

South Calgary Community Association: Comments regarding the River Park, Sandy Beach and
Britannia Escarpment Management and Development Plans

Attn: Mr. Adrian vanGorp, City of Calgary Parks, Adrian.vanGorp@calgary.ca
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In general the South Calgary Community Association (SCCA) agrees with the design principles for the River Park and Sandy Beach Britannia Escarpment (Park) in terms of management.

Principles

- Protect and respect the river
- Keep everyone safe
- Make preservation and restoration of sensitive natural areas a priority
- Strike a balance among diverse users
- Create space for both shared and solitary moments
- Inspire visitors to become stewards
- Make the park a better neighbour
- Establish a strong identify

Although it may be difficult to draw distinctions between management and development plans we know the City has limited funds for implementation of both Management and Development Plans (e.g. \$10million unfunded Bowness Park Plan, October 2009). While it is important to have a future to aspire and plan to, current management of the Park is critical.

From the very beginning of this process the overuse and under maintenance of the park and the haphazard approach to its management were identified as key problems to address. As a result SCCA would like to see priority placed on the implementation and funding of critical management actions that will protect the park from further degradation before undertaking non-essential capital projects.

Priorities:

1) restoration and protection of riparian edge on both sides of the river using bio-engineering techniques as much as possible and restricting unlimited access to the Elbow River. City of Calgary Parks policy of allowing unfettered dog and human access to the river has resulted in severe degradation of the Elbow River's edge. Dog access to water is a very controversial and divisive issue, however, there is a Migratory Bird Act, Fisheries Act and a City Bylaw that restricts access to water under certain conditions and locations.

Migratory Bird Act

http://www.cws-scf.ec.gc.ca/legislations/laws1_e.cfm

Fisheries Act

http://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/oceans-habitat/habitat/water-eau/require-exigez_e.asp

City of Calgary Bylaw: 20M2003

<http://www.calgary.ca/DocGallery/BU/cityclerks/20M2003.pdf>

Water (P5)

14. No Person shall enter, wade, swim or skate in, or upon any body of water which flows through, is adjacent to or is located within a Park unless such activity is specifically allowed by the Director pursuant to this Bylaw.

15. No Person shall:

(a) jump, dive or otherwise propel themselves from or off any Amenity into any water course or pond which flows through, is adjacent to, or is located within a Park;

(b) affix or secure themselves to any structure or Amenity for the purposes of water play.

16. No Person shall launch a boat, canoe, kayak or similar craft from or within a Park except where specifically allowed by the Director.

Prohibited Activities (P6)

20. No Person shall engage in any conduct or activity in a Park which may:

(a) injure any other user of a Park;

(b) disturb the use or enjoyment of the Park by any other user of a Park;

2) realignment of pathways away from river edge and/or top of bank - set backs required. Typically the riverbank has been armoured with riprap to protect infrastructure that has been poorly placed in the past. It is time to protect the river and its functionality even if it requires relocation of infrastructure especially if it is contributing to degradation of the riparian area.

3) protection of escarpment areas with fencing to prevent dogs and humans from accessing the steep escarpments - this includes some of the gentler slopes on the southeast end of River Park. The area below the high level transmission tower at the south end of River Park includes the only intact native vegetation community left in the park which is threatened by informal paths, mountain bikes and invasive alien species.

4) an invasive alien species strategy and implementation plan to deal with the proliferation of weeds that has occurred due to the lack of an invasive species strategy and implementation plan, inefficient funding, overuse with insufficient maintenance and a poorly understood concept of naturalization - don't cut, let the weeds grow (i.e. eastern longitudinal length of River Park and the wet area and creek at the north end of the park).

5) increased bylaw presence and enforcement of bylaws in conjunction with dog ownership responsibilities and water education and awareness program. Currently, a non-profit group, The Friends of River Park, has undertaken dog owner education and awareness. This group also holds monthly clean-ups of River Park. Increased bylaw, police and parking authority presence and enforcement on hot rafting days during the summer have had beneficial impacts and have been appreciated.

6) rationalize existing parking areas to accommodate more parking stalls - parking on 50 Ave and 14A St on high use days helps to slow traffic speed, often a complaint of 14A St residents. Parking permit zone could be initiated on the west side of 14A St.

7) improve all signage including interpretive signage for sensitive areas - it is important that people understand why access might be restricted, clear indication of off and on leash areas, water hazards, etc.

8) formalize major and minor pathways with pathway surfaces dependent on classification and use.

9) improve waste management. The large doggy doo bins are unsightly and very smelly in the summer time. If there is a way to reduce the smell factor and make them more attractive through design or art it would contribute to a stronger identity, better neighbour relations and stewardship of the park.

10) monitor water quality. If the Director permits wading and swimming at Sandy Beach, water quality should be monitored by Alberta Health Services during summer months. Sandy

Beach should be closed if bacteria counts that contribute to recreational water illnesses exceed Alberta Water Quality Guidelines for Recreational Use. All point source and non-point sources of pollution in this stretch of the Elbow River should be identified and remedial action taken.

Alberta Surface Water Quality Guidelines

<http://environment.gov.ab.ca/info/library/5713.pdf>

Guidelines for Canadian Recreational Water Quality

<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ewh-semt/water-eau/recreat/index-eng.php>

In general, SCCA does not support infrastructure that is going to draw people and dogs beyond the threshold capacity of the Park and take away from the management and maintenance of the Park. Many believe River Park, for example, has reached its capacity and can ill afford to attract more users.

Furthermore SCCA does not support:

- 1) Additional parking (115 parking stalls) at the south end of 14A Street and 15th Street SW in the Water Reserve Area.
- 2) New washroom facilities on the upper portion of River Park. This is not a day use area and people ought to be able to plan bathroom use in advance.
- 3) A new lower washroom until management of the Park is under control unless there are sewage or septic field problems that require immediate attention.
- 4) Spray pool, sand boxes, expansion of the Sandy Beach area, and a pond and public garden at the north end of River Park. These may be nice features but will serve to attract more people to the Park than it can handle. The pond may be exempted from this list if it serves to treat storm water runoff prior to entering the Elbow River. We should work with the existing landscape features to restore and appreciate the subtlety nature has to offer - i.e. daylighting Skinny Creek.
- 5) Extending a pathway from the west end of Riverdale Avenue to Elbow Drive, behind residences on the south side of Landsdowne is definitely not supported. Some areas should be left to nature and not opened up to public access. The slope is too steep with potential drainage and erosion issues. Putting a pathway through this area could also contribute to crime and unsafe behaviours. The cost benefit analysis points toward an unnecessary capital expenditure and maintenance costs that the City can ill afford for questionable benefit.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to comment on the Management and Development Plans for River Park, Sandy Beach and the Britannia Escarpment.

Yours truly,

Evan Polowick
President, S.C.C.A.