

Background

An information report regarding playgrounds was provided at the Finance & Administration Committee meeting of September 20, 2016. The report provided an inventory of the City of Greater Sudbury's 189 playground sites and ranked the current inventory of play structures based on a poor, satisfactory, or good rating. Following the report, Council requested an additional report to include options and financing to bring all parks to a city-wide standard to be presented back to the Finance and Administration Committee.

On April 12, 2017 a report entitled "Playground Revitalization" was provided to the Finance & Administration Committee. The report recommended developing a business case to improve 48 playground sites ranked in poor condition at an approximate cost of \$1,920,000 and consideration to dispose of 10 playground sites deemed redundant. The Finance & Administration Committee referred the matter to the Community Services Committee, requesting a series of incremental reports on the subject of playground revitalization.

At the June 19, 2017 Community Services Committee meeting a report entitled "Playground Revitalization Incremental Report #1" was presented. The report included a review of best practices and policy in regards to parkland development and revitalization. The report summarized previous recommendations and action items from the Parks, Open Space and Leisure Master Plan and the Green Space Advisory Panel in regards to playgrounds. The report also included a summary of industry trends and implications for play spaces as per the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA).

The June 19, 2017 report also outlined a number of next steps relating to Playground Revitalization including community consultation and the development of design guidelines for Neighbourhood and Community Parks.

Community Consultation Results

As part of the Playground Revitalization process, the City of Greater Sudbury (City) asked residents for feedback about municipal playgrounds. The consultations sought information about frequency of use, level of satisfaction, preferred play structures and equipment, and design elements to improve access and use of playgrounds.

Consultations were held in a number of different ways:

- 12 Playground Neighbourhood Huddles held in each ward
- Online survey
- Stakeholder meetings with Neighbourhood Associations, Accessibility Advisory Panel and Seniors Advisory Panel

Playground Neighbourhood Huddles

A total of 136 residents participated in playground neighbourhood huddles held at the following locations:

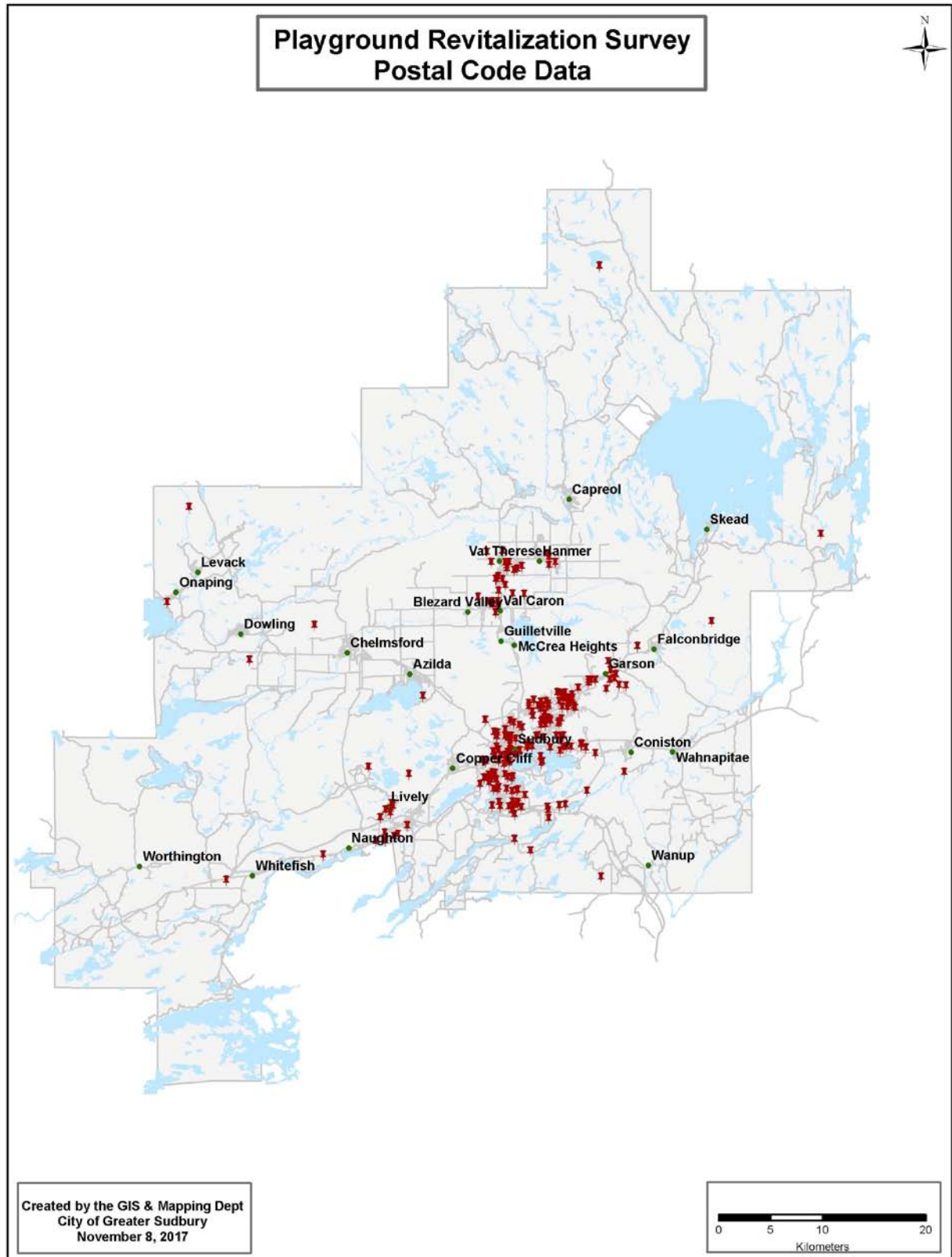
- Delhi Dozzi Complex (Ward 1)
- Sixth Avenue Playground (Ward 2)
- Onaping Community Centre (Ward 3)
- Antwerp Playground (Ward 4)
- Carol Richard Park (Ward 5)
- Elmview Playground (Ward 6)
- Capreol Millennium Centre (Ward 7)
- Rosemarie Playground (Ward 8)
- Wahnapiatae Community Centre (Ward 9)
- Riverdale Playground (Ward 10)
- Carmichael Community Centre (Ward 11)
- Percy Playground (Ward 12)

Playground Revitalization Online Survey

A total of 335 responses were received during the period that the online survey was available. The following is a profile of the respondents:

- 46% of respondents were between the ages of 29 to 38 years old; 25% of respondents were between the ages of 39 and 48 years old
- 42% of respondents indicated that two or more children resided in their home
- 54% of respondents indicated that children that resided in their home were between the ages of infant to 5 years old; 44% responded stated children in their home were ages 6 to 12; 18% indicated children ages 13 to 18
- 75% of respondents indicated they visited playgrounds as a parent with children; 17% indicated they visited playgrounds on their own; 12% stated they visited playgrounds as grandparents with grandchildren
- 69% of respondents indicated that they did not have playground equipment in their backyard or shared outdoor living area
- 16% of respondents indicated that they were the primary caregiver of a child or children with special needs

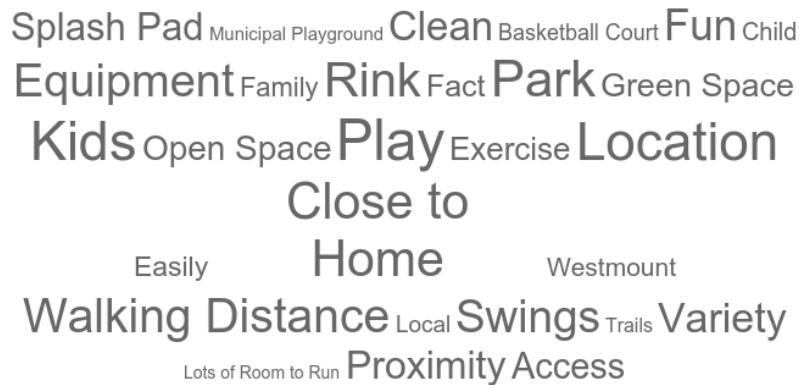
The following is a visual representation of where respondents lived (by postal code):



Respondents named over 150 unique playgrounds that they visit. 66% of respondents indicated that they visited their municipal playground(s) once or more each week. Overall, respondents indicated the following satisfaction with playground conditions:

- 51% stated playgrounds were in Good condition
- 24% stated playgrounds were in Satisfactory condition
- 25% stated playgrounds were in Poor condition

When asked what they like best about their municipal playground, respondents most frequently stated satisfaction with location, proximity to home and opportunities for play. The following is a visual representation of responses received:



When asked what they liked least about their municipal playground, respondents most frequently cited limited and dated playground equipment, park cleanliness and limited park amenities such as shade structures. The following is a visual representation of responses received:



Survey participants were asked what services would encourage more visitation to municipal playgrounds. Respondents ranked the following services most important:

- Higher standard of maintenance
- Higher standard of cleanliness
- Water fountains

When asked what structures would encourage more usage of municipal playgrounds, respondents ranked the following of highest importance:

- New play structures
- Open areas for unstructured play
- Accessible play structures

Survey respondents stated that the following features were most important when asked what would encourage visitation at municipal playgrounds more often:

- Shaded rest areas
- Washrooms
- Benches

Survey respondents stated that the following traditional playground equipment was most important when asked what they or their children were most likely to use:

- Swings
- Slides
- Monkey bars

When asked about what types of newer playground equipment was most important to them or their children, survey respondents ranked the following of highest importance:

- Rock walls
- Obstacle course
- Rope walls

Survey participants were asked about preferred playground designs. The following playground designs ranked highest:

- Fitness focused play (structures that encourage climbing, balance, strength, coordination including ropes, webs, obstacles, etc.)
- Traditional play structures (play structures traditionally found in playgrounds, including swings, slides, monkey bars and teeter-totters)
- Nature inspired play (Play structures and landscaping inspired by natural surroundings, including structures that incorporate the look and feel of rock, wood, etc.)

When asked what the most important thing the City needs to address at municipal playgrounds, most common responses included:

- Investing in new play structures
- Providing a variety of equipment and play opportunities
- Ensuring equality of playground standards across the City
- Providing opportunities for all ages at playgrounds
- Providing safe, well maintained and accessible play spaces

Overview of Community Stakeholder Meetings

The Neighbourhood Association President's dinner was held on October 3, 2017 with approximately 60 neighbourhood volunteers in attendance. Information regarding Playground Revitalization was provided as the main agenda item. There were initial concerns expressed regarding the potential closure of playgrounds. The audience was assured that the consultation process was focused on gathering information on usage and preferences regarding local playgrounds. Volunteers expressed their appreciation for the process as information gathered would provide the necessary community feedback to formalize investment in playgrounds into the future.

The Leisure Services Division met with the Accessibility Advisory Panel to discuss Playground Revitalization. Recommendations from the panel included focusing on fitness based play, requirements for park amenities such as shade and benches and ensuring accessibility for all, including those accompanying children. Of most importance was ensuring that playgrounds and support facilities are accessible for people of all ages and abilities.

The Seniors Advisory Panel and the City also discussed Playground Revitalization. The group suggested that playgrounds would be more inviting if equipment was replaced, shaded rest areas and benches were provided, washrooms were accessible and there were amenities such as flower gardens, walking paths, community gardens, adult exercise equipment and improved ground surfaces. The group noted preference for multi-generational play, water parks, picnic areas and natural playgrounds.

International Play Association (IPA) Conference

Representatives from the Community Development Department had the opportunity to present at the IPA Triennial World Conference in Calgary, September 13 to 16, 2017. The conference reflected clearly on the direction that recreation and leisure are moving toward. Specifically some of the major takeaways were the shift toward informal and unstructured leisure opportunities.

This reflects the lifestyle and complexity of working families and the need to integrate play into the free time and structured time of both children and parents. With respect to mental health and wellness, a clear message was the importance of building resilience. As society has moved towards a risk averse comfort level, (i.e. helicopter parents), what has resulted is risk averse children with poor resilience skills than prior generations. Evidence indicates risky play is essential to healthy child development. Risk-benefit assessments are essential for design of space. A key message to municipalities was to reflect upon and challenge the insurance policies which minimize risk, adventure, and creative programming.

Research has indicated that children prefer to play in safe areas, nearby nature, and close to their friends and home. Including natural elements into outdoor design is sustainable and reflective of a healthy environment.

Design Guideline Principles for Neighbourhood and Community Parks

As the majority of play structures are located at Neighbourhood and Community Parks, previous reports indicated that guidelines would be developed for these types of facilities. These park classifications are defined in the Parks, Open Space and Leisure Master Plan Review and the Green Space Advisory Panel Report as follows:

- Neighbourhood Park - to meet the recreational needs of its immediate neighbourhood
- Community Park - to provide the space and supportive facilities needed for active recreation

Design principles for Neighbourhood and Community Parks have been developed based on the following:

- Parks, Open Space and Leisure Master Plan Review (2014)
- Final Report of the Green Space Advisory Panel (June 2010)
- Canadian Standards Association (CSA) guidelines
- Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA)
- Industry trends and best practices
- Input received from the Playground Revitalization community consultation process
- Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) Principles

The design principles focus on play equipment, seating areas, shade structures, waste receptacles, washroom facilities and other park amenities.

Neighbourhood Park Design Principles

Definition:

A Neighborhood Park's primary purpose is to meet the recreational needs of its immediate neighborhood. This could include a playground, passive space with benches, paths, informal natural areas, or other options. By nature, a neighborhood park's use is fluid and should change over time to adapt to neighborhood growth.

Additional Characteristics:

Limited non-organized sport group activities are encouraged where various age groups can play simultaneously, with emphasis on the youth. A neighborhood park is built and designed typically for 20 minute to one hour experience.

Facilities and Features:

Safe pedestrian access. May contain play equipment, room for casual play, shaded rest areas. May also contain open space, natural areas, walking paths and other features.

Size:

Typically 0.2 – 1 hectare.

Service Standard:

0.25 ha per 1000 residents, within 800m without crossing a major barrier.

Proximity:

Neighborhood parks to be provided within 800m (10 minute walk) radius of residential neighborhoods and in close proximity to multifamily complexes, without crossing major barriers such as a railway line or arterial roads. Ideally these facilities should be centered within safe walking and bike access.

Playground Equipment Area:

Ideally, the equipment installed within a play area a minimum size of 20' x 60'. Typically ground surface is sand. Where budget allows, wood chips or engineered wood fiber could be considered.

Playground Equipment:

Focus on independent equipment. If space allows, a small play structure may be considered, pending on the availability of similar structures in the area. Play equipment geared to ages 2 to 12. A minimum of one slide (independent or incorporated in to play equipment) to be included. Equipment should encourage adventure and fitness while incorporating and blending into the park's natural setting. Accessibility features such as active play and sensory components to be incorporated.

Swings:

A minimum of one swing bay recommended with a minimum of one belt swing and one infant swing. Considerations should be made for accessible and intergenerational swings, pending on availability of these types of swings at other parks in the area.

Seating:

A combination of seating should be provided including 6' perforated metal benches anchored to 4' wide concrete slabs as well as 6' picnic tables anchored to 5' concrete slabs. A maximum of two units should be provided, in any combination of the above.

Open Space:

The opportunity should exist for a flat grassed open space 15' x 20' in dimensions for supplementary, unorganized play.

Shelters:

Where budgets allow, neighborhood parks are suitable locations for small covered shelters, such as 10' x 20' wood or metal gazebos, either on 7'6" footings or a 5" tapered, brush finished concrete slab. As passive space and use of the park is considered acceptable, these structures provide focal points for small neighborhood gatherings.

Water Access:

Typically, Neighbourhood Parks are not serviced for waste water/water. As neighborhood parks exist adjacent to residential homes with intended stays of 20 minutes to an hour, provision of water source is not recommended.

Washroom Facilities:

Typically, Neighbourhood Parks are not serviced for waste water/water. Portable washroom units are often not desired by abutting residents. As neighborhood parks exist adjacent to residential homes, with intended stays of 20 minutes to an hour, washroom facilities are not recommended.

Waste Receptacles:

Seasonal receptacles are recommended as the probability of food and drink consumption during winter is limited. Seasonal receptacles should be portable in nature, light weight and stackable for maximum efficiency of travel. Portable waste receptacles could potentially match the inserts of their permanent counterparts. Pet waste dispensers should be considered.

Parking:

Limited parking is necessary due to proximity to residential neighborhoods. Pending on location, one or two off road parking spots are desirable.

Bike Racks:

Bike racks should be provided to encourage an alternative to vehicular travel and to encourage healthy means of transportation.

Lighting:

CPTED principles to dictate where park lighting may be required.

Signage:

Parks signage should be clearly placed at all entrances and exits to the Park. Signs should be consistent with City's visual identity program and describe the Park name, its available amenities, contact for repairs (311) and prohibited activities.

Fencing:

Where CSA guidelines require the use of fencing to separate play areas from adjacent roads, a 4' chain link fence is to be installed. Where hard fencing is not a requirement, vegetative deterrents (i.e. hedge) should be considered to separate areas.

Community Park Design Principles

Definition:

A Community Park's primary purpose is to provide the space and supportive facilities needed for active recreation in the community. A Community Park is characterized by sports fields and/or other sports facilities, but often includes opportunities for other uses such as play equipment, paths, picnic areas, or natural areas. A Community Park will often meet nearby residents' needs for a park in their neighborhood (and so is understood to play a dual role as a neighborhood park for that area). However, distinct from a Neighborhood Park, a Community Park is designed to serve the active recreational needs of the wider community.

Additional Characteristics:

A Community Park would service various ages, with emphasis on organized sport group activities and potential protection of natural areas. Community Parks are built and designed typically for a two to three hour experience.

Facilities and Features:

Facilities for active recreation such as sports fields, hard courts, outdoor rinks, field houses, beaches, picnic areas, paths, natural areas. Safe pedestrian and bicycle access, access by public transit, and sufficient parking.

Size:

Typically 2 to 10 hectares.

Service Standard:

1.5 ha per 1000 residents, within 1600m without crossing a major barrier

Proximity:

Should serve the communities and settlement areas, be within a 20 minute walk without crossing major barriers.

Playground Equipment Area:

Ideally, the equipment installed within a play area be a minimum size of 50' x 100'. Common ground surface is sand. Ideally wood chips or engineered wood fiber surfacing to be used, pending available budgets. Synthetic surfaces may be considered where utilization and budgets allow.

Playground Equipment:

A combination of play structures and independent equipment. Play equipment geared to ages 2 to 12. A minimum of two slides (independent or incorporated in to play equipment) to be included. Equipment should encourage adventure and fitness while incorporating and blending into the park's natural setting. Accessibility features such as active play and sensory components to be incorporated. Play structures must include accessibility features. Themed playgrounds to be considered where suitable for the local area/community. Opportunities for adult fitness equipment should be considered.

Swings:

A minimum of two swing bays recommended with a minimum of one belt swing and one infant swing. Accessible and/or intergenerational swings to be included.

Seating:

A combination of seating should be provided including 6' perforated metal benches anchored to 4' wide concrete slabs as well as 6' picnic tables anchored to 5' concrete slabs. A minimum of two units should be provided, in any combination of the above. Additional bleacher seating may be required to support organized play surfaces and courts.

Open Space:

The opportunity should exist for a flat grassed open space 20' x 40' in dimensions for supplementary, unstructured play. This would meet the needs for unorganized use to complement that of the existing fields and courts organized use by way of spectators or by existing neighborhoods. Simultaneous multiple programming, multiple use of Community Parks should be pursued to encourage not only exercise but also to strengthen community bounds as social nexus points. This concept is supported by CPTED principles as being an effective means to combat vandalism and other undesirable activities.

Shelters:

Community Parks are suitable locations for small to medium covered shelters, (10' x 20' to 20' x 40') ideally made of metal materials.

Water Access:

Exterior water fountains should be made available at Community Parks, attached to existing building structures such as canteens, field houses or maintenance buildings.

Washroom Facilities:

Portable washroom facilities to be considered for Community Parks as the parks serve as a hub for more than the immediate neighborhoods' use. Typical stays of two or more hours would necessitate facilities for multiple segments of the population that would require the use of a washroom. Seasonal rental, not permanent installation, should match Park usage programs for organized sporting events.

Waste Receptacles:

Permanently installed waste receptacles are recommended based on the probability of food and drink consumption over the two to three hour site visit. Permanent receptacles should sit on a 3' x 3' concrete pad and be anchored into it. Receptacles should consist of a perforated metal outer sleeve of a 30" diameter that is anchored to the slab with a removable insert that can be replaced as needed. Planned provision of additional portable waste receptacles for organized sporting events should be accounted for as well. Portable waste receptacles could potentially match the inserts of their permanent counterparts. Pet waste dispensers are recommended for Community Parks.

Parking:

Medium sized parking lot (approximately 10 vehicles with dedicated accessible parking) is required as the Community Park services more than the neighborhood and residents can be expected to drive to this location for organized events.

Bike Racks:

Bike racks should be provided to encourage an alternate to vehicular travel and to encourage healthy means of transportation.

Lighting:

Community Park lighting is designed to facilitate active recreation use and as such would match the appropriate criteria for rink, court or field lighting, as per the Parks Design Guidelines. Lighting should be controlled to enable organized sporting event use only. Parking lot lighting should be permanent for safety reasons.

Signage:

Parks signage should be clearly placed at all entrances and exits to the park. Signs should be consistent with the City's visual identity program and describe the park name, its available amenities, contact for repairs (311) and prohibited activities.

Fencing:

Where CSA guidelines require the use of fencing to separate play areas from adjacent roads, a 4' chain link fence is to be installed. Where hard fencing is not a requirement, vegetative deterrents (i.e. hedge) should be considered to separate areas. Sport specific fencing should exist that compliments the use of the court, field or rink and match the guidelines for each.

Prioritizing Investment in Playgrounds

The Parks, Open Space and Leisure Master Plan Review (2014) includes an action item to continue to place a high priority on the maintenance of replacement of play equipment, with consideration to accessibility regulations. A second action item included in the Parks, Open Space and Leisure Master Plan calls for the installation of fully accessible barrier-free playgrounds in the communities of Rayside-Balfour, Nickel Centre and Walden.

An inventory of the 189 municipally owned play structures was completed as per the Finance and Administration report presented on September 20, 2016. This report indicated that 58 of the structures were deemed in poor condition, with replacement required in the next five years. An additional 45 structures were deemed in satisfactory condition. These structures will require replacement within 10 years. Subsequent reports also detailed the capital requirements based on Building Condition Assessments for field house buildings at playground locations.

A business case has been prepared as part of the 2018 Budget Process for capital investment in the 58 structures rated in poor condition as well as necessary upgrades to field houses.

As City capital funds become available, the following criteria are recommended to prioritize which locations are to be invested in:

- Priority neighbourhoods based on socioeconomic factors.
- Neighbourhoods with parkland gaps as per Green Space Advisory Panel reports. Conversely, areas with overlap according to service levels will not be ranked as high.
- Facilities and equipment that is nearing its end of lifecycle or in need of urgent repairs.

- Parks, Open Space and Leisure Master Plan Review recommendations for fully accessible barrier-free playgrounds in Rayside-Balfour, Nickel Centre and Walden.

The Leisure Services Division will work with the City's GIS section to complete a priority ranking for playground investment based on the above.

Summary

Based on the community consultation process for Playground Revitalization as well as the Parks, Open Space and Leisure Master Plan, previous work of the Green Space Advisory Panel, industry trend and best practices and applicable legislation, design guideline principles for Neighbourhood and Community Parks have been developed. A method to prioritize investment in municipal playgrounds has also been outlined. Upon the availability of capital dollars for playground investment the City now has a methodology to revitalize its playground system with the goal of bringing all playgrounds to a minimum standard.

Next Steps

The Business Case regarding Playground Revitalization has been included as part of the 2018 Budget process for Council's consideration.

A priority ranking for investment at municipal playgrounds will be developed in the first quarter of 2018.

A detailed Parks and Playgrounds Design Guideline Manual will be developed by the end of 2018.

References

Playgrounds Report, Finance and Administration Committee (September 20, 2016)

<http://agendasonline.greatersudbury.ca/index.cfm?pg=feed&action=file&agenda=report&itemid=7&id=973>

Playground Revitalization Report, Finance and Administration Committee (April 12, 2017)

<http://agendasonline.greatersudbury.ca/index.cfm?pg=agenda&action=navigator&lang=en&id=1169&itemid=12145>

Playground Revitalization Incremental Report #1, Community Services Committee (June 19, 2017)

<http://agendasonline.greatersudbury.ca/index.cfm?pg=feed&action=file&agenda=report&itemid=5&id=1152>

Parks, Open Space and Leisure Master Plan Review (2014)

([https://www.greatersudbury.ca/sudburyen/assets/File/Leisure%20Master%20Plan%20Review%202014\(1\).pdf](https://www.greatersudbury.ca/sudburyen/assets/File/Leisure%20Master%20Plan%20Review%202014(1).pdf))

Final Report of the Green Space Advisory Panel (June 2010)

http://www.greatersudbury.ca/content/div_planning/documents/GSAP_June_8_with_appendix.pdf