

City of Kelowna

# Parks Master Plan

Phase 1 Report | August 2022



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# Introduction

The City is undergoing the process to complete a *Parks Master Plan*. Building from the work and open space priorities established in *Imagine Kelowna*, the City's Official Community Plan (OCP), the *Parks Master Plan* will provide a vision, goals, and overall framework to guide Council and City Administration in making long-range park planning and near-term development decisions to grow and sustain the City's portfolios of parks, open spaces and natural areas over the next 10 years.

Phase 1 of the Master Plan's development is summarized in this report. This phase of work involved extensive background review including analysis of the existing park network and its amenities, research on best practices and trends in park needs and provision, as well as engagement with the citizens of Kelowna on their current use of parks and future aspirations for the park system. In this Phase, the parks system was examined at a city-wide scale. Future work in Phase 2 will explore community specific growth, trends, and needs to determine more detailed direction for these areas.



## Purpose

The purpose of the Phase 1 Report is twofold.

1. The first aim is to summarize the findings from the various research, analyses, and engagement findings to provide a clear picture of the current state of Kelowna's park system and areas of existing need.
2. The second function is to propose a framework for parkland and public space amenities, including an overall vision, guiding principles, goals, and service levels which will inform direction within the Parks Master Plan.

## Project Phases

The Kelowna Parks Master Plan will be developed in three phases:

**Phase 1: Framework** – This phase, summarized in this report, includes the City's vision statement, guiding objectives and goals, and a detailed inventory of Kelowna's park and open space systems at a city-wide level. The creation of the report involved background research, analysis of Kelowna's parks, amenities, and trends as well as public engagement to inform future aspirations for the park system.

**Phase 2: Strategic Moves** – The next phase will focus on community specific growth, trends and needs, specifically for Kelowna's urban centres. The phase will involve community engagement to support and identify opportunities and challenges, identify missing parks and public space resources, and establish metrics and asset targets.

**Phase 3: Plan Adaption** – The last phase will provide finer-scale neighbourhood-level recommendations, future park implementation strategies, funding priorities, parks management and operational direction.

## Objectives

Active parks, open spaces and natural areas have played an important role in the development of Kelowna over the past century. At present, the City is facing new development challenges with respect to dynamic city growth balanced with a desire for increased active parks, amenities and recreation. It is with this in mind that the Parks Master Plan was envisaged and that every park must be unique and singular in its own way.

The Master Plan was also purposefully crafted to fulfill the following wide-ranging objectives:

1. Utilize technical study and community input to guide future park development, parkland acquisition, and investment focus within our park system over the next fifty years.
2. Draw inspiration from Kelowna's special natural setting, cultural context and unique recreation opportunities.
3. Be a sustainable instrument for positive park development, enhanced livability and healthy city-building.
4. Ensure our parks and public spaces are connected, welcoming, and accessible for all citizens.
5. Provide recommended service requirements for all park typologies throughout Kelowna.
6. Reflect community values and inspiration through ideas contributed by residents, stakeholders and local Indigenous peoples.
7. Set ambitious park development goals for safeguarding our natural lands and waterways, as well as increasing public access to Okanagan Lake.
8. Implement the parks specific direction within Imagine Kelowna and the 2040 Official Community Plan.



## Policy Alignment

The *Kelowna Parks Master Plan* sits below Kelowna's 2040 *Official Community Plan (OCP)* *Imagine Kelowna*, the community's vision for the future (Figure 1). As such, it must adhere to the 2040 OCP's direction and policies. The Parks Master Plan is also informed by a number of other city-wide policies and plans and in turn informs strategies and policies that provide specific direction on the parks system.

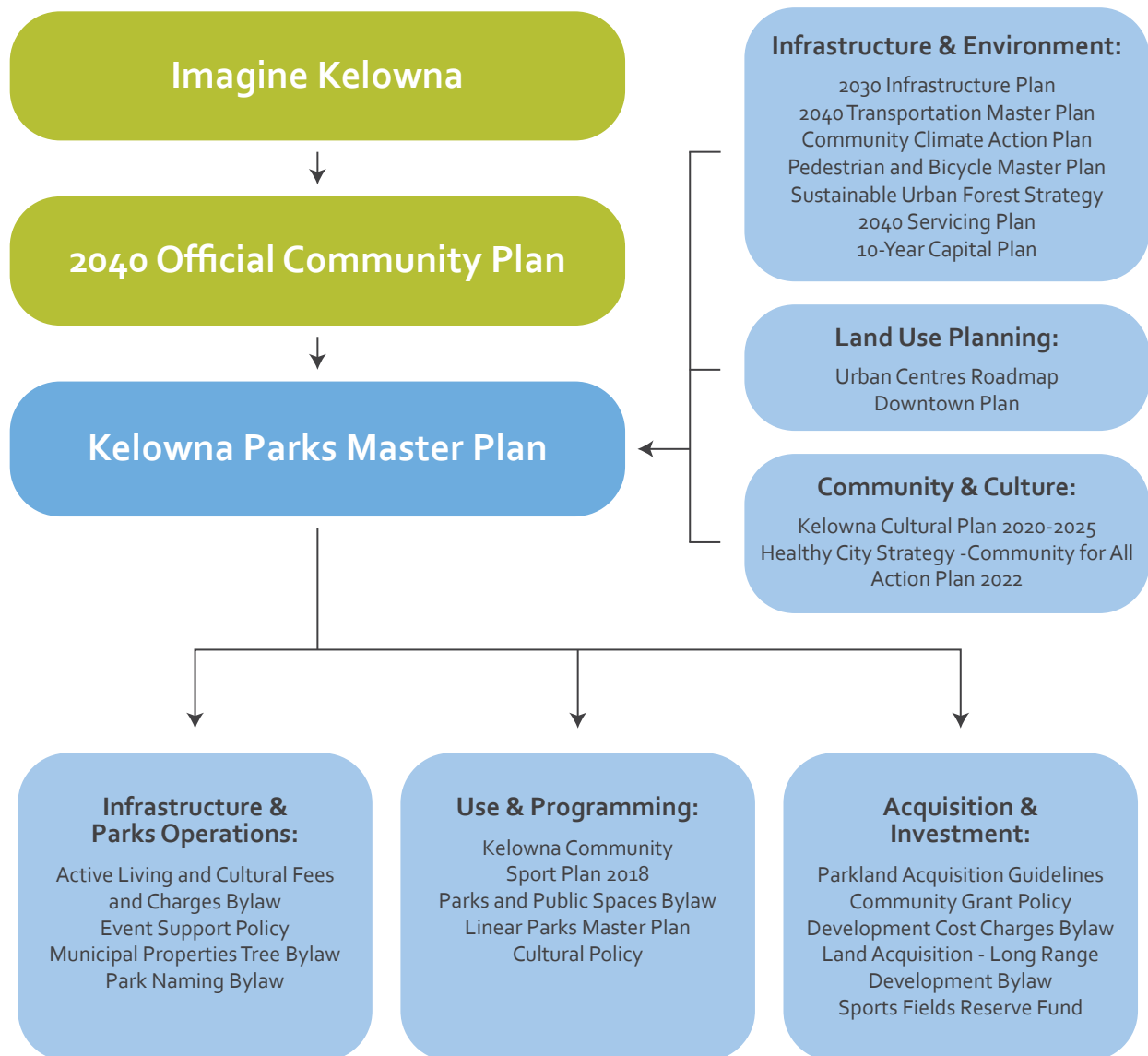


Figure 1: Kelowna Policy Hierarchy

## 2040 Official Community Plan

The *2040 Official Community Plan (OCP)* sets a strategic course for the next 20 years for the city's growth into a more urban and vibrant community. The Plan guides development to help realize the bold Imagine Kelowna vision. This vision informs 10 OCP Pillars that are the foundation of future planning and development in Kelowna. These pillars, listed below, focus on creating a Kelowna that is sustainable, equitable, and connected:

1. Prioritize sustainable transportation and shared mobility.
2. Strengthen Kelowna as the region's economic hub.
3. Take action on climate change.
4. Protect and restore our environment.
5. Focus investment in Urban Centres.
6. Incorporate equity into city building.
7. Target growth along transit corridors.
8. Promote more housing diversity.
9. Stop planning new suburban neighbourhoods.
10. Protect agriculture.

All 10 of these pillars inform plans and strategies such as the *Kelowna Parks Master Plan*. However, the most relevant pillars to the park system call for prioritizing sustainable transportation, taking action on climate change, protecting and restoring the environment, focusing investment on urban centres, and incorporating equity into city building. This means that parks should strive to balance natural protection with recreation and should be inclusive spaces that are equitably distributed throughout the city.

The *2040 Official Community Plan* also has 5 objectives directly related to parks. These objectives call for parks to be well-connected, accessible, and reflective of their unique natural and cultural contexts. The City is also encouraged to acquire new parks, increase public access to the water, and form partnerships to acquire and deliver park services. Within these objectives are several specific policies and targets regarding access to parkland for residents, including:

- OCP Policy 10.1.4: 2.2 hectares of active parks per 1,000 population.
- OCP Policy 10.1.5: Within the Urban Centres and the Core Area, strive for a walking distance of 400 metres to neighbourhood and community parks.
- OCP Policy 10.1.5: Outside the Core Area and Urban Centres, strive for a walking distance to neighbourhood, community, linear parks or natural areas within 500m.

These targets have been incorporated into the Service Levels, discussed later in this report.

## Other City-wide Plans and Policies

In addition to the 2040 Official Community Plan, the Kelowna Parks Master Plan is informed by a number of other policies and strategic plans, including the:

- 2040 Transportation Master Plan
- 2030 Infrastructure Plan
- Urban Centres Roadmap
- Community Climate Action Plan
- Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan
- Kelowna Cultural Plan 2020-2025
- Sport and Recreation Infrastructure Plan 2015
- Healthy City Strategy – Community for All
- Action Plan 2022
- Downtown Plan
- Parkland Acquisition Guidelines
- 2040 Servicing Plan
- 10-year Capital Plan
- Sustainable Urban Forest Strategy

The vision and principles for these plans supplement those in the Official Community Plan and inform a vision

of Kelowna's parks as inclusive and diverse spaces that are accessible, well connected through multiple modes of transportation, and a key part of the community's culture, health, and wellness.

## Subsidiary Plans and Policies

There are a variety of plans, policies, and bylaws that are subsidiary to the direction of the *Kelowna Parks Master Plan*. These plans and policies inform park acquisition and investment, park use and programming, and infrastructure and parks operations. Future updates to any of these plans and policies should follow the direction of the *Kelowna Parks Master Plan*, including:

- Active Living and Cultural Fees and Charges Bylaw
- Event Support Policy
- Municipal Properties Tree Bylaw
- Park Naming Bylaw
- Kelowna Community Sport Plan 2018
- Parks and Public Spaces Bylaw
- Linear Parks Master Plan
- Cultural Policy
- Community Grant Policy
- Development Cost Charges Bylaw
- Land Acquisition – Long Range Development Bylaw



# Context and Trends

The following sections provide the context for understanding Kelowna's parks system and trends that will impact future parks planning, including historic development context and current recreation preferences and trends. This includes the feedback that we heard from engagement Phase 1 on residents' park and activity priorities and preferences.



## Historic Development of Parks

As Kelowna expanded and grew over the past 50 years, different planning practices have impacted the way the community has developed. These different development patterns have influenced the types of parks in different communities. These historic patterns were analyzed using publicly available air photos from 1976 to 2019, and a review of existing legislation and policy tools used by the municipality.

The Central City sector of Kelowna is the oldest part of the city, encompassing the entirety of the city in 1905. Parts of South Pandosy and the Glenmore-Clifton-Dilworth sector also make up some of the older parts of the city, primarily developed before the 1970s. These communities were developed with many sidewalks in the Downtown core and sporadic sidewalks in the other two neighbourhoods. A variety of different park types and sizes were also developed. This included a number of waterfront parks, including City Park and Waterfront Park, as well as larger parks such as Dilworth Mountain Park. As many of these parks were older, they went through a number of upgrades over the years. For example, Parkinson Recreation Park expanded to include a stadium between 1976 and 1984 and has undergone a number of improvements from the late 1990s right through to the 2010s. City Park, one of the oldest parks in Kelowna, also saw a number of changes throughout its history, including the removal of the lake swimming pool, the introduction of promenades, a pavilion building in the 1970s, recreational courts in the 1970s and 1980s, and a skatepark and children's splash pad in the 1990s. These upgrades over time are representative of the changing recreational trends and needs of Kelowna's residents.

Many communities in Kelowna started out as small agricultural communities in the 1800s and early 1900s before becoming part of the growing city. The 1970s to

the mid-1990s saw the expanded development of the Rutland and McKinley communities, as well as parts of South Pandosy and Upper and Lower Mission. As they were developed, the more populated areas of these communities had more parks and many of these were smaller, pocket parks. Compared to some of the older areas, Rutland generally had more medium size parks rather than large parks serving regional users. On the other hand, the McKinley area had mostly pocket parks and a few large or regional parks. The parks developed in both the Upper and Lower Mission areas were also larger than those in other areas and most of the park spaces were clustered together.

The Belgo-Black Mountain and Southeast Kelowna areas saw initial development in the 1970s and 1980s, including school sites and agricultural parcels. These areas, as well as the lands around Highway 97 saw more intensive developed in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Many of the other communities also expanded during this time, most notably Upper and Lower Mission. These areas primarily had larger parks that were clustered or connected with each other. In neighbourhoods adjacent to or near Mission Creek, many of these larger, well connected park spaces revolved around the Mission Creek Greenway Regional Park. There were some smaller, local parks located in these communities as well, but they were generally more dispersed. There tend to be more sidewalks in these newer communities, which creates a more pedestrian oriented environment and better connectivity between parks and active and passive greenspaces.

Looking forward into the 2020s, there are several parks and capital development projects on the horizon. This includes Pandosy Waterfront Park, which is scheduled to open in December 2022. This park is Kelowna's newest waterfront and city-wide park development in over 13 years. Other capital development projects announced for 2023 include DeHart Community Park and the redevelopment of the Kelowna Community Campus and Sports Fields.



# Recreation Trends

There are several demographic and recreation trends that will impact future park planning in Kelowna – from an aging population to an increasing popularity of self-directed recreation activities. As part of Phase 1, a trend study was conducted, which looked at demographic trends for Kelowna, recreational trends across BC and Canada, as well as trends in recreational access across the Country. These high-level trends are summarized in the following subsections. The full Trends Study is available in Appendix B.

## Demographic Trends

There are two significant demographic trends that will influence park development moving forward. First, there is a growing senior and older adult population in Kelowna. This means there will be a greater desire for age-appropriate facilities, intergenerational activities and programming, as well as additional accessibility considerations for both indoor and outdoor facilities. Further to this, Kelowna also has a smaller than average household size and a variety of different household types. This means that parks need to be flexible to serve multiple generations of users as communities grow and change. The second major demographic trend impacting parks is the growing diversity of the community. There is a need for park spaces to be more inclusive of all cultures and backgrounds and to create spaces for everyone to come together and foster compassion and understanding. Barriers faced, particularly by new Canadians, such as language, accessibility, and costs (programming, equipment, etc), will also need to be considered and accommodated. A more detailed demographic analysis can be found in Appendix B.

## Activity and Amenity Trends

Across Canada, there is an increasing desire for self-directed leisure activities and a decreasing interest in programmed recreation. This means that there is more demand for flexible, multi-purpose spaces that can accommodate self-directed sports or leisure activities. Programming that is shorter and more flexible, such as drop-in programs, are also becoming more desirable, since they can better accommodate the busy schedules of participants and their families.

Trail-based recreational uses, including hiking, mountain biking, and running, are also increasing in demand. This has been particularly evident since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in the early spring of 2020.. Many municipalities are creating more multi-use pathways for both recreational and transportation uses, which also helps to create connections within and between parks. With the increase in trail use also comes increasing user conflicts, usually between faster moving bikes/scooters and pedestrians. In some places, these modes are separated into different pathways for safer travel and to provide a broader range of experiences.

Throughout BC and Canada, there are several recreational activities that have been increasing in popularity (Table 1). Some of these top activities include pickleball, waterplay, BMX, mountain biking, and hiking. A more extensive trend analysis can be found in Appendix B.

**Table 1: Recreation Trends**

*(Sources: Department of Canadian Heritage, n.d.; Town of Okotoks, 2017; Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation, 2017)*

THE MOST POPULAR PARK ACTIVITIES (CANADA-WIDE AND IN B.C.)		ACTIVITIES INCREASING IN DEMAND INCLUDE	
• Walking	• Basketball	• Trail-based recreation	• BMX facilities
• Sitting	• Baseball	• Hiking	• Ziplining
• Cycling	• Picnicking	• Pickleball courts	• Mountain biking
• Running and jogging	• Soccer	• Children's waterplay facilities	• Splash pads for kids
		• Indoor tracks	



# Key Considerations for Kelowna's Parks

## Balancing Protection & Use of Natural Areas

Balancing recreational use and the protection of ecological areas is another tension within parks planning. However, it has been demonstrated that those who have greater access and connection to nature are more inclined to see its value and promote its protection. Nature-based recreation and environmental stewardship are growing trends, and Kelowna has a strong community of volunteers and stewards. More information can be found in Appendix B.

## Inactivity Crisis

It is recommended that adults participate in 150 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity per week and children and youth participate in 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity every day (Tremblay, 2016). In Canada, only 38% of children and youth (ages five to 17), 18% of adults (ages 18-plus), and 14% of older adults (65-79) currently meet these recommendations (Government of Canada, 2018). Inactivity is a crisis in Canada and is estimated to cost the healthcare system up to \$6.8 billion annually in preventable chronic diseases linked to physical inactivity (Government of Canada, 2019).

Parks play an essential role in supporting physical literacy and helping citizens remain active for life. Parks need to provide inclusive play spaces, spaces for youth, and places for both organized and informal physical activity for all ages. Parks should be designed to provide exposure to many different environmental conditions and experience to help with early development, such as water play, winter play, and nature play (Higgs et al, 2019).

## Natural Hazards

Natural hazards include smaller scale safety concerns such as falling trees, erosional gullies, and dense vegetation, as well as larger and broadly distributed events such as wildfires, smoke, floods, heat waves, or large scale weather events. These pose risks to public safety, land stability, and public health that must be acknowledged in the City's parks management approaches. There is also opportunity design parks to assist with response and resiliency to such events. For example, parks can be designed to provide amenities such as shade, washrooms, and water fountains, to support those who are most vulnerable during extreme heat events.

Climate change will also continue to impact how parks function and municipalities will need to adapt to these changes. Increased susceptibility to natural hazards will be seen throughout the city and its environs. This results in increased repair and maintenance costs for the city. Changes to weather patterns also affects residents' ability to participate in certain activities that require particular weather conditions, impacting sports and tourism events, which may have social and economic impacts to the city.

## Equity

While having a variety of amenities is important, it is critical that both amenities and parks are accessible to everyone and welcoming, particularly for equity seeking groups (Indigenous people, people experiencing homelessness, women, racialized communities, LGBTQ2+ communities, veterans and people with disabilities). The pandemic has highlighted the importance of parks to mental health and quality of life while also demonstrating





how inequitable the distribution of parks and open spaces is throughout cities. It is essential that parks planning not only look at the number of amenities and the amount of park space, but how accessible these features are within different communities, how welcome users feel in park spaces, and if the specific needs of communities are being met. More information can be found in Appendix B.

## Homelessness

There are several challenges and opportunities regarding parks planning and homelessness. In Kelowna, there are at least 297 people without secure housing (Kelowna Housing Hub, 2020). Many of these individuals also identify as part of other equity-seeking groups (6% youth between the ages of 15-24, 21% Indigenous, and 1% as LGBTQ2S+).

Parks can be an important space for those experiencing homelessness. When designed inclusively, parks can provide needed amenities such as drinking water, washrooms, shade or shelter from the elements, and safe gathering and social spaces. Park programming can help connect those experiencing homelessness with social supports as well as provide access to meaningful wellness, recreation, or skill-based activities. Beyond serving those actively experiencing homelessness, parks can also play a role in preventing homelessness, by providing opportunities for building community, contributing to individual resiliency, and fostering a sense of belonging.

One of the greatest challenges regarding homelessness in parks is safety. Research shows that those experiencing homelessness are more vulnerable to victimization and crime than housed people (Homeless Hub, 2021). In less active parks, where there is less passive surveillance or passersby, parks can become unsafe for both those experiencing homelessness as well as for other park users who may become the targets of crime. It is critical that parks are designed and programmed so that they are visible and vibrant to deter such activities. Lighting, sight lines, and access to emergency services are important design elements to consider.

Another challenge regarding homelessness in parks is inclusivity. Parks should foster compassion and understanding for those experiencing homelessness. Rather than hardening parks with defensive architecture to exclude those experiencing homelessness, parks should be designed in collaboration with those who use the space and their needs. Parks can also provide education, art,

signage and outreach that highlights the human aspect of homelessness and clearly communicates that parks are spaces for everyone.

## Indigenous Peoples

The City of Kelowna, including all of its parks system, is located on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded lands of the syilx/Okanagan people. Active partnerships and direct relationships with local Indigenous communities will be essential to create inclusive parks that respect Indigenous history, traditional uses, and contemporary cultural expression as well as foster Truth and Reconciliation.

Truth and reconciliation has become a core priority in both the Federal and Provincial government mandates, as exemplified in annual budget allocations and Speeches from the Thrones, with over \$11 billion dollars over six years assigned to support Indigenous communities in the federal budget alone. Grant funding in British Columbia, particularly from senior government levels have also been assigned to this priority requiring details on how projects address the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action.

Kelowna has a young and growing urban Indigenous population. Approximately 5.5% of the total population of Kelowna identified as Indigenous in the 2016 Census. This is slightly lower than the Indigenous population in BC at 5.9% but higher than the Indigenous population in Canada at 4.9%.

Within Kelowna, Indigenous peoples have historically been denied the ability to practice their culture in our parks and public spaces and have been removed from placemaking in favour of settler-colonial narratives. Contemporary research across Canada also shows that Indigenous people face greater barriers to accessing and participating in recreation. Wherein, Indigenous youth are less likely to participate in organized sports due to increased social, cultural, and economic barriers for their families (Department of Canadian Heritage, n.d.). These barriers can be overcome by working directly with Indigenous youth and their families to improve access and create programming that caters to their needs.

With respect to the Parks Master Plan, Indigenous history and traditional cultural practices may be of particular significance informing our park planning Guiding Principles of stewardship, equity and celebration as the syilx Okanagan People have been stewards of this land long before Kelowna existed as a municipality.







# Phase 1 Engagement Summary

Public engagement for Phase 1 was conducted from November 2-December 12, 2021. Members of the public, community organizations, and Indigenous partners were invited to participate in this visioning; sharing ideas and insights for the future direction of the parks system. A variety of methods were used to reach a wide and diverse audience, including a public survey, sounding boards, quick answer online questions, stakeholder workshops, and stakeholder discussion guides. A total of 371 surveys were completed and 8 stakeholders participated in the workshops. The full Engagement Summary can be found at Appendix C.

The public engagement process highlighted a number of priorities for Kelowna to incorporate in the Parks Master Plan, such as:

- Providing spaces for connecting with nature, self-directed leisure, and respite from urban areas
- Providing unprogrammed, flexible spaces for people to casually use
- Protecting natural areas and stream alignments
- Ensuring that parks are equitably distributed and accessible for all residents
- Providing more pathway connections
- Addressing safety concerns voiced by residents, particularly those related to drug use in parks
- Responding to homelessness in parks

Highlights from the engagement questions and topics are discussed in the following subsections.

## Results

### Great Public Spaces

Members of the public were asked to describe what makes a great public space. Participants described spaces that were easy to access, safe and clean, and universally accessible. Great public spaces also have lots of trees and feel natural, providing a place for relaxation and retreat within the city. Participants also felt that great public spaces were spacious and had adequate amenities such as seating and washrooms, as well as flexible greenspaces, playspaces for children, gathering spaces, and access to water.



## Benefits to the Public

A common theme throughout the engagement process was the various benefits of parks, which have been highlighted over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, 46% of participants mentioned that their park use increased over the pandemic. Participants cited a number of benefits including mental health benefits from having a place to unwind and connect with nature. Parks also provide a number of physical health benefits by providing a space to engage in sports and recreational activities. Parks provide a space for people to engage in recreational activities as well as connect, gather, and engage with each other.

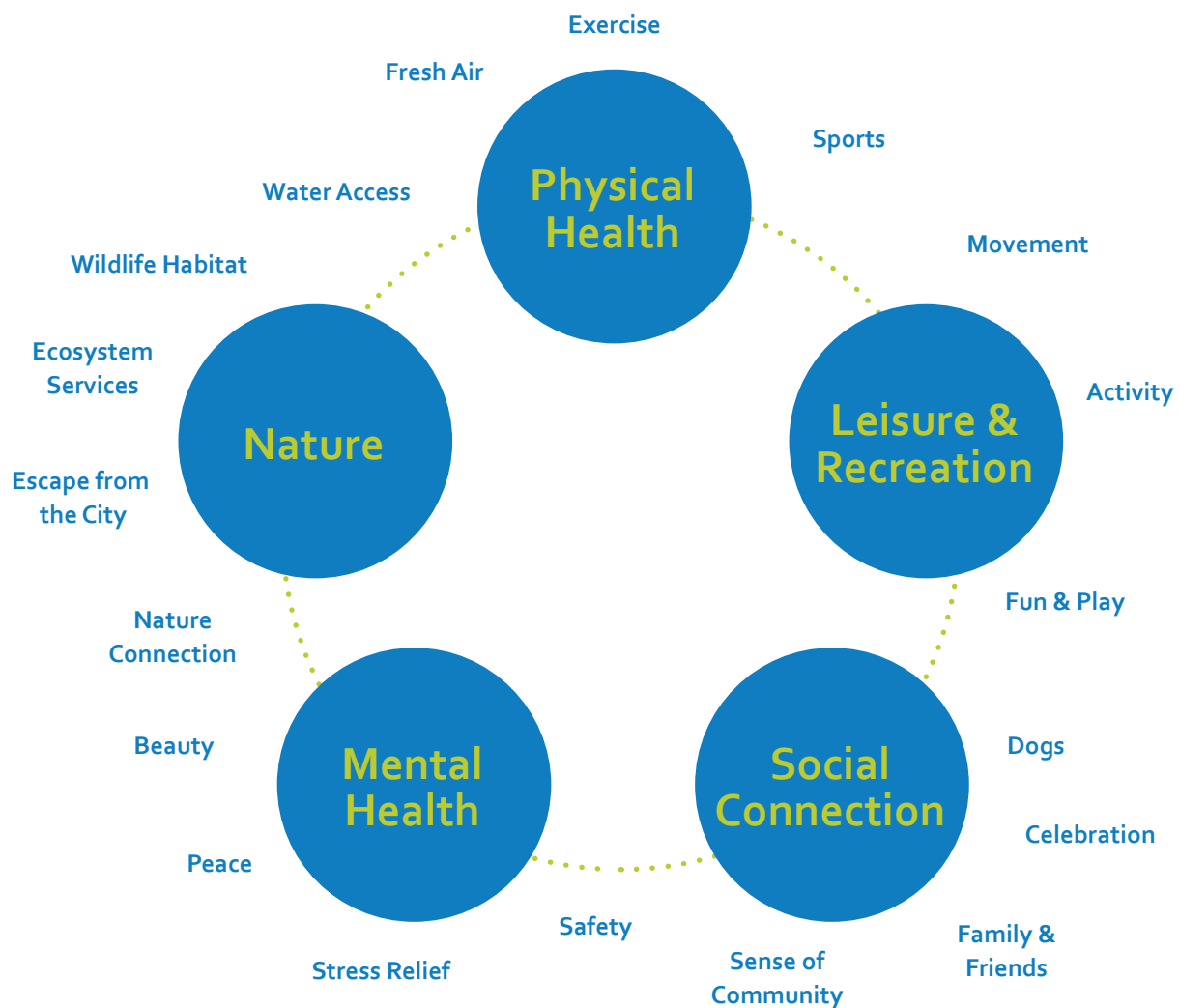
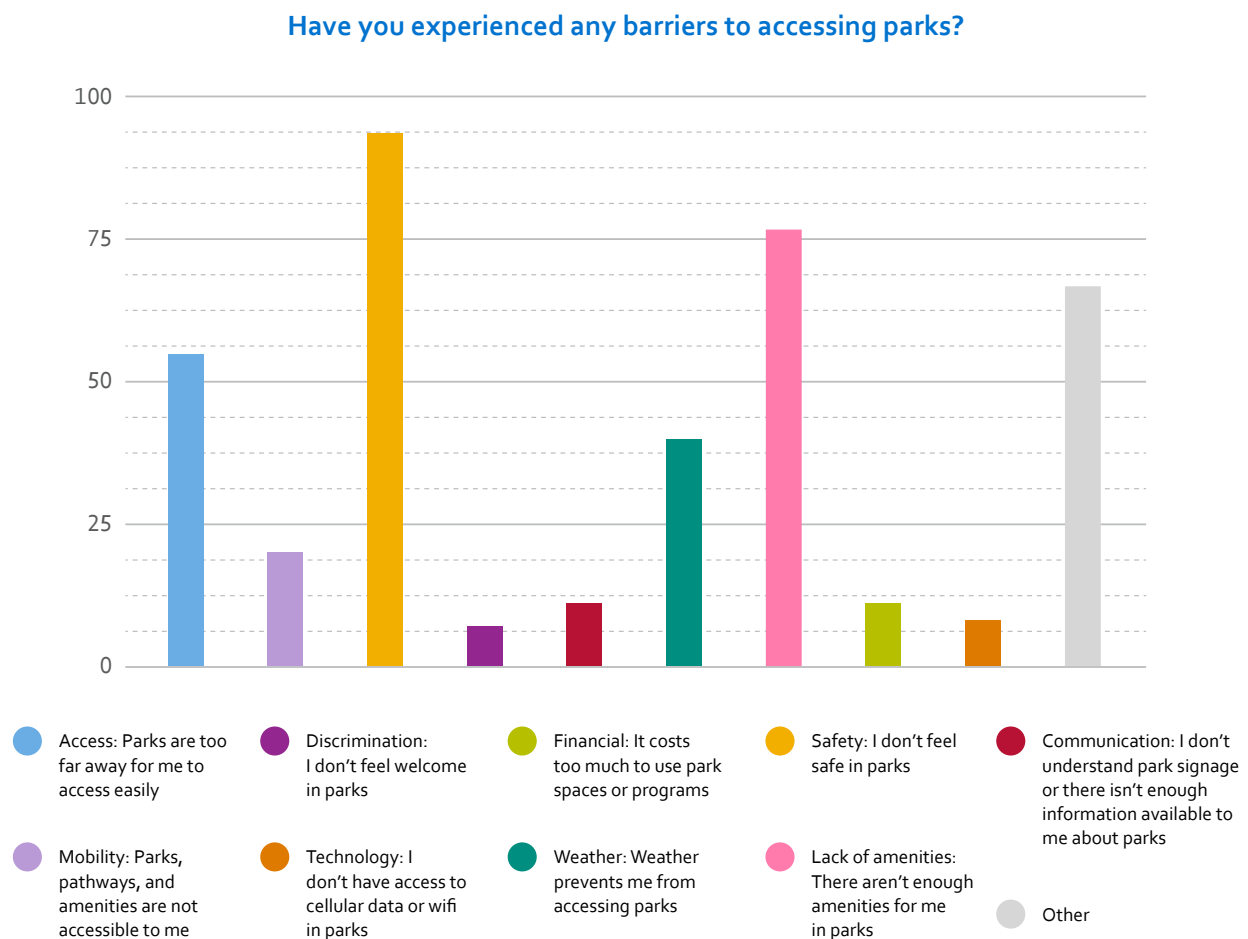


Figure 2: Benefits of Parks



## Barriers to Access

Both the public and stakeholders were asked about barriers to accessing parks or participating in recreational activities. One of the most common barriers was limited access, with participants mentioning that there were no park spaces located near them. A lack of parking was also mentioned as a barrier. Since most people walk or drive to parks, these spaces should be located within walking distance and adequate sidewalks and parking should be provided. Other common barriers were safety, a lack of amenities, overcrowding, a lack of physical accessibility features, and expensive fees.



**Figure 3: Barriers to Access**

## Recreational Trends and Activities

To determine high-level recreational trends, the public was asked about the types of activities they currently participate in. The most common activities were spending time connecting with nature, closely followed by walking / running / travel by wheelchair. Many participants also indicated that they use parks to rest and relax, socialize / connect with others, and swim / play at the beach very often. Participants generally attended events and participated in court and field sport less frequently. Stakeholders mentioned that they expect park use to increase in the next 5 years and that tennis, pickleball, water parks/splash pads, skate/BMX parks, climbing, and trail-based recreation were all increasing in popularity.

### How frequently do you do the following activities in Kelowna's parks?

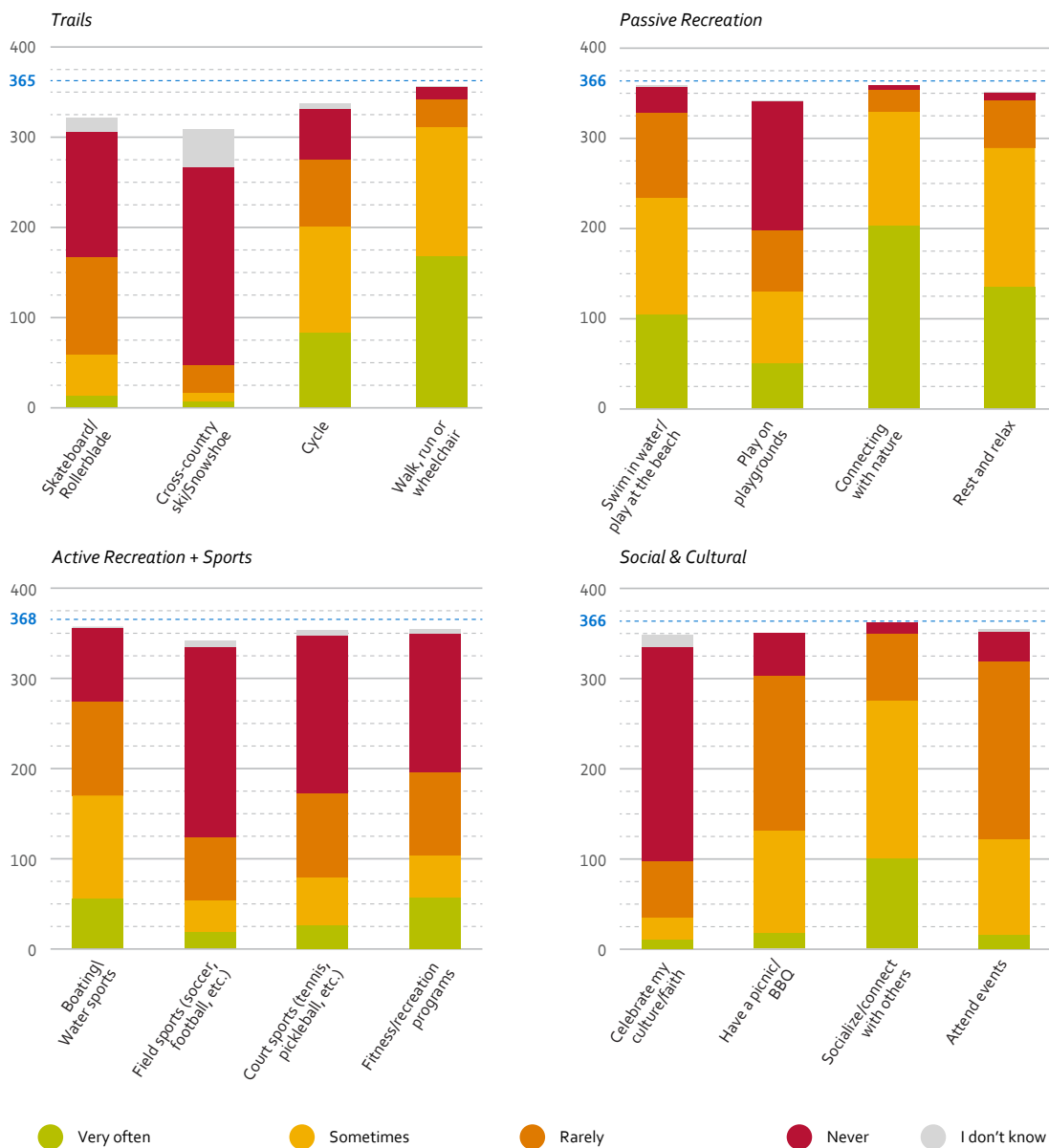


Figure 4: Activities in Parks

## Park Planning Priorities

The public and stakeholders were asked how important they think different park planning considerations are for the future of Kelowna's park system. The public ranked environmental sustainability as the most important park considerations. This was also highly ranked amongst stakeholders, as was ensuring connectivity and access and inclusivity. Both stakeholders and the public believe it is important to create a connected waterfront, acquire parkland in growth areas, and focus on underserved neighbourhoods first. Other important considerations include collaboration with Indigenous partners, stewardship opportunities, and reducing maintenance and irrigation requirements in parks. Sense of place was lowest amongst park priorities. There was some difference of opinion amongst stakeholders on whether to prioritize natural spaces or provide more amenities.

### How important do you think the following are to the future of Kelowna's parks system?

