



Corporate Report

NO: R106

COUNCIL DATE: June 16, 2008

REGULAR COUNCIL

TO: Mayor & Council DATE: June 12, 2008
FROM: General Manager, Planning and Development; General Manager, Parks, Recreation and Culture FILE: 6120-01
SUBJECT: Proposed Mini-Park and Plaza Designations

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Council:

1. Receive this report as information; and
2. Approve “*Mini-Park*” and “*Plaza*”, as defined within this report, as sub-categories of the Neighbourhood Park classification in the Master Parks, Recreation and Culture Master Plan for application in higher density areas of the City as generally described in this report.

INTENT

In December 2007, Council requested that staff provide a report on the introduction of small “pocket” parks in higher density neighbourhoods on the basis that the current approach to providing parks is not fully meeting the needs and demands from the public. The intent of this report is to provide a set of draft classifications and guidelines for new types of small parks for Council’s consideration and approval.

BACKGROUND

Existing Standards

The definition of and criteria for neighbourhood parks in the 1996-2006 Parks and Recreation Master Plan is as follows:

“Neighbourhood Parks provide the local park function at the neighbourhood and village level. They generally serve a 0.8 km (0.5 mile) radius catchment area. They can be developed for active recreation

or remain as passive areas; for example, ravine or linear park. The standard for neighbourhood parks is currently set at 0.6 ha (1.5 acres) per 1,000 residents.”

Under the existing Parks, Recreation and Culture Policy P-2 (3), the minimum size for a neighbourhood park is set at 1.6 ha (4 acres) and when added to an elementary school, the total site is to have a minimum size of 4.5 ha (11 acres). The neighbourhood park ratio of 0.6 ha (1.5 acres)/1000 residents is the standard in the Official Community Plan.

The City has 129 small parks (<0.5 ha [1.25 acres]). Many are known as tot-lots, and are located primarily in older single-family residential neighbourhoods. These tot-lots tend to have narrow openings to the fronting street, have side or back yard fences bordering them, and often contain a small playground. Unfortunately, the location, surrounded by low-density development and development-interface design of many of these tot-lots has resulted in limited public use.

New mini-parks (parkettes) have been constructed in the East Clayton neighbourhood. The design for these parkettes includes significant road frontage and development facing onto the park, thus permitting better surveillance of the parks by residents, visitors, by-law officers and police. With these design elements the city is anticipating increased use, safer environments for residents, and less inappropriate evening and nighttime use of the parks. Appendix “A” contains an example of a mini-park recently approved by Council.

Impact of Growth and Changing Densities

During the period of the 1996 – 2006 PRC Master Plan, Surrey’s population grew from approximately 286,000 residents to over 400,000. It is anticipated that growth in Surrey in the next ten years will result in a population of over 500,000.

Recent residential development in the City has seen a far greater emphasis on multi-family residential development and single family small-lot and coach house residential neighbourhoods with much higher densities than ten years ago. In the new higher density neighbourhoods, the private outdoor space provided offers more limited opportunities for informal active play or community gatherings in comparison to the larger residential lots that were more typical 10 years ago.

Because of this shift in available space on private grounds, the consultants leading the development of the new Parks, Recreation and Culture 10-Year (2008 – 2018) Strategic Plan identified the need for smaller parks in high density areas to meet needs associated with early childhood development, to provide public space where residents can find temporary solitude and to provide small aesthetically pleasing civic meeting places for the local community. The consultant’s findings mirrored the current staff perspective on the need for small parks and small civic plazas in high-density neighbourhoods and the need to strategically locate these parks/plazas through comprehensive park planning.

In the draft 2008 - 2018 PRC Strategic Plan, the consultant has suggested a maximum of 400 m distance between any residence and the nearest park; i.e., approximately a 10 minute walk. The consultant has also suggested that the existing Park categories of “Neighbourhood”, “Community”, “City” and “Nature Preserve & Linkages” be further divided to provide a finer typology of neighbourhood parks that meet more specific needs in communities undergoing transition from rural to suburban or suburban to urban. These further subcategories of Neighbourhood Parks would include “Mini-park” and “Plaza” as the smallest area sub-category under the Neighbourhood Park classification.

DISCUSSION

“Mini-Park” and “Plaza” Concept

Neighbourhood Parks under the new park system planning would allow for mini-parks and plazas in high-density¹ areas, where there is currently not a local park within a 400m radius, or 10 minute walking distance that local residence or visitors can access. These new park classifications differ from the older “Neighbourhood Park” classification principally through their scale. They provide a mechanism for more comprehensively meeting local park amenity needs at the sub-neighbourhood level.

The mini park / plaza concept, also differs from the older tot-lot model in relation to their design. The principal difference between a “mini-park” and a “plaza” is that the plaza will be largely hard landscaped (fountains, paving, art) and will be predominantly located in high traffic mixed use, business or commercial areas. Mini-parks are to be located in areas that are predominantly residential. They will incorporate much more greenery and will focus on local demographic amenity needs, such as playgrounds, ball courts, and sitting areas.

Specific difference between Mini Park and Plaza Classifications

1. Plazas are civic open spaces in **high-density urban mixed-use, commercial, business and service areas**. The primary function of a plaza is to create a place for social interaction, where people can temporarily escape the hustle and bustle of a busy area. It is a local focal point, that may include public art, monuments, education pieces, or more traditional features such as fountains. Plazas will be a minimum of 150 square meters, and generally less than 2,500 square meters.

Central features in a plaza are best appreciated and cared for by the local community when the feature is relevant to and chosen by the local community. The plaza will have strict design guidelines and siting criteria to ensure a sense of safety for users and appropriate use. It needs to be open and accessible to encourage use as a dynamic space and may integrate community design and or art with local uses and groups to ensure a local sense of ownership over the space. A plaza will function best when surrounded by animated human scale space, such as cafes, restaurant patios, and busy pedestrian corridors. Plazas in Surrey will differ from traditional larger European plazas by their smaller size and local use, as opposed to a focus on large markets or cathedrals, as was traditionally associated with the classic plaza.

Plazas should be open to the street on 2 to 4 sides. In some instances, windows from busy retail or commercial facilities could replace street frontage, thus ensuring “eyes on the plaza” for safety and security. (See Appendix B includes some photo examples of mini-plazas)

¹ High density is defined using Census Canada information, which for the 2006 data, is approximately 5,000 - 19550 people per km² in Surrey, which equals 20-77 people an acre, or 50-190 people per hectare.

2. Mini-Parks are open spaces in **high-density residential areas**. Their primary function is to ensure basic local park amenities that compensate for the lack of private open spaces that would be found in the large backyards of lower density (larger lot) residential neighbourhoods. Mini-parks should not be smaller than 285 square meters (0.7 acres) and not larger than 1.2 hectares (3 acres).

The mini-park creates a local green open space that facilitates the placement of neighbourhood park amenities within easy walking distance from nearby homes. The target patrons for a mini-park are families or clusters of specific amenity user groups, such as seniors. A mini-park should be located such that it has houses facing onto it and be surrounded by streets on 2 to 4 sides to ensure the safety of users and appropriate use. Special design consideration will be applied to mini-parks that exhibit important ecological values and are connected to a larger, continuous natural corridor.

Considerations For Siting and Design of Mini-Parks And Plazas

The following siting and design guidelines will be applied to mini parks and mini-plazas:

- Ensure clear sightlines across the entire site.
- The mini park / plaza must be open to the street on 2 to 4 sides.
- Buildings adjacent to or integrated into the park must be front facing, with walkways joining into the park and active rooms in adjacent buildings should face onto the park.
- Cafes or businesses interfacing with the mini-plaza should open onto the mini-plaza.
- Plazas should be oriented to be easily accessible to public transportation and should not interface with parking lots.
- The design of the mini-park or plaza must reflect human scale, as should adjacent development.
- Lighting may be included to increase visibility in the winter and to deter negative use during evening and nighttime hours.
- The local community will be engaged in the design process, both for built form and for artistic enhancement, reflecting the requirements of the City's public art policies.

Criteria for Siting Mini-Parks

- Mini-parks will be developed in higher density residential areas with high numbers of families with children up to 14 years old or the potential for such a demographic mix.
- Subject to the immediately preceding criterion, mini-parks should be located within a 400m walking distance of all residences in their service area.
- Where possible, mini-parks should include some emphasis on natural landscapes with which children can interact as a means to gain a better understanding of and appreciation for nature.
- A mini-park may feature a unique environmental niche or rare ecosystem needing protection, and could be connected to a larger natural system, corridor or node via a liner park or riparian setback area.

Costs Associated with Mini-parks and Plazas

Based on experience with development of Parkette # 4 in East Clayton, which will be one of the first mini-parks in the City, a one-acre mini-park will cost approximately \$55/sq. m. to develop, or approximately \$250,000 per mini-park. This cost allows for basic landscaping and simple amenities such as park benches and basic playground equipment.

The cost for plazas exceeds that of mini-parks, due to the extra costs associated with hard landscaping elements, averaging approximately \$95/sq. m. or \$400,000 per mini-plaza based on a 0.4 ha (1.0 acre) plaza. Extra features such as fountains would add to these costs.

The unit costs for maintenance and operation of mini-parks will be greater than for larger parks, due to the lack of economies of scale and due to relatively high levels of public use.

Implementation

The Planning and Development Department and the Parks, Recreation and Culture Department have developed a tool for analyzing areas where mini-parks or plazas are required. This tool is essentially a gap analysis based on density maps of the City. The tool will be applied in Neighbourhood Concept Plan areas and in other re-developing areas of the City where density is currently increasing, or where density is expected to increase due to changes in zoning. This tool has already been used in preparing support materials for the new *City Centre Plan*. In the study area, preliminary analysis shows the need for two mini-parks and an additional plaza in the City Centre area.

Once neighbourhoods have been identified as meeting the criteria for the development of mini-parks or plazas, land acquisition for the sites will be undertaken in accordance with the plans laid out in the Parkland Acquisition Program. Development of these mini-parks and plazas would then be prioritized in accordance with funding made available for such purposes in the Park Development Capital Program, in accordance with the Five-year Financial Plan.

Other Considerations

Mini-parks/plazas could also, in part, be acquired through the 5% parkland dedication on large subdivisions, as permitted under Section 941 (1) of the Local Government Act. Alternatively, these sites could be part of the outdoor amenity space in multi-family residential developments, where public access would be guaranteed through registration of appropriate right-of-ways.

Developers under City-approved design guidelines and construction standards could construct city-owned mini-parks and plazas. A separate report is being prepared for Council consideration that will provide a process to allow developers to construct mini-parks, plazas and neighbourhood parks on behalf of the City during the land development process.

SUMMARY

“Mini-park” and “Plaza” are proposed new sub-categories of the Neighbourhood Park classification that will assist in addressing the needs of residents living in higher density areas of the City. It is recommended that Council approve “*Mini-Park*” and “*Plaza*”, as defined in this report, as subcategories of the Neighbourhood Park classification for use in high-density areas of the City and that Council approve the siting and design criteria for these park and plaza subcategories as articulated in this report.

Jean Lamontagne
General Manager,
Planning and Development



Laurie Cavan
General Manager,
Parks, Recreation and Culture

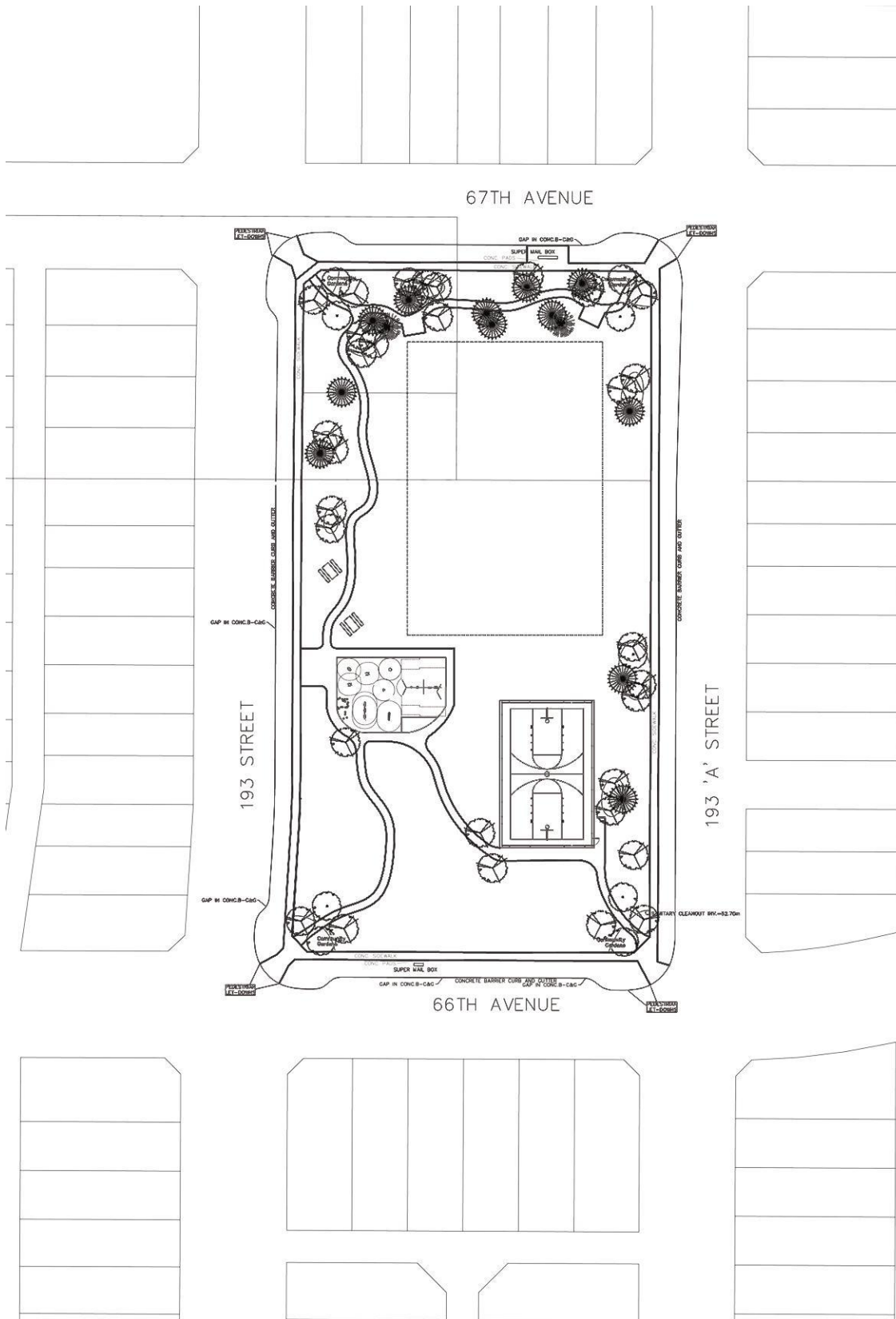
CSP/OCC

Attachments

j:\park-rec\wpcentre\corprpts\2008\mini park-plaza corporate report june 2008 1.doc
DCV 7/15/10 4:04 PM

Appendix A

Example of a Mini-Park: East Clayton Parkette No. 4



Appendix B

Mini Park Examples



Mini Plaza Examples

