



City of Prince Albert

RPT 2025-14

TITLE: State of the Playgrounds 2024-2025 Report

DATE: November 28, 2024

TO: Budget Committee

PUBLIC: X

INCAMERA:

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Playground Program or 2025, as outlined within RPT 2025-14, be approved as part of the 2025 budget.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Playground development has been an important aspect of park development with the introduction of the State of the Playgrounds Report to members of council back in 2019. The purpose of the report is to help guide and assist in conversation around identifying future playground development whether that be through replacement or refurbishment. The goal of the department is to prioritize safe, distinctive, and sustainable play environments that foster socialization, coordination, imagination, and cognitive development. To help accommodate this goal, we need to have a continued understanding of how our playgrounds serve our community, the distance in which people travel to get to them, what is important to the community when it comes to outdoor play and what the city's role continues to be in creating meaningful legacy built projects that will serve each distinct part of our community for years to come.

The report to council provides an overview of the current state of playgrounds, what has been successfully accomplished to date, current and past investments, partnerships and ongoing maintenance and possibilities for refurbishment and/or replacement in the future.

The city has been the beneficiary of some great legacy projects over the last several years and those projects such as the Alfred Jenkins Playground, Little Red River Park, Lions Park, David E. Laird, to name a few have been well loved and very well used by our community.

As a result of that overwhelming response in use to the newer park spaces, this has resulted in the necessity for repair and replacement of some components within these spaces sooner than expected. This will require the department to pivot on the use of the Capital and Operational funds to protect the newer investments while also looking to reinvest a portion of those funds in some of the existing older spaces. By pivoting to a maintenance focused strategy, we will position ourselves in a positive manner to head off unnecessary increased costs for repair and replacement of these play spaces in the future while protecting our newest assets.

Taking a pause on development at this time will as well allow the department opportunity to source out future funding partnerships and/or grants to assist in future priorities within the State of the Playground report when it comes to our park spaces.

This report will show that plan of re-evaluation of our park spaces and how we plan to utilize funds to help us achieve our goals.

BACKGROUND:

The City of Prince Albert owns and maintains **twenty-nine** playground structures, **one** paddling pool and **7** Spray Parks, and these structures come in all types throughout the neighborhood parks.

While some tend to be elaborate with fully themed units, climbers, spring toys, multi-level playhouses other, playgrounds are age appropriate, designed and enjoyed by smaller children.

Spray parks are as well unique in nature to the area in which they were built allowing for a unique experience at each location you visit.

The report to Council is to provide the current state of playgrounds and current investments within the city and continues to look at the ongoing maintenance and possibilities of refurbishment/replacement. Community Services over the past 5 years began this journey by providing Council with a comprehensive State of the Playgrounds Report back in 2019 outlining objectives to refurbishment/replacement. Prioritizing those objectives through a systematic inspection process continues to identify priority locations and those that could wait. Funding levels in the 2024 budgeting season provided for \$70,000 in operational dollars used to enhance, maintain, and improve upon current play spaces and capital investment dollars of \$150,000 towards the concept and future development of an identified playground project.

Partnerships and funding opportunities have and continue to play a particularly significant role to the city in achieving milestones in playground and spray park development. These partnerships give the City of Prince Albert a competitive edge in providing newcomers and those looking for a place to invest and settle a reason to look seriously at reasons why Prince Albert is a great investment for business, family, and play.

The 'City of Parks' is a ringing endorsement noting the quality of legacy projects that have been completed over the past 6 years.

PROPOSED APPROACH AND RATIONALE:

Through Capital funding and partnership, the following had been accomplished in the 2024 budget season.

Midtown Community Centre (Lee Atkinson Park) Spray and Play

Partnerships continue to play an important part in seeing projects or enhancements to park space completed in 2024.

Partnership through a federal grant provided by the Canada Community Building Fund – Infrastructure Investment Plan has helped to bring a long-awaited project to completion in 2024. The Midtown Spray and Play was slated for construction in 2023 and due to delays in ordering and shipping of construction materials the project did not break ground until spring of 2024. With weather delays and the project 90% complete we were able to open it to the public August 29, 2024, with considerable fan fair and excitement. There is still some surfacing work to complete in 2025 to tie the Spray Park and Playground together along with some new fencing which we look forward to completing in 2025. The Spray and Play boasts a space for family and friends to play and enjoy for years to come and will serve as a hub for playground programming providing more opportunities for fun and community engagement.

The new Spray and Play Park offers a wide range of exciting amenities for residents of all ages. The 2,856-square-foot spray pad features a Dynamic Zone, Family Zone, and Tot Zone, with the Verosplash Ball serving as a highlight—a centrepiece that makes a big splash!

The adjacent playground spans 4,370 square feet and has a custom ship-themed design. Children can explore the Crow'snest, steer the Ship Wheel, slide down the Double Swoosh Slide, climb the Ship Bow Chain Climber, and much more. Additional features include the Wiggle Ladder, Oodle Swing, picnic tables, benches, and a sunshade, ensuring family comfort and convenience. New lighting has also been installed to allow for extended playtime as the days grow shorter in the fall.

This eagerly anticipated community space has been developed at a cost of \$650,000 with the generous support of the City of Prince Albert – \$158,075 and the Canada Community-Building Fund – \$491,925.

In the early years of this report, it was noted that 75% of our playgrounds; were identified as being obsolete, what did that mean? Other than the playground supplier was no longer in business it also meant that parts for the playgrounds would be difficult to find but possible to obtain. We continually review and assess our playground improvement opportunities, prioritizing that work with an amazing \$5,478,656 in playground/play space dollars reinvested through important partnerships, grants, and increased funding since 2015. Through this same process we have seen an amazing investment in our spray parks from (2015-2024) totalling \$1,415,673. We continue to recognize that playground replacement priorities do change and will change from year-to-year based on many factors and we continue the work in identifying those priorities, reporting them back to Council so that we can identify where budgeted dollars should be prioritized.

As we move into 2025, we want to take the time to recognize the wonderful work done to bring several legacy projects of play to the city. Those projects have helped to shape play in the City of Prince Albert for years to come. With that work comes a reassessment of needs in the State of the Playground report and how we see investment Capital being utilized in 2025 and 2026. When we started this project back in 2019, the expectation was a slow and steady pace in playground and spray park development. What we did not plan for was the generous support of partners which expedited the playground and spray park development program resulting in unprecedented growth.

With that unprecedented growth we have had an overwhelming response in use from the public to these newer park spaces and that has resulted in the necessity for repair and replacement of some components within these spaces sooner than expected. For the department to address

these issues we find it necessary to pivot over the next 2-years and refocus our efforts on maintenance of our newer spaces while reinvesting in some of our older spaces. If we do not make the pivot in this next year to a maintenance focused strategy, we will find ourselves in a position of increased costs for repair and replacement and falling behind in protecting our newest assets before pushing ahead with consideration on additional construction projects.

For this reason, the department has devised a plan through a re-evaluation of our spaces in our State of the Playgrounds presentation that shows how we plan to utilize the funds from both the capital and operational funds to help us achieve our goals.

If we want to have playground environments, we are proud of, that offer children, families and other users the opportunity to experience play in fun, unique and safe spaces, we believe steps must be taken within the report to ensure we are thinking long term and building on legacy that adds value to community. Our end goal is to ensure that the City playgrounds are around for the long term by investing in today and reaping the benefits of that investment tomorrow.

CONSULTATIONS:

The department is committed to ongoing engagement with the community in decisions about parks and playgrounds. Documents like the Community Services Master Plan and tools such as 'Let's Talk Prince Albert' can be used to help guide and direct the on how and when we engage the public for their feedback as well as how we can encourage users to take an active role in planning the future of our parks.

COMMUNICATION AND/OR ANNOUNCEMENT PLAN:

Decisions based on future playground investment and funding will flow through our Communication Department

BUDGET/FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

Parks, Recreation and Culture would like to recommend to members of council the following options for consideration in the 2025 budgeting process.

- That the current source of Capital funding of \$150,000 be maintained in 2025 and that those capital dollars be considered for use in making the necessary maintenance and repair improvements in existing playground and spray parks. This would provide the opportunity to bring play structures that have fallen into disrepair back into compliance with playground CSA regulations while enhancing and building on creating a safe environment for play.
- That the current source of Operational funding of \$70,000 be maintained in 2025 and continue to be used for playground maintenance in conjunction with the \$150,000 in capital funding.

Parks, Recreation and Culture is committed to its work in seeking out external funding opportunities to assist with future playground and spray park opportunities whether that be refurbishment or replacement strategies.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS/IMPLICATIONS:

There is no policy, privacy implications, or other considerations.

STRATEGIC PLAN:

The proposed project(s) align with the Strategic Goal(s) within the City's 2023-2025 Strategic Plan as follows:

Investing in Infrastructure through 'Nature Area Planning' with continued prioritization and support of recommendations identified through the annual reporting of the State of the Parks & Playgrounds Improvement Plan, Little Red River Park Master Plan, and the Urban Forestry Management Plan.

And,

Delivery Professional Governance through 'Engaged Government' by 'Identifying' sensitive issues in advance and implement thorough quality communication as well as 'Strengthen' relationships with external organizations to share information and collaborate on project and services.

OFFICIAL COMMUNITY PLAN:

There are three (3) Strategic Goals related to the Community Services Master Plan supported here:

Active & Caring Community: The planning process has considered all feedback received by the public, user groups and stakeholder organizations.

Sustainable Growth: The planning process will continue to identify recommendations that focus on priorities for the future with the understanding of available resources to implement any initiatives.

Infrastructure: The city will create infrastructure that supports growth while planning for continuous improvement.

This report supports the Community Services Master Plan initiatives and addresses the goal of contributing to infrastructure and sustainability efforts through proper planning which can help preserve and maintain natural and built environments. Our connection to the natural world is important and must be considered in the delivery of community services.

PUBLIC NOTICE:

Public Notice pursuant to the Public Notice Bylaw No. 24 of 2015 is not required.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. State of Playgrounds Report: 2024 - 2025
2. State of the Playground Power Point: 2024 – 2025

Written by: Timothy Yeaman, Parks, and Open Spaces Manager

Approved by: Director of Parks, Recreation & Culture and City Manager