



2011 May 30

First Draft: Public Comments Summary

River Park, Sandy Beach, Britannia Slopes Combined Park Management and Design Development Plan

Introduction

Public comments on the first draft of the park plan for River Park, Sandy Beach and Britannia Slopes were gathered between May 10-20 at a public open house and online via the project web site.

In total, 94 separate comments were submitted, including 83 online. Eleven feedback forms were submitted by the 41 citizens who attended the Saturday, May 14 open house.

The three questions asked to gather public feedback online and at the open house were:

1. Do you feel this draft plan will help make the park more sustainable and enjoyable for current and future generations?
2. Could the plan be improved to benefit the park (and park users) as a whole?
3. During this public consultation process, have you had the chance to share your comments and suggestions as well as hear those of others?

Response Summary

Responses to the first question were split, in terms of those who feel the draft plan would make the park more sustainable and enjoyable and those who felt it would not.

Of those who said that the draft plan would not make the park more sustainable and enjoyable most often cited:

- the reduction of off-leash space was too restrictive and would lead to further deterioration
- the reduction of off-leash space did not go far enough to address current issues in the park
- fencing would take away from the regional park's natural character

Of those who felt the plan would improve the park, reasons included:

- The draft plan is an improvement to the previous version developed in 2009-10
- the plan incorporated public input and balanced opposing points of view
- the environment will be better protected

For the second question on ways to improve the draft plan, the most common responses included:

- Increasing the amount of off-leash areas
- Provide more maintenance
- Remove the proposed fencing
- Decreasing the amount of off-leash areas

A large majority of respondents to the third question answered that they did have a chance to provide their input and hear the input of others during the public consultations. In total, there has been two stakeholder group meetings and 10 public input opportunities from 2009-11.

General Consensus/No Consensus

The draft plan represents a number of difficult decisions, due to the wide variety of park users and their desired uses and concerns. Planning decisions were based on public input, City policies, expert opinion, park management best practices and City of Calgary operational realities and resource levels.

While public input was a major factor in many of the decisions made within the plan, there were important topics where no clear direction from the public, consensus or middle ground was achieved.

Topics where there was clear direction from stakeholders included:

- protection of the river, water quality and sensitive habitat
- increased park maintenance
- restoration of the river banks and slopes
- increased public education/stewardship and bylaw enforcement
- improved signage
- reducing user conflicts (most notably between out-of-control off-leash dogs and other park and pathway users).

Specific topics where no consensus was reached included:

- the optimal size of the off-leash areas within the regional park
- how to delineate the off-leash and on-leash areas

Off-Leash/On-Leash

Public input on the draft plan contrasted sharply between individuals who did not want to see a reduction in the size of the off-leash areas and those who wanted to see a significant reduction in the size of the off-leash areas within the regional park.

Due to the lack of consensus on this topic, the park plan will limit off-leash areas in the most appropriate areas to avoid negative impacts on sensitive natural areas (such as the slopes and river banks). Thus, the plateau areas within the regional park are the most suitable for off-leash use.

Decisions were also based on avoiding user conflicts, namely between off-leash dogs and pathway users and off-leash dogs and park users (including seniors and families with young children) wishing to use park areas without the fear of being approached by out-of-control dogs.

To allow river access for dog walkers, two designated river access points were provided to avoid unnatural erosion and vegetation damage to large sections of the river banks.

The less frequently used off-leash area at the north end of River Park would be made on-leash, to avoid user conflicts and allow that area to become naturalized parkland for passive recreation opportunities.

Fencing

In addition to improved public education and enforcement, clearly marked boundaries between off-leash and on-leash areas are required in the regional park to encourage responsible use and avoid user conflicts.

Public opinion during the consultation phase was divided on the best methods to delineate the borders between the on-leash and off-leash areas. The most effective and natural looking solution determined by

the planning team was living fences. A living fence is a buffer of low, thick shrubs with low-impact fencing hidden within the vegetation.

In River Park, living fences will be used along with clustered trees to effectively allow the closure of sections of the manicured park, as needed, to allow for ongoing, rotating turf restoration efforts. Without rotating closures to allow an effective turf restoration and maintenance plan at River Park, the turf will continue to deteriorate from its current condition. In Britannia Slopes, living fences would be used to reduce user conflicts at the off-leash area near the regional pathway.

Changes to the Draft Plan

Seven changes were made to the draft plan based on comments gathered online and from conversations held at the May 14 Open House session:

1. In order to avoid user conflicts on the bridge along the regional pathway, there would be additional signage to discourage speeding and a bridge entrance feature to encourage cyclists to dismount.
2. The existing large dog waste bins at River Park were included in the plan as was an additional bin at the Riverdale Ave. SW parking lot.
3. The fence layout in the southeast corner of the escarpment at River Park would be adjusted to retain the use of an existing toboggan hill.
4. Support for the resident-only parking restrictions on the west side of 14A Street SW would be extended for residents between 50th Ave SW and 39th Ave SW. A request for a community traffic study would need to follow the guidelines identified in The City of Calgary's Traffic Calming Policy.
5. The off-leash area boundary near the Riverdale parking lot would be extended to include an existing flat area.
6. The undesignated existing trails connecting Britannia Drive SW to Riverdale Ave. SW would be retained to allow loop walks and provide improved safety and erosion prevention.
7. The existing undesignated trail on Britannia Slopes near the southwest side of the off-leash area at Britannia Slopes would be retained as an informal trail.

Next Steps

The Proposed Combined Park Management Plan and Design Development Plan will now be presented to Council's Community and Protective Services Committee on June 29, 2011.

Committee agendas, minutes and live webcasts of meetings are available at www.calgary.ca (follow the links on the right hand side of the home page). Meetings are also broadcasted on Channel 89 on Shaw Digital TV.

The development of this park plan and its presentation to Council is the first step towards receiving funding to implement the project. If the plan is approved by Council, the project would then be submitted as a capital funding request for the 2012-14 City budget.