

Report to Council



Date: PM Council Meeting_Mar09_2020
To: Council
From: City Manager
Subject: 2040 OCP Parks & Open Spaces Strategies
Department: Parks & Buildings Planning

Recommendation:

THAT, Council receives for information the Report from the Parks & Buildings Planner Specialist, dated March 9, 2020, providing an overview of the key considerations and strategies needed to deliver future parks in response to the endorsed 2040 Official Community Plan Growth Scenario;

Purpose:

This Report focuses on the important role parks play in supporting the endorsed 2040 OCP Growth Scenario through their contribution to Kelowna's livability and vibrancy; and to provide Council with context to the 20 Year Financial Plan and Future Land Use Planning reports that will come forward at a later date.

Background:

The 2040 Official Community Plan (OCP) will establish the direction for active parkland acquisition and development for the next 20 years. Several challenges, as well as opportunities, will need to be addressed in order to deliver future parks in a way that is consistent with the direction of the OCP. Staff has undertaken a detailed study and assessment on the parkland needs in response to a shift from suburban to more urban development. This shift will concentrate growth within the City's core area, with approximately 50% of future growth occurring within the City's five urban centres. The City's success in delivering parks over the next 20 years will depend on balancing the visionary goals and current parkland standards with realities of acquiring parkland within a constrained urban context.

Parks & Open Space Vision:

Parks are essential to creating vibrant and livable cities. With more than 80% of Canadians living in urban areas¹, parks and open spaces play an ever-increasing role in improving our physical and social well-being, as well as helping to make our cities more attractive places to live, work and play. The City of Kelowna recognizes this trend and the key role parks can play in supporting the City's future vision as reflected in several of the key directions Council has provided in recent years, in particular with Imagine Kelowna, the 2019-2022 Council Priorities, and the 2040 OCP Growth Scenario.

¹ *The Canadian City Parks Report (2019), The W. Garfield Weston Foundation*

Imagine Kelowna:

Parks touch upon each of the four community vision goals identified in Imagine Kelowna:

- Responsible:
Grow vibrant urban centres & limit sprawl;
Preserve Okanagan Lake as a shared resource;
- Smarter:
Take action in the face of climate change;
Build healthy neighbourhoods for all;
- Collaborative:
Build a fair & equitable community;
- Connected:
Create great public spaces;
Provide opportunities for all;
Cultivate an engaging arts & culture scene.

2019-2022 Council Priorities:

Parks also support several of Council's priorities such as:

- Vibrant neighbourhoods :
High quality, context sensitive site design;
Accessible and multi-purpose amenities;
Animated parks & public spaces;
- Environmental protection:
Resiliency & adaptability to climate change.

2040 OCP Growth Scenario & Growth Strategy:

The growth scenario endorsed by Council in 2019 represents a shift away from the 2030 OCP (51% outside core / 49% within core) towards more urban development for the 2040 OCP (33% outside core / 67% within core). This approach will require parks to take on an increasingly important role as redevelopment in the urban areas, characterized by more multi-unit development, will result in less private outdoor space for residents.

As such, one of the "Big Moves" identified in the Growth Strategy is the prioritization of parks and public spaces within the core area and urban centres to ensure that these neighbourhoods continue to offer a high quality of life for both existing and future residents.

While there will undoubtedly be challenges to meeting all the goals, especially when taken in context with all other demands that the 2040 OCP will place on City resources, there will also be many opportunities to provide new, exciting and innovative parks. Key to the future parkland strategy is to identify those opportunities early on in order to prioritize and to seize upon them before they are lost.

Benefits to Community:

There are many benefits to parks beyond the visual appeal to residents and providing opportunities to engage with nature. Some typical benefits parks provide include:

- *Community for All:* allow for social interaction across a broad spectrum of ages, incomes and cultures that might not otherwise occur.

- *Social Connection*: help to strengthen social ties among neighbors that create safer, stronger neighbourhoods.
- *Play & Learning*: offer children a sense of place and self-identity through physical activity and free-range play that is outside of the more constrained activities of their daily life.
- *Natural Ecosystems*: allow opportunities for people to connect with nature in an urban environment through natural ecosystems.
- *Climate Change*: help to mitigate heat island effect in urban areas and can serve as a frontline defense against the negative impacts of climate change in an urban environment.
- *Mental Health*: provide opportunities for a wide range of activities that promote mental well-being.
- *Active Living*: allow for a variety of activities that promote physical health.

Risks to Community:

When weighed against all these benefits, the greatest risk to the 2040 OCP's growth strategy is the same difficulty facing many Canadian cities – the ability to acquire new parkland to match new growth within urbanized areas. This risk becomes most notable in Kelowna's core area where land is at a premium. However, if park acquisition to match growth is not addressed proactively and consistently the risk is a municipality can eventually face a run-away park deficit that it is unlikely to recover from as land prices continue to rise.

Parkland Classifications:

The City of Kelowna identifies several different park classifications. The diversity of park classifications allows Kelowna's parks to serve a broad range of individual, social, cultural, economic and environmental needs, and to respond with flexibility to the changing needs and community priorities.²

Current parkland standards are based on an overall parkland acquisition rate of 2.2 Ha per 1,000 population growth, with varying rates for each park classification:

- Neighbourhood Park (0.6 Ha / 1,000 pop.) serving 2,000 residents within 1km walking distance.
- Community Park (0.4 Ha / 1,000 pop.) serving 12,000 residents within 3km walking distance.
- City-wide Park (0.6 Ha / 1,000 pop.) serving the broader city and beyond.
- Recreational Park (0.6 Ha / 1,000 pop.) serving the broader city.
- Linear Parks (0.5 km / 1,000 pop.) located adjacent to creeks, streams and shoreline.

Local parks (ie. Neighbourhood and Community parks) are the most critical to the success of the 2040 OCP. They are located to support nearby residents, with the appropriate level of local amenities, and hence there is less flexibility in their location in response to growth, and the role these parks play in supporting higher density residential development.

There is more flexibility in the location of other park types as they are intended to serve the broader city. City-wide parks are selected based on unique environmental or cultural significance that can draw people from around the city as well attract tourists (i.e. beaches, hilltops, viewpoints). Recreational parks are selected based on property attributes such as size and gradient of land needed to accommodate various

² *City of Kelowna Parkland Acquisition Guidelines (January 2011), The City of Kelowna; Juliet Anderton Consulting Inc.*

organized sport activities. Linear parks typical follow our major waterways, waterfronts, or key recreational corridors as a pleasant alternative to our road, active transportation and sidewalk networks.

However, our ability to maintain the current parkland acquisition standards, given the high land costs in the core area and urban centres, and the ability to provide new park amenities in pace with growth, is the greatest challenge for our parks program created by the 2040 OCP growth strategy. A re-thinking of the City's traditional approach to parks is required, along with robust strategies to help compensate for any shortages, to provide a high quality of public open space and outdoor leisure opportunities.

Urban Parks:

Urban parks offer several benefits over suburban parks. Most notable is in the number of residents, workers and visitors that can typically benefit from close access to an urban park versus a suburban parks.

The economic benefits of urban parks over suburban parks are also significant when considering the value urban parks bring in attracting private investment, as well as the City's return on investment in terms of the cost expended on resources to maintain and number of users that those resources serve.

Urban parks provide environmental benefits by helping to mitigate harsh urban conditions through a reduction of the heat island effect; improved stormwater management through natural infiltration and reduction of pollutant loading into nearby waterways; and improved air quality through the capture and sequester of particulate matter and carbon dioxide.

Urban parks also provide a greater social benefit in response to changing demographics and housing types, and the need to provide an alternative to the private yard space commonly found in most suburban communities. As a result, urban parks tend to be developed more intensely through a higher level of amenities, programming and design quality to accommodate the increased demand from a wider range of users.

Funding Models:

Staff has, as part of a detailed study and assessment, looked at current park provision based on the 2030 OCP park acquisition standards and population growth through the lens of 2040 OCP Growth Scenario. The following study areas are identified to have the highest need of future parkland acquisition to meet projected growth:

- Downtown Urban Centre;
- Capri/Landmark urban Centre;
- Midtown Urban Centre;
- South Pandosy Urban Centre;
- Rutland Urban Centre;
- Core Area, including the Glenmore Core.

Park acquisition projections in other areas of the City will be revisited in order to maintain equity and balance between all new growth areas. The implications of the adopted growth scenario on the 20-year Servicing Plan will be presented to Council in a separate report which considers all the cost centres together. Four funding models have been developed for consideration:

- **Funding Model IK** considers the cost implications of implementing the full vision of Imagine Kelowna;

- **Funding Model A** is the baseline condition with the total DCC program matching the anticipated growth rate, with no increase to DCC unit rates;
- **Funding Model B** is the baseline plus ten percent increase;
- **Funding Model C** is the baseline plus twenty percent increase.

The cost and service level implications will be discussed in the subsequent report in the context of all the cost centres together. This report considers the strategic implications of the same four funding models:

Funding Model IK:

This model follows the acquisition and development standards established in the 2030 OCP, and most notably locates the local park types (Neighbourhood & Community) within the urban centres in close proximity and proportionate to the urban growth. This aligns closely with the vision to develop vibrant urban centres, great public spaces and healthy neighbourhoods. However, as was experienced in the Capri/Landmark Urban Centre Plan, due to the much greater costs of land acquisition, this model results in a substantial increase over the existing 20-year Servicing Plan.

Funding Model A - Baseline:

This model is achieved by reducing the local park acquisition in the urban centres where the average land costs are the greatest, to 19% of the current city standard. This reduction is partially offset with a target of 45% of our acquisition in the core area around the urban centres where land costs are less, but still greater than suburban land costs. Although the funding model could support more acquisition in the suburbs where land costs are typically less, in order to maintain equity between neighbourhoods the future local park acquisition in the suburban neighbourhoods is matched to the aggregate in the urban areas at 27%. This model also includes a reduction in the aspirations of waterfront acquisition for city-wide use.

This model represents a substantial reduction in our local park acquisition standard and a challenge to the vision of Imagine Kelowna. However, this reduction may be offset in several ways:

- An increase in acquisition in city-wide, recreational, and linear parks (municipality-wide parks) that serve the whole municipality. These park types can be acquired in areas of lower land cost, such as mountain top city-wide parks;
- Development of dense urban parks with a greater provision of amenities in a smaller space;
- Alternate policies to create park spaces other than through the DCC program or taxation. The alternate policies will be considered subsequently.

Funding Model B – Baseline + 10%:

With this model the local park acquisition in the urban centres is 21% of the City standard, and 75% in the core area around the urban centres. The suburban acquisition standard is reduced to match the aggregate of 37% of our current local park acquisition standard. Similarly, this model also includes a reduction in the aspirations of waterfront acquisition for city-wide use.

Funding Model C – Baseline + 20%:

Local park acquisition in the urban centres is 25% of our current standard, and 85% in the core area around the urban centres. The suburban acquisition standard is again reduced to match the aggregate of 43%, and waterfront acquisition for city-wide use is reduced.

With each of these models the overall standard of 2.2Ha/1000 population can still be maintained through the acquisition of municipality-wide parks outside of the urban core. Such acquisitions still add amenities to the parks portfolio, and secure park sites that are valuable well beyond the horizon of the 2040 OCP. However, they do not contribute to the walkability and livability of the urban centres, where 50% of projected growth over the next 20 years is targeted, which is an important tenant of both Imagine Kelowna and the 2040 OCP.

The value of alternative policies to supplement both taxation and the DCC program becomes increasingly important. Staff are currently considering:

- Pocket parks;
- Rooftop parks;
- Parklets;
- Accessible art;
- Reduced parking standards in urban parks;
- Green lanes;
- Shared streets; Planning policy.

These alternate policies will be considered in greater detail in a subsequent report to Council.

Conclusion:

The vision for vibrant urban centres, great public spaces and healthy neighbourhoods is clear through Imagine Kelowna and Council Priorities for this term. Urban parks serve a proportionately greater number of visitors, employees and residents, many of whom in multi-family homes will have less access to privately owned outdoor space.

However, these spaces are competing for land with the developments they serve, creating much greater pressure on both taxation and the DCC program. Staff recognizes the need to balance future parkland needs and acquisition cost in order to be truly successful in delivering on all the growth demands that will be placed on our community over the next 20 years and beyond. Targeting future parkland acquisition too high will be unaffordable. Setting the target too low, will result in parkland too far away from where it is needed to support residential density and growth.

The funding models need to be considered in the context of similar demands from other cost centres, and this report is therefore not seeking a resolution from Council for the park strategy until the broader picture can be presented and considered. A number of alternate policies are also under consideration to make better use of our existing urban parks, and alternate city spaces, and alternate park models in order to better support the park portfolio for the future.

Internal Circulation:

Infrastructure Division;
Community Planning Division;
Financial Services Division;
Parks Services Department;
Community Communications Department

Considerations applicable to this report:

Existing Policy:

Imagine Kelowna identified Kelowna community vision goals. Specifically, relevant to this report:

- Responsible:
Grow vibrant urban centres & limit sprawl;
Preserve Okanagan Lake as a shared resource;
- Smarter:
Take action in the face of climate change;
Build healthy neighbourhoods for all;
- Collaborative:
Build a fair & equitable community;
- Connected:
Create great public spaces;
Provide opportunities for all;
Cultivate an engaging arts & culture scene.

Council Priorities 2019-2022 identified measures to transform this vision into action. Specifically, relevant to this report:

- Vibrant neighbourhoods :
High quality, context sensitive site design;
Accessible and multi-purpose amenities;
Animated parks & public spaces;
- Environmental protection:
Resiliency & adaptability to climate change.
- Economic resiliency:
Infrastructure deficit is reduced.

City of Kelowna Parkland Acquisition Guidelines, January 2011.

Considerations not applicable to this report:

Personnel Implications:

Financial/Budgetary Considerations:

External Agency/Public Comments:

Communications Comments:

Alternate Recommendation:

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Approved for inclusion: Derek Edstrom, Divisional Director, Partnership & Investments

Attachment: 1. Selected notable extracts and statistics from The Canadian Parks Report, 2019.
2. PowerPoint