

6. FROM VISION TO PLAN - IMPLEMENTATION

The City of Spruce Grove's Parks and Open Space Plan is a philosophical and policy based document to provide the guidance necessary to implement a city-wide open space system. This final section provides tools to acquire land, move forward on identified projects and secure funding to achieve the open space vision. The City will determine priorities through the budgeting process each year.

6.1 Maintenance and Construction Standards for Open Space

The City of Spruce Grove is encouraged to develop a formalized Operations and Maintenance Plan based on individual park space requirements. The POSMP proposes the classification of parks into Types of Open Space. Using this system of classification will allow Parks to define specific operations and maintenance criteria for each Type. Each type (regardless of size) will have standard elements and activities therefore the transition from asset to maintenance requirements will be straightforward.

Priority Action

1. The Open Space Planning Team with Public Works is encouraged to classify each open space and park as one of seven Types of Open Space in POSMP and set up operations and maintenance requirements based on this classification system. All open space typologies should be added to The City's GIS database.

6.2 Acquisition Strategies

The City of Spruce Grove Parks and Open Space Master Plan is forward thinking document that will enable the City to pursue, protect, enhance and acquire important open spaces. This Plan for Acquisition serves as a comprehensive approach to acquiring lands within the city and is in keeping with the recommendations, priority actions and policies contain within this Parks and Open Space Plan.



For Spruce Grove to develop in a sustainable and progressive manner, while ensuring the continued enhancement to the quality of life for its residents, efforts must be made to maintain and improve the quality of the open spaces. As Spruce Grove plans for residential, industrial and commercial growth it must too plan for growth to its open spaces and trail network.

Citizens of Spruce Grove state they are very satisfied with their trail system and opens spaces. As this study illustrates that there is still some room for improvement, not only on the open space and trails themselves, but also on the level of communication with residents. As Spruce Grove maintains, plans, and builds parks, trails, and protects natural spaces, residents should be informed and encouraged to learn more about the active and passive recreational opportunities in their community.

The Parks and Open Space Master Plan is complementary to The City of Spruce Grove's Sustainable Development Charter, which ensures The City will work to:

- Create a livable community.
- Improve the quality of our environment.
- Live within the capacity of our natural resources.
- Protect and enhance natural areas and green space.
- Promote a sustainable, resilient economy.
- Foster a strong sense of community.

Open Space Acquisition Strategies

The following principles serve as general guidelines to support the protection, betterment, and development of an interconnected, functional, and accessible open space system.

General Land Acquisition Principles

- Ensure lands are acquired to enhance and build a greater functioning open space system of parks and trails that are publicly accessible to meet the needs of all city residents.
- Ensure all community neighbourhoods have equitable access to parks and trails.
- Encourage sustainable practices by expanding the interconnected trail network to promote commuting by walking, jogging, and cycling.
- Protect, expand and enhance natural habitats in collaboration with urban forests.
- Seek potential partnerships for the protection, purchase and maintenance of parks, trails and natural areas.
- Future planning for parks, trails, and natural areas shall be integrated with the land use process to ensure a citywide interconnected and accessible open space network.

General Land Acquisition Practices I: Voluntary Land Acquisition Techniques

In some cases private landowners may wish to assist in implementing the Parks and Open Space Master Plan by voluntarily agreeing to adopt best practice management techniques. They may also wish to enter into stewardship agreements with The City to preserve their land and only engaging in specific activities on their land, such as walking, hiking, or bird watching. Typically these voluntary conservation techniques are not a guaranteed protection of the open space, however, they can add significant areas to an open space system.

Fee Simple

Fee simple is the purchase of the fee title in a parcel of land. Lands are usually acquired at its fair market value. In some cases, lands can be sold at a reduced price, which may qualify as a charitable donation from income taxes. However, prior to purchasing fee simple lands it is important to conduct the appropriate environmental investigation to ensure the lands are not contaminated.



Restrictive Covenants

It is an act where by a developer voluntarily restricts the use of a portion of land, in order to provide an amenity space. One example may include common ownership area such as in a condominium development where homeowners back onto a privately held open space. This technique usually ensures that the common area will not be developed except for purposes relating to recreation or park space.

Conservation Easements

As discussed in *Section 22* of the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act (Alberta) conservation easements are a voluntary legal agreement between a landowner and a land trust or government agency that permanently limits uses of the land to protect its conservation values. It allows the owner to continue to own the land, sell it or pass it on to heirs, however you give up the associated rights to the lands.

Donation

Land donation is a way in which private landowners can give their land to a land trust or government agency. This allows the owner to potentially release themselves the responsibilities of managing the lands and can provide a substantial income tax deductions and estate tax benefits. Donations could also be made through an Adopt-a-Park or Tree program or through corporation donations where physical structures or parks are named after the company.

Land Trusts

They are independent non-profit organizations that work with landowners interested in protecting open space. These organizations may also work collaboratively with local, provincial and federal governments. Land trusts can also accept land donations, funds to purchase additional lands, and development rights to ensure the lands are protected for open space or remain in a natural state. (Source: New York State Local Open Space Planning Guide 2004)

Urban Forest Legacy Program

A legacy program could be established and designed specifically to identify and protect environmentally sensitive forests that are threatened by invasive species such as noxious weeds or by residential growth affecting groundwater tables and contributing to soil erosion. The Program could acquire land and conservation easements from willing sellers or those wishing to donate land. The Forest Program could receive support from a number of programs such as the Tree Canada Foundation (Green Streets Canada and Greening Canada's School Grounds).

Land Exchange

The idea is to exchange land for land. In an example a developer may have parcels of land that they may wish to develop however, it may be identified as protected open space. The City may at this point exchange the lands for surplus lands it may have in its inventory that are not significantly valuable as open space.

Public Access Easements

Public access easements allow the general public the right to access and use a specific parcel of the property. These are commonly used to develop a pathway through a development in order to ensure access to other pathways, lake and other water bodies, parks and open space areas.

General Land Acquisition Practices II: Regulatory Land Acquisition Techniques

Local municipalities can regulate the kind of uses that are permitted by a number of provisions set out in the Municipal Government Act (MGA). The MGA empowers Municipalities to make their own municipal plans and supporting plans to ensure the safe development of their communities. The following techniques are an example of the type of devices that may be used to protect open spaces.

Municipal Reserves

As stated in *Section 664(1)* and *671(1)* of the MGA (Alberta) land may be taken as municipal reserve only to be used for the following purposes: a public park, a public recreation area, a school, or to separate areas of land that are used for different purposes. Triggered by an application of subdivision, the municipality may take as municipal reserve no more than 10% of the land or cash-in-lieu, after subtracting any required environmental reserve, or such lesser amount set forth in the municipal development.

Municipal reserve sites shall: be located to allow for convenient access by and a safe environment for the public; consist of lands that do not contain excessive slopes, are not susceptible to flooding, and are not legally encumbered by rights-of-way or other limitations which would reduce design options for the site; and accommodate as broad a range of activities and user groups as possible without creating unsafe conditions or high potential for conflicts among users.

Environmental Reserves

As stated in *664(1)* Subject to *section 663*, MGA (Alberta) a subdivision authority may take land as environmental reserve only if it consists of a swamp or a gully; is land that is subject to flooding, or in the opinion of the subdivision authority, is unstable; or is a strip of land not less than 6 metres in width abutting the bed and shore of any lake, river, stream, or other body of water to prevent water pollution or to provide public access.

Dedication / Density Transfers

This mechanism allows open spaces to be dedicated to the City for density transfers on the development of a property. Known as density transfers, dwelling unit equivalents may be relocated to other portions of the same parcel or to contiguous land that is part of the common development plan.

Overlay Zoning

The overlay zoning technique is a common set of standards or controls that are applied over a large area, across many different conventional land use districts. In the case of open space, a zoning ordinance can be superimposed as an overlay to ensure areas unsuitable for development

are protected or that development that occurs does not interfere with the sensitive environmental features of the area. (Source: New York State Local Open Space Planning Guide 2004)

Development Setbacks / Buffers

Development setbacks are another way to protect open spaces. Common examples include setbacks from a river, floodplain, landfill, escarpments and environmentally significant areas.

Performance Zoning

This technique establishes zones, which are based on an allowable environmental impact to the resources of an area as opposed to a specific allowable use. This technique is a good way for a municipality to maintain control over development impacts and to ensure that development will occur only in ways in which the natural resources will not be severely damaged. For example, a community zoning ordinance might require water bodies to be protected with vegetated buffers. Thus, instead of requiring buffer zones depending on the specific use of the land, buffer zones would be established regardless of the use. Rapidly changing technology can create new industries, making it difficult in some areas for a municipality to establish effective zones based on specific uses. In these communities, the performance standard approach may be particularly helpful. (Source: New York State Local Open Space Planning Guide 2004)

Special Use Permits

A zoning regulation will list "as of right" uses which are allowed in a particular district without the necessity of obtaining any further review. After these uses are listed, a list of conditional uses or "special use permit" uses may be listed, as exceptions. The kinds of uses that require a special permit are those which may be desirable but which could have adverse impacts that require special review and conditioning before being approved. For example, special use permit criteria can require development proposals to provide buffer areas and best management practices for control of non-point source pollution adjacent to wetlands. They can also require that a percentage of land be left as open or green space. (Source: New York State Local Open Space Planning Guide 2004)



6.3 Financing Strategies for Open Space

The following list outlines methods to fund open space and park development.

Fee Simple, Development Process

The City of Spruce Grove will acquire through the reserve dedication processes provided in Great Places, as much municipal and environmental reserve possible in new development proposals where it is deemed appropriate. This is the simplest and least costly form of acquiring land for open space and park development. Developer levies are collected to cover the cost of building City parks.

Public-Private Partnerships

The City may wish to enter into a development agreement with a landowner or developer whereby land for park space (normally additional to 10% MR and ER dedication) is provided to the municipality in exchange for “incentive” benefits to the developer such as density bonusing or up-zoning to allow for higher densities. Spruce Grove may also enter into a business arrangement where land is owned by the City for park use and is leased back to the developer to be administered as a pay-per-use (fee-based) open space or park.

Government Grants

Government grants at the provincial and federal levels are available to municipalities for the development of parks and open space. Most are specific to a certain purpose and the City will need to develop a strategy for targeting certain types of grants. Park Grants may be for:

- Tourism
- Health and wellness
- Ecological management
- Community development

Examples of grants include:

- Infrastructure Canada-Alberta Program (ICAP): Under ICAP, the federal and provincial governments provide up to two-thirds of the funding for eligible project costs. Partnering communities or private sector organizations (proponents) cover the remainder of project funding. In Alberta, ICAP is implemented by Western Economic Diversification Canada and Alberta Infrastructure and Transportation.
- Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM), Green Municipal Funds (GMF): Under the GMF program, municipalities may apply for grants or loans to construct green infrastructure. The grant is up to 50% of the project cost, matched by other third party contributors or the municipality.
- The City of Spruce Grove Funding – Parks and Planning Department Staff can propose to the rest of Administration and Council, that funds be set aside each year in addition to their regular budget, for the purposes of implementing one or two additional projects required to augment the open space and park system. This will require a marketing and business case initiative to gain buy-in from Spruce Grove residents, and then translate into political support.

Adopt-a-Park – Municipal programs like Adopt-a-Park provide financial relief for municipalities in terms of capital and operations costs. User groups and other interested citizens are invited to assist in park and open space development and long term maintenance to off-set costs borne by the City which would otherwise not be possible to fund. This also makes residents “stewards” of the park and provides a sense of ownership which is valuable for a community.



6.4 Landowner Donations

As outlined in the land acquisition section, land may be donated to the City for the purpose of park and open space development. Alternatively, a landowner may apply to the Land Conservancy to have the land designated as conservation land and then provided to the City.

Priority Action

- 1. The City should establish a list of grants available and begin the process of applying early each year – some applications are onerous and go through a long and iterative review period.**
- 2. All park spaces proposed should be expressed in terms of best approaches for funding.**

6.5 Parks and Open Space Master Plan Implementation Goals

Management Goals

- **Goal One - Funding & Support**

Establish and encourage a focused and coordinated dialogue between adjacent municipalities, non-profit companies, private sector and citizens, and charitable organizations to advocate, acquire, protect and maintain natural areas, parks, and trail connections.

- **Goal Two - Public Stewardship**

To increase the value of Spruce Grove's open spaces, parks, trails and natural areas, public involvement should be increased by promoting more awareness, utilization, and care of parks, trails and natural areas.

- **Goal Three - Regional Node Approach**

This approach helps ensure that the entire City is connected, not just certain neighbourhoods. Connections within the City must occur in all quadrants and the planning of future parks and open space must be cognoscente of this.

- **Goal Four - Deferred Reserve Study**

Undertaking a deferred reserve study will provide The City of Spruce Grove with the necessary information required to form the linkages with current parks and open spaces with proposed or future areas.

Operational Goals

- **Goal Five - Highest Priority**

Focus short-term efforts on areas of highest priority, to ensure protection of key open space, trail connections, urban forestry and natural areas and that areas deficient of open space have equitable access to parks and trails.

- **Goal Six - Consider all Lands**

Review existing City owned lands (e.g., road rights-of-way) in collaboration with the POSMP Plan prior to sale of lands to the public. Similarly, work with utility companies and railways to ensure the consideration of possible donation of unused lands for parks or trails.

- **Goal Seven - Improvements**

Once the short-term needs are met, The City of Spruce Grove can turn their attention to the areas that require improvement, renovation, expansion etc that will ensure the current areas are meeting the needs of its citizens.

6.6 Open Space Management

To ensure policies and guidelines are managed and developed to keep pace with the growth of the City while maintaining a high level of quality of parks, trails and natural areas

- The City shall acquire, develop and maintain parks, trails and natural areas to provide a range of recreational opportunities along with encouraging environmental preservation.
- The City should engage in a communications plan (newsletter, website, maps) to identify new parks and trails and encourage use of the open space system
- Regular condition reports shall be performed every 5 years on City owned parks, trails, facilities and other assets to ensure public safety and that open space infrastructure is being maintained and or replaced as required.
- City should be committed to the accessibility, safety and security of their open spaces; providing well-lit areas, increase police presence, and adopt practices from Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) program.
- Encourage the use of Best Practices to reduce energy consumption and greenhouses gases.
- Recognize annually individuals or organizations that play a vital role in the stewardship or contributions to the City's open spaces.
- Parks containing lighted fields for adult and tournament play should be located in commercial or light industrial parks when reasonable and affordable. Parks designed for children should not be located in commercial or light industrial areas.
- Be committed to public consultation ensuring the public is on side with the planning of facilities, parks, trails and natural areas.

6.7 Partnerships

Partnerships play a key role in the development of the acquisition plan. Accessing the support from developers, local businesses, residents, school boards and non-profit organizations will help in funding, maintaining and growing the open space system. Partnerships are not only important for cash or land donations, but are also important in fostering a community spirit. Partnerships with youth groups can play an important role in the stewardship, teaching youth the importance of open spaces and encouraging them to value the parks, trails and natural areas.

6.8 Evaluating Success

Success can be measured in various ways. For The City of Spruce Grove, the usability of their parks and open space provides a valuable measure of worth. A variety of open space types provides opportunities for a variety of uses, and ensures that the important environmental, historical and cultural assets are preserved and enhanced. Inclusion of the street and path system in the open space network emphasizes the support of walking and biking as forms of exercise, recreation and commuting, and strengthens the city structure.

Key indicators of success include the:

- degree to which the open space or path is used;
- degree of accessibility of the open space, especially without the use of a car;
- amount of maintenance required;
- variety of uses and users in each open space; and
- quality of the open spaces, trails and streets, not necessarily their quantity.

A comprehensive open space system that addresses the needs of all residents is the goal of the open space plan. Spruce Grove has the opportunity to continue to be the Community of Choice as it offers a high quality of life and wide range of opportunities, and as it develops an open space plan that expresses its environmental setting and forms a strong and high quality public realm.

Spruce Grove has the opportunity to continue to be a distinctive and unique small city, offering a high quality of life and an exemplary open space system.

6.9 Updating the Plan

The Parks and Open Space Master Plan is a policy document and was created largely on the basis of existing conditions and expressed public need. As a result, it may change depending available budgets, changing public desires and development timelines for new communities. The POSMP should be reviewed each year, prior to municipal budgeting.



Priority Action

- 1. A Triple Bottom Line (TBL) Checklist will be used for reviewing the POSMP to ensure it is meeting the overall objectives and principles of the Plan.**