

Robert Hunter West Park Upgrade

Feedback Report - Engagement Summary
May 7, 2024



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1 Engagement Summary

Robert Hunter West Park, located in the River Heights neighbourhood, will be receiving upgrades in 2024 as part of the City's Park Upgrade Program, an ongoing capital project that provides funding for improvements to existing neighbourhood parks to address deficiencies and bring them up to current park standards. The upgrade work in Robert Hunter West Park is also being funded in part by the Government of Canada's Natural Infrastructure Fund.

Starting in Fall 2023, the City began work on the Robert Hunter West Park Upgrade project to address deficiencies and bring the park up to current standards.

Upgrades to the park will include:

- Upgraded and new pathways
- Pathway lighting
- New site furniture
- Tree maintenance
- Naturalized plantings

To address any impending concerns regarding the upgrade, the City engaged with the community to present the park upgrade plans and address any concerns they might have. As a part of the engagement, initial discussions were held with the Robert Hunter West Community Association members.

The community and identified stakeholders who may be affected by the proposed park upgrade were invited to provide feedback during the in-person open house meeting on December 12, 2023.

1.1 City Project Team

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| Hrolfur Kristinnsson | Special Projects Manager |
| Barb Giocoli | Landscape Development Coordinator |
| Kinesha Denny | Landscape Architectural technologist |
| Aisha Rafique | Public Engagement Consultant |
| Jennifer Pesenti | Senior Communications Business Partner |

2 Summary of Engagement Activities

The objective of this engagement was to **inform** and **consult with the** local impacted community about the proposed park upgrade at Robert Hunter West. Specific engagement goals included:

- Gather feedback on the Preferred pathways and fruit options planned for the park.
- Provide clear and transparent communication about project timelines, how the process may impact stakeholders and partners, and how input was used to influence the project.
- Develop and maintain positive relationships with the community and stakeholder groups.
- Follow the City of Saskatoon's Public Engagement Principles.

Engagement activities for Robert Hunter West Park Upgrade project included an Engage webpage that hosted project information and updates, and an in-person public open house event. Flyers were delivered to residents living near River Heights neighbourhood with information about the open house

event held on December 12, 2023, informing about the project and a link to the online survey. Overall, feedback was received from approximately 95 residents through the survey, emails, and conversations with the project team.

2.1 Public Drop-in Session

An in-person public open house session was held on December 12, 2023 from 6:30 p.m. to 8 p.m. at École River Heights School, Small Gym, 60 Ravine Drive. The intended audience for the open house were residents who would likely be most impacted by proposed park upgrade project. The open house details and flyer were posted on the project's Engage webpage, so interested members of the public outside of the local neighbourhood could access the invitation.

This come-and-go session enabled residents to talk with City staff to ask questions and provide feedback on the proposed measures. 20 community members attended the public information session. Feedback during the open house ranged from requesting further understanding of the proposed park upgrade, need for the upgrade, funds, providing recommendations for consideration, questions regarding the next steps for the project, accessing alternative methods to provide feedback and the overall project scope.

Administration conducted a self-administered online survey from December 12, 2023, till December 20, 2023. A link to the online survey was available on the project's Engage webpage, allowing interested members of the public outside of the direct neighbourhood with access to the survey.

2.2 Email and Phone Correspondence

The project's Engage webpage includes contact information for site visitors to send comments or ask questions directly with the project team. There were no concerns received from the community via emails or phone correspondence.

2.3 Marketing Techniques

The survey was promoted through neighbourhood flyers, the City's social media, as well as the project's Engage webpage.

3 Summary of Feedback

20 members of the community attended the Open House, while the Survey was answered by 75 participants. 87% of the survey respondents live in the neighbourhood around Robert Hunter West Park.

Engagement Highlights:

- Frequency of use was equally distributed ranging from daily, weekly, monthly to occasionally with no specific spike, as the park is frequented quite often for different purposes.
- Usage ranged from walking (to school, for leisure, for pets, nature walk etc.), outdoor games, picnics, etc..
- Asphalt pathway was more preferred over crusher dust pathway (~45%)
- Clear and strong preference for edible plantings (~76%). Preferred edible plantings suggested were primarily Raspberries, Sour Cherry, Haskaps, Raspberry, Oak Trees, Prairie Lily, Black

Eyed Suzan and Brown Eyed Suzan, Prairie Sage, Whorled Milkweed, Saskatoon berry & apple trees, blueberries.

- Concerns were expressed over noxious weeds control.
- Location of the bins, picnic tables, BBQ stands, benches was highlighted several times.
- Community emphasised on preserving the natural look and wilderness of the park.
- Safety concerns were highlighted as the park gets very dark. Queries on lighting were raised.
- Trees should be preserved as much as possible. Suggestions to add more trees.

3.1 Feedback Themes from Engagement:

Use of Park

The park is frequented quite often as was observed during the discussions at the Open House and feedback received on the surveys. The use of park ranged from walking (to school, for leisure, for pets, nature walk etc.), outdoor games, cycling, picnics, and the likes.

Preference for Edible Plants

Several responses suggested edible plants such as Raspberries, Sour Cherry, Haskaps, Raspberry. Oak Trees, Prairie Lily, Black Eyed Suzan and Brown Eyed Suzan, Prairie Sage, Whorled Milkweed, Saskatoon Berry & Apple trees, blueberries and many more.

Many respondents also suggested including flowering bushes/perennials that attract bees, birds, and butterflies. A water feature for birds such as a fountain or stone bird bath was also suggested.

The below table shows the distribution of views received towards the preference for edible plants.

| Feedback | Yes, edible plantings would be a nice addition to the park | No, I would prefer non-edible plantings | I am not sure/No Opinion | No Response |
|-------------------|--|---|--------------------------|-------------|
| Survey (75) | 56 | 8 | 11 | 0 |
| Info session (20) | 11 | 0 | 0 | 9 |
| Total (95) | 67 | 8 | 11 | 9 |
| | 70.5% | 8.4% | 11.6% | 9.5% |

Type Of Pathways

A key element of the park upgrade design was to improve the existing pathways. The community was given the option to select from Crusher Dust pathway and Asphalt pathway. Approximately 45% of participants preferred asphalt pathways.

| Feedback | Crusher Dust | Asphalt | No Preference | No Response |
|-------------------|--------------|--------------|-----------------|-------------|
| Survey (75) | 32 | 31 | 12 | 0 |
| Info session (20) | 4 | 12 | 4 (no response) | 0 |
| Total (95) | 36 | 43 | 16 | 0 |
| | 38% | 45.2% | 16.8% | - |

Park Design Concerns

Many respondents welcomed the proposed upgrade to the park and emphasised on maintaining the natural look of the park, maintaining the existing trees, green spaces, and planting more trees. Some were concerned about tree removal and overdevelopment of the park. A few participants were concerned about the brightness of the lighting that will be installed and were concerned about light pollution. Some were interested to know how the hills at the park will be improved as they prefer the hill to stay as is. In addition, the participants were also keen on having more trash bin receptacles, benches, picnic tables and barbeque pits.

Additional Input

Participants were asked to share additional feedback regarding the upgrade project. While the overall feedback has been positive with many in favour of the proposed park upgrade, there were a few who did not see a need for the upgrade, while some were concerned about the timing of the park closure as it affects their summer activities at the park. Few participants were concerned about weed management and fire hazard at the park due to unkept trees, deadfall from old trees, and requested that the area be mowed and clean.

Many participants emphasised on having more trees and maintaining the natural wild look of the park. Some participants were keen to understand more about the pathways, the grading, and preferred the pathways to be curved than straight. Few participants again highlighted the need for benches, lighting, playground, outdoor gyms, and amenities for other activities, while very few enquired if it could be an off-leash dog park.

4 Limitations

This engagement was focused on the residents in and surrounding Robert Hunter West Park neighbourhood.

Both online and in-person options were offered as part of this engagement process to try and accommodate participation. Some residents may not have been comfortable or available to attend the in-person engagement session. Some participants may have limited access to internet or technology that presented challenges in completing the online survey.

To help participants understand the different options available for pathways, description and images for the two pathway options, was shared in the online survey and in the open house presentation boards.

5 Next Steps

A summary of engagement results was shared with the Project Team for the way forward and proceed with tendering for the park upgrade. Construction is expected to start in the summer of 2024.