

Design Development Plan - Blakiston Park

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 set 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 park redevelopment. The group spent 1.5 hours touring the park, discussing issues and opportunities for park 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 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 Blakiston Park Sounding Board

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

- 230 comments

A sounding board, a large semi-permanent structure installed on-site at Blakiston Park, was 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 ...

2.4 On-line Web Map Tool

On-line | On-going

- 34 comments

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

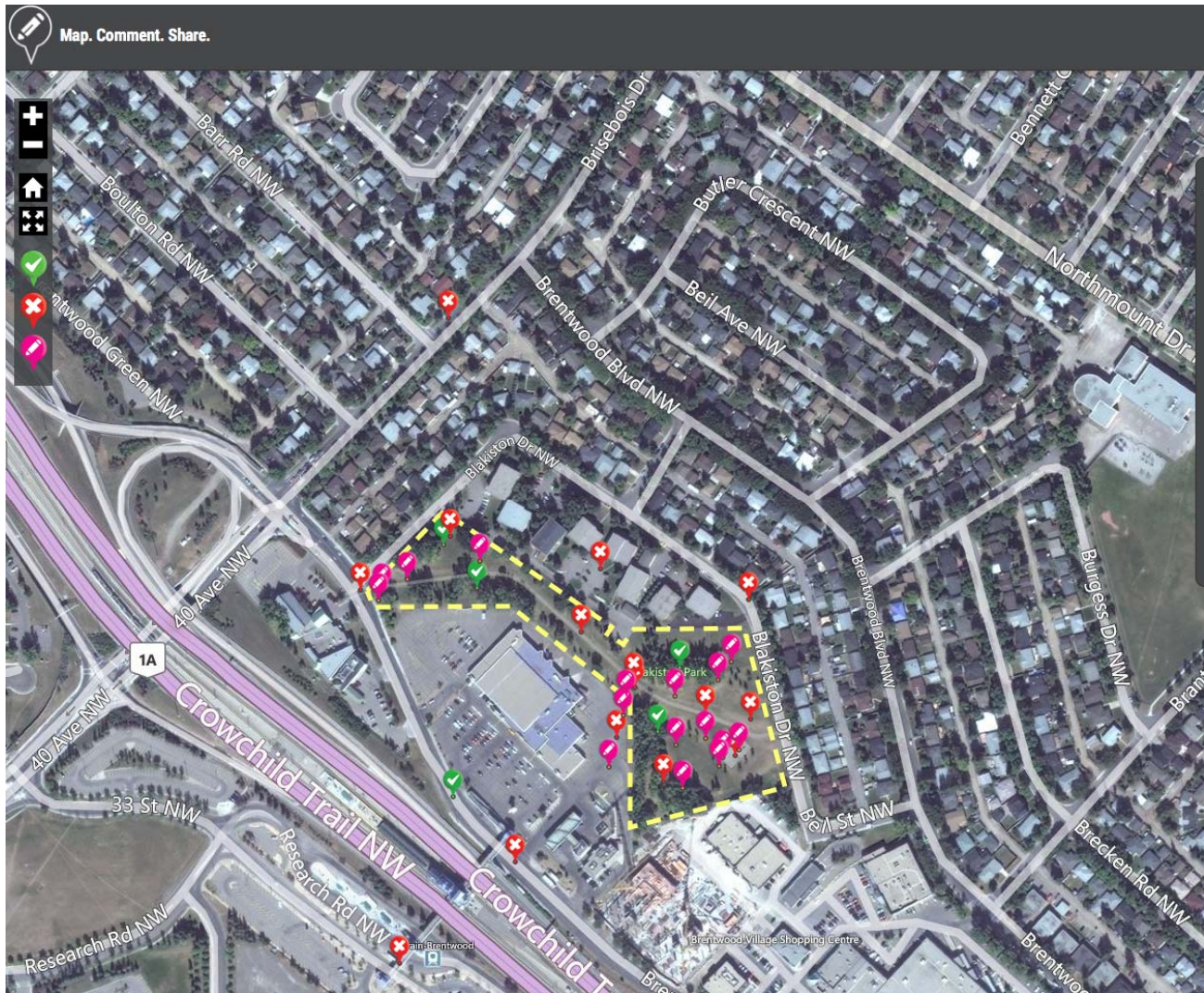


Figure 2. Web Map

2.5 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.

2.6 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 use of 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.

5. Blakiston Park Concept Design Activities

This phase of engagement focused on identifying a preferred design concept for the park. The design concept establishes the overall look and feel of the park, and sets the stage for unique features, amenities and programming elements.

In September and October 2014, the project team presented two design concepts for public review and comment. The design concepts were developed based on input received through initial engagement, and a detailed analysis of the site.

There were many different ways to get involved.

5.1 Blakiston Park Concepts Open House

Rocky Mountain College | Wednesday, September 24, 2014

- Approximately 40 people attended, including:
 - Ward Councillor Druh Farrell
 - Brentwood Community Association (BCA) members
 - Adjacent landowners
 - Brentwood area residents
- 58 sticky note comments
- 80 sticky dots

The drop-in open house allowed attendees to learn about the different concept options, speak with project team members, and provide comments on the different park concepts. Attendees provided comments using sticky notes to annotate concept elements that meet their needs, and to identify elements that did not fit with their vision for the park. Attendees could also use sticky dots to show which concept elements they prefer.

The open house was advertised online, in posters at the Brentwood C-Train station and other community locations, on the sounding board in the park, using street-level bold signs, through word of mouth, and through the BCA mailing list.

5.2 Concept Comment Form

Hard Copy | Available for completion at open house

Online | October 1 – October 17, 2014

- 31 completed comment forms

The comment form asked residents to identify which overall design concept they prefer, and to identify which specific features and amenities best meet their needs and desires for the park. Respondents were encouraged to explain their choices, and to provide any additional comments they may have.

5.3 On-line Web Map Tool

Online | October 1 – October 17, 2014

The on-line web map tool enabled people to explore the concept options and provide comments in an interactive format. Users could click on points of interest to learn more about key features, and annotate the map with their comments.

5.4 Sounding Board

On-site Installation | October 2 – October 17, 2014

A sounding board was installed at the park to present the two concept options, and to direct interested passers-by to the project website. A QR code was used to provide direct links to the comment form and the on-line web map tool.

5.5 Engagement Monitoring

The engagement period attracted fairly good levels of resident participation. For a project of this size, the open house was well attended and served as a good discussion forum. Large concept maps were placed in the centre of the room, and were the focus of discussion amongst attendees and project team members.

Thoughtful and engaged comments were received through the sticky-note exercise and in the comment forms. The on-line map tool was the least used feedback mechanism, however it did provide a good platform for reviewing and exploring the different concept options.

Feedback from the open house emphasized that the concept designs reflected community input, and that the project team is listening to community needs and desires.

6. Blakiston Park Concept Design – What We Heard

Through the second phase of engagement, the project team sought feedback on the two different concept options to identify a preferred overall concept for the park. Engagement focused on two broad questions:

1. Which overall design concept is preferred, and why?
2. Which specific features and amenities best meet your needs and desires for Blakiston Park?

Each design concept was developed to illustrate different levels of amenities that seek to balance what park users said they want with what the park itself can accommodate. The two different concept options show the trade-offs between level of activity, landscape features, and open space availability within the park.

- **Concept Option 1** enhances the existing, passive uses of the park, set within a more naturalized setting, and emphasizes cultural activities over structured recreation.

Figure 3. Concept Option 1



- **Concept Option 2** provides for more active uses that accommodate a range of new activities set within a more formalized landscape.

Figure 4. Concept Option 2

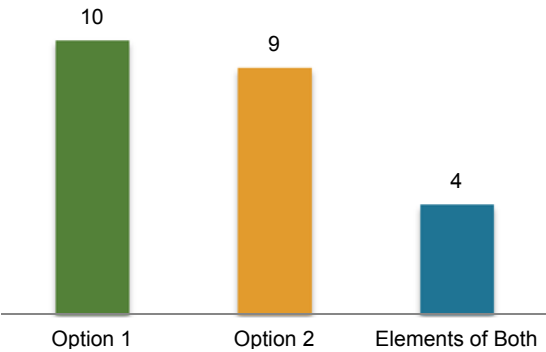


A summary of feedback is presented below. Major themes are identified, based on levels of agreement and disagreement. This feedback will be used to generate the overall concept for the park, and as the basis for preparing the detailed design development plan.

6.1 Preferred Concept Option

There is no agreement among respondents about the preferred concept option. Figure 5 shows that about half of comments from respondents prefer Option 1, and the other half prefer Option 2. Some respondents indicate that they would like to see a concept that contains elements of both.

Figure 5. Results – Preferred Concept Option



Some respondents provided comments explaining why they preferred one comment over another. Feedback is summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Rationale – Preferred Concept Option

	Like	# Heard	Dislike	# Heard
Option 1	Grassed area, nature, open space <i>“More trees, the better, more natural the landscape, the better”</i> <i>“Informal areas”</i>	7	Theatre <i>“Will not get much use, and will be target for vandalism”</i>	2
	Performance pavilion <i>“provides sense of community ownership to the park”</i>	5	No formal sports area	
	Pathways / Connections <i>“Path to Blow St”</i>	3	Needs more trees and shrubs	
	Picnic grove is nice idea <i>“Like picnic tables, but not the fire pits”</i>	2		
	Other amenities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Park feels safer – not like a forest • Keep open area for playing / scrimmage • Plaza 			
Option 2	Courts and exercise equipment <i>“Formal recreation structures will draw people to the park”</i>	5	Design is too active / structured <i>“Too many active sports areas need maintenance”</i>	3
	Treed grove <i>“Good barrier from stores”</i> <i>“Like flowering trees”</i>	3	Treed grove <i>“Too dense”</i> <i>“Too formal”</i>	2
	Other <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Like option for hockey rink • Contemplation oval • Plaza • Like bocce 		Other <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community garden instead of bocce • Community garden will attract loitering • Pathways are less connected • No basketball courts because of noise 	

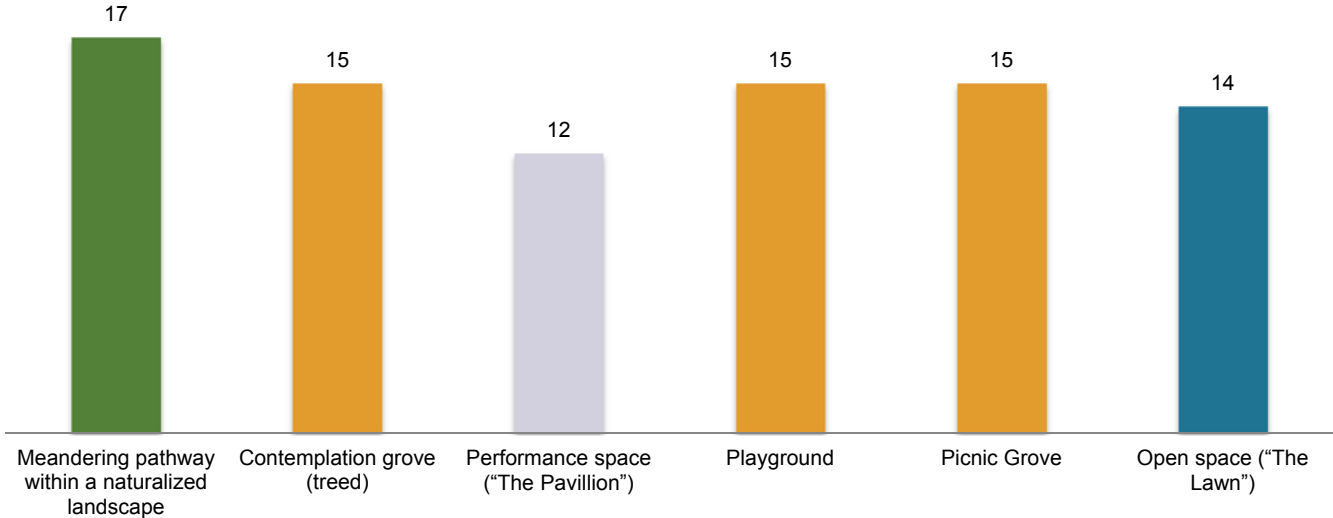
6.2 Features and Amenities

The comment form and the sticky dot exercise at the open house asked respondents to identify which features and amenities best meets their needs and desires for park.

Option 1

Responses, as shown in Figure 6, suggest a good level of agreement with most concept features.

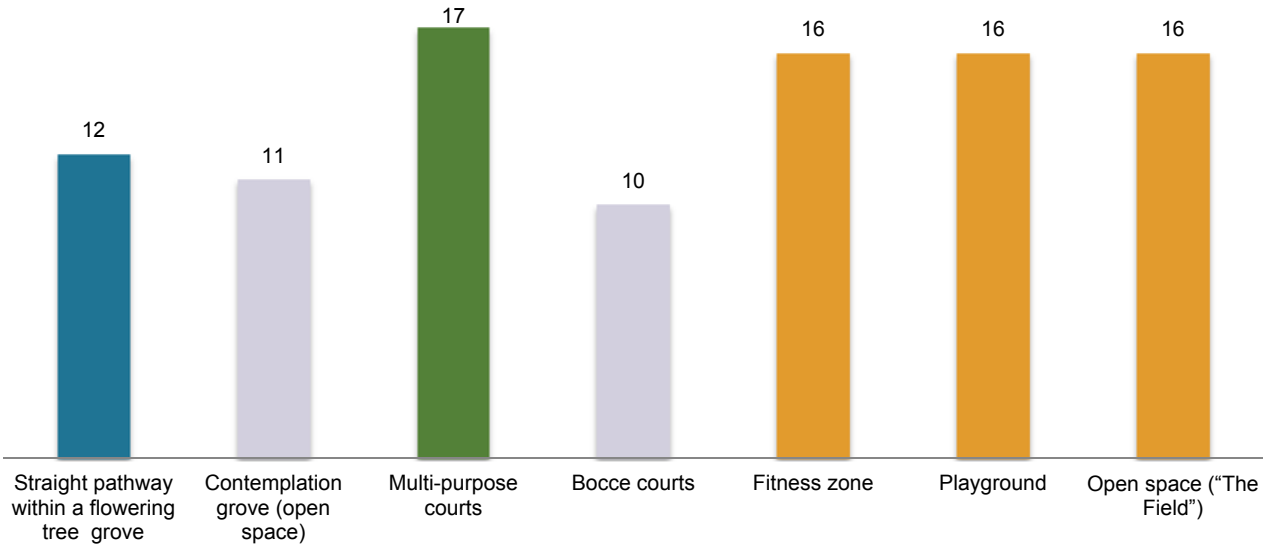
Figure 6. Option 1: Preferred Features and Amenities



Option 2

Responses, as shown in Figure 7, suggest more discernible preferences. The most preferred features are the multi-purpose courts, the fitness zone, and the open space ("the lawn"). The least preferred features are the treed grove and the bocce court.

Figure 7. Option 2: Preferred Features and Amenities



It is instructive to review the comments provided on the comment forms and from the annotated sticky notes to understand why certain features elements are preferred over others. Table 2 provides a summary of results.

Table 2. Comparison of Preferred Elements

	Option 1	Option 2
General	Prefer park that offers space for relaxation Design promotes sense of community within the park	Makes park more interesting and encourages people to spend time outdoors
Contemplation Grove	Is this necessary? No standing water, but fountain would be nice	Who pays for maintenance on the water feature? Make this a gathering space for events Like the pools Make the water feature a seasonal fountain Electric barbecue
The Path	Connectivity Prefer weaving path Connection to Coop x2 Parking Need to double up pathway Trees / Vegetation Native plantings Meandering path within forest setting / flowering trees x3	Connectivity Straight path is nice for bikers Add walking path to connect coop to residential Connect the path to Blow St Perimeter loop pathway for joggers / runners Safety Needs lighting x2 Safety concerns Trees / Vegetation More trees the better x2 Trees gives sheltered feel Love colourful trees. What about fruit? Too many trees No flowering trees Avoid anything too formal – make it curvilinear or natural, and work with the topography Forest is too dense – may attract campers Trees are too formal
Picnic area	Like picnic area and fire pits Create a buffer between residential area and picnic area Fire pits are not appropriate for a park of this size and will attract late-night parties x2	Screen garbage bin Community garden is better use than bocce court Fire pits may not be used. Picnic tables are a good idea.

	Option 1	Option 2
Open Space	Prefer open space over basketball courts	Grassed “porkchop” area is wasted space – too chopped up Create a water park in the “porkchop” Water park creates lots of traffic Existing hockey rink gets little use Bike rentals
Programmed Space	Pavillion Put open space near the pavilion Stage needs to be open so that it doesn't attract loitering Water feature nearby x2 Love the performance space No loud concerts Playground Spread out the play equipment Incorporate natural play structures and ecological ideas No pea gravel Creative play space	Multi-Purpose Courts Will attract people to the park and help build community x2 Is one court enough? What about soccer? Who pays for upkeep? Create multi-season activities No courts - concerned about noise x3 Other courts already available in the community May keep large areas of the park from being used by the whole community Playground Create a unique theme (dinosaur) Have monkey bars, climbing wall and jungle gym Turtle park Fitness Zone Add fitness zone to option 1
Plaza	More trees Watch amount of paving Use pavers over poured concrete	
LRT Connecting Path + NE Entry	Most important priority is connecting to CTrain Maintain the path in the winter Light path for safety x2	
Buffer		Make sure buffer is spaced enough to be permeable Use trees to buffer the coop

Other Comments

- Safety
 - Need for lighting along pathways x3
 - Trees must preserve sightlines for safety

- Maintenance
 - Need for garbage cans, winter maintenance x3
- Concerns
 - Noise, especially at night
 - No dogs, or at least on-leash area
 - East-west pathway is not well used, and shouldn't be considered a main pathway
 - Neither option ties into UniverCity
- New Ideas
 - Create an art installation for the park
 - Create café in area behind the coop
 - Precedent: Canmore Spring Creek. Good example of meandering path with pavers and trees throughout with seating
 - Paint the coop wall to make it blend it more
- Nature / Open Space
 - Keep trees growing rather than clearing the space
 - Consider the environment when planning
 - Green spaces are vital to making area feel like a community
 - Currently a lot of open space in the park that isn't being used
- Project Process
 - When is this happening?
 - Why was I not informed of the development? Should provide notice in utility bills
 - Look forward to a useable, worthwhile space to make residents proud of development
 - Appreciate that park is being revitalized

6.3 Discussion

While there is no clearly preferred concept, there are definite areas of agreement and disagreement. These themes emerged across both concept options, and in the discussion of specific features. These areas of agreement and disagreement will be used to balance the refinement of a single concept for the park.

Agreement

Areas of agreement reflect many of the values and aspirations heard during the first phase of engagement. These include:

- Connectivity to the commercial area / CTrain station is important
- Ensuring safety and maintenance is important
 - Well-lit pathways
 - Natural sightlines
 - Winter maintenance
- Trees, nature and open space are valued, and concrete surfaces should be minimized
- The park should be a well-used community amenity

There is also agreement on a few preferred features:

- Playground
- Ecological design
- Buffer to Co-op
- Plaza
- Gateway / entry features

Disagreement

Areas of disagreement emerge around the “how” of designing and programming certain spaces. These include:

- There is no agreement on what type of design is best for creating community within the park.
 - Some respondents suggest that programmed spaces (multi-use courts) will engage residents in specific activities, and draw them to the park.
 - However, many respondents did not want multi-use courts due to concerns over noise and the close proximity of other available courts
 - Other respondents suggest that more unstructured open space is more in keeping with community character, and creates opportunities for more informal gatherings.
 - There is concern from some respondents that structures designed for community gathering (pavilion, fire pits) may attract “nuisance” uses such as parties or street-entrenched individuals.
- Water feature / water park
 - Many respondents would like to see a seasonal water feature or a water park incorporated into the design.
 - However, there is some concern that a water feature would be too costly to maintain, and might attract mosquitoes.

7. Next Steps

The project team will incorporate the comments received through the second phase of engagement to identify one concept design. The project team will need to balance what has been heard to identify a final design. As highlighted above, the biggest area of disagreement is over what type of design will best create community within the park. The refined concept design will highlight the trade-offs made in developing this design.

The refined concept design will be presented to the public for review and comment with the goal of seeing if the design is consistent with the community's desires for the park. At this time, the project team will ask the community what their priorities are for implementation and use this input to develop a design development plan and phasing plan.