

DRAFT



Parks Renaissance Strategy



Overview

The City of Markham parks and open spaces are integral to defining the physical and social fabric of our city - contributing to overall livability, encouraging investment and providing much needed respite from the built-up urban environment. The parks, open spaces and natural areas define the foundation of the city's spatial organization and overall natural heritage system. These spaces and their inherent and constructed infrastructure create opportunities for a wide variety of recreation facilities, programs and events that encourage active living, provide enrichment and build a strong sense of community.

As a community of communities, with its origins dating to the late 1700s, Markham's urban areas exhibit different forms, growth rates, and socio-demographic characteristics. Consequently, there is a disparity in parkland service levels in some older communities, and the associated facility infrastructure is aging and of varied conditions. Markham has experienced tremendous population growth and is one of Canada's most culturally diverse municipalities. Parks in recently developed areas include modern

development and facility provision that offer exciting and creative spaces with a range of amenities that do not exist in the older parks and open spaces. As new development and intensification plans are submitted, increased populations, changing demographics, and cultural shifts will place new demands and pressures on existing parks and facilities.

It is often stated that great parks are essential to great cities. Recognizing this, municipalities across North America are rethinking and investing in their existing parks and open spaces as part of urban renewal strategies. Whether through necessity or cultural and social choices, trends suggest that in the future people will be spending more time in their local communities, which will increase the use of public parks and open spaces. The provision of new parks in existing, built-up urban areas will be problematic due to a limited or restricted land base. This will necessitate a more flexible approach to park provision than in greenfield areas, including the re-imagining of older parks to meet contemporary standards and leisure interests.





Markham is committed to the ongoing development and enhancement of its existing parks and open spaces to meet the diverse and changing needs of its residents as a means of nurturing and enhancing the quality of life for residents. The Parks Renaissance Strategy establishes a framework, complete with an implementation plan, for the re-imagining of, and

reinvestment in, Markham's existing parks and open spaces. Working alongside other aspects of the Public Realm Strategy and the City's planning initiatives to stimulate urban growth and renewal, the Parks Renaissance Strategy provides the impetus for the rejuvenation of local parks in a creative, sustainable and fiscally responsible manner.



Vision

A place for all that is engaging, sustaining and beautiful.

Shared Places Our Spaces: Markham's Public Realm Strategy (2015)



Markham's parks and open spaces are an integral part of the broader public realm. In 2015, the City completed Shared Places Our Spaces: Markham's Public Realm Strategy (2015). The strategy engaged Council, City staff, residents and community stakeholders in articulating a vision and identifying opportunities to enhance, improve and raise awareness of Markham's public spaces. The outcome is a series of recommendations for achieving successful public spaces that are well planned and designed and where heritage, culture and diversity can be celebrated.

The Parks Renaissance Strategy builds on the work completed for Shared Places Our Spaces with a focus on the renewal of parks in older communities. The vision statement for Markham's public realm is, "a place for all that is engaging, sustaining and beautiful". As elements of the public realm, this simple but inspiring Vision statement can apply equally to the Parks Renaissance Strategy.

The Goals of the Public Realm Strategy provide further articulation of the Vision. The Public Realm Strategy speaks to high quality, innovative design, beautification and animation of Markham's parks and neighbourhoods through meaningful community engagement.

1. Made in Markham Innovation and Design

Reviewing Our Existing Spaces: Improving Design, Innovation and Accessibility
Aligning Our Current Policies
Delivering High Quality Public Realm

2. Keep Markham Beautiful

Preserving and Enhancing Our Heritage Assets
Maintaining Our Private and Public Properties

3. Animate Our Neighbourhoods & Districts

Engaging Our Community

4. Harmonize Our Efforts and Share Our Resources

Improving Partnerships, Sponsorships and Joint Ventures

Continuing Collaboration, Cooperation and Budget Priority

5. Create Gateways and Destinations

Showcasing Public Art

Developing Green and Cultural Assets as Destinations



Reviewing Our Existing Spaces: Improving Design, Innovation and Accessibility
Aligning Our Current Policies
Delivering High Quality Public Realm


Creating Lasting Impressions
Showcasing Public Art
Developing Green and Cultural Assets
 as Destinations




Maintaining Our Green Assets
Preserving and Enhancing Our
 Heritage Assets
Maintaining Our Private and
 Public Properties


Improving Partnerships, Sponsorships, and Joint Ventures
Continuing Collaboration, Co-operation and Budget Priority
Exploring Grant, Foundation, Crowd-sourcing, and Charity Opportunities


Updating Current By-laws and Resourcing Events
Interpreting Our City
Engaging Our Community

*Shared Places Our Spaces: Markham's
 Public Realm Strategy (2015) - Goals*

Objectives for the Park Renaissance Strategy



The Parks Renaissance Strategy provides a series of tools for identifying, evaluating and prioritizing improvements to the city's existing parks, open spaces, trails and pathways. Objectives for the strategy are to:

- Adopt the Vision outlined in the approved Public Realm Strategy for this project;
- Create guiding principles and a framework to guide the identification and implementation of Parks Renaissance projects;
- Develop an approach for engaging Council, staff, stakeholders and the community in the identification of park, open space and trail improvement opportunities;
- Implement the recommendations of the approved Public Realm Strategy with respect to the renewal of existing parks. Align with other related studies including: Shared Places Our Spaces: Markham's Public Realm Strategy (2015); the Integrated Leisure Master Plan (2016); the Parks and Open Space Master Plan (2016); and facilities asset management plans;

- Establish processes including evaluation criteria, triggers and standards to assist with prioritizing initiatives to be included in the Parks Renaissance Strategy;
- Establish a plan for undertaking and evaluating Parks Renaissance Pilot Projects. These need to celebrate the distinctive characteristics of Markham neighbourhoods and be meaningful to local residents; and,
- Develop an implementation plan complete with a funding and phasing strategy to maximize the input on as many projects as possible within a five-year timeframe.



Policy Context

The City has done extensive visioning and consultation on community aspirations in recent years in conjunction with: Building Markham's Future Together (2015-2019 Strategic Plan); the Markham Official Plan (2014); the Integrated Leisure Master Plan (2010, with update in 2016); and Shared Places Our Spaces: Markham's Public Realm Strategy (2015). These over-arching documents include relevant visions, goal statements and policies that inform the Parks Renaissance Strategy.

Section 4 of the Markham Official Plan (2014) outlines objectives *"to achieve a balanced distribution of parks and open space facilities and activities to meet the diverse recreational and leisure needs of Markham's residents, workers and visitors"* (4.3.1.1), and *"to design and develop high quality parks and open spaces that provide for comfortable, safe, accessible, and year-round use"* (4.3.1.3).

Section 4.3.5 Parks and Open Space Acquisition, Design and Improvement of the Markham Official Plan, identifies that *"Where Markham communities fall short of active and passive parkland targets as established in the Integrated Leisure Master Plan, these areas will be considered priority areas for additional public parks and open space acquisition and improvements."*

The recently approved Shared Places Our Spaces: Markham's Public Realm Strategy (2015) notes that the *"intensity and commitment must be focused on the funding, design and implementation of facilities within older communities"*.

Building Markham's Future Together (2015-2019 Strategic Plan) speaks to *"an inclusive city" and "building a liveable, caring and interconnected community"*.

The Integrated Leisure Master Plan (2010) which addresses needs and priorities in the areas of parks, recreation, culture and library facilities and services, echoes these statements. It outlines a common Mission Statement for Markham's integrated leisure services which speaks to the provision of *"inclusive, accessible, safe, enjoyable, and sustainable leisure, learning, sport and cultural opportunities essential to vibrant places"*.

The Integrated Leisure Master Plan (ILMP) further proposes that parks can be viewed as outdoor, 'living community centres'. As key building blocks in the provision of leisure and recreation programming, parks not only serve as spaces for programmed activities such as sports but should be designed in a way that animates and engages the community in non-traditional, no-cost and self-directed activities. The Integrated Leisure Master Plan further notes that "great parks have a 'wow' factor" and are flexible and responsive to user trends and preferences.



Guiding Principles

Guiding Principles for the Parks Renaissance Strategy:

- *Inclusivity / Diversity*
- *Connected*
- *Innovative & Beautiful*
- *Responsive*
- *Sustainable*
- *Flexible*
- *Fiscally Responsible*



As Markham's population increases, the parks and open space system must continue to meet the social and recreational needs of both existing and new residents. Active living, fitness and organized sports will need to be supported together with passive recreation, nature appreciation and quiet enjoyment. Opportunities to introduce new large parks may be limited in areas of intensification and there will be pressure on the existing parks, open spaces and trails to respond to a broader range of user demands.

Well-designed parks and open spaces invite use by residents, project a strong positive image for a neighbourhood and the City as a whole, and encourage private investment. To be consistent with the high standard of quality reflected in Markham's newer parks, the Parks Renaissance Strategy should strive for the same quality of design and visual appeal in its rejuvenation of older parks. The unique cultural identity and shifting demographics of neighbourhoods can also be supported and expressed through the design of parks and public spaces. These opportunities should be explored with the local community. Parks should provide a palette of programs and activities that are appropriate to the site, the neighbourhood and their role within the overall parks system. In addition to supporting active and passive recreation, parks and

open spaces accommodate opportunities for natural areas and habitats, which significantly contribute to the ecological and environmental health of the urban tree canopy.

The planning and design for parks included in the Parks Renaissance Strategy must consider sustainability of the infrastructure. The design should consider operational costs and implications as well as capital costs. Opportunities to align with other projects and funding sources such as the asset replacement program will increase the impact of the project and the value of the financial investment.

From the vision and objectives for Markham's parks and public spaces established in Shared Places Our Spaces, and the policies of the City's strategic plans, a number of key themes emerge that can serve as guiding principles for projects to be undertaken through the Parks Renaissance Strategy.

Guiding Principles for the Parks Renaissance Strategy

Suggested principles for the Parks Renaissance Strategy that will need to be discussed and reviewed through the consultation process:

Inclusivity / Diversity

- Support leisure and recreation opportunities for a diverse range of ages, cultures and abilities. Create social places that allow residents to interact safely.
- Provide for leisure and recreation activities that are accessible and affordable.
- Foster a sense of community and nurture a respect for the local neighbourhood and community character.
- Encourage community engagement and partnerships with resident and business groups.
- Encourage cultural expression.

Connected

- Deliver projects that facilitate a connected City and community through a system of pathways, trails and active transportation routes.
- Facilitate the connection of natural areas and maintenance of ecological functions with parks as one of the green building blocks.

Innovative & Beautiful

- Create diverse, vibrant and memorable spaces with a quality of design to match new development standards.
- Design and implement innovative solutions.
- Incorporate public art.

Responsive

- Take advantage of the unique characteristics of the site.
- Support a range of activities that respond to neighbourhood leisure needs and interests.
- Identify active sports and passive recreation needs and strategies to resolve shortfalls.
- Include cultural expression that celebrates the distinctive characteristics of Markham neighbourhoods and is meaningful to local residents.
- Explore new ideas and approaches to “Place Making”.

Sustainable

- Support the protection, enhancement and continued health of natural features on the site and within the natural system.
- Develop and enhance volunteer participation, stewardship and education.
- Implement low impact design measures that support environmental and sustainable objectives.

Flexible

- Consider multi-functional spaces and/or the provision for self-directed, un-programmed uses.
- Consider future adaptability to changing needs and leisure interests.
- Provide suitable spatial requirements and buffers for recreation facilities.

Fiscally Responsible

- Consider life cycle project investment synergies.
- As this project provides additional amenities to existing parks due to growth related needs, the primary funding source is Development Charges.
- Consider long-term operational impacts of the design as well as capital costs.
- Where possible, align with other project funds or capitalize on non-tax-based sources of funding to optimize the financial investment.
- Complement and enhance existing funding through increased business, volunteer and community involvement.
- Maintain standards for health and safety in planning and implementing safe, attractive, accessible and comfortable design solutions.



Evaluation Criteria



The outcome of the Parks Renaissance Strategy will be a methodology that determines a prioritized list of parks and open space improvement projects. These projects will respond to aging park infrastructure in Markham and recognize the role that existing parks will play in supporting population growth and changing community interests. There will be an equal distribution and a balanced approach to the supply of solutions. These projects typically would include amenities such as shade structures, pathway improvements, lighting and site furniture enhancements (benches, waste receptacles, interpretive signs, bike racks, etc.)

All projects should align with one or more of the agreed upon Guiding Principles for the Parks Renaissance Strategy.

In evaluating potential projects within the Parks Renaissance Strategy, information will need to be drawn from other parks and recreation planning exercises in order to fully understand the City's existing levels of service, forecasted community recreation needs and socio-demographics.

Sources of this information include:

- Parks and open space inventory;
- New parkland classifications being developed for the Official Plan;

- Parks and Open Space Acquisition and Master Plan (2016), which is addressing parkland supply and deficiencies, existing and forecasted service levels for parks and open spaces, and a strategy for parkland acquisition; and,
- Integrated Leisure Master Plan (2016), for recreation facilities and program needs.

Criteria will be used to evaluate parks renaissance projects including:

Park Conditions

- General aging of the park infrastructure, amenities, or facilities, with priority to older parks considered to be those developed more than 20 years ago;
- Current condition is increasing operations and maintenance demands;
- Activities in the park are no longer reflective of the surrounding neighbourhood or the Integrated Leisure Master Plan.

Recreation Needs

- Facility or improvement fulfills identified need or gap in the Integrated Leisure Master Plan;
- Existing facilities or infrastructure are under utilized;

Population or Socio-demographic Changes

- Population in the service area is increasing as a result of intensification;



- Demographics in the service area have changed as a result of an aging neighbourhood (‘turn-over’ to the next generation is generally considered to be 25-30 years);
- Socio-demographics in the service area have changed as a result of cultural shifts.

Park Usage

- Nature of park use has changed (increased or decreased), particularly if it impacts the physical or social capacity of the park, or warrants rethinking of park facilities to support new activities or current policies and programs (e.g. AODA);
- Community use of the park has changed.

Engaged Community

- The existence of park stewards / volunteers;
- Input from community members.

Where site capacity or utilization issues have been noted or when evaluating community requests for park improvements it may be helpful to track and monitor the frequency of use in key parks for a period of time, as part of the evaluation. Parks Operations staff represent a resource to gauge the changes in park use and should be considered an invaluable source of information for consultation process.

It will also be important to examine potential Parks Renaissance projects alongside the asset management program. Parks Renaissance projects may differ from

a routine park facility repair and replacement which may happen on a different timeline as a ‘one-off’ replacement to address safety concerns, or as part of life-cycle replacement. There will be opportunities to realize synergies related to any project either through parallel or alternate funding resources.

Other factors which may suggest a higher consideration for a project include initiatives or improvements recommended through a previous planning exercise, and councillor or community requested projects.

Funding Model

New parks design and construction are funded 90% from Development Charges and 10% from a non-growth related funding source. Replacement and/or rehabilitation requirements for existing parks are funded from the Life Cycle Replacement and Capital Reserve Fund. The objective of the Park Renaissance Strategy is to provide additional amenities to existing parks in order to align to the standards of the new parks, upon which 90% of the additional growth-related amenities to existing parks could be funded from Development Charges. Funding requests for the Park Renaissance Strategy will be considered as part of the annual Capital Budget process.





City of Markham

Anthony Roman Centre
101 Town Centre Boulevard
Markham ON L3R 9W3

  markham.ca

