

OAK MEADOWS PARK Community Engagement Summary

Parks has recently completed the preliminary planning and design process for Oak Meadows Park, a new 1.7 hectare (4.2 acre) neighbourhood park in Sunnyside Heights. This process included site surveys and assessments, two online CitySpeaks surveys and an open house on May 12, 2015.

The City provided project information and updates through a dedicated project webpage, and advised residents on engagement opportunities through newspapers ads, neighbourhood mail-outs and social media. Consultation opportunities were aimed at generating ideas and gathering input from residents and potential park users.

Key Findings

A total of 108 respondents completed the online CitySpeaks surveys and 22 people completed questionnaires at the May 12 open house. The following findings summarize the feedback received through this process.

Preferred Park Amenities

We heard that the park should build on the existing natural features of the site, and that active amenities like sport fields and structures should be reserved for more suitable locations nearby. Popular park amenities included pathways and trails, an expanded forest, wildlife habitat enhancements (bird boxes, insect habitat etc.), a nature play area for kids and passive open space. Flowering trees, picnic tables and a view point were also popular. The following figure summarizes the order of most preferred park improvements as expressed by all respondents.¹



It was evident from the survey and open house that residents were looking for a children's play area that provided a natural play experience, as opposed to a traditional playground. There was some concern with the location of a traditional playground as it may create privacy and noise issues.



63%

of people who wanted a children's play area preferred nature play over a traditional playground



84%

of people identified with the natural features of the site and wanted them retained in the plan

¹ Combined surveys and open house results (May, 2015, 130 respondents) – Top 5 desired park amenities

Natural Areas and Wildlife Habitat

It was clear from the open house and survey that residents connected with the natural features of the site. We heard that active amenities in the park should be kept to a minimum, and that we should focus on enhancing wildlife habitat wherever possible. Reforestation, planting native plant species and wetland rehabilitation were widely supported. We also heard that opportunities to enjoy and learn about nature should be provided, including boardwalks through the wetland, seating opportunities along pathways and interpretive signage to allow visitors to learn about the local ecosystem.

Picnicking and Passive Open Space

Areas for picnicking and passive open space were widely supported in the plan, with a number of residents in support of picnic tables. There were, however, some concerns with larger covered shelters and gathering areas as they may encourage loitering after dark. We also heard that the existing old field habitat was valuable, and that regularly maintained lawn space should be limited. It was felt by some that the picnicking area should be close to a children’s nature play area to encourage family outings.

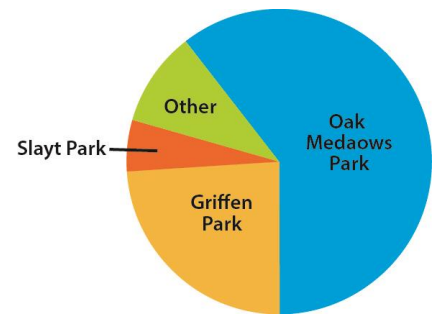


Dog’s in the Park

We also heard from some residents regarding the potential for a dog off-leash area, with residents both in favour and opposition. However, given the public’s overwhelming support for natural features and amenities, a dog off-leash area is not compatible or suitable for this park. As such, Bylaw signage requiring dogs to be on-leash at all times will be posted at entrances to the Park. It should be noted that the nearby Wills Brook Dog Off-leash Area has recently been approved. A larger destination scale dog off leash area is also planned for a future community park northeast of 168th street and 24th Avenue.

Park Name

When asked to select a park name, the majority (60%) of respondents identified with the name **Oak Meadows Park**, which reflects the natural features of the site, notably the large English Oak trees and old field meadow habitat. Other popular names included Griffen, which was the original name of 23 Avenue, and Slayt, which was the name of the original family that owned the site. Other notable write in names included Grandview Ridge Nature Park, Royal Oak Park and Wild Fields Park.



SUMMARY

The City has completed public engagement for the design of Oak Meadows Park. The process included a range of public consultation opportunities to ensure that stakeholders and the public had meaningful opportunities to share ideas and provide feedback. Community outreach will continue through park development and once the park is open to the public.

Respondents were largely in support of the concept, with amenities that take advantage of the existing natural features and emphasise environmental stewardship. The final park concept plan was developed with consideration to the community feedback that was received. Amenities for children’s natural play and picnicking were included, while concerns of privacy and loitering have been addressed through pathway placement and landscape design. The plan is consistent with majority public opinion and provides the top 5 amenities desired by survey respondents.