

West Eau Claire Park & Public Realm Plan

What We Heard Report

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Prepared for: The City of Calgary

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1. Introduction

The City of Calgary is developing a plan for the West Eau Claire Park and adjacent public realm. The project goal is to develop a comprehensive plan that will enhance the public realm to create a more liveable, caring and thriving place.

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

1.1 Public Engagement

Public engagement is critical to the success of the plan. The City of Calgary and the consulting team led by O2 Planning + Design is committed to involving stakeholders, residents, park users, adjacent property owners and businesses in planning for the future of the area. The engagement will be undertaken in 3 engagement periods, as follows:

1. Project Notification + Design Issues / Aspirations

August - September 2014

Objective: To create project awareness and seek stakeholder input on design issues and aspirations.

Promise: We will ask you to tell us what is working and what is not, and to describe your aspirations for the area. We will use this information to complete a Site Analysis Report and inform the development of a vision, guiding principles, and design alternatives.

2. Concept Vision + Design Priorities

September – October 2014

Objective: To present previous concepts and design alternatives, and seek community feedback on preferred elements and priorities.

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

3. Final Concept

November 2014

Objective: To present the final concept and confirm that the concept is consistent with the vision, guiding principles, and other design direction.

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

2. Issues, Opportunities, Dreams and Desires Engagement Activities

In August and beginning of September 2014, the project team engaged stakeholders, residents, park users, adjacent property owners and businesses to share their thoughts and ideas about the area redevelopment. Over 1,600 comments were gathered over this period.

There were many different ways to get involved.

2.1 Stakeholder Walking Tour

West Eau Claire Park | Wednesday, August 13, 2014

Stakeholder groups in attendance:

- Eau Claire Community Association
- Office of Councillor Farrell
- City of Calgary Parks
- City of Calgary, Centre City Planning & Implementation
- City of Calgary, Engagement & Communication Partner Services

The walking tour allowed the project team to meet various organized stakeholder groups with an interest in the area redevelopment and discuss issues, opportunities, and desires for the future.

2.2 Stakeholder Workshop #1

Internal Stakeholders | Wednesday, August 20, 2014

Stakeholder groups in attendance:

- City of Calgary, Centre City Planning & Implementation
- City of Calgary, Parks
- City of Calgary, Engagement & Communication Partner Services
- City of Calgary, Corporate Properties & Buildings
- City of Calgary, Calgary Parking Authority
- City of Calgary, Transportation Planning
- City of Calgary, Community & Neighbourhood Services
- Calgary Fire Department – Tech Services
- Calgary Police Service
- Office of Councillor Farrell
- Ward 8 Councillor Evan Wolley

External Stakeholders | Wednesday, August 20, 2014

Stakeholder groups in attendance:

- Eau Claire Community Association
- Bike Calgary
- Eau Claire YMCA

The first workshop was an opportunity to share initial site analysis and gather input on issues and opportunities. The second part of the workshop was dedicated to discuss preferred vision for the area.

2.3 Sounding Board

On-site Installation near Peace Bridge | August 16, 2014 – September 2, 2014

- 386 comments

A sounding board, a large semi-permanent structure installed in West Eau Claire Park, was used to gather feedback from park users. Using sticky notes, passers-by completed two simple statements and continued on their way.

The animating statements were:

- What I like about the park is...
- I wish this park ...

2.4 Pop-up Information Table

On-site information table | Saturday August 23, 2014 – Morning, Thursday August 28, 2014 – Lunch Time, September, Thursday September 4, 2014 – Early Evening

- 20 comments

An information table was set-up on-site near the sounding board to engage directly with park users.

2.5 Surveys

Online and Paper Surveys | August 18, 2014 – September 15, 2014

- 217 online surveys completed
- 36 paper surveys completed

The survey included the following questions:

- What is good about the West Eau Claire Park area?
- What changes should be made?
- Provide key words to describe your vision for the West Eau Claire Park.
- Are there any important elements/constraints you are aware of that should be considered?

2.6 On-Line Web Map Tool

On-line | August 18, 2014 – September 15, 2014

- 226 comments

The on-line web map tool allowed users to provide comments on an interactive map. The following push-pin buttons were available to provide comments:

- Great Place!
- Needs Work...
- I Have An Idea...

The information provided is stored in a geodatabase that can be accessed when refining the concept.

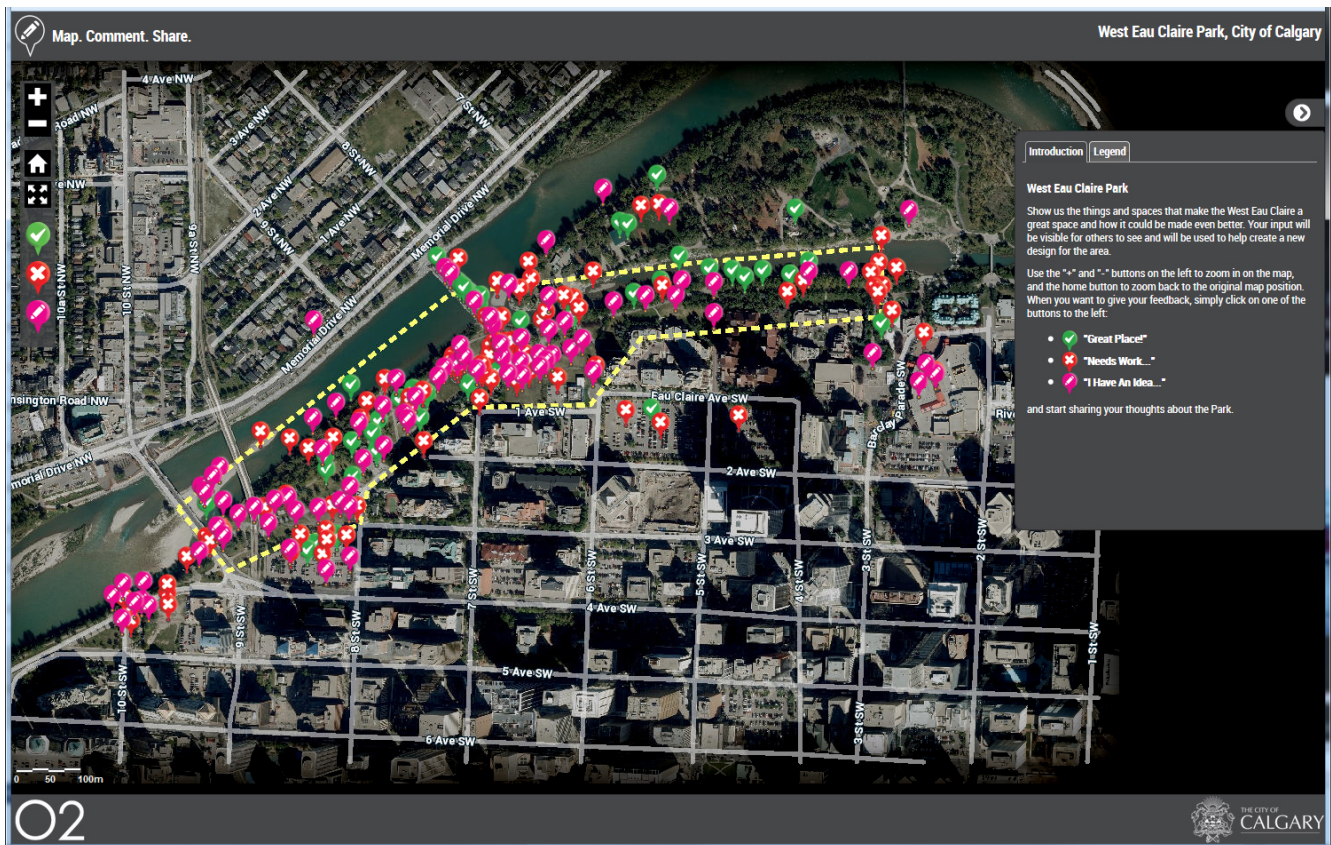


Figure 1. Web Map

3. What We Heard

The intent of this report is to highlight common themes that emerged from the first phase of the engagement. Frequently heard comments are grouped into four 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 the area 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.

Along with the major themes, many respondents mentioned to “keep it the way it is”. These comments reveal two main ideas: the area is highly valued, and there is a fear of loss of green space to development with recent condo developments in the area. Many respondents also expressed the desire to keep the park design simple and minimize development.

3.1 Circulation and Accessibility

Circulation and accessibility refers to the way people move around and through the park. West Eau Claire Park is a critical piece of the Bow River regional pathway system. The pathway is highly used for commuting, but also for park enjoyment and recreation.

Pathway user conflicts emerged as one of the main issues to be resolved throughout this process. However, some disagreements exist on how to achieve this. The majority of respondents would like to see a separation of uses (i.e. RiverWalk in East Village), while some respondents are in favor of a multi-use pathway. In the second case, the rationale provided is that multi-use pathway tends to slow down cyclists when busy, and that conflict resolution resides in increasing enforcement and adding signage (to reduce cyclist speed).

Many areas with circulation issues were identified, such as blind corners, unsafe intersections, awkward pathway alignments, desire lines to be accommodated, etc.

Design challenges: How to integrate pedestrian and other pathway users safely and effectively while minimizing infrastructure development

We heard that respondents **value**:

- Wide pathways
- Ease of access and proximity to downtown
- Peace Bridge

We heard that respondents **want**:

- Safer pathways for all users
- Better access and circulation to the Peace Bridge
- Better pathway/cycling connections to downtown (a more direct cycling connection to the 5th street or 7th street cycle tracks)

Representative quotes:

“Pathway is extremely busy through here. Separation, like on RiverWalk, for bicycles and walking is needed.”

“Increase of cycle community means increase in bike traffic at peak times and congestion at Eau Claire”

“Shared bike/walk pathways can slow bikers”

“Balance of needs for pedestrians and cycling”

“Absolutely love the Peace Bridge, but the landscaping and access on its south side are poor.”

“Many desire lines run through here [south Peace Bridge access]. Additional pathways should be provided across the green space.”

“Have nearly been run over by bicycle commuters - they should NOT be allowed to "rip" through the area scaring everyone to death [...] Bikes MUST BE SEPARATED from the pedestrians because pedestrians can't relax knowing they can be hit by a bicyclist at any time.”

“I have to stress the pathway needs to be widened. I'm a daily bike commuter and the area can be heavily congested with walkers, runners, young children on bikes, people pushing strollers. Many people do not understand how to react to a bike bell. They should move to the right but often times they don't. Regrettably, I collided with two pedestrians on that section of path this year. People who simply refused to move to the right. The divided path through the East Village may be a model to follow.”

3.2 Vegetation and Green Space

Vegetation and green space figures as a favorite park features. The area is often described as an “oasis” of nature in an urban environment. Two distinct types of vegetation are appreciated: the natural vegetation with its mature trees, and the more ornamental vegetation with the park’s flower baskets, manicured green space, and lined trees along the pathway.

Design challenges: How to maintain natural areas while increasing sense of safety

We heard that respondents **value**:

- Natural area
- Mature trees
- Ornamental vegetation (flower basket)
- Flexible manicured green space

We heard that respondents **want**:

- Keep it green and natural
- More trees (for atmosphere and shade) and flowers
- Maintain flexible green spaces
- Attractive winter vegetation
- Relocate or integrate the helipad

Representative quotes:

“The combination of 'natural' and 'manufactured' space”

“Nice natural setting in the inner city. Plenty of trees. An urban Oasis!”

“Green Space, it is an oasis in the middle of downtown. Really nice with the flower planters and trees”

“Vast expanses of grass, the natural trees and bushes which provide a buffer between the river and the bike path”

“I think the RiverWalk should be continued, but with more emphasis on preserving the natural riverbank”

“The trees and shrubs here both provide good bird habitat, so please do not clear the entire area out due to security concerns.”

3.3 Amenities

Amenities are the activities, features and programming of the park. Generally, the existing park amenities are highly valued: from the pathways, benches, and public art, to the open spaces. Flexible open spaces emerged as the prominent features within this theme. These spaces are used for impromptu sport games or to simply linger. Many respondents are questioning the existence of the helicopter pad in the park and suggesting to relocate or to better integrate the infrastructure in the park.

The majority of the ideas focus on complementing existing uses of the site (i.e. drinking fountains for runners), and accommodating recent growing uses such as river surfing. Ideas for new amenities include: urban beach, community gardens, playgrounds, sport fields, and swimming pool. Some disagreements exist regarding if commercial activities should be allowed in the park or not. Events held in the park are also appreciated and some respondents commented on the opportunity to increase the offer.

Comments provided reveal contradictions in terms of desired type of amenities, highlighting point of tensions between park users and residents. On one side, there is a desire for an increase of amenities to support park use as a recreational corridor, and on the other side, there is a desire for a less cluttered space or for the development of community focus amenities, such as community gardens.

Design challenges: 1) How to balance the desire for more amenities and active programming while preserving the natural and flexible open space. 2) How to balance the needs and/or desires of park users and local residents

We heard that respondents **value**:

- Flexible open space
- Wide pathways
- Benches
- Public art

We heard that respondents **want**:

- Amenities that complement existing uses
 - More benches and/ places to sit
 - More public art
 - Washrooms
 - Drinking fountains
 - Outdoor fitness equipment
 - Picnic tables
 - More gathering places by the river
 - Maintain flexible green space
 - Relocate or integrate the helipad
- New amenities and/or programs:
 - Urban beach

- Food services (cafés, restaurants, food trucks and vendors)
- Playgrounds
- Community gardens
- Ability to use in winter (skating rink, warm hut, etc.)

Representative quotes:

“I'd appreciate more places to sit. Especially on weekends, seating is taken. In the shade preferably.”

“Nice open space - allows people to use whenever and however they would like...lounging, playing with their kids, etc.”

“As a resident, I think this should be maintained as open, flexible space, not cluttered up with work out space for downtown workers during their lunch hour. It should meet the needs of people that are in the area 7 days a week!”

“River surfing the new wave is a great amenity for Calgarians!! Can we make this permanent providing a structure like this: <http://www.surfanywhere.ca/>”

“Provide amenities for river surfers and viewers (seats, change areas, board holders)”

“The helicopter landing area is something that I have not seen used in the 6 years I have been going to Eau Claire Park on a daily basis. The large area this consumes when including the fenced off area interrupts the flow of the park and it would be fantastic...”

“Create more restaurant/diner/cafe/pub patio space facing the river - like River Cafe, Boxwood, or San Antonio's Riverwalk. [...]”

“Fantastic in the summer - it needs “something” so more enjoyment during the winter month (ice festival, gas heaters in some location so we can have lunch there”

3.4 Maintenance and Safety

Multiple comments were made about safety concerns regarding maintenance and undesirable use of the site. The wooded area along the river was identified as a very unsafe area. The absence of sightlines and poor lighting makes this area attractive for undesirable uses. Other maintenance and safety concerns identified were related to unsafe pathway intersections and lack of lighting along pathways. Overall, there is a general agreement within this theme.

Respondents provided a series of recommendations to resolve the safety issues associated with the undesirable uses, such as police patrol, surveillance camera, better lighting, signage, emergency phone, and better sightlines. These recommendations highlight the concept that natural surveillance improves the sense of safety as the area becomes less attractive for inappropriate behaviors or activities.

We heard that respondents **value**:

- General maintenance or “cleanness”
- Winter pathway maintenance

We heard that respondents want:

- Better lighting (under Louise Bridge, along the regional pathway, and adjacent to forested areas)
- Safer area – elimination of undesirable uses

