

Background

Playground Revitalization

An information report regarding playgrounds was provided at the Finance & Administration Committee meeting of September 20, 2016. The report provided a an inventory of the City'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. Information requested included:

- A comprehensive review of best practices and policy in regards to parks and playgrounds.
- A review of demographics and needs of playgrounds at a neighbourhood level.
- Consultation with neighbours, children in the area, etc. regarding use of existing playgrounds.
- Considerations for accessibility and various user groups (children, youth, seniors).
- Development of design standards for parks and playgrounds.
- A business case for playground enhancements providing various funding options.

City of Greater Sudbury Playgrounds

The City of Greater Sudbury (City) has a current inventory of 189 playgrounds. This represents a ratio of one for every 87 children, birth to age nine based on 2014 population data. The Parks Open Space and Leisure Master Plan Review (2014) notes that the per capita supply of playgrounds in the City of Greater Sudbury is amongst the highest in Ontario. The Leisure Master Plan notes that the City's numerous small settlement areas and dispersed geographic landscape are part of the reason for the considerable supply.

The Leisure Master Plan identifies that many of the City's playgrounds contain outdated and outmoded play equipment, surface treatments and pathways. The plan also highlights the new built environment regulations of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act which applies to playgrounds installed or redeveloped after 2015.

As part of the Parks Open Space and Leisure Master Plan Review (2014) individuals were surveyed on which activities that anyone in their household participated in during the previous 12 months. 47% of individuals responding indicated that their household made

use of playground equipment. 88% of individuals stated that outdoor leisure facilities, such as playgrounds, are important to their household, however only 50% of individuals responding were satisfied with Greater Sudbury's playgrounds. When asked about what type of facilities individuals support spending additional public funds on, 79% supported additional spending on playgrounds (third out of 22 facility types asked about).

Parks, Open Space and Leisure Master Plan Action Plans

The Parks, Open Space and Leisure Master Plan Review (2014) included a number of action items with respect to play structures, parkland development and design:

- In new or redeveloping urban residential areas, ensure that play structures are provided within an 800-metre radius of every residence without crossing a major arterial road or physical barrier. As per City policy, all new play structures must have a minimum of one play component that is fully accessible. Signage that identifies age-appropriate information should also be provided.
- To improve geographic distribution, locations in Rayside-Balfour, Nickel Centre, and Walden should be considered for the installation of fully accessible barrier-free playgrounds.
- Consider the disposition or re-purposing of surplus playground sites (e.g., those within 400 metres of another playground) within the context of its Parkland Disposal Policy and Green Space Advisory Panel recommendations. Equipment in good repair should be moved to other sites.
- Continue to place a high priority on the maintenance and replacement of play equipment, with consideration to accessibility regulations.
- Integrate the City's inventory of playgrounds (and other leisure assets) within the Geographic Information System to improve analytical tools and future planning.
- Develop a Leisure Facilities Standards Manual to identify facility design standards (e.g. signage, accessibility, support amenities, etc.) to guide the development and redevelopment of leisure facilities.
- In designing parks, continue to:
 - incorporate spaces and amenities encouraging physical activity, wellness, and informal use opportunities;
 - consider the needs of a diverse and aging population through the provision of washrooms, seating, shade/shelter, drinking fountains, pathways, and picnic areas;
 - follow accessibility legislation and guidelines to accommodate persons with disabilities;
 - apply CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) principles;
 - promote designs that encourage sustainable maintenance practices;

- incorporate a balance of native, drought-resistant, and colourful vegetative features;
- utilize materials that are robust, durable, and mindful of future maintenance requirements;
- seek innovative and engaging initiatives that encourage environmental stewardship (e.g., recycling bins);
- encourage public art; and
- encourage active transportation connections and a linked open space system.

Green Space Advisory Panel Recommendations

The Green Space Advisory Panel's 2010 Report, provided a definition of a park classification system and details of each park class including purpose, intended use, facilities and features, size and service area/standard.

The parks classification system recommended by the GSAP allows green space to be classified as one of the following types of parks:

- Neighbourhood Park: to meet the recreational needs of its immediate neighbourhood
- Community Park: to provide the space and supportive facilities needed for active recreation
- Regional Park: to be a focal point for the City as a whole
- Linear Park: to be a connector for people and/or wildlife
- Natural Park: to protect a natural area while meeting residents' needs for passive recreation
- Special Purpose Park (cultural/historical): to protect sites with historic, scientific, cultural, social, or spiritual importance; or to serve a special, specific purpose
- Ecological Reserve: to protect significant natural areas with ecological and/or geological importance, or that capture a characteristic natural feature of the City
- Facilities: while not an official category, the inventory in the 2013 GSAP Interim Report contained land upon which indoor facilities (e.g., community centres, arenas, etc.) are situated

For the purposes of the playground revitalization reports, the following parkland classes are included as part of the review:

Type	Neighborhood Park	Community Park
Purpose	To meet the recreational needs of the neighbourhood.	To provide the space and supportive facilities needed for active recreation in the community.
General Description	Easily accessible neighbourhood park space. May contain play equipment, sand boxes, benches, informal playing fields, natural areas, benches, community gardens, etc, depending on the needs of the neighbourhood.	Developed park that can provide a focus for active recreation. Multi-purpose and catering to all ages. Centrally located close to major residential areas, if possible designed pedestrian access; on arterial or collector roads for ease of community access.
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 trails and other features.	Facilities for active recreation such as sports fields, hard courts, outside rinks, indoor facilities, beaches, picnic areas, paths, natural areas. Safe pedestrian and bicycle access, access by public transit, and sufficient parking.
Size	Typically 0.2 – 1 hectare.	Typically 2 – 10 hectares.
Service Area and Standard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Serves immediate neighbourhood (up to 10 minute walk). •0.25 ha per 1000 residents, within 800m without crossing a major barrier. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Serves a community/settlement area (up to 20 minute walk) •1.5 ha per 1000 residents, within 1600m without crossing a major barrier.

The Green Space Advisory Panel Final Report (2010) also provides a list of green space opportunities along with a rating structure for potential parkland acquisitions. The Interim Green Space Advisory Panel Report (2013) further examined additional green space opportunities and refined existing information. As a result, several gaps for green spaces have been noted by service area for both neighbourhood and community parks. This information will be used as part of the playground revitalization process.

AODA and Play Spaces

The Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation, Ontario Regulation 191/11 and the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA) call for a number of requirements related to outdoor play spaces. Outdoor play spaces are defined as an area that includes play equipment, such as swings, or features such as logs, rocks, sand

or water, where the equipment or features are designed and placed to provide play opportunities and experiences for children and caregivers.

The Standard provides a broad definition of play space in order to allow communities to decide what will meet their needs based on community need, budget and site characteristics (size, opportunities and restrictions).

New or significantly redeveloped, existing outdoor play spaces must meet the following technical requirements:

- incorporate accessibility features such as, but not limited to, sensory and active play components for children and caregivers with various disabilities;
- provide a ground surface that is firm and stable to accommodate users with mobility devices, yet resilient enough to absorb impact for injury prevention in the area around the play equipment; and
- provide sufficient clearance in and around the play space to allow children with various disabilities and their caregivers room to move around the space.

The Standard also requires municipalities to consult on the needs of children and caregivers with various disabilities before building new, or redeveloping existing, play spaces, including consultation with accessibility advisory committees (where established).

Elements such as exterior paths of travel, outdoor public use eating areas, and accessible parking must also meet the requirements specified by the Standard.

Industry Trends

The playground equipment industry has recognized the challenges of attracting children and families away from screen time and providing interesting play opportunities. The following is a summary of trends in the parks and playgrounds industry:

Nature Inspired Playgrounds

Newer playgrounds are being designed to incorporate elements which connect children to the natural environment. Equipment is designed to have the look and feel of rocks, wood, etc. There are also examples of incorporating natural elements as part of playground design.

Playgrounds for All

With AODA requirements, more inclusive playgrounds are being built. Playgrounds are being designed to bring people of all abilities together, to include all types of children within the same play space. Playground manufacturers have also recognized the benefits of designing equipment so that parents can also take part in activities (multi-generational equipment).

Fitness Focused Play

Playgrounds are opportunities to provide physical fitness opportunities, and as such the design of equipment is changing to encourage climbing, balance, strength and coordination. Ropes, webs, obstacles, balance boards and are replacing some of the pieces which are traditional elements like slides, swings and steps.

Adult fitness equipment continues to be part of modern playground design. This equipment often utilizes body weight as a resistance and provides opportunities for individuals to improve core strength, balance and flexibility.

Themed Playgrounds

Many new playgrounds are being designed with a theme such as space, science, music, animals, etc. A playground theme provides an opportunity to design a playground around a neighbourhood's local history or culture.

Sensory and Music Play

Outdoor musical instruments continue to be incorporated as part of playground design. Music stimulates the brain and aids in cognitive and motor development. Children with autism or cognitive issues find challenges with socialization, communication, play and imagination. Sensory play panels encourage exploration and discovery, and provide a "just-right" experience for those seeking sensory stimulation.

Integrated Shade

Manufacturers have recognized the need to provide shade at playgrounds, and have incorporated sails and sun covers into playground design and park furniture.

The Weston Family Parks Challenge

With a commitment of \$5 million over three years, The W. Garfield Weston Foundation launched the Weston Family Parks Challenge to ensure the long-term sustainability of Toronto's parks. Building on the success of the first year, the Ontario Trillium Foundation joined in 2014 with an additional commitment of \$1.125 million towards the initiative.

The Weston Family Parks Challenge supported projects over a three year period which enhanced the natural elements in parks, engaged community partners and offered new solutions to manage and maintain parks. The program sought innovation in park design and partnerships that could be replicated elsewhere.

The organization called Park People authored a report entitled Breaking New Ground, Lessons and Impacts from the Weston Family Parks Challenge. This report provides several recommendations to consider as Greater Sudbury looks to revitalize or possibly repurpose a park. Lessons learned include:

- Engage communities in the long-term stewardship of natural areas
- Support local community park champions
- Keep residents engaged through creative programming
- Use food as a catalyst for community development
- Provide economic and skill-building opportunities

KaBoom!

KaBOOM! is a non-profit organization dedicated to bringing balanced and active play into the daily lives of all kids, particularly those growing up in poverty. KaBoom! has built or improved over 16,700 play spaces, including O'Connor Playground in Greater Sudbury.

The KaBoom! organization also provides information online for communities to utilize for playground build or revitalization projects. Resources include:

- Step by step instructions for community based enhancement projects including instructions for landscaping, seating areas, shading, etc.
- A toolkit designed to walk organizations through the process of how to create a community-build play space.
- Annual reports and studies outlining the importance and benefits of play.

Summary

The Parks, Open Space and Leisure Master Plan as well as Green Space Advisory Panel reports provide the foundation for sound playground planning moving forward. Incorporating AODA requirements and considering industry trends and best practices in playground and parkland design, will result in enhanced public spaces resulting in a high quality of life for City of Greater Sudbury residents.

Next Steps

The second interim Playground Revitalization report scheduled in the fall of 2017 will provide a review of demographics and playground needs at a neighbourhood level. In order to complete this report, the Leisure Services Division will be undertaking the following work:

- Consultation with Community Action Networks and Neighbourhood Playground Associations regarding playground needs and opportunities.
- Engage the community at large (neighbours, children, youth, etc.) regarding suggestions and ideas for playground improvements.
- Observation project at local playgrounds to determine utilization.
- Working with City of Greater Sudbury GIS Division to prioritize neighbourhood profiles and determine priority areas to be considered for playground enhancements.
- Development of design standards and guidelines for Neighbourhood and Community Parks. Design standards and guidelines would include recommendations for types of equipment, seating areas, shade structures, waste receptacles, washroom facilities and other park amenities.

The final Playground Revitalization report will focus on a business case for playground enhancements providing various funding options. The final report will be brought forward as part of the 2018 budget process.

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>

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

Interim Green Space Advisory Panel Report (November 2013)
<https://www.greatersudbury.ca/linkservid/735D205A-BAC2-521F-C7ADE63B79FAFFC7/showMeta/0/>

Pathways to Recreation – Learning about Ontario’s Accessibility Standard for the Design of Public Spaces (Parks and Recreation Ontario)
http://www.prontario.org/index.php/ci_id/9179.htm

Breaking New Ground, Lessons and Impacts from the Weston Family Parks Challenge
https://parkpeople.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Park-People_Breaking-New-Ground-2017.pdf

KaBoom!
<https://kaboom.org>