

Design Development Plan - Blakiston Park

DRAFT What We Heard Report

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1. Introduction

The City of Calgary Parks is preparing a design development plan for Blakiston Park, in the intensifying community of Brentwood. Improvements to the park are needed to ‘upgrade and rejuvenate’ the 2.6 ha site. Public participation is key to developing a vibrant, functional park that responds to the community’s diverse needs.

This report summarizes what we heard from the public over the course of the “Issues, Opportunities, Dreams and Desires” engagement period, held through June and July of 2014. **A detailed record of all comments received is provided in Appendix A.**

1.1 What is the Design Development Plan?

The Design Development Plan will guide the redevelopment of Blakiston Park. The park’s redevelopment is part of the Brentwood Station Area Redevelopment Plan created by The City of Calgary that sets the vision for making Brentwood a more sustainable, vibrant and mixed-use urban community.

Over the past few years, the community has seen a lot of growth and change. This means the needs and desires for community amenities, like Blakiston Park, are changing too. The park is an important public space around the Brentwood Station and a link between shopping, transit and residential areas, but it isn’t well utilized. The Design Development Plan sets out the process to find out why, and develop solutions to make Blakiston Park better. Public engagement over the summer and fall (2014) will build on the Blakiston Park Redesign Community Charette, which was created in 2009, to ensure the new park design continues to meet the needs and desires of the community.



Figure 1. Key Map

1.2 Public Engagement

Public engagement is critical to the success of the Design Development Plan. Calgary Parks and the consulting team led by O2 Planning + Design is committed to involving residents and neighbouring businesses in planning for the future.

There are three engagement periods before project completion in December 2014, timed to correspond with major project decision-points. Within each engagement period, multiple opportunities for participation will be provided. The three engagement periods are:

1. Issues, Opportunities, Dreams and Desires

June – July 2014

Objective: To seek initial community input on park issues and opportunities.

Promise: We will ask you to tell us what is working and what is not at Blakiston Park, and we will use this information to the greatest extent possible to develop design solutions that address your concerns. While we may not be able to do everything for safety, financial or design reasons, we will consider all feedback that you give us.

2. Blakiston Park Concept Design

September 2014

Objective: To present a concept plan for the park, and seek community feedback on preferred elements.

Promise: We will confirm the design direction for the park with you by asking for input on what you like and do not like about the concept. We will use this information to refine and finalize the plan. While we may not be able to respond to all concerns, we will develop a final draft plan that is consistent with your design direction.

3. Blakiston Park Final Draft Plan

November 2014

Objective: To present a final draft plan for the park, and confirm that the plan is consistent with community design direction.

Promise: We will check with you to confirm that the final draft plan is consistent with the design direction you provided. We will listen to your input on the final draft plan, and make minor design adjustments, as required.

All engagement activities, and the engagement periods themselves, are designed to build on each other. In this way, the project team will use public input to turn the shared vision into the long-term strategies needed to rebuild the economic, environmental and cultural vitality of High River.

2. Issues, Opportunities, Dreams and Desires Activities

In June and July 2014, the project team engaged area residents and businesses to share their thoughts and ideas about Blakiston Park: things they like, don't like and want for the future. In total, approximately 230 comments were gathered over this period, providing insightful ideas on what should be celebrated and improved in the park.

There were many different ways to get involved.

2.1 Stakeholder Walking Tour

Blakiston Park | Monday, June 9, 2014

- Brentwood Community Association
- Calgary Police Services
- University City developer
- O2 and City of Calgary Parks Staff

The walking tour allowed the project team to meet the various organized stakeholder groups with an interest in the park redevelopment. The group spent 1.5 hours touring the park, discussing issues and opportunities for the redevelopment. The group also discussed the engagement process for the project, focusing on activities that would reach the diverse demographic groups that make up the Brentwood community.

2.2 Community Promotion - Super Soccer Saturday

Sir Winston Churchill Sports Fields | Saturday, June 21, 2014

- Spoke with approximately 100 people
- Handed out approximately 75 project cards

City of Calgary Parks, City of Calgary engage!, and O2 staff attended Super Soccer Saturday, a large community soccer festival attracting over 500 children and their families. Attendance at the event allowed the project team to engage with community members and promote awareness of the project. Informal discussions also allowed the project team to gather initial feedback on park issues and opportunities.

2.3 Meeting with Councilor Farrell

Councilor Farrell's Office | Thursday, July 3, 2014

City of Calgary Parks and O2 staff met with Councilor Farrell to review the design development plan process. The meeting introduced Councilor Farrell to the project and how public and stakeholder engagement activities are to occur throughout the process. Councilor Farrell was supportive of the means of engagement and the redevelopment process in general and requested status updates as the project progresses.

2.4 Meeting with CO-OP

CO-OP Real Estate & Development Office | Tuesday, July 8, 2014

- Met with Tony Argento, Director of Real Estate & Development

O2 and City of Calgary Parks met with CO-OP representatives to review the design development plan process for the park, identify issues and opportunities that exist between the park and the CO-OP site, and review initial ideas that the CO-OP has for redeveloping their property. The meeting introduced CO-OP to the park redevelopment process. High level discussion allowed the redevelopment team and CO-OP to brainstorm ideas that will create a better relationship between the CO-OP site and the park. CO-OP welcomed ongoing dialog throughout the redevelopment process.

2.5 Blakiston Park Sounding Board

On-site Installation | Monday, June 23 – Monday, July 14, 2014

- 230 comments

Two sounding boards, large semi-permanent structures installed on-site at Blakiston Park, were used to gather feedback from park users. Using sticky notes, passers-by completed three simple statements and continued on their way. This fun, simple and interactive engagement technique allowed the project team to efficiently gather information on park uses, preferred park elements, and potential elements that are needed or could be changed.

The three animating statements were:

- I use this park to ...
- My favourite thing about this park is ...
- I wish this park ...

2.6 On-line Web Map Tool

On-line | On-going

- 36 comments

The on-line web map tool allowed users to provide comments on an interactive map.

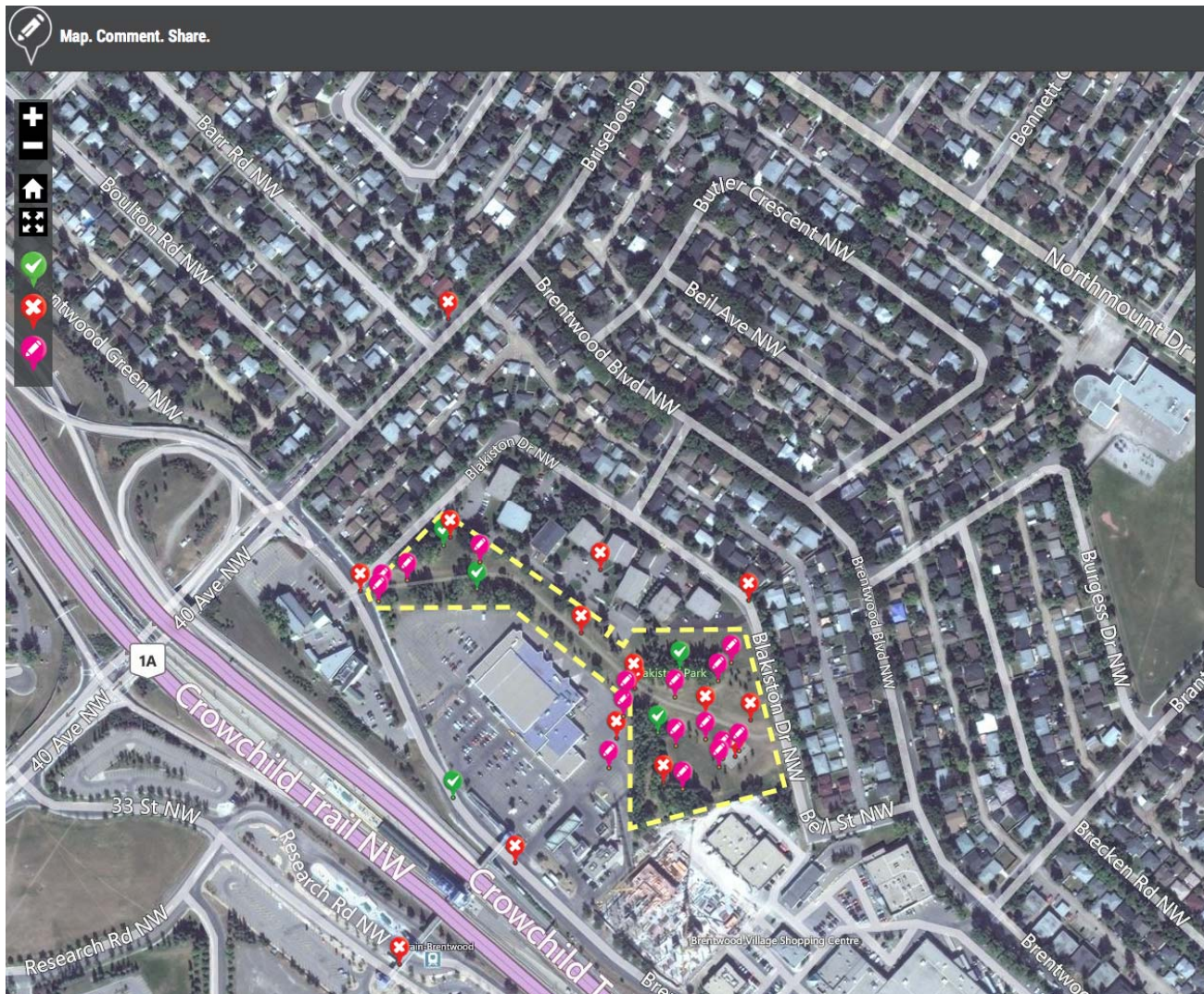


Figure 2. Web Map

2.7 Community Posters

Various Site Locations | On-going

- Throughout the Blakiston Park Site
- Brentwood C-Train Station
- COOP Store
- Rocky Mountain College
- Lobbies of residential towers

Posters were affixed in high traffic community locations to notify area residents of the project, and encourage use of the sounding board and the webmap.

2.8 Engagement Monitoring

The engagement period attracted excellent levels of resident participation. The sounding boards were well-used due to their convenience. The Brentwood Community Association also reported good levels of resident satisfaction with the engagement activities to date.

Given the success of the sounding board, a “reporting back” poster will be affixed to the sounding board structure to continue the conversation with residents as a site analysis and preliminary design concepts are prepared. The project team will explore ways to continue engaging with residents using on-site installations as the project progresses through the next phase.

3. What We Heard

The intent of this report is to highlight common themes that emerged from the engagement period. Input will be incorporated into an overall analysis of the site. This site analysis will help direct the development of a new park design, including:

- Identifying potential spaces within the park that could accommodate a range of activities;
- Updating amenities such as benches, tables, play structures and lighting;
- Providing improved links to shopping, transit, and other services; and
- Using environmental design techniques to improve the safety/security of park users.

Engagement was structured around identifying things that residents and park users like, don't like and want for the future of Blakiston Park. Frequently heard comments are grouped into five major themes, and summarized to highlight areas of agreement and disagreement. These themes provide useful insights for the design team around identifying shared aspirations for park redevelopment, and identifying points of tension to be reconciled through concept design.

In addition to considering emergent themes, the report also identifies overlap and contradictions. Drawing attention to these linked themes highlights the interconnections between issues. In this way, the park concept can reflect the linkages between different design considerations and create solutions that address multiple issues at one time.

3.1 Maintenance and Safety

Maintenance and safety emerge as two critically linked elements. Many responses suggest that a lack of maintenance creates safety concerns. Overall, there is considerable agreement within this theme.

We heard that respondents **want**:

- Better lighting
- Increased winter maintenance
- Recycling in the park
- Improved general cleanliness

Representative quotes:

"I wish this park had better lighting and was safer at night"

"I wish this park was well taken care of"

"I wish this park had the pathway ploughed in the winter"

3.2 Vegetation and Green Space

Vegetation and green space figure prominently as a favourite park feature, and as a key element for future park design. The open space and mature trees on the site currently contribute to a peaceful and enjoyable atmosphere. Given the input that vegetation and green space inject a feeling of nature into an otherwise urban environment, there is a desire for the park to retain its natural feel and improve the use of vegetation to screen parking lots from view.

Design challenge: How to balance the desire for a green, naturalistic open space with improved amenities and access to the transit-oriented development along the park edges.

We heard that respondents **value**:

- Green space and mature trees
- The "forest" and "prairie" feel

- The separation the park provides from surrounding development

We heard that respondents **want**:

- More trees and shrubs
- For the park to remain naturalistic and open
- Increased screening of adjacent properties

Representative quotes:

“My favourite thing about this park are the mature trees and open space”

“My favourite think about this park is how it is nice and open”

“I wish this park would remain as natural as possible”

3.3 Atmosphere

Atmosphere relates to the general qualities of the park that people enjoy. Overall, many of these qualities are closely related to the experience of being in a green space, and the sense of peace and quiet the park provides. An emergent tension is the sense that transit-oriented development adjacent to the park, in particular new residential development that could potentially introduce a younger student demographic to the area, will disrupt the current atmosphere.

Design challenge: How to balance the peaceful atmosphere with transit-oriented development along park edges and the desire for improved amenities / active programming.

We heard that respondents **value**:

- Peace and quiet
- A safe place for kids to play

We heard that respondents **use the park** to:

- Read a book and relax
- Get away from the city

We heard that respondents **are concerned** about:

- Park spaces cater to new tenants rather than the whole community
- Change
- More development reducing the amount of green space

Representative quotes:

“It is a nice green space for relaxing in and strolling through”

“A hidden gem”

“I wish the park would stay the same”

3.4 Amenities

Amenities are the activities, features and programming of the park. Currently, the amenities used the most in the park are the playground and the open space for picnics, games and sports. Respondents provided a wealth of ideas for improving amenities in the park, with the “I wish this park...” portion of the sounding board garnering the most comments.

Many of the ideas focus on creating new, shared community spaces that promote interest and social interaction within the park. Several respondents highlight that the park used to be known as “turtle park” and suggest public art or a climbable kids sculpture to reference this notion. Some of the suggested amenities may be incompatible with one another or with site constraints. In addition, amenities may need to be balanced with other valued park elements.

Design challenges: 1) How to identify the suitability of park amenities. 2) How to balance the desire for more amenities while retaining green space and preserving a peaceful atmosphere.

We heard that respondents **use the park** to:

- Play with children
- Play sports and games
- Have a picnic

We heard that respondents **want**:

- Bike paths
- More children’s play areas
- Water features / splash pad
- Sports facilities
- Picnic tables
- Benches / seating
- Central gathering space
- Improved pathways

Representative quotes:

“I wish this park had spaces for live performances and farmers’ markets”

“I wish this park had more space for sports such as volleyball, basketball or tennis”

“I wish this park had more space and activities for kids”

3.5 Circulation and Accessibility

Circulation and accessibility refers to the way people move around and through the park. Based on the feedback from the “I use this park to...” portion of the sounding board, the park’s primary use is for accessibility, both for commuting and for pleasure. Commuters use the park as a connector to access the C-Train station, the Co-op or the Brentwood Mall area. Pleasure uses include strolling, biking and dog walking. Many respondents note that accessibility could be improved on the site, in particular by improving connections between the residential community and the emerging transit-oriented development (TOD) around the C-Train station. Several comments suggest that the park would see more use if it was part of the cycling network.

Design Challenges: 1) How to integrate the park with the TOD to improve overall circulation to/from the community, and within the park itself. 2) How to balance the different ways people move around in the park.

We heard that respondents **use the park** to:

- Stroll, bike and jog
- Access the C-Train and other services
- Walk the dog

We heard that respondents **want**:

- Paved access to the C-Train
- Bike paths and improved bike access
- Better access for people with mobility constraints

Representative quotes:

"I use this park to commute between my Brentwood home and the LRT"

"I wish this park had paved access to the Co-op and C-Train"

"If an official bike route connected to both ends, maybe the path would see more traffic"

3.6 Summary

Comments suggest a good level of agreement amongst park users on valued park features and current park uses. The quiet and peaceful atmosphere created by the open space and mature trees provide respite from an otherwise busy urban environment. The primary park use is for accessibility, as well as relaxation and unstructured play. Moreover, there is a clearly expressed desire for the park to be made safer in terms of improved maintenance and lighting. Many comments indicate there is excitement about what could be; there is a shared recognition that the park is in need for redevelopment.

Areas of tension may begin to emerge as different park uses and amenities are introduced. There is already some concern that the atmosphere of the park may change due to area redevelopment and residential intensification. In addition, emergent concerns may include perceived conflicts between park uses, desired amenities and valued elements. In particular, there is a need for the design to identify and balance potentially incompatible amenities with the desires of park users, and to balance the different elements (green space, atmosphere and uses) that make the park special.

4. Next Steps

The linkages and points of tension that emerged from the engagement period underscore the need for flexible and adaptable approaches to design. The next steps in the process are:

- Through July and August, the design team will prepare a site analysis that incorporates the project team's findings with community input. This analysis will help direct the development of draft park concepts.
- In September, the design team will present different park concepts, and ask area residents, park users and adjacent landowners to confirm an overall design direction.
- In November, the design team will present a draft plan for the park, and check back to ensure the plan is consistent with input we received in September.

Upcoming engagement will build on the successes of installation activities, and provide an opportunity for face-to-face interaction with the design team. Engagement will continue to promote the use of on-line tools for sharing and reviewing information. Care will be taken to schedule in-person events in a way that decreases the likelihood of "engagement fatigue" or with other planned community events.