



Official Community Plan

Nelson 2050

Leading the way, together.

# OCP 1-Pager Series: Parks & Recreation

When we think of Nelson and nature, the vast forests and mountains that surround the city probably come to mind first. But that doesn't mean that our municipal parks and recreation services are any less important: whether it's playgrounds, indoor facilities like the NDCC, Lakeside Park and its beach, or one of the several neighbourhood parks that allow you to go for a stroll within walking distance of home, it's important to properly plan for parks and recreation, particularly as our population grows. In a 2023 survey, 64% of Canadian city dwellers stated that they visit a park at least twice a week.<sup>1</sup> Parks and recreation planning touches on all three guiding principles of the 2024 Official Community Plan (OCP): equity, health, and climate action.

## Parks: Quantity or Quality?

The debate over whether to prioritize the quantity or quality of parks within a city is complex. On the one hand, a higher *quantity* of parks may enhance accessibility and proximity, and provide green spaces for a larger population, fostering a sense of community and promoting physical well-being. Conversely, emphasizing the quality of parks can allow us to focus our attention on environmental sustainability, design (aesthetic appeal and practical services), and overall user satisfaction. Striking the right balance is pivotal to cater to diverse needs and preferences, ultimately contributing to the overall well-being of residents.

### Quantity

How much parkland does a city need? The World Health Organization (WHO) states that the minimum acceptable level is 0.9 hectares per 1,000 people, but that the ideal is 5 hectares.

Within city limits alone, Nelson has around 61 hectares of parkland, or 5.49 ha per 1,000 residents. We thus surpass even the aspirational target for park land, having enough for a population of 12,200, which Nelson is expected to attain in 6 to 7 years. This situates us between Vancouver (only 1.8 ha per 1,000 inhabitants) and Kelowna at 8.8 hectares. Even then, Kelowna aims for 2.2 hectares per 1,000

The WHO also recommends ensuring parks within 300m of all homes, however Nelson does not have enough neighbourhood parks to reach that goal.

The current OCP calls for a few new parks and trails, such as a north shore trail, the formalization of Red Sands Beach, and a waterfront park closer to downtown.

### Quality

A park is only as successful as its design: having a park is not enough, it has to be a well-designed, high-quality public space if it is to become a beloved neighbourhood destination.

The 2023 Canadian City Parks Report<sup>1</sup> calls on cities to refocus on park quality: "If a park is within a five minute walk, but it has none of the amenities you need, or you don't feel safe, or everything feels run down—well, you may be disinclined to use it much," a statement backed up by their public survey data. It invites cities to focus less on creating new parks and more on maintaining existing, aging assets. Extreme climate events are causing more and more costly damage to parks.

Across Canada, resources are indeed lacking to maintain what's already there. The percentage of Canadians who consider that their city's parks are well cared for fell from 78% to 65% between 2021 and 2023, but over half of municipalities report facing burnout and overwork of parks staff.<sup>1</sup>

## Recreation

Nelson's Parks and Recreation Master Plan goes back to 2014 and was a joint project with the Regional District of Central Kootenay, which also manages the NDCC (Nelson & District Community Complex). At the time, public satisfaction levels with Nelson's indoor recreation facilities were already very high according to a survey.

A lot has changed since the plan's release in 2014, notably the NDCC's major renovation. The plan also proposed seeking to use school gyms for all-ages recreation programming on evenings and weekends.

The Regional District will engage in public engagement this year on the Nelson recreation campus that will inform a new long-term plan to renew infrastructure and better meet the needs of the population.

## Opportunities

### Healthier Lifestyles

Investment in recreation infrastructure is an investment in public health. A study last year in Peterborough, ON found that the development of a small urban park will result in annual health system benefits and savings of \$133,000 per year.<sup>2</sup>



### Numerous Co-benefits

The U.S. Forest Service calculated that over a 50-year lifetime, a tree generates \$31,250 USD worth of oxygen, provides \$62,000 worth of air pollution control, recycles \$37,500 worth of water, and controls \$31,250 worth of soil erosion.<sup>3</sup>



## Challenges

### Cost & Land Availability

Nearly any indoor recreation facility costs millions of dollars. As for parks, even a simple park requires finding scarce, costly land. It is easy to underestimate the actual cost of maintenance. Nelson's park upkeep costs are expected to increase by 8% in 2024 to \$1.5 million, almost twice what street and sidewalk snow removal costs.



### Inclusivity & Accessibility

Making parks accessible to people with disabilities and ensuring inclusivity for all members of the community is a challenge. Adapting to changing demographics and recreational trends requires flexibility.



## Initiatives Snapshot

Red Deer deploys **goats** in parks to control invasive weeds. More and more cities, are 'hiring' **sheep** to mow their lawns.



Some places, like Groningen even make an educational event out of the annual **sheep**-shearing.

Conflicts arising from changing community needs, environmental concerns, and varying preferences among residents led Saanich to adopt a **People, Pets, and Parks Strategy** in 2023, which seeks to foster understanding among user groups and find common ground.



Many cities are including their parks in their approach to **Truth and Reconciliation**. Examples include Vancouver's colonial park audit, Kitchener's Indigenous placemaking strategy for parks and open spaces, and Winnipeg's Indigenous Peoples Garden. The National Urban Park program is a new federal program to advance Reconciliation that will see the creation of National Urban Parks in urban centres across Canada.



## Project Information

OCP Update: [Nelson2050.ca](https://nelson2050.ca)

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1 <https://ccpr.parkpeople.ca/2023/>

2 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10049315/>

3 <https://library.weconservepa.org/guides/98-economic-benefits-of-parks>

4 <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/resilient-parks-sponges-dickie-moore-1.6961224>