

COMMUNITY SERVICES DIVISION



2021

Parks

YEAR-END REPORT





WELCOME

Welcome to the 2021 Parks Department Year-End Report. The 2021 Report is intended to provide an overview on the past year and information about the programs and services offered by the Parks Department, highlight various initiatives, and look ahead to 2022.

Who We Are

Parks plays a lead role in developing, preserving, and enhancing the City of Saskatoon's investment in its parks system and civic open spaces. The Department accomplishes this through operational efficiency, policy development, collaboration and communication with internal and external stakeholders, and the provision of maintenance and design services. From broad ranging city-wide initiatives, such as the Urban Forest Management Plan to ensuring that residents' local park and open space areas are well maintained, this Department has a significant impact on Saskatoon and its residents. The Parks Department's work primarily supports the Strategic Goals of Quality of Life and Environmental Leadership.



who we are, what we do

OUR MISSION:
A Safe, Dynamic Team
that Connects all
Residents to Nature

what we aspire to be

OUR VISION:
To Make Green
Space Experiences
Exceptional



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COVID-19 Response

Service Levels – 2021 brought another year of working under modified service levels necessary to safely operate programs while ensuring that the Saskatchewan Health Authority’s safe physical distancing and gathering requirements were met throughout Parks’ operational areas. Service level activities focused on safety and asset preservation and were provided by a staffing level of approximately 80% of historical levels.

Staff Safety – Return to Work Safety Plans were developed for all of Parks’ operational program work sites and provided the necessary safety protocol for supervisory teams and staff to follow. No virus outbreaks occurred in Parks’ workplaces.

- ▶ **Fusion** – Parks collaborated with partners in the Fusion and IT teams to implement the new SuccessFactors and Workforce System (WFS) software. Staff began using WFS for time entry and approvals and Success Factors to manage staff profiles and information, resulting in the retirement of paper processes. Workstations were set up or upgraded at Parks’ satellite locations to improve access to computers to make use of the new system.
- ▶ **Citizen Expectations** – Planned park development projects that upgraded and developed several park and open spaces were successfully delivered.
- ▶ **Asset Management** – Park Development Standards Update project which will support the continued development of safe, accessible, and sustainable parks for communities was initiated in 2021 with analysis and stakeholder engagement work being conducted.
- ▶ **Community Gardens** – No new community gardens were established in 2021 due to COVID-19 restrictions.
- ▶ **Community Support and Engagement** – Parks provided services and support to several community groups, including:
 - BIDS – Cottony Ash Psyllid tree removal/replacement and the supply of flowerpots.
 - Leif Erickson Park positive Dutch Elm Disease (DED) case – Communicating DED positive case and ongoing response activities to residents in 4 neighbourhoods.
 - Support various community and volunteer organizations by helping to coordinate and approve clean-up activities and special events in various park and open space areas throughout the city.
 - Provision of Irrigation services to Community Gardens located in park areas.
 - In collaboration with Hindu and Sikh communities and other key stakeholders, guidelines to support the release of cremated remains in the South Saskatchewan were developed and approved by City Council.
- ▶ **Employee Training** – Additional temporary training resources for orientation and training on Parks power mobile equipment were deployed to support smaller group training sessions that were required due to COVID-19.

- ▶ **Winter City Strategy** – Maintained 4 main cross country ski trails throughout the City: Diefenbaker, Forest Park, Kinsmen and Meewasin. Parks worked with Recreation and Community Development to accommodate additional ski trail requests for Community Associations.
 - Improved staff safety by implementing snowmobile training, purchasing equipment and updating job safety procedures.
- ▶ **Collaboration** – Continued collaboration and communication with other corporate departments to plan, manage, and maintain green space in the community as effectively and efficiently as possible. For 2021, collaborative efforts resulted in improvements in the following areas:
 - Fleet Services – improved equipment procurement and maintenance processes.
 - Construction and Design – tree protection support to roadway and sidewalk renewal programs.
 - Saskatoon Water – provided landscape project management support to the Churchill storm water project.
 - IT – upgraded computer terminals and connectivity in operational areas in preparation for Fusion.
 - Saskatoon Fire – development of a formalized response to assist and support those living in unsafe outdoor park and open space locations.
 - Sustainability – Boulevard gardening updates and water conservation initiatives.
 - Recreation and Community Development – Festival site plan development.
 - Planning and Development Department – Capital planning associated with the restoration of the Civic Conservatory.
- ▶ **Skills Development** – Provided 13 employees with opportunities to increase their horticultural and forestry skills and levels of education, necessary for positions of greater responsibility within the department.

Employee Engagement – Organized employee recognition events with appropriate social distancing and virtual options to ensure that dedicated service continued to be recognized during the pandemic.
- ▶ **Partnerships** – Provided ongoing representation on the following committees/initiatives: Green Infrastructure Strategy, Water Conservation Strategy, Planning and Development Review Process, Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED), City of Saskatoon Wayfinding Workshops, and the Natural Areas Strategy.
- ▶ **Health & Safety** – Threatening and Aggressive Interaction Standard Operating Procedure was developed to provide employees awareness of the potential of these interactions and process to follow if they do encounter members of the public who are interacting in an aggressive or threatening way.
- ▶ **Reducing our Carbon Footprint** – Adding and monitoring the effectiveness of electrically powered hand-held equipment and utility vehicles.

OUR BUSINESS

Meeting the needs of a growing community continues to be the Parks Department's biggest challenge. As Saskatoon grows in population, so does the amount of green infrastructure within park and open space areas. New subdivisions include new community parks, playgrounds, pathways, sport fields, community gardens, landscaped medians, traffic circles, and buffers/berms adjacent to roadways. In 2021, Parks added 3.0 hectares (7.41 acres) to the departments maintenance inventory.

The Parks Department prides itself on meeting this challenge through the provision of a variety of efficient and effective maintenance and design services that directly contribute to people's quality of life. We take initiative to identify and respond to the needs of a diverse community through the development of strategy and the continuous improvement of various Parks programs and the services they provide. Parks' key programs and services include:

PARK AND OPEN SPACE MAINTENANCE

Parks Maintenance employees are responsible for maintaining all turf grass and horticultural displays in over 2,272 hectares of parks and open space in the city. Services provided include:

- Mowing, trimming, and fertilizing, as well as other turf maintenance for regular park areas, community sport fields, and non-park green space, including medians, boulevards, rights of way, buffer strips, and berms.
- Care for shrub beds and herbaceous perennial and annual flower plantings.
- Maintenance of playground surfaces.
- Litter picking and garbage removal.
- Maintenance and repair for asphalt and aggregate pathways within parks.
- Winter snow removal on over 140km of asphalt pathways and sidewalk park frontages.
- Provide support services to over 400 special events, held annually, in various parks and open spaces throughout the city.



HIGHLIGHTS IN 2021

- Successfully adjusted maintenance schedules of over 200 staff to provide safe, socially distant work sites.
- Collaborated with Roadways to sweep road salt and sand off park turf.
- Topdressing of 24 neighborhood sports fields throughout Saskatoon, where a 50/50 mix of City compost and soil was applied to improve turf quality and safety to users. The program was expanded from 12 neighborhood sports fields in 2020.

NATURALIZED PARK MAINTENANCE

Approximately 12% of the Parks inventory is maintained as naturalized park area, representing various habitat types in Saskatoon, from native prairie to wetlands, and aspen parkland. Naturalized areas provide key habitats for wildlife, support local and regional biodiversity, and provide opportunities for nature appreciation.

HIGHLIGHTS IN 2021

- Developed and distributed prescribed fire communication and education material to create awareness and understanding of the benefits and safe practices employed when conducting prescribed fires in Naturalized Parks.
- Co-ordinated with Meewasin and Saskatoon Fire Department to conduct 3 prescribed fires in October in Gabriel Dumont, Lakewood, and Donna Birkmaier Parks.
- Participated in the Urban Wildlife Information Network for monitoring wildlife populations and movements within the city.
- Partnered with the Saskatoon Horticultural Society and featured a video in July educating and highlighting naturalized parks in the city.



WOODLAWN CEMETERY

Woodlawn Cemetery is a 42.45 ha National Historic Site that has been operated by the City of Saskatoon since 1906. Parks also maintains the 7.31 ha Nutana Pioneer Cemetery, a heritage site that has been closed since 1911.

Services include:

- Administrative services in booking and processing funeral requests, customer complaints, and financial aspects.
- Interment opening/closing services for funerals in both casket and cremations.
- Landscaping and monitoring turf establishment for completed interments.
- Offer a variety of monument services, such as installing foundations, flat markers, and other memorialization services.
- Mowing, trimming, and fertilizing of turf areas.
- Preparing, planting, and maintaining flower and shrub beds.
- Planting and ensuring establishment of new trees.
- Snow clearing of cemetery roadways and pathways.



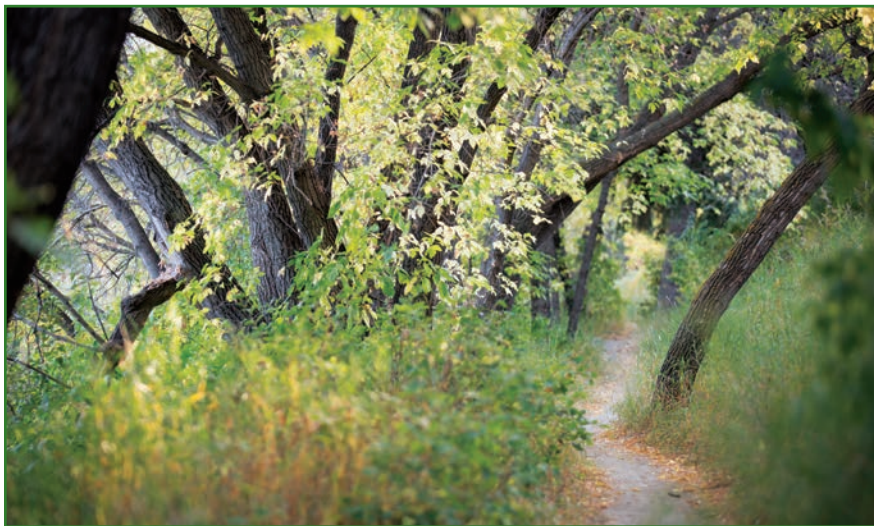
HIGHLIGHTS IN 2021

- Maintained essential services during pandemic to ensure funeral services can remain. In 2021, there was an 8% increase in interments: 519 interments were performed, with 237 being traditional burials and 282 cremation burials.
- 47 subsidized interments occurred at Woodlawn Cemetery.
- Planted 20 new trees at Woodlawn. Trees were selected to provide winter interest and reduce current monoculture.
- Renovated the shrub beds located at the Between the Crosses Memorial.
- Installed two memorial benches.
- Tendered a 72-niche columbarium for installation in April 2022.
- Upgraded soil handling equipment was implemented to improve ease of access to grave locations resulting in less turf damage when conducting landscaping.
- Cemetery Masterplan that provides an overall vision to guide the future development, operations, and long-term sustainability of the City's cemeteries was completed and prepared for submission to City Council in 2022.

URBAN BIOLOGICAL SERVICES

The Urban Biological Services Program (UBS) provides control and inspection services to manage invasive plant and animal populations through the following activities:

- Monitoring and testing mosquitoes for West Nile virus.
- Mosquito habitat across approximately 945 square kilometers is regularly monitored and treated with larvicide application, as required.
- Monitoring the urban forest for pests and diseases, such as Dutch elm disease, cottony ash psyllid, and emerald ash borer.
- Controlling populations of Richardson ground squirrels on City-owned property.
- Providing solutions for conflicts with urban wildlife, including informational and trapping services.
- Enforcing the Weed Control Act and Forest Resources Management Act (Dutch elm disease) through inspection and issuance of orders and agreements.
- Provision of scheduled and reactive weed control service levels on hard surfaces, such as roadway medians, city wide.



HIGHLIGHTS IN 2021

- Developed a delegation of authority process to streamline the appointment of Municipal Weed Inspectors and DED Inspectors.
- Municipal Weed Inspectors enforcement of The Weed Control Act included the administration of 179 weed agreements with landowners to address noxious and nuisance weed infestations.
- One positive case of Dutch Elm Disease (DED) was identified in Leif Erickson Park. Response activities included:
 - Risk assessment/mitigation and communication to residents and property owners, including informational letters and brochures delivered to residents.
 - Completion of a DED inspection sweep of properties within a 2 km radius of the positive tree.
 - Removal and disposal of the DED positive tree.
 - 2 additional nearby elm trees removed, and all nearby elm trees tested due to the risk of transmission.
 - Sampling and testing of 282 Elm trees.
 - Removal of 12,352 kg of elm wood from resident yards.
- Mosquito populations were low last year due to aggressive treatment procedures and a diminishing habitat due to dry weather.
- Cottony Ash Psyllid populations were not harmful to susceptible tree species due to low insect population.



URBAN FORESTRY

The Urban Forestry Program protects, preserves, and perpetuates the health, beauty, and safety of the City of Saskatoon's urban forest for the enjoyment of all.

The components of this program include maintaining a tree inventory, civic nursery, planting programs, and providing ongoing maintenance operations. Ongoing maintenance operations include a 1 in 7-year pruning cycle for boulevard trees, a 1 in 13-year pruning cycle for park trees, responding to weather events, as well as internal and external service requests.

HIGHLIGHTS IN 2021

- 1,565 Urban Forestry service requests.
- 7,556 trees pruned as part of cyclical tree maintenance schedules.
- 735 trees pruned in response to service requests and other reactive work.

- 559 trees removed.
- 1030 stumps removed.
- 773 trees planted as part of park and urban reforestation initiatives.
- 214 sites inspected and monitored for tree protection.
- Shelter belt pruning maintenance was provided to the following areas:
 - Circle Dr. shelterbelt west side from 8th St E to 14th St.
 - Circle Dr. shelterbelt east side from Taylor St to 8th St E.
 - Wanuskewin Rd shelterbelt east side from Lenore Dr. to Wheeler Dr.
 - 8th St E shelterbelt north side from McKercher Dr. to Boychuk Dr.
 - Kilburn Park shelterbelt.
 - Father Basil Markle Park shelterbelt.
- The Urban Forestry Master Plan was unanimously approved, in principle, by City Council in March 2021. Several high priority KPI's outlined in the UFMP were initiated in 2021.
- A project to develop a new Tree Protection Bylaw for City trees was initiated in Q4 of 2021.

SPORTS FIELDS AND LANDSCAPE CONSTRUCTION

The Sports Fields and Landscape Construction Program maintains 308 city-wide sport fields (Ball diamonds, soccer, lacrosse, and multi-purpose). Included within this inventory are 147 hectares of Class 1, 2, and 3 sport fields. Class sports fields receive above basic service levels that support higher levels of sporting competition. Higher service levels are funded by the various user groups that utilize the Class sports fields and includes:

- Mowing and trimming for Class 1 and 2 sports fields.
- Infield grooming for Class 1, 2, 3, and neighborhood ball diamonds
- Sports fields painting program involves lining 85 Class 1, 2, and 3 sports fields. As well, accommodating other requests throughout the year (e.g. cricket fields).
- Grading of parking lots associated with recreational facilities related to parks where sports fields maintenance is done by the crews.
- Deliver, place, and pickup of BID flowerpots and centre median flowerpots in Spring and Fall, in conjunction with Greenhouse Program.
- Other work from Parks' zones and different departments as needed (i.e. hauling topsoil/compost, bobcat work, replacing or new installation of bollards).



HIGHLIGHTS IN 2021

- Increased staffing levels to provide pre-covid service levels.
- Provided winter snow removal services to include 9 City Recreation Facilities and other locations such as Marr Residence and Access Transit.
- Parks used 1,200 m³ of compost and mulch from City compost depots.
- Ensure quality of play and safety initiatives, such as:
 - Removed edge and added additional torpedo sand on 20 neighborhood ball diamonds.
 - Major renovation of Parc Canada ball diamonds included reducing infield size to regulations and converting infield from crusher dust to shale.



IRRIGATION

At an average annual total precipitation of 350 mm, Saskatoon regularly experiences drier and more arid environmental conditions than other major Western Canadian cities. The Irrigation Program supports water delivery service levels on approximately 660 hectares of park, open space, and streetscape green infrastructure, which includes turf, trees, shrubs, and annual/perennials plants. Irrigation staff are trained, certified, and legislated to maintain these systems to ensure the safe, efficient application of water throughout the growing season. Examples of the services provided include performing spring system start-up, regular system checks (including backflow prevention testing), line locating, and automated controller scheduling and system winterization.



HIGHLIGHTS IN 2021

- Through the Water Conservation Strategy, Parks irrigation conducted an evapotranspiration - based (ET - based) Irrigation Pilot. Parks staff were able to familiarize themselves with related software and equipment, as well as realize the benefits of using ET – based watering as a method to deliver appropriate amounts of irrigation water to park areas. The pilot saved a total of 3.8 million litres of water, which is equivalent to \$9,160 in cost savings and 1,630 kg CO₂e in 2021.
- Participated in the implementation of the City's new online Utility Locate Request form on the City's website. This allows other organizations and public to request irrigation line locate(s) with ease and improve communication.
- Eight rain gauges are strategically placed throughout the city to measure rainfall. Rainfall estimates are as follows:
 - In 2021, 146 mm of rainfall accumulated, which was less than the historical average of 264 mm and the 4th lowest seasonal rainfall total out of 122 years since 1900.
 - Due to the dry year, Irrigation was increased in locations where severe drought impacted vegetation.

GREENHOUSE PROGRAM

The Greenhouse Program is responsible for providing and maintaining floral displays for public viewing and/or landscape enhancement at City Hall, and other civic facilities, as well as major public roadways, parks, and public open spaces.

HIGHLIGHTS IN 2021

- Greenhouse staff produced annual flowers for 734 flowerpots in the business improvement districts.
- 295 flowerpots were produced for center medians on major city corridors.
- Annual flowers were produced for 103 flower beds in parks.
- 275 flowerpots in parks and other areas.
- In-house trials on different types of fertilizers and products that control plant growth were performed in order to continuously improve plant quality for the flowerpot and flowerbeds programs.
- Planting workstations were modified to improve employee ergonomics.
- Rejuvenation of plants maintained and returning to civic facilities throughout the City.



PARKS AND OPEN SPACE DESIGN PROGRAM

The Design Section is involved in the planning, design, and construction development of public lands, which includes parks. Core responsibilities include:

- Planning, estimating, and administration of capital budgets.
- Conceptual and detailed design.
- Project construction management.
- Internal and public consultation.
- The review and approval of external design submissions for open space.
- The construction inspection and approval of externally managed park construction projects.



HIGHLIGHTS IN 2021

- New parks were turned over to the City in the following neighbourhoods:
 - Aspen Ridge: Drainage Channel (MR16, 17, & D9).
- Completed new construction and infrastructure upgrades to the following parks and open spaces:
 - Parc Canada Upgrade.
 - Aspen Ridge Drainage Channel.
 - Kensington North Entry.
- Continued development of a portfolio management framework to prioritize business plan objectives and investments through the Building Better Parks capital allocation process.
- Park amenity buildings: RCD and Parks are working to bring washroom facilities, winter warmup areas, and summer play program buildings to parks across the city. These buildings are currently under construction in Al Anderson Park (2) and Glen H Penner Park. Construction will begin on Wallace Park and Funk Park shortly.



EXPRESSWAY TURF MAINTENANCE

- Manage contracted Freeway/Expressway mowing services on over 490 hectares of Road Rights of Way.
- Contracts for the 2021 season were completed and a new contract has been implemented for 2022/2023, with a renewal option at the end of the term.
- Improved Traffic Control Plans to ensure worker safety. This includes mandatory safety zones where City Sign Shop support is required on identified high-risk areas.
- Developed a Contract Administrator resource to oversee turf maintenance contract areas improving work safety and quality of work.
- Program to remove volunteer elm seedlings from expressway around fence lines and guard rails was completed.

PARKS DEPARTMENT – LOOKING AHEAD TO 2022

- Initial implementation of the Enterprise Asset Management (EAM) system.
 - EAM will track the work occurring in City green spaces and will be central to Parks' Asset Management of green infrastructure and playgrounds by providing data on work capacity and expenditures.
 - Parks will focus on implementing tracking for both regular maintenance and requests.
 - Refinement of data and the development of data collection processes will be ongoing to meet the departments business planning needs.
- The SuccessFactors Learning Management System (LMS) will be implemented in Parks.
- Park Development Standards focusing on key priorities to bring improvements to the planning, design, and construction of green spaces will be completed and brought forward to City Council for information.
- Parks will:
 - Collect playground condition rating to update existing data. This data helps guide the upgrade, replacement, and improvement of green spaces.
 - Research Playground Accessibility Standards in use in Canadian municipalities.
- Construction of green space for Churchill Park Storm Management Pond.
- Design of green space for the Weaver Storm Water Pond.
- Construction of Aspen Ridge Linear Parks.
- Construction of Rosewood Linear Parks.
- Construction of Kensington Lions Century Park.
- Upgrades in A.S. Wright, WJL Harvey Park South, Canon Smith, Forest Grove Linkage, Kistikan, and Marriott Park.
- First phases of the Urban Forestry Management Plan implementation will be planned.
- Initial steps towards the implementation of new a new tree protection policy and bylaw.
- Bring forward opportunities for an Integrated Pest Management Plan
- Preliminary design and cost estimating work on an accessible and inclusive ceremonial site for scattering remains in the South Saskatchewan River will be brought forward for City Council review.





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Printed August 2022