

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

TO: Shane Bourke, City Manager	DATE: October 10, 2023
FROM: Brian Glavin, Chief Operating Officer	MEETING: Operational Services Committee
REPORT WRITER: Kase DeVries, M.Sc., Director of Parks	
SUBJECT: Playground Strategy	

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Operational Services Committee recommend Council approve the Playground Strategy as presented in Attachment 1.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL / COMMITTEE DIRECTIONS

At the November 17, 2022, Budget Deliberations, the following motion was passed:

Committee amend the Parks Capital Budget under “Playground Replacement Program” to remove funding of \$500,000 in 2023.

BACKGROUND

As of 2023, there are 130 playgrounds within the City of Grande Prairie, of which 104 are City-owned, and 26 are located on school sites. Most City playgrounds are located within residential neighbourhoods, although a few are centrally located and serve as regional playgrounds.

City playgrounds undergo regular inspections and maintenance; however, like any asset, they eventually reach a point where replacement is required. Considering the rising costs of replacements, it becomes crucial to establish a methodology that determines which playgrounds should be replaced and identifies the suitable amenities to replace them with.

ANALYSIS

The Playground Strategy (Attachment 1) is the City of Grande Prairie’s approach to prioritizing the renewal of existing playgrounds and the development of alternative amenities within parks. The Strategy is a tool that ensures playground renewal decisions are made using neighbourhood-level considerations.

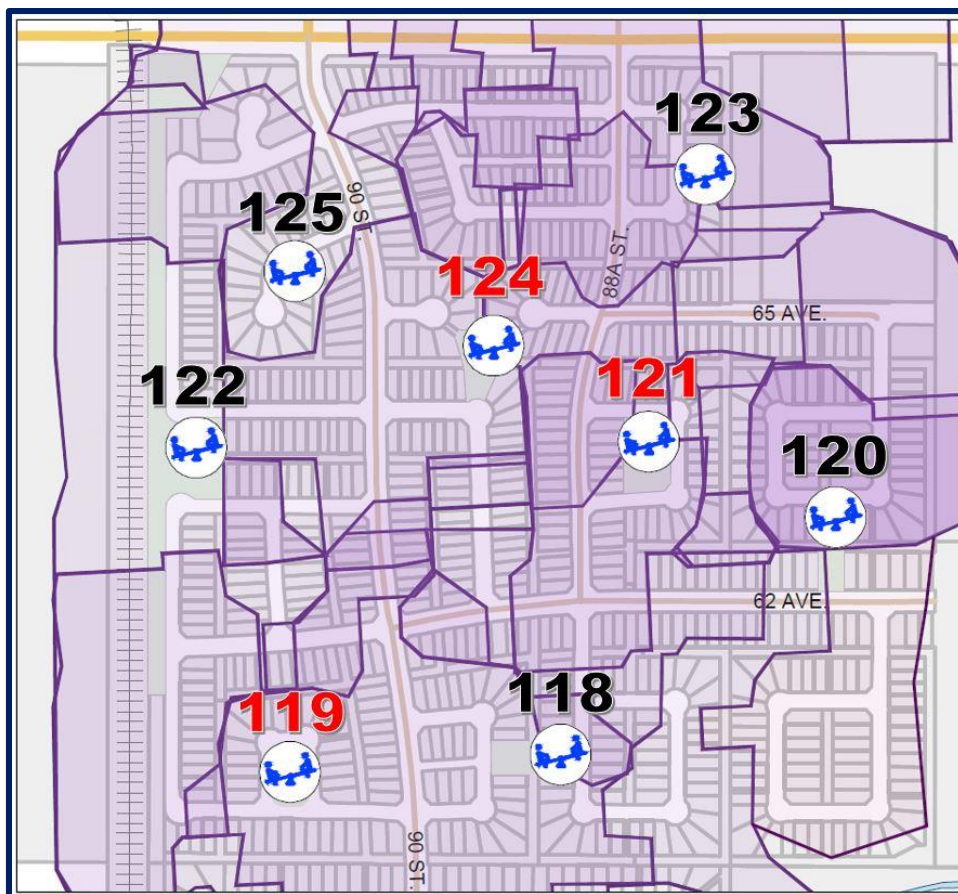
The Strategy adopts a data-driven approach, harnessing geospatial analysis and neighbourhood demographics to foster consistent decision-making. This methodology facilitates the development of playgrounds and amenities that harmonize with the distinctive characteristics of each neighbourhood within the municipality.

The excerpt below from Attachment 1 presents an example of how the Strategy will be implemented:

Example Scenario: Countryside South

To illustrate the application of the strategy, consider the Countryside South neighbourhood as a case study. A demographic analysis of this neighbourhood reveals that it is home to 473 children aged 0-14 years, ranking it 13th out of 43 neighbourhoods in terms of the total number of children. This places Countryside South ahead of others in terms of child population, supporting overall investment for playground infrastructure. This insight also helps narrow down alternative amenities that are more suitable for younger children.

Currently, Countryside South includes eight individual playgrounds, each with unique asset numbers and associated walking distance polygons, as depicted in the image below.



Upon evaluation of the walking distance coverage of each playground, the following data were observed:

1. Playground 118 serves the southeast portion of the neighbourhood.
2. Playground 119 covers the southwest area, but its coverage overlaps with 118 and is complemented by the linear north-south coverage of Playground 122. Thus, it might be considered for an alternative amenity.
3. Playground 120 caters to the far east side of the neighbourhood.
4. Playground 121 provides coverage in the center, but its service area also overlaps with 118 from the south and 123 from the north, making it a candidate for an alternative amenity.
5. Playground 122 serves the western part of the neighbourhood.
6. Playground 123 covers the northeast portion of the neighbourhood.
7. Playground 124 caters to the central area, yet it is well-served by 123, and 125. Thus, it could be considered for an alternative amenity.
8. Playground 125 serves the northwest portion of the neighbourhood.

Based on these observations, the potential sites for alternative amenities in the future include: 119, 121, and 124. Administration would further evaluate these parks, considering additional variables from Table 1. For instance, 119's proximity to the west paved trail system suggests it would work well to feature a small bike pump track. 121, with its existing grade and ample space, could accommodate a small sledding hill and a playable court. Lastly, 124, centrally located with large shade trees and greenspace connectivity, is a suitable candidate for a small gathering area like a gazebo or covered structure.

While this evaluation serves as an example of the strategy's application, it illustrates how a neighbourhood with eight playgrounds can transform into one with five playgrounds, a gazebo, a bike pump track, a playable court, and a small sledding hill.

Relationship to City Council's Areas of Focus / Strategic Priorities

Quality of Life - Fostering a community in which our residents love where they live and embrace their environment.

Environmental Impact

The Playground Strategy centers on the renewal of current playground infrastructure, which inherently translates to reduced environmental impacts when transitioning to new structures.

Economic Impact

Municipal assets within neighbourhoods invariably enhance the appeal of those areas.

Social Impact

Playgrounds and alternative amenities stand as pivotal municipal infrastructure, vital for nurturing the recreational satisfaction of neighbourhood residents. Playgrounds promote physical well-being through healthy play and serve as communal focal points, fostering social interactions and a sense of belonging among residents.

Relevant Statutes / Master Plans / City Documents

[Parks and Open Space Master Plan \(2012\)](#)

[Design Manual](#)

Risk

There may be situations where not all stakeholders agree with the decision to replace a playground with an alternative amenity; however, Administration will work to engage neighbourhood residents such that the best alternative is selected.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Internally, Parks consulted with Planning and Development and Engineering Services on the development of the Playground Strategy. Externally, insights were gathered from other municipalities such as Fort Saskatchewan, Medicine Hat, and Edmonton. Much of the framework for the Playground Strategy is crafted following the City of Edmonton's new approach to community park development, which was implemented in 2023.

BUDGET / FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Playground Strategy enables Administration to conduct annual assessments of playgrounds requiring replacement within the community. The Strategy and the tools developed as a result will support future capital funding requests to sustain the required replacements of playgrounds with new playgrounds or alternative amenities.

SUMMARY / CONCLUSION

The Playground Strategy represents a comprehensive approach to addressing the renewal of existing playgrounds and the development of alternative amenities within neighbourhood parks. As a vital component of the community's infrastructure, playgrounds and alternative amenities contribute significantly to fostering a high quality of life for residents by providing spaces for healthy play and social interaction.

By enabling ongoing assessments to support capital funding requests, the Playground Strategy offers an alternative approach to playground replacements. Therefore, Administration recommends that the Operational Services Committee recommend Council approve the Playground Strategy as presented in Attachment 1.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – City of Grande Prairie Playground Strategy