



THE CITY OF
CALGARY
RECREATION

A DISCUSSION PAPER ON SKATEBOARD AMENITIES



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INTRODUCTION

Skateboarding continues to be a popular recreational activity for many youth and adults in Calgary. While Calgary does have a few existing skatepark facilities including Shaw Millennium Skatepark and three mobile parks operated by The City, these were approved and built on a case-by-case basis in the absence of an integrated and comprehensive strategy. The growing interest in skateboarding along with the recognition of the growing skatepark gap was the catalyst behind the development of a Discussion Paper.

This Discussion Paper was a collaborative effort with the Calgary Association of Skateboarding Enthusiasts (CASE), a key community stakeholder group, and with relevant business units within The City including Bylaw Services, Recreation, Parks, Community and Neighborhood Services, and Land Use Planning. The intention of this Discussion Paper is to guide further consultation and input from the broader community.

What follows is a summary of skateboarding in Calgary, examples of municipal involvement with skateboard amenity development, and the presentation of priorities that emerged through initial internal and external consultations.



SKATEBOARDING IN CALGARY



According to the most recent Alberta Recreation Survey, 8.2 per cent of Calgary households reported at least one skateboarder (Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation, 2008). According to the 2009 census there are about 440,000 households in Calgary (The City of Calgary, 2009), so that translates to an estimated 36,000 skateboarders in Calgary. However, this is a very conservative estimate given there are many households with two, three, or more skateboarders. The Calgary skateboard marketplace is likely significantly larger than 36,000. Calgary also supports a growing board shop industry with five local core skate shops (Source, Mission, Royal, Chikko and Group Seven) comprising 11 locations (including two new locations in recent years), a number of online skate shops, a number of other retailers that offer skateboards and national board shop retailer West 49 with four Calgary locations and reports of more coming soon. The City also hosts a number of skateboard brands, manufacturers and distributors.

Calgary's three fixed skateparks include the well known Shaw Millennium Skatepark constructed in 2000, a small temporary community modular ramp skatepark owned by the Resident Association in Mackenzie Towne, and a privately owned and operated small modular skatepark at the Westside Recreation Centre (which replaced the old concrete Westside skatepark demolished for West LRT construction). The City also maintains three mobile skateparks that are circulated throughout interested communities.

Wherever they are built, skateparks are well used. Many skateboarders are very passionate about skateboarding and it is common in winter to see a group of skateboarders clear large sections of Millennium Park of snow so they can skateboard on any relatively warm days. Skate parks are rarely empty when outside of weekday school hours and the weather is reasonable. Calgary has two churches that offer indoor skatepark programs (which are limited time co-opted focus) and on any given open evening these churches very small skateparks can be severely

overcrowded with over 50 participants. The saying, "If you build it they will come!" is never more true than when talking about skateparks.

SKATEBOARD PARK DEVELOPMENT IN OTHER MUNICIPALITIES

Calgary is lagging behind other major cities and towns in Alberta and across Western Canada in the number of skateparks available for their residents. The City of Edmonton has five large concrete skateparks, several smaller skateparks, two skate plazas, and has just announced a new temporary skatepark in a downtown park. Edmonton also boasts the indoor West 49 park in West Edmonton Mall. Calgary is also behind other, smaller prairie cities like Saskatoon (six parks) and Winnipeg (eight parks), as well as British Columbia cities such as Vancouver (six parks), North Vancouver (five parks), West Vancouver (two parks), Surrey (three parks), and Burnaby (two parks).

Many smaller municipalities surrounding Calgary have also demonstrated a commitment to supporting the activity by constructing new skateparks. Especially noteworthy are the large modern concrete skateparks in Canmore, Cochrane and Airdrie.

SKATEPARKS IN SELECTED ALBERTA MUNICIPALITIES

Municipality	# of Skateparks	Indoor	2009 City Population	Population Per Park	Comments
Calgary	3	0	1,296,000	432,000	1 large concrete park, 2 small modular parks
Edmonton	9	2	782,439	86,938	4 large concrete (1 brand new in 2009) 1 small asphalt/concrete 1 Seasonal Temporary park 1 modular 1 small indoor (privately owned) 1 large indoor (privately owned)
Airdrie	1	0	38,091	38,091	1 new Large concrete skatepark which opened spring 2010 replacing current modular skatepark
Cochrane	1	0	13,760	13,760	1 large concrete park
Leduc	1	0	21,597	21,597	1 large concrete park
Medicine Hat	1	1	61,097	30,549	1 large concrete 1 large indoor
Okotoks	1	0	21,690	21,690	1 small concrete park
Red Deer	1	1	89,891	44,946	1 concrete park recently renovated 1 small indoor
Sherwood Park	1	0	61,660	61,660	1 medium size concrete

BENEFITS OF DEVELOPING A SKATEBOARD AMENITIES STRATEGY

The need for a strategy is best understood when considering the following facts:

1. The recent approval of The City of Calgary Recreation Master Plan which envisions an active, creative and vibrant Calgary, outlines the development of a Recreation for Life model that encourages a variety of recreation activities across the lifespan.
2. Recent studies undertaken by Alberta Parks and Recreation Association and The City of Calgary Recreation demonstrates that skateboarding continues to grow in popularity. Approximately 36,000 Calgarians are actively involved in skateboarding.
3. In recent years, administration has received requests for the development of additional skateparks within the city and to the inclusion of skateparks in new recreation facility development.
4. The development of skateparks in Calgary has fallen behind demand, and given the rapid increase in population over the past five years, this gap has grown exponentially.

A skateboard amenities strategy would:

- a) acknowledge skateboarding as an important recreational activity enjoyed by many Calgarians that requires proactive planning;
- b) set out strategic priorities for supporting a growing recreational activity;
- c) demonstrate a commitment by The City to work collaboratively with community and key stakeholder groups in the development of facilities and programming;
- d) identify location criteria to be used to select and assess sites for new skateboard facilities; and,
- e) provide a framework for guiding capital investments in skateboarding facilities



PLANNING FOR RECREATION SERVICE DELIVERY IN CALGARY

The Recreation Master Plan, which was approved by Council in June 2010, outlines a new 10-year vision for recreation service provision in Calgary: *An Active, Creative and Vibrant Calgary*.

Recreation – sport, fitness, arts, culture, festivals, events, and leisure activities – plays a vital role in the lives of Calgarians. The Master Plan grounds Recreation’s vision and mission in practice; to provide all Calgarians with opportunities to derive the many community and individual benefits of recreation while demonstrating outcome-focused planning, integrated service delivery and sustainable practices. As the steward of a broad recreation service delivery continuum, City of Calgary Recreation has an ongoing responsibility to engage Calgarians and key stakeholders in public recreation planning decisions. The collaboration of CASE on the development of this strategy demonstrates the importance of engaging community expertise in the planning recreation service provision for Calgarians.

The Recreation Master Plan outlines Recreation Facility Investment Criteria that must be considered in the development/redevelopment of any recreation facility. The planning for and development of new skateboard parks must align with these investment criteria.

Ten criteria have been defined that include:

1. Facilities as Community Hubs

Facility investment decisions will enhance neighbourhood integrity and support opportunities to position facilities as cornerstones to complete communities.

2. Range of Recreation Opportunities Across the Facility Continuum

Facility investment decisions will support a wide range of recreation opportunities, from introductory to high performance, from neighbourhood to city-wide and special attractions, and be designed to create synergies in skill and interest development.

3. Balance of Growth and Existing Facility Infrastructure Investment

Capital investment decisions will be done in a manner to achieve an equitable balance between existing facilities and the infrastructure needs of tomorrow.

4. Facility Grouping and Amenity Bundling

Facility investment decisions will support grouping of facilities and bundling of amenities, where appropriate, to expand user opportunities, optimize service options and support economies of scale.

5. Flexible Facility Designs to Accommodate Changing Needs

Facility investment decisions will ensure, to the degree possible, facilities are flexible in design, with opportunities to accommodate a wide a range of use, and the ability to be converted to other uses in the future.

6. Integrated Land Acquisition Strategy

Facility investment decisions will be informed by the Community Services & Protective Services Land Acquisition Strategy.

7. Total Asset Management Program

Facility investment decisions will be informed by Recreation's Asset Management Program.

8. Physical and Geographic Facility Accessibility

Facility investment decisions will ensure, to the degree possible, that facilities are physically and geographically accessible to users of all ages and abilities.

9. Facility Safety and Sustainability

Facility investment decisions will ensure long-term sustainability of quality facilities by incorporating safe and sustainable operating and building practices.

10. Partnership Opportunities

Facility investment decisions will support partnering opportunities that generate public value for Calgarians.

GUIDING PRIORITIES

The following priorities emerged from initial consultations with internal and external stakeholders. Upon further analysis, these priorities could form the bases for a comprehensive skateboard amenities strategy.

PRIORITY #1:

Provide additional skateparks in Calgary.

To meet the needs of a growing number of Calgarians, additional skateparks are required throughout the city. The size and location of these parks should be influenced by the location of existing facilities, the availability of land, community interest and need, and opportunities that may exist to partner with community organizations, group recreation facilities or bundle recreational amenities.

PRIORITY #2:

Provide geographic distribution of skateparks in Calgary.

To align with Recreation's Facility Investment Criteria, planning for additional skateparks should aim to provide a good geographic distribution of skateparks so that skateboarders, especially children and youth, are not required to travel long distances from their homes to access a skatepark.

A three tier system would provide for skateboarding opportunities evenly across the city.

The **city-wide** skatepark is the largest and highest order skatepark ($\pm 3000\text{m}^2$ or $\pm 32,000\text{ft}^2$). It is centrally located and attracts users from across the city. The city-wide skatepark could serve users of all skill levels; however emphasis would be on intermediate to advanced skill users.

Regional skateparks are smaller in size than the city-wide skatepark ($\pm 1800\text{m}^2$ or $\pm 19,400\text{ft}^2$). They are ideally located in a regional park and/or near a recreation facility and attract users from larger geographic regions of the city. Regional skateparks could serve users of all skill levels. The City of Calgary Recreation should aim to develop one regional skatepark in each of the four quadrants of the city.

Community skateparks are the smallest in size ($\pm 500\text{m}^2$ or $\pm 5400\text{ft}^2$). These skateparks are a walk-to facility that focuses on providing terrain that would appeal to skaters of all levels and serves only the immediate



community that the skatepark is located within. The number of community skateparks should be determined on an as-needed basis community by community.

PRIORITY #3:

Explore options to provide an indoor skateboarding facility in Calgary.

There is significant demand in the skateboarding community to have an indoor skateboard facility in Calgary. An indoor facility would allow for year-round skateboarding in a safe, supervised climate-controlled environment. The size of the facility, whether the installation is permanent or under a license of occupation, whether the facility is in a new or renovated building, and the operating model all need exploration before a decision is made. Ideally, a large accessible multifaceted permanent indoor facility would best serve the skateboard community.

PRIORITY #4:

Locate new skateboard facilities in parks or in conjunction with recreation facilities that meet as many of the following criteria as possible:

- a) The proposed skateboard facility should be located where users have access to public amenities: Required support amenities include; public transit, accessible pathways, trees and benches. Within a reasonable distance washrooms and vehicle parking should be available. Optional support amenities include community centres;
- b) the proposed skateboard facility should be located where noise can be minimized for nearby residents;
- c) the proposed skateboard facility should be located where it is visible from recreation facility or from a nearby street;
- d) the proposed skateboard facility should not displace other established park uses or a group of park users; and
- e) the proposed skateboard facility is compatible with the existing community and other park or recreational uses.

PRIORITY #5:

Provide variety in the skateboarding system:

- a) some destination facilities;
- b) some local serving facilities;
- c) all should incorporate minimum levels of difficulty; and
- d) all should offer a diverse range of amenities and elements.

The principle of embedding variety in the skateboarding system is good and should be pursued as the number of skateparks is increased in the years to come. An important facet of meeting the diverse needs of skateboarders is to offer variety in terms of:

- i. the scale and size of the skateparks;
- ii. the level of difficulty/challenge of the skateparks;
- iii. the design and style of the skateparks.

PRIORITY #6:

Explore opportunities to purchase additional mobile skateboard equipment that can be used seasonally and at special events.

Currently, The City of Calgary Recreation has enough equipment to erect three small mobile skateboard parks. Having additional mobile skateboard equipment would be helpful for:

- a) seasonal skateboard programming that can occur at/near community centres; and
- b) skateboard demonstrations at a variety of special events.

Putting the mobile park equipment to use in a temporary indoor setting available to the public should be considered.

PRIORITY #7:

Explore opportunities for increased skateboard programming at City of Calgary Recreation facilities and Community Centres.

City of Calgary Recreation should explore opportunities to increase skateboard programming and information clinics at both recreation facilities and community centres, to go hand-in-hand with an expanded set of skateboard facilities. Programming and outreach would focus on a variety of topics, including basic training for new skateboarders, instructor training, and sessions to reach out to groups who typically have lower participation rates in skateboarding.

Skateboard programming and information clinics within communities could serve a number of functions:

1. Risk Management - By teaching skaters the basics of skateboarding including safety and awareness, the risk of injury is reduced.
2. Access - As with all recreation activities, skaters vary in ability and age, and it is important that all skaters feel welcome at each site. Clinics can show that the facility is available for all levels of skaters and gives them the confidence to mix with the different aged and ability of users.
3. Community Service - Skateboarding clinics can be an important tool in managing a skatepark. As well, skateboarding promotes an active lifestyle and is a very inexpensive sport.
4. Improving the Image - Skateboarding can be perceived by some to be a precursor to anti-social behavior. Clinics can introduce parents to the sport of skateboarding and help familiarize them with the sport. In doing so this can help to de-stigmatize the negative image that the sport has for some.

Skateboard programming would be seen as augmenting unstructured use of skateboard parks.

PRIORITY #8:

Engage in coordinated consultation processes with community and key stakeholders to determine skatepark location and design options.

The size, scale and design of skateparks will vary from location to location based on community needs and site compatibility. The City of Calgary Recreation should engage the public and the skateboarding community (e.g. CASE) before developing and implementing any plans to erect mobile skateparks, to construct new permanent skateparks, or to enhance existing skateparks.

PRIORITY #9:

Explore financing options for the development of additional skateparks in Calgary.

Financial support for skatepark development/redevelopment will likely occur through a combination of:

1. City of Calgary capital funding as prioritized through the Culture, Parks & Recreation Infrastructure Investment Plan;
2. Community fundraising by key stakeholder groups such as CASE; and/or
3. Grants, sponsorship, donations from private organizations.

Further exploration of these funding options would help inform the development of capital investment requirements.

DEVELOPING THE SKATEBOARD AMENITIES STRATEGY

Planning for the development and redevelopment of skateparks within Calgary will require further research, analysis and ongoing engagement of key internal and external stakeholders and communities throughout Calgary.

To determine feasibility, timing, location, partnership opportunities, design requirements and funding options, The City of Calgary Recreation recommends undertaking a detailed and comprehensive Skateboard Amenities Strategy.