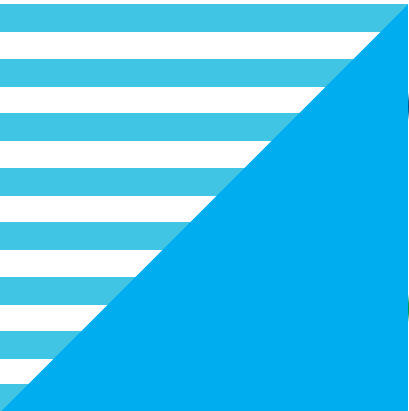
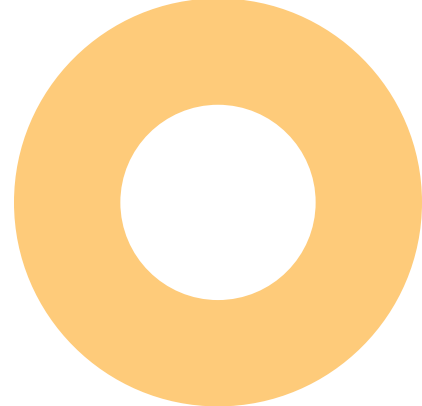


City of Victoria

Parks and Open Spaces Master Plan & Urban Forest Master Plan 2020 Annual Report



Introduction

The City of Victoria is located on the homelands of the Songhees and Esquimalt People.

Parks and open spaces are a vital element of the city's character, culture and vibrancy. Serving residents and visitors alike, they offer opportunities for socializing, relaxation, play, learning and connecting with nature. They are an important contributor to quality of life and support the physical, social, ecological and economic health of the city and its residents.

Victoria has 254 hectares of municipal parks and open spaces and approximately 132 hectares of other public open spaces. This inventory includes 201 hectares of actively maintained parks and green space and 53 hectares of natural areas including Garry oak meadows, rocky outcrops and coastal bluffs. Within parks there are 105 hectares of sport fields, courts, and lawn bowling greens along with 40 playgrounds. In addition, staff maintain over a thousand baskets and planters, a green roof, rain gardens and hedges along with over 300 acres of mown grass areas, and more than 33,000 trees in parks and boulevards.



In 2020, the global pandemic further highlighted the vital importance of parks and open spaces in our city. Following a brief closure in spring, all outdoor recreation facilities including playgrounds, spray parks, sport courts, and skate and bike parks re-opened as part of the City's Parks and Recreation COVID-19 Recovery plan.

During this challenging year, parks were used for temporary shelter by a significantly higher number of people experiencing homelessness. This increased demand was due in part to pandemic impacts which limited indoor shelter options and the capacity of service agencies. Outdoor shelters were erected in parks across the city and additional resources were required to support response efforts, including temporary hygiene facilities, additional waste removal, security patrols, increased Bylaw staff, as well as enhanced washroom and park cleaning. In addition, the City updated bylaws and received a court order to enforce the protection of environmentally sensitive areas in Beacon Hill Park and prohibit sheltering activities in these sites. Full-time sheltering had major implications for certain parks, which required large scale remediation.



City staff worked tirelessly to care for and maintain parks and open spaces for everyone, including visitors, employees, and people seeking temporary shelter. Throughout the year, the City also collaborated with internal and external stakeholders to explore sheltering alternatives, as well as preserve the important role of parks in helping residents continue to stay active.



Despite the extreme challenges presented by the pandemic, the City launched a number of innovative community programs. One such program was Build Back Victoria (BBV), developed to assist local business owners with expanded outdoor space where they could offer their services while meeting public health protocols. Several of these operations were approved for parks and boulevards through the summer and fall. Another important initiative addressed issues relating to food insecurity by using City horticulture operations to grow more than 80,000 vegetable seedlings. These plants were then distributed to residents across the region, including individuals and families disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. Both of these programs were highly successful and, like many experiences of the past year, provided lessons that will inform future service planning.

This report provides an overview of the progress made in 2020 towards implementing the goals outlined in the Parks and Open Spaces Master Plan and Urban Forest Master Plan.



Parks and Open Spaces Master Plan

The Parks and Open Spaces Master Plan was approved in 2017 and is a strategic roadmap to help guide the planning and management of, and investment in, the City's parks system.

The Master Plan sets out a vision, goals and guiding principles in four key areas including:

- Protecting the environment
- Fostering engaging experiences for everyone
- Celebrating Victoria
- Strengthening partnerships



GOAL 1:

Protect the Environment



PARKS AND OPEN SPACES PROTECT AND IMPROVE NATIVE ECOSYSTEMS AND HELP THE CITY ADAPT TO CLIMATE CHANGE.

Sensitive ecosystems and natural areas are an important part of the biodiversity of southern Vancouver Island, the City of Victoria, and the parks and open spaces system. They create a unique landscape character that residents and visitors recognize as distinct from any other place. Sensitive ecosystems and natural areas also provide numerous benefits such as climate regulation and stormwater management.



GOAL 1: Protect the Environment

HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2020 INCLUDE:

- Through an analysis using LiDAR technology, a net increase in overall tree canopy was identified between 2013 and 2019 - the increase of 46 hectares is roughly equivalent to an area covering 60 soccer fields
- Maintained natural areas through the management and monitoring of species at risk, removal of invasive species, and restoration of native species
- Published and posted tree planting and care resource guides on the City's website
- Sought a court order to prohibit sheltering in designated environmentally sensitive areas in Beacon Hill Park
- Increased tree planting by 40 per cent, adding 535 new trees to the urban forest
- Participated in the UN Trees in Cities Challenge
- Recognized as a Tree City of the World for leadership in urban forest management
- Managed 400 more trees on the young tree maintenance program (total of 1,900 trees)
- Completed technical assessments for more than 830 mature trees to verify structural integrity
- Processed 372 tree permit applications, a 40 per cent increase from 2019, and 946 development related applications for tree impacts, representing an increase of 18 per cent over 2019
- Completed remediation projects at Topaz Park, Pandora Green and Centennial Square
- Added new electric mowers as part of the conversion of fleet to electric-powered equipment
- Completed the naturalization of garden beds across the City, including pollinator-friendly plants



GOAL 2:

Foster Engaging Experiences for Everyone



PARKS AND OPEN SPACES PROVIDE A RANGE OF DIFFERENT EXPERIENCES, ENCOURAGE ACTIVE LIVING, AND ARE MULTIFUNCTIONAL, INCLUSIVE AND ACCESSIBLE.

The parks and open spaces system must be adaptive to meet the changing needs of residents. Among the most critical factors are the increasing population and demand, the aging population, the desire to attract families, new activities, and the challenge of expanding the parks and open spaces system in a largely built-out and geographically constrained city.



GOAL 2: Foster Engaging Experiences for Everyone

HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2020 INCLUDE:

- Completed the renewal of seven sport courts at Oaklands Park and Stadacona Park
- Installed new seating in s̓c̓amaθən/Peter Pollen Waterfront Park
- Conducted a public competition to select a consultant to work on the design and build of a skate and bike skills park in Topaz Park
- Delivered the Get Growing, Victoria! program which distributed 81,500 vegetable seedlings in partnership with 44 community organizations to support citizens disproportionately impacted by the pandemic – over 100,000 lbs of food was grown by residents at home and up to 10,000 households were supported with seedlings, gardening and educational materials
- Installed new and improved wayfinding signage along the waterfront from Dallas Road to the Inner Harbour
- Completed a public engagement process for s̓c̓amaθən/Peter Pollen Waterfront Park, which resulted in 680 completed surveys and strong overall support for the preliminary design concept
- Installed 1,000 metres of split rail fencing along Dallas Road to mitigate conflicts between pedestrian circulation on the walkway and off-leash dog park
- Established a Recreation Ambassador program to help people maintain physical distance while enjoying parks
- Provided signage at City facilities to reinforce COVID-19 safety protocols
- Provided eight hand-washing stations, and potable water in locations where vulnerable populations were sheltering
- Maintained 24/7 access to all public washrooms, as well as additional portable washrooms in parks





GOAL 2: Foster Engaging Experiences for Everyone

- Collaborated with stakeholders to distribute information on community services for individuals experiencing homelessness
- Developed park maps, temporary sheltering signs, and a handout to communicate rules for temporary sheltering in parks during the pandemic
- Launched Fun for Life, Go! online resource kit to help residents stay healthy and active during the pandemic
- Developed the Parks and Recreation COVID-19 Recovery Plan resulting in the safe reopening of indoor and outdoor recreation amenities
- Introduced Royal Athletic Park as the Recreation Hub serving 800 local children in summer camps, 700 adults in fitness classes, and more than 1,500 residents in free programs, activities, and performances
- Launched the Community Garden Start-Up grant to assist local organizers establish new gardens





GOAL 3:

Celebrate Victoria



SPECIAL PLACES AND AMENITIES IN THE PARKS AND OPEN SPACES SYSTEM ANIMATE THE CITY AND SUPPORT EVENTS FOR RESIDENTS AND VISITORS.

Typically, outdoor festivals, celebrations, concerts, and performances enliven the parks and open spaces system, entice new park users, offer opportunities for social connection, and are naturally multigenerational. In 2020, the pandemic changed how parks and open spaces were animated and activated. Despite the year's challenges, Parks created safe spaces for the community to get outside and enjoy the city.



GOAL 3: Celebrate Victoria

HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2020 INCLUDE:

- Acquired 1,178 square meters (0.3 acres) of land in the South Jubilee neighborhood, protecting a sensitive Garry oak ecosystem, to create Agamemnon and Eleni Kasapi Park
- Offered free arts and culture programs at Royal Athletic Park for over 350 participants
- Collaborated with Indigenous Artist in Residence Dylan Thomas on designs for two major projects: Songhees Park Expansion and s̓c̓əmaθən/Peter Pollen Waterfront Park
- Relocated the Commerce Canoe sculpture to Triangle Green
- Expanded opportunities for local business owners in parks as part of the Build Back Victoria program





GOAL 4:

Strengthen Partnerships



COMMUNITY MEMBERS, STEWARDS AND PARTNERS HELP ENHANCE ALL PARKS AND OPEN SPACES IN THE CITY.

There is a significant number of residents and volunteer organizations that contribute to the improvement of open spaces across the city, from neighbourhood associations, and environmental stewardship groups, to other service providers and government organizations. The City continues to play a proactive role to build partnerships, support volunteers, coordinate efforts, and maximize the use of parks and other open spaces.



GOAL 5: Strengthen Partnerships

HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2020 INCLUDE:

- Supported BC Housing, Island Health, and other agencies in the setup of infrastructure and support services for vulnerable populations
- Partnered with the Greater Victoria School District, LifeCycles Project Society and Farm to School BC, to compliment the school district's emergency meal programs and distribute food seedlings
- Partnered with the North Park Neighbourhood Association to animate Royal Athletic Park with community-led recreation
- Identified underused urban spaces for urban agriculture and community gardening potential in support of the Food-Eco District
- Developed partnerships with Songhees Nation, Pauquachin First Nation, **SW, CENENITEL**, Victoria Native Friendship Centre, the WSANEC School Board and the Aboriginal Coalition to End Homelessness to launch Get Growing, Victoria!
- Distributed approximately 200 cubic yards of leaf mulch and compost at four community locations for residents to access for their own gardening needs with the support from Community Garden Volunteer Coordinators and the Public Health Association of BC
- Hired an accessibility trainer to launch a webinar series on accessibility and universal design in community gardens for the community garden coordinator network in partnership with the Public Health Association of BC



CLOSING STATEMENT

The past year was challenging in many ways due to the COVID-19 pandemic, forcing everyone to adjust and respond to unique circumstances. A special thank-you to the many community organizations, the employees of the Parks, Recreation and Facilities department, as well as the larger City of Victoria team, who demonstrated resilience and an unwavering commitment to serving the needs of residents. For more information, please visit victoria.ca/parks.

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