

Parks & Open Spaces

Led by: Director of Parks & Open Spaces

Service Description

Calgary's parks and open spaces are cherished places that connect Calgarians with nature, our heritage and each other. The citywide parks system provides Calgarians with safe, inclusive, active-living opportunities. The system includes regional and neighbourhood parks, natural areas and the river valleys. The service maintains and stewards almost 8,700 hectares of public spaces (the equivalent of 11,000 football fields spread out citywide over 5,200 parcels of land). Parks and Open Spaces conserves and promotes biodiverse ecosystems and cultural landscapes. It supports park stewardship among Calgarians through volunteer and education programs.

Service Updates

Key Service Results

Awards

Calgary's Child Magazine - 2023
Parents' Choice Award - Best
Accessible/Inclusive Experience for Kids

Opening in 2023, Haskayne Legacy Park is Calgary's first regional park to open in over a decade. The new 126-hectare city regional park, in northwest Calgary, allows Calgarians to experience traditional western ranchlands alongside spectacular mountain, river and prairie views.

Parks & Open Spaces (P&OS) Initiative 1 highlights included an accessible playgrounds map, which allows users to find inclusive playgrounds throughout the city. It is now available through The City's public map gallery.

P&OS worked with Recreation Opportunities to deliver city golf courses' busiest season yet, with 56,000 more golf rounds than in 2022. P&OS Initiative 6 successes included winter and night golf pilots, the use of golf scooters and the All Abilities Championship.

The traditional land use project (P&OS Initiative 7), worked with the 8 Nations to create Elder recordings that share stories of the landscape for park visitors to experience. Each Elder was paired with an emerging artist from the same Nation to create a visual interpretation of the stories. This cultural learning opportunity is a small step in the journey toward reconciliation and celebrating unique traditions and practices.

Service Challenges

In recent years, there has been an increase in real and perceived safety concerns in downtown parks for the public and City staff. In response, the service is working closely with enforcement and outreach partners to optimize public safety strategies. Ongoing initiatives to address park safety include: park activations (free events) to encourage more Calgarians into parks, enhanced communication between partners and increased staff training and awareness.

The service worked towards full implementation of a new Parks Asset Reporting and Information System (PARIS 2.0) for greater insight and accuracy on parks data for sustainable improvement for operations. Technical challenges include integration with the 3-1-1 system and large-scale staff training requirements. We added more resources to this project and collaborated with Information Technologies and Human Resources.

Capital project challenges included inflation and internal supply delays, impacting cost estimates and timelines.

Trends & Potential Uncertainties

An anticipated increase in severe weather events such as flooding, hailstorms, wildfire and drought may impact our parks and open spaces, which could result in public safety issues, budget impacts due to potential damages, expensive repairs, lost revenue and restricted public access. Risk mitigation includes capital projects such as park flood protection, our business continuity plan, and general resiliency efforts.

Funding constraints and other challenges may result in lower ecological health in parks and open spaces. P&OS mitigation strategies include working with other City services on habitat restoration projects (e.g., naturalizing roadways), implementing the 2023-26 capital budget for new habitat restoration work and more community education and outreach.



Measuring Our Performance

Legend

— Actuals

■ Expected Future Performance

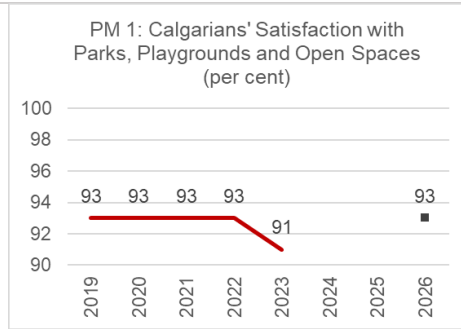
→ Progressing as planned

⊖ Not progressing as planned

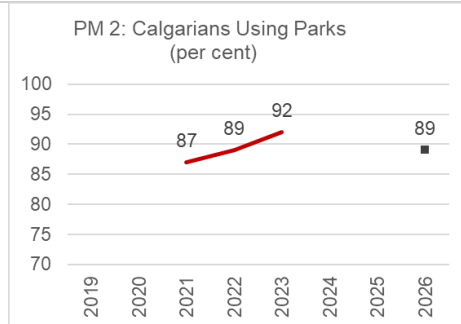
Performance Measures

Story behind the numbers

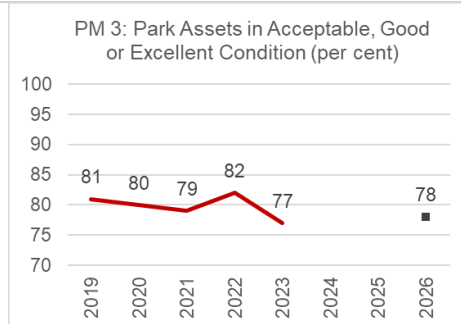
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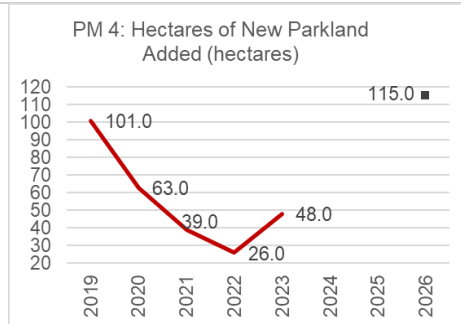
Calgary's parks have consistently scored high since the introduction of the annual Calgarian satisfaction survey. The 91 per cent score is from the 2023 Spring Survey of Calgarians Report. The slight decline may reflect the lower usage of parks in the winter months by Calgarians and the stress the system absorbed during high usage during the pandemic. For 2023-26, P&OS aims to maintain high public satisfaction with requested funding to maintain current service levels (with annual growth funding) and lifecycle capital funding for repairs and replacements of aging park amenities.



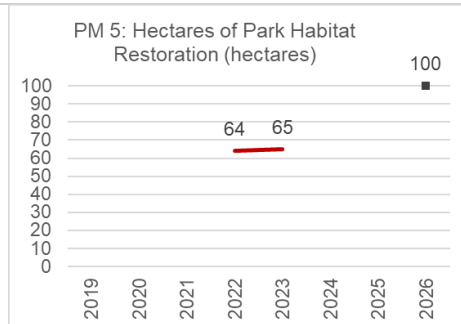
This Pulse on Parks survey result reveals the percentage of Calgarians who reported using parks in months without snow (April-September) in 2023. The 92 per cent year-end score, which is two per cent higher than the 2026 expected future performance, reflects the important role that parks play for Calgarians in providing spaces and opportunities to connect with nature, heritage, and each other. The service aims to increase the use of parks in winter months with the continuation and expansion of cold-weather park attractions (such as skating, cross-country ski trails, firepits, etc.).



This performance measure captures the percentage of our municipal park infrastructure rated as 'acceptable', 'good' or 'excellent' condition (as opposed to park infrastructure in need of repairs or replacement and rated as 'poor' or 'failing'). As park assets decline with age, the scores are also expected to decline, as reflected by the 77 per cent score for 2023. For 2023-26, P&OS prioritized lifecycle funding as part of its capital requests to help mitigate the declining condition of parks assets.



As Calgary grows, The City adds new parkland from developers, land acquisitions, etc. In 2023, 48 hectares (ha) of new parkland was added to the municipal parks system. Since 2017, 423 ha of new growth was absorbed, however, total funding per ha has decreased, despite funding additions in 2023. While growth drives efficiencies, the impacts also include lower maintenance levels (e.g., longer grass). For 2023-26, P&OS is slated to receive growth and inflation funding to help maintain 2022 service levels. Note: 2021 value has been updated to 39 ha due to a data reporting error.



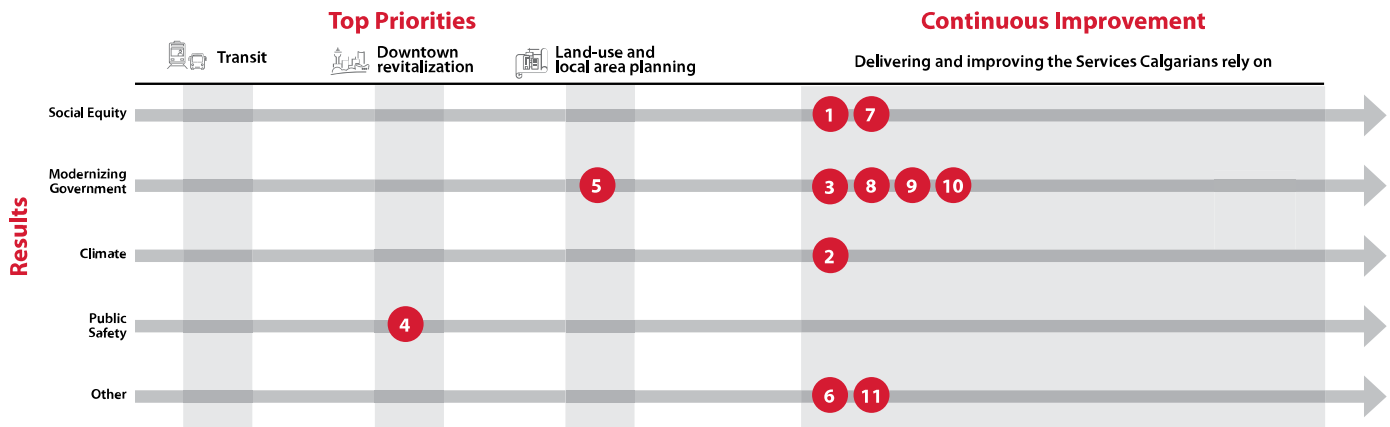
Park habitat restoration improves Calgary's ecological health and climate resilience. Due to capital funding constraints and no capital funding for this work in 2019-22, habitat restoration is projected to only reach approximately 45 per cent of The City's goal to restore 20 per cent of open space by 2025. The approved 2023-26 capital budget will help improve progress towards expected future performance, with new projects initiated and in the planning stage in 2023. P&OS plans to restore approximately 100 hectares of priority parks to improve ecological health and climate adaptation.











Progress on Service Delivery

Alignment with Council Refined Priorities and Result Areas



- Legend**
- ✔ Completed
 - ➡ Progressing as planned
 - ⊖ Not progressing as planned
 - ⏻ Not started
 - 1 Initiative number

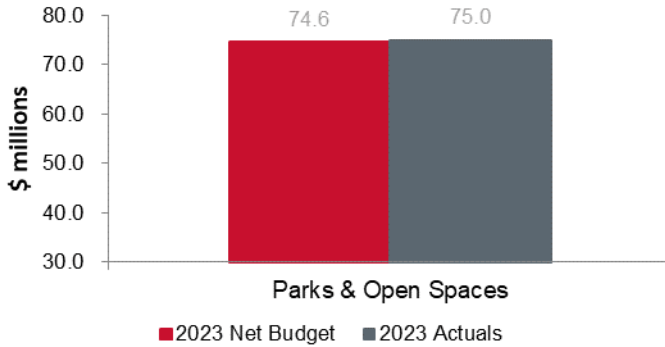
Initiative	Initiative Update	Status
1 Enhance the quality of life of Calgarians, Parks and Open Spaces by providing safe, inclusive, vibrant and accessible parks and open spaces.	The accessible playgrounds map, which allows users to find inclusive playgrounds throughout the city, became available in 2023 through The City's public map gallery. Capital highlights included the opening of Bow to the Bluff Corridor, Balmoral Circus, and Haskayne Legacy Park, Calgary's first regional park to open in over a decade. The new 126-hectare city regional park is in northwest Calgary and allows Calgarians to experience traditional western ranchlands alongside spectacular mountain, river and prairie views.	➡
2 Support climate resilience, focusing on improving the health of the ecological network, through the development and implementation of Habitat Management Plans.	The Ecological Network (EN) model was integrated into policy and open data layer. Climate & Environment is applying the EN to park planning in new community development. The approved 2023-2026 capital budget for habitat restoration will help improve progress on this initiative. In 2023, the Weaselhead Habitat Management Plan (HMP) completed restoration feasibility and external engagement. It is now in the process of internal engagement. Three additional HMPs are in planning stages (Edworthy, Douglasdale, Weaselhead and J.H. Woods parks).	➡
3 Assist and encourage commercial activities in City parks by continuing to improve processes for interested businesses and citizens who can enhance the park user experience.	In 2023, we introduced our updated Vendors in Parks guidelines that brought more transparency to the program and updated the fee structure to be more in line with the market. We increased from 13 to 15 summer vendors over the last year, with five new activations and saw a revenue increase. One of our newest vendors, Parc du Café, in North Glenmore Park has been getting great media coverage, and is thrilled with the program and plans to expand to other parks. This vendor is unique as they are also able to activate in the winter supporting increased connection to our parks in the colder months.	➡
4 Support downtown revitalization to increase community safety and enhance Calgarians' experiences in our downtown parks and open spaces by working with our partners, including public sector, private sector and non-government organizations.	We supported downtown revitalization by partnering with Calgary Downtown Association to activate three parks, supported winter events like Chinook Blast and prepared Prince's Island Park Lagoon skating rink. The Tipi Project created 'pop-up' gathering spaces for 26 downtown cultural activations. The Washroom Attendant Pilot Project, a pilot to improve public safety, attended 10,489 washroom visits at Olympic Plaza and Century Gardens. The pilot review included feedback from partners, which will be used in recommendations for a broader Public Washroom Strategy led by Community Strategies.	➡
5 Improve the sustainability and resiliency of Calgary's parks and open spaces system by updating the Parks Open Space Plan which is the overarching policy that governs use, provision and preservation of our municipal parks system.	Phase 1 and 2 public engagement for Connect: Calgary's Parks Plan, has provided clear policy direction for draft plan development. P&OS has partnered with Planning & Development Services (PDS) to finalize park policy creation; as a result, Connect content will now be split between PDS's new Calgary Plan and P&OS's Connect Plan. The plans will jointly guide how The City will develop and manage an exceptional, inclusive and sustainable parks system into the coming decades. Given this new approach, Connect project timelines will need to shift to honour and complement the Calgary Plan's timeline.	➡

Initiative	Initiative Update	Status
6 Maintain community connections and Calgarians' wellness by providing year-round amenities and activities, including winter activities and new attractions as opportunities arise.	P&OS service levels declined slightly in 2023 but will resume 2022 service levels in 2024. In 2023, new cold-weather park programs and amenities introduced during the pandemic provided the public with safe, fun and healthy activities during the winter (e.g., outdoor skating ponds, firepits), and a new skating rink was added in West Confederation Park. We worked with Recreation Opportunities to deliver city golf courses' busiest season yet, with 56,000 more golf rounds than in 2022. Initiatives included winter and night golf pilots, the use of golf scooters and the All Abilities Championship.	
7 Celebrate Calgary's past and strengthen The City's commitment to Truth and Reconciliation by continuing to maintain and celebrate Calgary's historic and cultural landscapes.	We partnered with the Koo Family on the Chinese Market Gardens on an archaeological study and found an original root cellar. Public tours of the site helped Calgarians to celebrate our past. Other cultural learning opportunities in 2023 included the Tipi Project (see P&OS Initiative 4) and the traditional land use project. The traditional land use project worked with the 8 Nations to create Elder recordings that share stories of the landscape for park visitors to experience. Each Elder was paired with an emerging artist from the same Nation to create a visual interpretation of the stories.	
8 To maintain Calgary's high quality parks and open space system, Parks and Open Spaces will continue exploring new funding mechanisms and partnerships that can provide value and benefits for Calgarians.	P&OS has entered into a short-term agreement for Millennium Park activation and are continuing negotiations to achieve a long-term sponsorship and activation agreement to enhance this park and create a true festivals and events location in the downtown. Additionally, the Parks Sponsorship Plan, a plan to explore options for identifying future opportunities for revenue generation and partnerships to support parks improvements, started in 2023 and will be finalized in 2024.	
9 Connect more Calgarians with their parks and open spaces system by developing and implementing a marketing and communications strategy to engage Calgarians on the value and benefits of using parks and accessing nature in the city.	Since implementing an updated social media strategy on July 1, 2023, we have reached 1.4 million viewers for our social media content on Facebook, a growth of 203 per cent from July-December 2023. During this period, we observed 24,100 interactions with our social media content (up 310 per cent) and 20,500 link clicks (up 106 per cent) when compared to the first six months of 2023. Increased frequency of updates to our webpages on calgary.ca, updated parks signage and good news stories in Calgary newsroom have increased awareness of parks and open spaces amenities and services.	
10 Support continuous improvement of the service by exploring more data and technology options to improve decision making, sustainability and service delivery.	A major and complex transition is underway for our Geographic Information System-based asset management and work tracking information system. This new system aims to help optimize processes, reporting and provide more data-based decision making for the service. The new system is expected to be implemented for the upcoming 2024 summer season. In 2023, the Customer Level of Service (CLOS) pilot started: CLOS is a model being used to assess our service delivery standards to aid in optimizing resources and decision making. It will continue in 2024 as more data will be gathered on park conditions.	
11 Provide a safe and healthy environment for park users, employees, contractors and volunteers by strengthening commitments to safety and well being.	The service is strongly focused on the continuous improvement of health, safety and environmental improvements for its staff, customers and partners. Ongoing initiatives to address park safety include: park activations (free events) to encourage more Calgarians into the parks, enhanced communication between partner organizations and increased staff training and awareness.	



Service Updates on Financial Performance

**Net Operating Budget and Actuals
as of December 31, 2023**



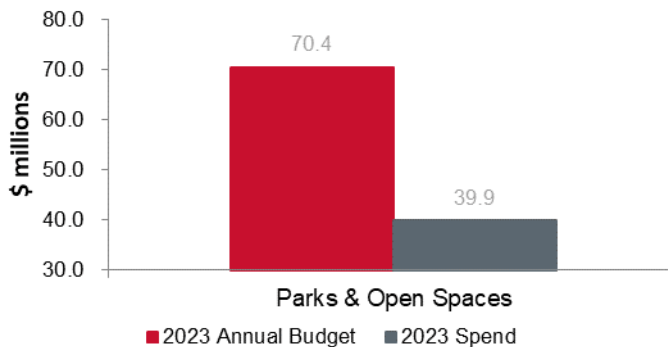
Operating Budget Updates - 2023 net operating budget vs actuals:

Parks & Open Spaces (P&OS) has an unfavourable operating variance of \$0.4 million. The primary drivers of the variance were tied to a significant increase in homeless camp cleanup and a mowing contractor unable to fulfill 50.0 per cent of their contract. To meet service demands hourly on-call contractors were used at a higher cost.

In 2023, P&OS Business Unit was on budget, however, resources were reallocated between service lines creating offsetting variances in response to changing service needs. Base and one-time funding totaling \$1 million was used to target critical repairs, lifecycle replacements and irrigation equipment. Revenues from playfield bookings remained at pre-COVID-19 levels in 2023 after initial recovery in 2022.

A big success for P&OS was the Customer Level of Service (CLOS) pilot, which is aimed at standardizing service delivery citywide by improving data collection to optimize resources and enhance equitable service decision making. In 2024, the CLOS model will be expanded as more data is collected citywide. Working with all Nations, including the Métis, was a big focus for P&OS in 2023: we delivered the Tipi Project, sweetgrass transplanting ceremony and Land Acknowledgement Signage initiatives and started discussions for the Elder Guiding Circle.

**Capital Budget and Spend as of December
31, 2023**



Capital Budget Updates - 2023 total capital budget vs 2023 spend:

Parks & Open Spaces has spent 56.7 per cent of the 2023 approved capital budget. The underspend is mainly attributed to projects deferred due to resourcing capacity; related to staff vacancies and increased project volume. It was also impacted by procurement delays: bids received well over approved budgets resulting in extended timelines for contractor negotiations, re-tendering and needed resolution of funding deficits. Projects also needed extended timelines for public engagement, site assessments and detail planning and design before construction.

In 2023, the capital expenditures have been primarily used to complete the new Haskayne regional park and several other smaller park improvements including completion of the "Bow to the Bluff" corridor. Substantial work was also completed on Humpty Hollow Park.