



Watershed Policy & Planning Committee

River Park/ Sandy Beach/ Britannia Slopes

Public Consultation – Online Survey #2 – April 2011

Deadline for participating in the online survey = Saturday 15 April 2011.

CRV comments are shown in BLUE below...

Engaging in the online consultation *(note: everyone's comments are posted for all to see...)*

How to get involved?

Please join this online consultation to identify your concerns and aspirations for this popular regional park. To share your thoughts simply create an account and then view the topics to comment.

What have we heard so far?

During the public consultation to date, the common themes that have emerged include:

- The park is and should be for the use of all citizens.
- A management plan must preserve the natural state of the park and focus on its long-term sustainability.
- The plan should be limited to restoring the park to its natural state and not include developments that will attract more users.
- The park needs improved maintenance.

To get a fuller sense of the public input to date, please visit the project web site at: www.calgary.ca/riverpark. Information on this web site includes: updates, results of the 2011 public consultation events, park maps, background information and results from the 2009 key stakeholder group and public consultations.

When will it happen?

Right now! The consultation will be open from April 4th to April 15th. We hope you stay engaged in this process. Please do so in the spirit of finding common ground and finding solutions that will keep the best interests of the park at the heart of the discussion.

Thanks again for joining this discussion and your contributions to ensuring the park is enjoyable, healthy and sustainable for current and future generations.

Size and Location of Off-Leash Area in River Park

A common theme communicated by the public in the engagement process to date was a need to ensure the park is more sustainable and restore health to the park. There have been a variety of suggestions as to the appropriate amount of on-leash, off-leash and restoration areas that should be provided within the 24-hectare River Park. There was general agreement that off-leash areas should not be located on steep slopes (i.e. slopes over 15%) or densely vegetated areas, in order to protect dogs, their owners and the environment. At the May 19th World Cafe public workshop, many citizens felt the River Park off-leash area should be reduced from 100% to 30%.

What proportion of the River Park off-leash area do you think would satisfy all park users?

- 1/3 (8 hectares) of the 24 hectare River Park area?
- 1/2 (12 hectares) of the 24 hectare River Park area?
- 2/3 (16 hectares) of the 24 hectare River Park area?

CRV COMMENTS:

Either 2/3 (16 ha) or 1/2 (8 ha) is likely the most viable option – removing the northern-most portion where a large ravine runs down to the river as well as a few narrow strips along the margins. This area should accommodate (a) the physical requirements of every breed of dog, and (b) the typical maximum number of dogs present and under control of their owners/guardians on any day.

These are “likely the most viable” options because this section of the park (a) is already familiar to many off-leash area users; (b) is *relatively* flat, sparsely vegetated and straightforward to maintain; (c) is already bounded along the east edge by an existing fence at the top of the escarpment; and (d) is large enough to accommodate a large population of dogs and dog-owners with minimal conflicts (i.e., large enough to allow confrontations to disperse).

The River Park off-leash area would be a good site for dedicated dog-and-owner facilities and amenities such as agility circuits, training corrals, water fountains, etc, which, if planned and built in conjunction with others across the city, could reduce overall stresses on Parks infrastructure and environmentally significant areas.

Turf Management

Experts advise that maintaining grass within an off leash area in River Park will require a rigorous turf management program – similar to a sports field. It will require the use of turf grasses (unfortunately native grasses will not survive with such high usage), irrigation, aeration, nutrients, and a rest period every few years. Some have suggested that the off leash area within River Park must be rotated to allow for turf restoration. This means a large area of the park would be “under restoration” each year, and the location of the off-leash area would change each year.

- Would this approach be acceptable?
- If you find this approach to be acceptable, how can those areas “under restoration” be physically closed in a way that will be acceptable to the majority of park users? Movable fencing? Temporary Signage?
- Should trails within the “under restoration” area be open or closed?

CRV COMMENTS:

Seasonal restrictions on park use would be very helpful, whether they are related to turf-management cycles or the life stages of local or migratory species (e.g., nesting, brooding). The closure of specific areas for restoration or conservation should be accomplished through fencing and ample explanatory signage. Fencing may be temporary but should not be easily movable. Trails within closed areas should also be closed.

Delineation of On and Off-Leash Areas

We heard that many people want a clear delineation between on-leash and off-leash areas. What approach or combination of approaches is needed to achieve this?

- Signage at major entry points?
- Signage throughout the park?
- Permanent signage?
- Temporary signage?
- Permanent fencing (at what height)?
- Movable fencing (at what height)?
- Planting (at what height)?

CRV COMMENTS:

All of the above... “No dogs” areas must be clearly identified and delineated permanently, including family-oriented areas as well as sensitive habitat and restoration areas. People enter the park at many points, so clear signage is needed throughout the park and prominently on Parks’ web page. Fencing should be designed appropriately to discourage

dogs and people, as specific conditions dictate – snow fencing may be adequate in some places, post & cable in others, but hopefully nothing as drastic as the Southland Park treatment will be necessary here. In any case, monitoring and enforcement will be mandatory in order to manage the park to achieve multiple objectives.

Restricted Parking in Lots

We also heard suggestions to restrict parking in off-street lots.

Would you support a 2 or 3-hour time limits in parking lots?

Other than signs, enforcement and fines, what could be done within the park to discourage illegal and overflow parking (e.g. on the Sandy Beach access road or on the turf at River Park)?

CRV COMMENTS:

Pathways should border the roads to passively discourage people from parking on the turf. For example, a pervious path along 14A Street or other open turf areas could suffice. Time-sensitive restrictions could discourage people from parking their vehicles in the park for off-park purposes. Special parking permits could be made available for special circumstances. Alternative forms of transportation should also be accommodated, with the provision of bicycle racks and lockups (in accordance with demand).

Currently, River Park is the “go-to” park for a large proportion of the city’s population. Reducing the regional demand for access to this park would help to relieve its problems from parking and over-use. However, this needs to be part of an integrated city-wide strategy, where significant regional parks and public open spaces are developed and promoted in a comprehensive planning process.

Re-design Parking at Sandy Beach

There seems to be general agreement not to add or expand parking lots in the park at this time, but participants have suggested the lot at Sandy Beach could be improved to be more efficient and effectively accommodate more cars within its current boundaries.

What do you think should happen at the lot at Sandy Beach?

CRV COMMENTS:

We should avoid covering parking lots in flood plains or over alluvial aquifers with impervious materials. Parking stalls could be delineated by narrow plantings or coloured fencing (e.g., post & cable) that is tall enough to be visible above an average car bumper or snow drift.

Adding or Removing Trails

There are many undesignated, informal trails in the parks contributing to erosion.

Where is it most important to reduce the number of undesignated trails?

Should any new trails or pathways be added elsewhere in the parks?

CRV COMMENTS:

The most critical areas to conserve and protect are in riparian areas and areas contributing directly to the health of the river corridor. These include all ravines, escarpments and other areas that are conducive to wildlife movement and life stages. Any proposed new

pathways must incorporate basic principles of maintaining and managing open spaces in an ecologically sustainable state, and must avoid areas of natural significance. Ideally, they would lead to increased efficiencies in moving and managing people and dogs throughout the park.

Additionally, consideration should be given to upgrading or enhancing the pathway along the top of the escarpment, because that alignment invariably attracts considerable traffic. Upgrades could include porous surface materials, appropriate slopes for natural drainage, and occasional viewing locations. Care should be taken to address any issues of ecological sensitivity or geophysical instability.

Fencing on Regional Pathway

Conflicts between bicycles, dogs and people on the regional pathway were identified as an issue. Some participants felt more signage and enforcement may help, but others thought they did not go far enough.

Which of the following physical mitigation strategies should be considered, if any?

- Widening the regional pathway
- Fencing along the edge of the regional pathway where it is adjacent to an off-leash area

CRV COMMENTS:

Both of these suggestions may be appropriate.

- A wider pathway may be suitable in the Sandy Beach area, to help mitigate conflicts between disparate user groups (families, cyclists, roller-bladers, leashed dogs, etc).
- Fencing along the pathway may be useful where disparate user groups cannot be separated, and would reduce incidents caused by off-leash dogs that have escaped their masters' control.

Restoration – Other Priority Areas

In addition to the riparian areas, what other areas should be a priority for restoration and additional tree planting?

CRV COMMENTS:

In general, parking lots benefit from additional vegetation – for pre-treatment of stormwater, erosion control and aesthetics, and to help delineate parking stalls. If done well, it can also provide for certain types of wildlife refuge throughout the day and night. The escarpment needs to be maintained as well, especially since heavy usage is often seen along the tops of embankments. Upper reaches of the natural ravine (i.e., near 38th Avenue) have been identified in the past as a candidate for naturalization – including an enhanced wetland and day-lighted stream. On the Britannia Slopes side, a comprehensive survey of natural drainage patterns (surface and sub-surface) would help to identify potential areas of significance for protection or restoration, and appropriate plantings.

Stairs at Britannia Slopes

There seems to be general agreement that some trails on Britannia Slopes need restoration and some of the informal trails need to be eliminated.

There is general agreement that the trail from south end of Britannia Drive down to the bridge/ regional pathway (about 400 metres long, about a 5-minute walk downhill) should be improved,

without asphalt paving if possible. But, other comments we heard (and the large number of shortcut trails to the bridge/ regional pathway) indicate that some park users want a shorter path to the bridge. Because the slope is too steep for a shorter trail, stairs are the only option. Stairs are currently successfully used at McHugh Bluff in Crescent Heights (across Memorial Drive from Prince's Island).

Should stairs be part of the plan at Britannia Slopes?

CRV COMMENTS:

Subject to a geotechnical assessment of the stability of the slope, a set of stairs may be a beneficial feature. However, desire-lines do not necessarily justify further braiding of the escarpment, which is what a staircase would effectively create. Other alternatives should also be considered, such as a spiral staircase with integrated ramps (as at some LRT stations), along with the removal of the sloping pathway altogether.

Water Use

We heard that some people would like dedicated access points for different user groups to access the river. There are limited opportunities for water access including:

- Below Sandy Beach on the west side
- Near the bridge on the west side
- Near the bridge on the east side

Are any of these areas a better point of access for; a) rafters b) dogs or c) should there be no dedicated access points?

Please note that access to the Lower Reservoir (south of Sandy Beach) is for pedestrians and bikes only. Reopening the Lower Reservoir for vehicle access is not an option due to access restrictions to the water treatment plant.

CRV COMMENTS:

Questions of the park's "carrying capacity" need to be addressed before dedicated access points are proposed, including an estimate of the Lower Elbow River's ability to sustain human recreational activities without damaging its overall ecological integrity. There have been pilot projects in other parks and the success of these initiatives needs to be assessed prior to implementing them here. For example, dog-access structures in Southland Park, dog-access areas in Bowmont Park, rafting access in Bowness and Baker Parks, and many informal but popular access points throughout the city.

Many participants in earlier consultation sessions commented that on-river and along-river recreational activities should not be provided at the expense of water quality or natural habitat (aquatic, avian or terrestrial). Seasonal restrictions are probably the most appropriate solution in this regard. If access points are provided, they need to be formally dedicated, multi-purpose, clearly demarcated, well-managed and enforced (as necessary).

Overall, the self-sustainability of the entire park should be the plan's primary objective. Minimizing the need for human interventions and active management is critical to the provision of major open spaces like River Park, Sandy Beach and Britannia Slopes. While concerns have consistently been raised about the intensity of human and canine use in this park, the level of use is only expected to increase in the near future. If the current mix of uses is necessary for the park-using public, then the intensity of park management initiatives can only be expected to increase as well.