Urban Parks in the Future (Calgary)

Joe Pavelka PhD
Mount Royal University
Urban Parks
Urban Parks

Environmental services
- Air/water filtration, noise reduction, micro-climate stabilization

Psychological services
- Reduce stress, respite, stability

Social services
- Provide a space for positive social integration

(Chiesura, 2004) The role of urban parks for the sustainable city, Landscape and Urban Planning 68 125-138
Leisure Context of Parks

1890s to 1950s – Early development
- Initial rise of leisure culture
- Rationale leisure movement respite

1950s to 1980s – Identify with Leisure
- Rise of recreation, sport, park-types, arts,
- Functional equivalents

1980s to Present – Consuming Leisure as Identity
- Leisure consumer culture as a way of life
- Rise of concern and causes (life-politics)
- Parks relate to identity-causes – commuting, food production, sustainability and urban culture
About Calgary
### About Calgary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Calgary</th>
<th>National Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population (1,214,839)</td>
<td>12.6 increase since 2006</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 and Older</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 to 64 (working population)</td>
<td>71.9%</td>
<td>68.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 to 14 children</td>
<td>18.3%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Families (330,625)</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English as mother tongue</td>
<td>70.9%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speak English Only</td>
<td>80.3%</td>
<td>85.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
About Calgary

• Consumer prices in Toronto are 6.05% LOWER than Calgary;
• Rent Prices in Toronto are 15.10% HIGHER than in Calgary
• Restaurant Prices in Toronto are 12.42% LOWER than in Calgary
• Groceries Prices in Toronto are 9.75% LOWER than in Calgary
• Local Purchasing Power in Toronto is 11.23% LOWER than in Calgary

http://www.numbeo.com/cost-of-living/compare_cities.jsp?country1=Canada&city1=Calgary&country2=Canada&city2=Toronto
Purpose of the Research

What is the vision of (urban) parks in 30 years?

What is required to achieve that vision?
Methodology

• Qualitative focus group and workshop setting with internal (City of Calgary) and external (community representatives);
  ▫ Each session was two hours in length;
  ▫ Facilitator and two recorders;
  ▫ Each session averaged 16.8 attendees;
• Data was transcribed and analyzed using content analysis
• Data interpretation occurred first by the researcher than triangulated with two other researchers
Community Input Sessions

- Total of nine (9) sessions
- 3 separate groups of City of Calgary Parks
- 1 City of Calgary employees (variety of departments and disciplines)
- 4 community leader/representative groups
- 1 with private sector Landscape Architects and Architects
Questions

1. Identify four ways Calgary’s parks have changed in the past 20 twenty years (or so)
2. Why did those changes come about – what factors precipitated that change?
3. Describe the ideal park – all the features you can think of;
4. What is your vision for parks 30 years from now in the year 2040?
5. What is Calgary’s park system not doing/providing today that it should in the future?
6. What is your biggest concern for Calgary’s park system going ahead in the future?
7. What are the three most important things Calgary Parks can do move closer to the ideal park system of the future?
Past Changes to Parks

The past 20 years of change to parks is characterized as more volume, complexity and diversity – less funding – additional focus on environmental sustainability

- More specialized uses (off-leash, river parks, skateparks, different classes of parks, fitness parks, neighborhood parks etc.)
- Driven by special needs (sport groups, culture)
- Stagnant funding in relation to growth
- Increased concerns around water use, naturalized parks, pesticide use,
Most Desirable Park Features

Most desirable park features are connectivity and accessibility

- Fully integrated park system incorporating water, cyclists, recreationists, environmental managers, wildlife and food production;
- Avoid driving my car to ride my bike;
- Integration of large and small parks to form corridors
- A park system so imbedded in the city that there is little if any demarcation park and non-park space
- Responsive and flexible system
- Financially sustainable and ‘realistic’
“parks are integrated into the overall design of the community and its buildings and that they are connected, they are for nature and people to use and to preserve natural areas in the new developments”
Ideal Park Descriptors

Ideal ways to describe the future park are connectivity, education, inspiration and sustainable

- Connecting people to nature (outdoor classrooms)
- Education of users on value and etiquette
- Social gathering place
New Features and Processes

*Few ‘new’ processes and features were identified but for:*

- More comprehensive planning and consultation;
- Household ‘park’ tax to denote different levels of maintenance;
- Permitting commercial food and drink in parks;
- Food gardens and rooftop gardens;
- More culturally relevant parks, park apps and technology;
- More education on the value of parks
Concerns for Future of Parks

That urban parks will be run down, irrelevant, and loose autonomy

- Concerns over park system, the park agency, and overall communication and education;
- Focus on ‘lawn-mowing’ equates to financial ruin;
- Influence of external stakeholders (e.g. development industry)
- Minimum standards means ‘boring’ parks – greatest threat to parks (irrelevant);
- Diversity and complexity is not likely to abate
How to Move into the Future

Planning process that includes customer focus, strong communication of the story:

- Internal and external support
- Predictable funding
- Minimize influence of development industry
- Education and communication of the back-story of parks (what we do and why)
A Question that emerged
Would you live in Calgary if not for your job and family?
Summary

• The role of urban parks in the identity of the city;
  ▫ Life-politics and use and support of urban parks
• The role of urban in technological respite
  ▫ Fully integrated technological parks cafes, playgrounds, festival areas, etc.
  ▫ Hubs of technology with more unsupported space
  ▫ Blocked wifi parks emphasis on nature
• Communication of the story of parks with
  ▫ High connection to the health/medical field
Thank you

Joe Pavelka PhD
Mount Royal University
Jpavelka@mtroyal.ca

Heather Stewart
Parks Strategy Development
Heather.stewart@calgary.ca