland
/ 1000 People

2,979.5 / 46%*

Hectares of natural
area/ percent of park-
land that is natural area

32

Community
Engagement Staff

500 m

5 min walk

Parkland Provision Goal

69,980 / 9%

Hectares of total city land
/ percent of city is parkland

13

Park focused
Community Groups

\$49,700,000

Total Operating Budget

\$790,000

Donations, Sponsor-
ships, Philanthropy

**10% of development site
or cash-in-lieu**

Park levy or legislative
tool to fund new parks

\$3,150,000

Total Capital Budget

N/A

Policy to waive permit fee
for groups with financial need?

**Adds 3% of the capital
price to service new park-
land and sportsfields**

Formula to adjust park
budgets based on new park
development?

\$0-137

Average cost of a permit

*Edit: Edmonton's natural parkland numbers updated

**The city of Edmonton has just completed a re-organization exercise that may see some functions in the parks be moved around from or into parks budget. This may result in major budgetary changes as items are moved around in the next year or two.

Key Plans & Strategies

PARK SYSTEM MASTER PLAN

[BREATHE Green Network Strategy 2018](#)

BIODIVERSITY PLAN/ STRATEGY

[Natural Connections Strategic Plan](#)

[Biodiversity Action Plan](#)

RESILIENCY & GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN/STRATEGY

[The Way We Green 2011](#)

[BREATHE Green Network Strategy 2018](#)

[Resilient Edmonton: Adaptation Strategy and Action Plan](#)

URBAN FOREST MANAGEMENT PLAN

[Urban Forest Management Plan 2012](#)

INCLUSION PLANS/ STRATEGIES

[BREATHE Green Network Strategy 2018](#)

COMMUNITY PARK GROUP PROGRAMS

[Partners in Parks](#)

Red Deer

104,492

Total Population

1,949

Hectares of parkland

230

Volunteers

18.7

Hectares Parkland
/ 1000 People

923 / 47%

Hectares of natural
area/ percent of park-
land that is natural area

0

Community
Engagement Staff

**18 HA / 1000
400m**

Parkland Provision Goal

10,701 / 18%

Hectares of total city land
/ percent of city is parkland

15

Park focused
Community Groups

\$8,278,043

Total Operating Budget

\$1,300,000

Donations, Sponsor-
ships, Philanthropy

YES

Park levy or legislative
tool to fund new parks

\$2,010,000

Total Capital Budget

N/A

Policy to waive permit fee
for groups with financial need?

YES

Formula to adjust park
budgets based on new park
development?

\$0

Average cost of a permit

Key Plans & Strategies

PARK SYSTEM MASTER PLAN

River Valley and Tributaries Plan, 2010 (river valley master plan only)

RESILIENCY & GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN/STRATEGY

Climate Change Adaptation Plan 2014

Environmental Master Plan, 2011

URBAN FOREST MANAGEMENT PLAN

Red Deer Urban Forest Management Plan 2018. Completed, but needs to be approved by council

Saskatoon

278,500

Total Population

1,030

Hectares of parkland

0*

Volunteers

3.7
Hectors Parkland
/ 1000 People
120 / 12%
Hectares of natural
area/ percent of park-
land that is natural area
13
Community
Engagement Staff
4 HA /1000

Parkland Provision Goal

23,633 / 4%
Hectares of total city land
/ percent of city is parkland
50
Park focused
Community Groups
\$20,000,000

Total Operating Budget

N/A
Donations, Sponsor-
ships, Philanthropy
YES
Park levy or legislative
tool to fund new parks
\$1,000,000

Total Capital Budget

N/A
Policy to waive permit fee
for groups with financial need?
**Annual operating impact
adjustments**
Formula to adjust park
budgets based on new park
development?
\$30

Average cost of a permit

*Volunteers are organized by another organization.

Key Plans & Strategies

PARK SYSTEM MASTER PLAN

Recreation and Parks
Master Plan 2015

RESILIENCY & GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN/STRATEGY

Green Infrastructure Strat-
egy in development

URBAN FOREST MANAGEMENT PLAN

Urban Forestry Management
Plan (currently in development)

COMMUNITY PARK GROUP PROGRAMS

Provides grants to com-
munity associations

Waterloo

137,420

Total Population

946

Hectares of parkland

1,850

Volunteers

6.9

Hectares Parkland
/ 1000 People

302 / 32%

Hectares of natural
area/ percent of park-
land that is natural area

2

Community
Engagement Staff

5 HA / 1000

Parkland Provision Goal

6,400 / 15%

Hectares of total city land
/ percent of city is parkland

2

Park focused
Community Groups

\$5,668,392

Total Operating Budget

\$13,090

Donations, Sponsor-
ships, Philanthropy

**Community Benefit
Charge or 5% of develop-
ment area**

Park levy or legislative
tool to fund new parks

\$1,658,843

Total Capital Budget

N/A

Policy to waive permit fee
for groups with financial need?

N/A

Formula to adjust park
budgets based on new park
development?

\$50-106

Average cost of a permit

Key Plans & Strategies

PARK SYSTEM MASTER PLAN

Park Strategy (in development)

URBAN FOREST MANAGEMENT PLAN

Urban Forestry Policy 2005
(currently being updated)

INCLUSION PLANS/ STRATEGIES

Older Adult Recreation Strategy 2015

COMMUNITY PARK GROUP PROGRAMS

Partners in Parks Program

COMMUNITY PARK GROUP PROGRAMS

Neighbourhood Matching Grants and Mini Grants

ONTARIO

Guelph

136,600

Total Population

1,289

Hectares of parkland

5,000

Volunteers

9.4

Hectors Parkland
/ 1000 People

807 / 63%*

Hectares of natural
area/ percent of park-
land that is natural area

9

Community
Engagement Staff

**2-3.3 ha / 1000 popula-
tion and five-ten minute
walk from residential area
served**

Parkland Provision Goal

8,800 / 15%

Hectares of total city land
/ percent of city is parkland

25

Park focused
Community Groups

\$8,400,000

Total Operating Budget

\$40,000

Donations, Sponsor-
ships, Philanthropy

**Community Benefit
Charge or 5% of develop-
ment area**

Park levy or legislative
tool to fund new parks

\$9,400,000

Total Capital Budget

N/A

Policy to waive permit fee
for groups with financial need?

Yes

Formula to adjust park
budgets based on new park
development?

\$75-100

Average cost of a permit

*Natural area number includes City-owned conservation lands
and non-City owned conservation lands.

Key Plans & Strategies

PARK SYSTEM MASTER PLAN

Recreation, Parks, & Cul-
ture Strategic Master Plan
2009 (update in progress)

BIODIVERSITY PLAN/ STRATEGY

Natural Heritage Action Plan

URBAN FOREST MANAGEMENT PLAN

Emerald Ash Borer Plan

Urban Forest Manage-
ment Plan 2013-2032

INCLUSION PLANS/ STRATEGIES

Older Adult Strategy

Think Youth

Richmond Hill

209,142

Total Population

1,002

Hectares of parkland

2,370

Volunteers

4.8

Hectares Parkland
/ 1000 People

686 / 68%

Hectares of natural
area/ percent of park-
land that is natural area

4

Community
Engagement Staff

1.52 HA /1000

Parkland Provision Goal

10,100 / 10%

Hectares of total city land
/ percent of city is parkland

0

Park focused
Community Groups

N/A*

Total Operating Budget

\$166,400

Donations, Sponsor-
ships, Philanthropy

**Community Benefit
Charge or 5% of develop-
ment area**

Park levy or legislative
tool to fund new parks

N/A*

Total Capital Budget

**Discounts be-
tween 30-50%**

Policy to waive permit fee
for groups with financial need?

N/A

Formula to adjust park
budgets based on new park
development?

\$164

Average cost of a permit

*Budget numbers were unavailable given the number of different divisions that deal with parks planning, design, and operations.

Key Plans & Strategies

PARK SYSTEM MASTER PLAN

Richmond Hill Parks Plan 2013

URBAN FOREST MANAGEMENT PLAN

Urban Forest Management Plan
(currently in development)

Urban Forest Plant-
ing Guidelines

INCLUSION PLANS/ STRATEGIES

Multi-year Accessibili-
ty Plan 2018-2022

COMMUNITY PARK GROUP PROGRAMS

Community Steward-
ship Program (CSP)

Mississauga

721,599*

Total Population

2,912

Hectares of parkland

7,600

Volunteers

4

Hectares Parkland
/ 1000 People

1,113 / 38%

Hectares of natural
area/ percent of park-
land that is natural area

5

Community
Engagement Staff

1.2 HA / 1000

Parkland Provision Goal

29,243 / 10%

Hectares of total city land
/ percent of city is parkland

11

Park focused
Community Groups

\$33,100,000**

Total Operating Budget

\$160,000

Donations, Sponsor-
ships, Philanthropy

**Community Benefit
Charge or 5% of develop-
ment area**

Park levy or legislative
tool to fund new parks

\$28,600,000

Total Capital Budget

N/A

Policy to waive permit fee
for groups with financial need?

**Area-based formula takes
into account park classifi-
cation, size, and operating
cost from previous years
from the same types of
parks.**

Formula to adjust park
budgets based on new park
development?

\$60-128

Average cost of a permit

*2016 population available only.

**Operating budget includes street trees.

Key Plans & Strategies

PARK SYSTEM MASTER PLAN

[Parks & Forestry Master Plan 2019](#)

RESILIENCY & GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN/STRATEGY

[Living Green Master Plan 2012](#)

URBAN FOREST MANAGEMENT PLAN

[Natural Heritage & Urban Forestry Strategy 2014](#)

[One Million Trees Naturalization Program](#)

INCLUSION PLANS/STRATEGIES

[Older Adult Plan 2008](#)

COMMUNITY PARK GROUP PROGRAMS

[Adopt-A-Park](#)

[Community Group Registry Program](#)

[Leash Free Mississauga](#)

COMMUNITY GRANT PROGRAMS

[Community Grant Program](#)

ONTARIO

Oakville

193,832*

Total Population

1,596

Hectares of parkland

350

Volunteers

8.2

Hectares Parkland
/ 1000 People

920 / 58%

Hectares of natural
area/ percent of park-
land that is natural area

N/A

Community
Engagement Staff

2.2 HA /1000

Parkland Provision Goal

13,850 / 12%

Hectares of total city land
/ percent of city is parkland

12

Park focused
Community Groups

\$16,699,000

Total Operating Budget

N/A

Donations, Sponsor-
ships, Philanthropy

**Community Benefit
Charge or 5% of develop-
ment area**

Park levy or legislative
tool to fund new parks

\$17,601,600

Total Capital Budget

N/A

Policy to waive permit fee
for groups with financial need?

**Templates to determine
annual cost for labour,
equipment, and materials
for various amenities (ball
diamonds, splashpads,
grass cutting per ha). Costs
are added into operating
budget.**

Formula to adjust park
budgets based on new park
development?

\$99-137

Average cost of a permit

*2016 population available only

Key Plans & Strategies

PARK SYSTEM MASTER PLAN

Parks, Recreation, & Library
Facilities Master Plan 2012

BIODIVERSITY PLAN/ STRATEGY

Wildlife Manage-
ment Strategy 2012

Biodiversity Strategy 2018

URBAN FOREST MANAGEMENT PLAN

Urban Forest Strategic Man-
agement Plan 2008-2027

COMMUNITY PARK GROUP PROGRAMS

Park Ambassador

Hamilton

563,480

Total Population

2,715

Hectares of parkland

907

Volunteers

4.8

Hectares Parkland
/ 1000 People

1,240 / 46%

Hectares of natural
area/ percent of park-
land that is natural area

1

Community
Engagement Staff

0.7 HA / 1000

Parkland Provision Goal

112,775 / 2%

Hectares of total city land
/ percent of city is parkland

69

Park focused
Community Groups

\$22,083,870

Total Operating Budget

\$250,000

Donations, Sponsor-
ships, Philanthropy

**Community Benefit
Charge or 5% of develop-
ment area**

Park levy or legislative
tool to fund new parks

\$8,890,000

Total Capital Budget

YES

Policy to waive permit fee
for groups with financial need?

N/A

Formula to adjust park
budgets based on new park
development?

\$80-113

Average cost of a permit

Key Plans & Strategies

URBAN FOREST MANAGEMENT PLAN

[Urban Forest
Strategy](#)

INCLUSION PLANS/ STRATEGIES

[Age Friendly Strategy](#)

COMMUNITY PARK GROUP PROGRAMS

[Adopt-a-Park](#)

Toronto

2,956,024

Total Population

8,095

Hectares of parkland

6,000

Volunteers

2.7

Hectares Parkland
/ 1000 People

3,693 / 46%

Hectares of natural
area/ percent of park-
land that is natural area

18

Community
Engagement Staff

N/A

Parkland Provision Goal

63,020 / 13%

Hectares of total city land
/ percent of city is parkland

85

Park focused
Community Groups

\$323,487,300

Total Operating Budget

\$5,500,000

Donations, Sponsor-
ships, Philanthropy

**Community Benefit
Charge or 5% of develop-
ment area**

Park levy or legislative
tool to fund new parks

\$224,705,000

Total Capital Budget

YES

Policy to waive permit fee
for groups with financial need?

N/A

Formula to adjust park
budgets based on new park
development?

\$91

Average cost of a permit

Key Plans & Strategies

PARK SYSTEM MASTER PLAN

[Parks & Recreation Facilities Master Plan 2017](#)

[Parkland Strategy \(under development\)](#)

BIODIVERSITY PLAN/ STRATEGY

[Biodiversity Strategy 2018](#)

[Pollinator Protective Strategy 2017](#)

[Ravine Strategy 2017](#)

RESILIENCY & GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN/STRATEGY

[Toronto Green Streets guidelines](#)

URBAN FOREST MANAGEMENT PLAN

[Strategic Forest Management Plan 2017](#)

INCLUSION PLANS/

STRATEGIES

[Seniors Strategy Vision 2.0 2018](#)

[Indigenous Place-making Framework 2018](#)

[Accessibility Design Guidelines](#)

COMMUNITY PARK GROUP PROGRAMS

[Community Natural Ice Rink Program](#)

COMMUNITY GRANT PROGRAMS

[Community Investment Funding](#)

[PollinateTO Community Grants](#)

Kingston

124,000

Total Population

633

Hectares of parkland

N/A

Volunteers

5.1

Hectares Parkland
/ 1000 People

198 / 31%

Hectares of natural
area/ percent of park-
land that is natural area

12

Community
Engagement Staff

4 HA / 1000

Parkland Provision Goal

45,119 / 1%

Hectares of total city land
/ percent of city is parkland

5

Park focused
Community Groups

\$4,700,000

Total Operating Budget

\$1,650,000*

Donations, Sponsor-
ships, Philanthropy

**Community Benefit
Charge or 5% of develop-
ment area**

Park levy or legislative
tool to fund new parks

\$4,600,000

Total Capital Budget

YES

Policy to waive permit fee
for groups with financial need?

**Annual operating cost
per hectare may be ap-
plied when new parkland
is brought into service as
part of annual operating
budget requests.**

Formula to adjust park
budgets based on new park
development?

\$120-150

Average cost of a permit

*2018 was an unusually high year for sponsorship/donation funding in relation to a specific project. The city is also currently updating its master plan, which includes reviewing parkland provision goals and other information presented here.

Key Plans & Strategies

PARK SYSTEM MASTER PLAN

Parks & Recreation Master Plan
2010 (currently being updated)

BIODIVERSITY PLAN/ STRATEGY

Biodiversity Strategy 2018-2023

URBAN FOREST MANAGEMENT PLAN

Urban Forest Manage-
ment Plan 2011

INCLUSION PLANS/ STRATEGIES

Engage for Change
(in development)

Facility Accessibili-
ty Design Standards

COMMUNITY GRANT PROGRAMS

Community garden grants
with \$5,000 budget

QUEBEC

Montreal

1,704,694*

Total Population

4,162

Hectares of parkland

N/A

Volunteers

2.4

Hectares Parkland
/ 1000 People

1,378 / 33%

Hectares of natural
area/ percent of park-
land that is natural area

N/A

Community
Engagement Staff

2.44 HA / 1000

Parkland Provision Goal

\$36,520 / 11%

Hectares of total city land
/ percent of city is parkland

N/A

Park focused
Community Groups

\$175,600,000

Total Operating Budget

N/A

Donations, Sponsor-
ships, Philanthropy

By-law concerning the transfer for purposes of establishing, maintaining and improving parks and playgrounds and of preserving natural areas on city territory

Park levy or legislative tool to fund new parks

\$247,200,000

Total Capital Budget

N/A

Policy to waive permit fee for groups with financial need?

N/A

Average cost of a permit

N/A

Formula to adjust park budgets based on new park development?

The City of Montreal owns 13 great parks and 8 natural parks managed by the Service Central des Grands Parcs, du Mont Royal et des Sports. The City is composed of 19 boroughs which have the responsibility of managing 1300 local parks. Boroughs also have separate powers and budgets to offer.

*2016 population available only

Key Plans & Strategies

PARK SYSTEM MASTER PLAN

Plan directeur du sport et du
plein air urbain 2018 (Sport and
Outside Recreational Urban
Activities Master Plan 2018)

BIODIVERSITY PLAN/ STRATEGY

Local Action for Bio-
diversity Program

RESILIENCY & GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN/STRATEGY

Climate Change Adapta-
tion Plan 2015-2020

Sustainable Montreal 2016-2020

Towards Sustainable Muni-
cipal Water Management 2013

URBAN FOREST MANAGEMENT PLAN

Urban Forestry Plan 2011

INCLUSION PLANS/ STRATEGIES

Municipal Action Plan for
Seniors 2018-2020

Action plan for Universal Acces-
sibility 2015 - 2018 (updating)

Quebec City

531,902

Total Population

N/A

Hectares of parkland

0

Volunteers

N/A

Hectares Parkland
/ 1000 People

1400 / N/A

Hectares of natural
area/ percent of park-
land that is natural area

250

Community
Engagement Staff

500m

Parkland Provision Goal

N/A

Hectares of total city land
/ percent of city is parkland

N/A

Park focused
Community Groups

N/A

Total Operating Budget

N/A

Donations, Sponsor-
ships, Philanthropy

\$28,989,884

Total Capital Budget

YES

Policy to waive permit fee
for groups with financial need?

\$0

Average cost of a permit

N/A

Park levy or legislative
tool to fund new parks

For each piece of equipment, the estimated additional management cost is calculated and submitted to the relevant department so they can add this amount to their operational budget. In the case of a contract awarded to an external organization, there is an increase in funding.

Formula to adjust park
budgets based on new park
development?

Key Plans & Strategies

PARK SYSTEM MASTER PLAN

Dreaming up our riv-
ers (in development)

URBAN FOREST MANAGEMENT PLAN

Ecological Management of
Urban Forest Strategy 2015

Tree Vision 2015

INCLUSION PLANS/ STRATEGIES

Universal Accessibil-
ity Guidelines

Gatineau

283,961

Total Population

5,000

Hectares of parkland

N/A

Volunteers

17.6

Hectares Parkland
/ 1000 People

3,310 / 66%

Hectares of natural
area/ percent of park-
land that is natural area

30

Community
Engagement Staff

15 min walk

Parkland Provision Goal

34,194 / 15%

Hectares of total city land
/ percent of city is parkland

20

Park focused
Community Groups

\$24,500,000

Total Operating Budget

\$0

Donations, Sponsor-
ships, Philanthropy

**10% of development site
or cash-in-lieu**

Park levy or legislative
tool to fund new parks

\$5,000,000

Total Capital Budget

YES

Policy to waive permit fee
for groups with financial need?

**Funds in the amount of
\$10,000 are allocated to
the public works depart-
ment for each new neigh-
bourhood park.**

Formula to adjust park
budgets based on new park
development?

\$150

Average cost of a permit

Key Plans & Strategies

PARK SYSTEM MASTER PLAN

Sport, Recreation and Community Infrastructure Master Plan 2012

BIODIVERSITY PLAN/ STRATEGY

Park Ecosystem Conservation Plan 2010

Strategy for Sustainable Development

URBAN FOREST MANAGEMENT PLAN

City Trees

Pour une plantation qui augmente la résilience des arbres municipaux de Gatineau
(For planting activities that increase the resilience of Gatineau’s municipal trees)

INCLUSION PLANS/ STRATEGIES

Gatineau Inclusive City - Persons with disabilities and reduced mobility framework and action plan

Three Year Integrated Action Plan 2017-2019 Family, Old Adult, and Universal Accessibility

NOVA SCOTIA

Halifax

431,701

Total Population

5,315

Hectares of parkland

N/A

Volunteers

12.3

Hectares Parkland
/ 1000 People

3,182 / 60%

Hectares of natural
area/ percent of park-
land that is natural area

6

Community
Engagement Staff

N/A

Parkland Provision Goal

592,700 / 1%*

Hectares of total city land
/ percent of city is parkland

7

Park focused
Community Groups

\$42,281,600

Total Operating Budget

N/A

Donations, Sponsor-
ships, Philanthropy

**10% of development site
or cash-in-lieu**

Park levy or legislative
tool to fund new parks

\$28,280,400

Total Capital Budget

N/A

Policy to waive permit fee
for groups with financial need?

N/A

Formula to adjust park
budgets based on new park
development?

\$45-96

Average cost of a permit

*The size of Halifax is vast (includes everything from downtown to rural areas) and is larger than Prince Edward Island in size. It contains substantial area of provincial crown lands and lakes. This should be noted when viewing the 'Percentage of City that is Parkland' stat, which clocks in at 1%.

Key Plans & Strategies

PARK SYSTEM MASTER PLAN

Green Network Plan 2018

BIODIVERSITY PLAN/ STRATEGY

Park Naturaliza-
tion Strategy 2019

RESILIENCY & GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN/STRATEGY

Green Network Plan 2018

URBAN FOREST MANAGEMENT PLAN

Urban Forest Master Plan 2013

COMMUNITY GRANT PROGRAMS

Grants to community groups
that work on multi-use trails

Charlottetown

36,000

Total Population

225

Hectares of parkland

N/A

Volunteers

6.3
Hectares Parkland
/ 1000 People
N/A
Hectares of natural
area/ percent of park-
land that is natural area
63
Community
Engagement Staff
5 minute walk

Parkland Provision Goal

4,429 / 5%
Hectares of total city land
/ percent of city is parkland
7
Park focused
Community Groups
\$1,753,669*

Total Operating Budget

\$1,008,400
Donations, Sponsor-
ships, Philanthropy
**10% of development site
or cash-in-lieu**
Park levy or legislative
tool to fund new parks
\$760,000*

Total Capital Budget

YES
Policy to waive permit fee
for groups with financial need?
N/A
Formula to adjust park
budgets based on new park
development?
\$30-\$100

Average cost of a permit

*Budgets adjusted from 15 month budgets (January 2018 to March 2019)

Key Plans & Strategies

PARK SYSTEM MASTER PLAN

Parks and Open Space
Master Plan (2007)

RESILIENCY & GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN/STRATEGY

Integrated Community Sus-
tainability Plan 2017

Climate Action Plan
2018-2023 (PEI)

URBAN FOREST MANAGEMENT PLAN

Dutch Elm Disease Management

COMMUNITY GRANT PROGRAMS

Community
Sustainability
Micro-Grant
Programs

Methodology



Needs Assessment

In 2018, Park People embarked on a needs assessment and feasibility study to determine the gaps, desires, and utility of a Canadian City Parks Report.

The needs assessment included reviewing current and past

reports and park measurement methodologies in Canada and the United States ([Yardstick](#), [ParkScore](#), [Municipal Benchmarking Network Canada](#)), conducting in-depth interviews with approximately 40 different park staff in 15 cities of varying sizes across

the country, and speaking with several provincial and federal parks and recreation associations.

These interviews were used to draft a thematic framework, including potential indicators, and define the report's scope.

KEY LEARNINGS:

Tracking varies widely between cities—both what is tracked and how.

Few opportunities exist, beyond some provincial/regional associations, to share information and best practices in Canada.

Storytelling, highlighting best practices, and providing analysis was most desired, with numbers taking a more supportive role.

City staff wanted evidence and information to support decision-making about resource allocation and programming.

Introducing a rating system was undesired as it wouldn't account for city differences across the country and may hinder the participation by many cities.

Methodology and Considerations



For the first Canadian City Parks Report, a list of 60 cities of varying sizes was developed from every province and territory. Cities received the questionnaire with a list of defined terms. A French version was distributed to Quebec cities. A total of 23 municipalities completed the questionnaire.

We independently verified specific answers in the questionnaire and followed-up with cities where questions remained. Stories and best practice highlights were

identified through answers to the questionnaire and our research. Park People staff did secondary research and, in some cases, interviews to verify information and provide additional context.

Although no statistic is perfect in displaying information across multiple cities with their own influencing factors, we attempted to ensure consistency and context. We did this by using methods that standardized for city size (e.g., ha of parkland per 1000 people).

In areas where answers were not directly comparable due to differences in the way cities tracked or organized information, we worked to create a standard (e.g., park permit costs for community events) or noted it directly in the City Profile for transparency.

We also include any contextual information a city thought important to share that may have influenced answers in the questionnaire (e.g., a one-time infusion of funds).

Challenges and Learnings



The first year of the Canadian City Parks Report is a pilot. As with any major new project, we learned a lot—and hope to learn more—about what worked and what didn't, and how to improve for future years.

Ensuring common definitions was a key challenge. We will be refining the report based on city feedback for future iterations. Another challenge was ensuring the quality of some of the data we received in certain areas.

Some cities track and report on many metrics already, while it was a new exercise for others.

For some cities, it wasn't possible to get certain information; such as the number of park groups or the breakdown of total park permits issued. We've included only the data we were comfortable with this first year and flagged other categories for potential future inclusion.

We hope that this report can help instill a culture of data collection and sharing in cities across Canada, with new points of information each year.

If you have a suggestion or a comment, we urge you to [get in touch](#).

Definitions

Definitions were devised through a review of established definitions in Canada. Many were adapted from those provided by Yardstick, a park benchmarking service offered worldwide and within Canada. Park People offers its deepest thanks for their assistance.

Budget (operating)

Direct parks operating expenditures (not including revenues) for the Current Budget Year. This includes:

- Planting and maintenance of trees in parks and natural areas
- Graffiti and vandalism repair
- Management and administration staff salaries/wages
- Operational staff salaries/wages
- Consultant/contractor costs
- Parks horticultural plantings
- Maintenance of closed cemeteries if carried out from the Parks Operating Budget
- Parks litter pick-up and waste disposal
- Inspection and maintenance of splash pads, playgrounds, and outdoor fitness equipment
- Maintenance and replacement of parks furniture
- Public toilets where maintained and/or cleaned from parks budget
- Sports field maintenance including grass cutting, aeration, overseeding, fertilization, etc.
- Snow clearing and ice control for parks and natural areas
- Any other parks/green space maintenance costs except cemetery costs where the cemetery is "active", golf courses, swimming pools, indoor recreation facilities/halls, forestry, and zoos.

Budget (capital)

Capital expenditure for all capital items related to land improvement works, planned for completion during the current financial year. It includes both new and renewal work, capital items carried forward from previous years, and salaries and wages for all staff involved in the design, planning and delivery of Capital projects.

Community engagement staff

Staff whose job description is focused on working with local community members in parks and green spaces to improve and/or program those spaces.

Current budget year

The approved budget for the current year. If this is not

available, the actual amount spent for the previous year.

Green infrastructure

Also known as "low-impact development." The engineering of natural systems that capture, hold, and treat rainwater where it falls. It may include features such as bioretention ponds, rain gardens, and bioswales.

Park

An actively maintained green space which is publicly accessible, and which is owned or leased by the municipality, or under a management agreement. Parks may be maintained by the municipality or on behalf of the municipality. These lands typically contain cut grass, planted trees and horticultural beds, park furniture, sports fields and other built improvements.

Park-focused community group

A resident-led, often volunteer group focused on improving, advocating for, and/or programming a local park (e.g., Friends of X park).

Parks system master plan

An overall plan or strategy dealing with the municipality's current and future park/green space provision and development needs. It will usually include an analysis of current provision against population and a review of future park/green space

acquisition (or disposal) needs based on future population changes and other demands.

Park programming

Activities, events, registered or drop in programs; examples could be yoga classes, nature walks, park cleanup events, tree plantings, farmer's markets, festivals and celebrations. These may be delivered by the municipality or by community groups. Programming must be open and publicly accessible, and does not include any large commercial activities, such as a private party.

Park system

All municipal green spaces with public access in a municipality, including Parks and Natural Areas.

Natural area

A green space which receives a relatively low level of maintenance and supports natural or naturalizing vegetation. Natural areas may include trails or walkways as well as parking areas and washrooms. Maintenance may include trail maintenance, occasional mowing (of meadows for example), woodlot management and tree and shrub planting (generally of native species).

Stewardship

The engagement in activities that improve, protect, or enhance the natural environment of a park. Examples include tree planting and watering, invasive species removal, native planting, and garbage removal.

Volunteer

Unpaid members of the community providing a service or task associated with the improvement, maintenance, operation, or programming of the park system.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Project Manager:

Jake Tobin Garrett

Project Coordinator:

Adriana Stark

Researchers:

**Molly Connor, Ali Darouiche,
Caroline Magar, Alexandra Sheinbaum**

Framework and questionnaire assistance:

Andy Wickens

French translation:

Sophie Côté

Design & Development:

Hypenotic

\\

Made possible through the generous support of

THE W. GARFIELD WESTON FOUNDATION

Media Partner

Municipal Career Stories



start right here ...

Find your dream job at
jobs.municipalworld.com



THANK YOU

Thank you to the cities and parks and recreation associations that provided feedback during the needs assessment, and the 23 cities that participated in this first year. Thanks to Chris Rutherford from [Yardstick](#) for his advice and openness, and the

team at ParkScore at the Trust for Public Land for their guidance. Thank you to Municipal World as our media partner. Finally, we would like to thank The W. Garfield Weston Foundation for its support for the creation and launch of this report.