



City of Edmonton
Office of the City Auditor

**Community Projects in
Neighbourhood Parks
Process Audit**

August 21, 2018



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Report Highlights

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Objectives

To determine if the process for completing community projects in neighbourhood parks is well defined for the City and the community stakeholders.

To determine if the process for completing community projects in neighbourhood parks is effective and efficient.

To determine if the City is managing the community projects in the neighbourhood parks program effectively.

Scope

This audit was specific to the process relating to the creation of **community projects** (i.e., playgrounds, community league halls, benches, gardens, skating rinks, water features, etc.) in **neighbourhood parks** (i.e., pocket parks, urban village parks, schools, and community parks).

We reviewed the documentation, controls, processes and procedures related to the Community Projects in Neighbourhood Parks Program. This included reviewing summary program statistics dating back to 2009. The branches involved, including the Community Standards and Neighbourhoods, Social Development, Infrastructure Planning and Design, and Infrastructure Delivery have been re-organizing and making process changes over the last 5 years. This has resulted in constant changes to the process throughout this time period.

Statement of Professional Practice

This project was conducted in accordance with the International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing



Executive Summary

The City of Edmonton is committed to partnering with community groups to facilitate the development and redevelopment of neighbourhood park amenities such as playgrounds, water features, community halls, benches, etc. The City partners with the community group by providing support, project management, or oversight as the community group completes a project.

What did we do?

The purpose of this audit was to determine whether the program is being managed effectively, whether the process is effective and efficient, and if the process for completing community projects in neighbourhood parks was well defined.

To do this we reviewed the guiding documents and analyzed project data. We interviewed city staff involved in the process and community group members who have completed or are completing projects. We also surveyed all the community leagues in the City of Edmonton.

What did we find?

We found that the program as a whole does not have an owner. There are multiple City departments involved in the process, but none are accountable for the entire program. It therefore does not have a performance management framework in place to define its goals, measures and targets and it is difficult to determine if the process is effective and efficient. Our survey of community league members found that 51% were satisfied with the overall process, which points out that there is room to improve the overall effectiveness of the program.

We did find that the process is well defined. The guiding documents developed by the City provide clear instructions for completing the process, including describing the roles and responsibilities between the City and the community groups. However, we found some areas where the documents can be improved in order to provide better clarity. In addition, our survey and interviews indicated that training and/or education to community groups should be conducted in order to provide the community group with a better understanding of the process.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1
Determine the program owner

Identify an owner of the entire Community Projects in Neighbourhood Parks program in order to determine who is accountable for the program.

Recommendation 2
Develop a performance management framework

Develop a performance management framework in order to measure performance of the program. This would also include ensuring data collected is complete and documentation is retained and easily accessible.

Recommendation 3
Improve program

Work with community stakeholders to address challenges. This includes determining whether the process can be scalable for smaller projects, providing more guidance/training to the community groups (who are mainly volunteers), and clarifying costs included in the project such as administrative costs and whether they are required to be matched by the community group.



What is the process?

There are two types of projects included in the Community Projects in Neighbourhood Parks Program:

1. Neighbourhood Park Development Program (NPDP) projects
2. Community Group Led Construction projects

Neighbourhood Park Development Program

NPDP projects are usually in an open space area. They involve the community group and the City working together to fulfill the requirements of the project from strategy through to completion. Once the strategy phase is completed by the community group, the City takes on a project management role and leads the project. The City is responsible for ongoing maintenance and operations upon completion. As well, the City will provide matching grants¹ based on the budgeted dollar value of the project:

2009 to 2017

\$79.7 million spent

\$45.1 million from City

\$34.6 million from Communities

188 Projects built in 120 out of 282 neighbourhoods (43%)



Basic projects - less expensive, simple to implement, replace or add a single element.

E.g.: public art, bench.

Grant amount: up to \$15,000 every 5 years



Intermediate projects - medium scope, physical infrastructure improvements.

E.g.: signage, trails, pathways, community gardens, lighting, and playgrounds.

Grant amount: up to \$75,000 every 10 years



Extensive projects - supports projects that will add several park amenities and fully develop a neighbourhood park. Usually completed in stages.

Grant amount: up to \$250,000 every 15 years

Additionally, the City provides up to \$15,000 in unmatched funds to community groups to encourage the planning of NPDP projects. There is also a one-time funding of 50% of total costs up to \$125,000 in matching funds for projects that add a water experience amenity in a neighbourhood park.

¹ Matching grants – The City matches the amount contributed by the community group, dollar for dollar up to the specified amounts.

Community Group Led Construction Projects

Community Group Led projects are intended to develop or redevelop neighbourhood amenities. Projects are located within land defined by a license, lease or agreement. They also involve the City and the community group working together to fulfill the requirements of the project from strategy through to completion. However, the community group assumes the role of project manager, with the City providing oversight. The community group is also responsible for the operation and maintenance of the project upon completion.

For projects that are led by a community league, the community league is eligible to apply for funding assistance from the City. This funding assistance is known as the Community League Infrastructure Program (CLIP). Projects vary in size and complexity, which dictates the amount and timing of funding assistance available from the City.

From 2010 to 2017 the City contributed **\$14.6 million** towards **280 Projects** completed by 119 out of 157 community leagues (76%).



Small project – small in size and complexity, few stakeholders, low risk.
E.g.: signage
Grant amount: up to \$25,000 each year



Medium – many stakeholders, medium to high risk
E.g.: minor facility renovations, rink redevelopment, storage shed
Grant amount: \$25,001 to \$100,000 every 3 years



Large – high complexity, major constraints, high risk
E.g.: community hall building, expansions and major renovations
Grant amount: \$100,001 to \$400,000 every 10 years

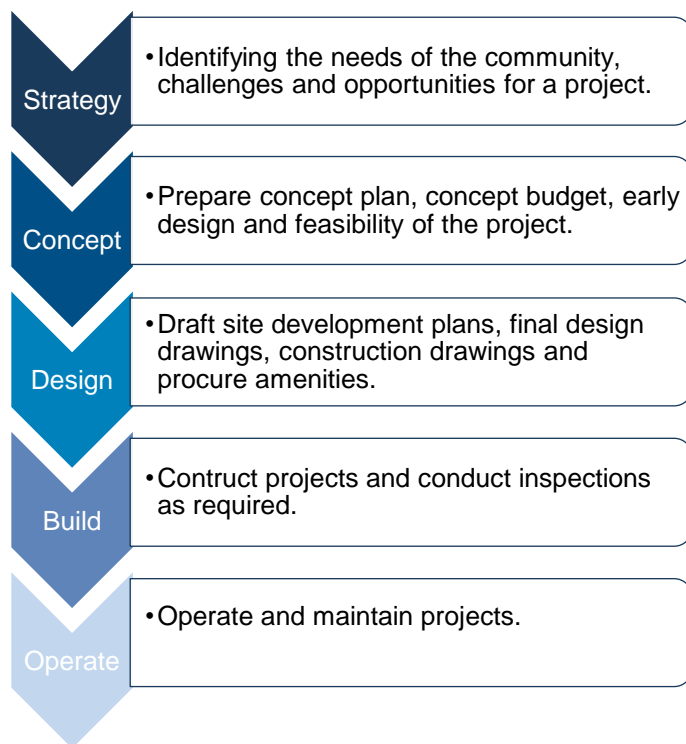
The Process

The NPDP and Community Group Led projects each have their own set of instructions for community groups and the City to follow. These are in place to ensure projects are built to Provincial standards and City specifications.

NPDP - Great Spaces Fun Places – Neighbourhood Park Development Program, Community Manual – July 2017 **(The Manual)**

Community Group Led projects - Community Group Led Construction Projects Guide – July 2016. **(The Guide)**

However, both processes are aligned to one another and follow the same five phase structure that aligns to the City’s internal process for providing oversight on all capital infrastructure projects. We will refer to this as “The Process” in the rest of the report.



City staff from **3 different branches support** community groups as their projects move through the phases.

The projects are supported by City staff in multiple branches as the project moves from the strategy phase through to the operate phase:

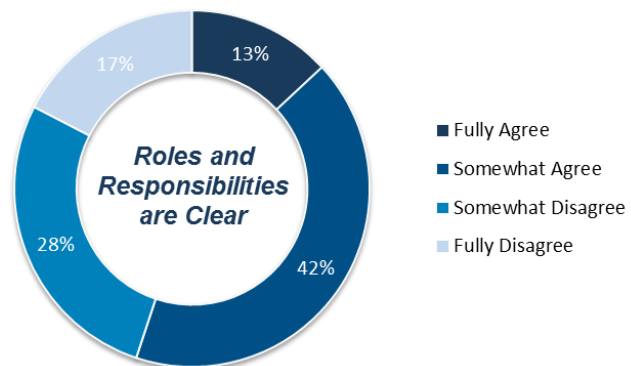
Strategy – This is the project inception phase where the business case and justification are created by the Community with support from the Neighbourhood Resource Coordinator from the Community Standards and Neighbourhoods Branch, Citizen Services Department

Concept, Design, & Build – This is the project development and delivery phase and involves multiple project managers or landscape architect from the Infrastructure Planning and Design Branch, and the Infrastructure Delivery Branch, Integrated Infrastructure Services Department

Operate – This phase begins when the project is built and involves a Neighbourhood Resource Coordinator from the Community Standards and Neighbourhoods Branch, Citizen Services Department. Where applicable, the Parks and Roads Services Branch will maintain the neighbourhood park.

Our review of the Manual, the Guide, and other internal procedure documents found that the roles and responsibilities within the City and between the City and community groups are documented for each phase of a project.

However, only **55%** of the community league members we surveyed fully agreed or somewhat agreed that the **roles and responsibilities for City employees and community leagues were clear.**



Some Community Groups we surveyed and interviewed were either not satisfied or noted frustrations when contacting the City due to constant staff changes or not knowing who to contact.

In our review, we were not able to determine who owns the entire Community Projects in Neighbourhood Parks Program (Citizen Services Department or Integrated Infrastructure Services Department). Not having a clear owner for the entire program could lead to risks including lack of accountability, documentation and no overall monitoring of the program as a whole.

There is no clear owner of the entire process.

Recommendation 1

Determine the program owner

We recommend that the Deputy City Manager of Citizen Services and the Deputy City Manager of Integrated Infrastructure Services work together to determine which department is accountable and is the owner of the entire Community Projects in Neighbourhood Parks Program.

Management Response

Accepted

There exists 3 main components related to the development of Community Projects on Neighbourhood Parks all distinct and unique depending on who is funding, who owns the infrastructure, where it is located, and who is responsible for delivering the work. The main components of the Program are; Project Management, Grant Administration, and Land Use Permitting.

The Deputy City Manager of Citizen Services, Deputy City Manager of Integrated Infrastructure Services, and Deputy City Manager of City Operations will work together to determine the overall Program Owner and Liaison for the entire Community Projects in Neighbourhood Parks Program. As the program covers all areas of project development and delivery the work will continue to leverage support from many areas of Administration to be successful. While this work advances Administration will continue to work together across departments, branches and sections to ensure that all groups work in an integrated and collaborative manner with good communication so that these projects can get delivered effectively and efficiently.

Implementation Date: January 31, 2019

Responsible Party: Deputy City Manager of Citizen Services, Deputy City Manager of Integrated Infrastructure Services, Deputy City Manager of City Operations



How is the program monitored?

Without a program owner monitoring the program as a whole (all projects from strategy to operate phase), it could be perceived to be more difficult to be able to determine whether the program is meeting its objective or whether the program is effective and efficient. Currently, project information is monitored at each phase of the process by the responsible branch and department.

Performance management framework

To monitor the success of the program as a whole, the new program owner needs to develop a performance management framework for the program. This would clearly define roles, responsibilities, accountabilities, and procedures for performance management activities. A performance management framework would also ensure that data collection is consistent and that the data is analyzed. This would allow the City to report on the achievement of the program through defined goals, measures, and targets.

Currently, the City does not have performance measures to measure the success of the Community Projects in Neighbourhood Parks Program.

We also found weaknesses in the collection of data and documentation retention. Having all pertinent data and documentation for the program in a central location ensures that information is consistent and accessible to all stakeholders.

Program data tracking

Project information is not tracked centrally from the start of strategy phase through to the completion of the build phase.

Currently, each individual Branch tracks the project information based on the phase the project is in. There is no central listing which tracks the project information from the project inception phase through to the completion of the project. The result is multiple worksheets tracking project data for various phases.

For NPDP projects, we reviewed a project tracking spreadsheet that is used to monitor projects and their funding eligibility. We found that the information was inconsistently recorded and was not able to reconcile to other spreadsheets.

Without a centralized location to store program information, it is difficult for staff to keep updated on the status of a project. Additionally, there exists the potential for City staff to report different information.

Documentation retention

Document retention is weak for projects dating back to 2009.

Currently, documents for each project reside within each individual branch depending on the phase the project is in. We randomly selected 40 projects (20 NPDP and 20 Community Group Led projects) from the over 450 dating back to 2009 and requested the required documents as per the Manual (19 documents) and the Guide (14 documents).

We were provided with electronic links to 21 folders. Information in the folders varied in terms of content and amount of documents. Upon review of the electronic folders, we were not able to locate all the required documents. On average, we found 4 documents for NPDP projects and 3 documents for Community Group Led projects. Management provided two primary reasons for this:

1. No central storage location to file the documents.
2. Multiple reorganizations occurred in the department resulting in staff movement to other branches or departments.

Management indicated that they are now retaining the required documentation for each phase of a project. However, documentation still resides within individual branches or with individual staff members and is not centralized. Without the use of a checklist or storing the documents in a central location that is accessible to all staff involved in a project, it will continue to be difficult to locate documents. If documents are easily located, it would improve efficiency in demonstrating the process was followed. Additionally, the City would be able to easily provide information to the community group on projects when requested.

Recommendation 2

Develop a performance management framework

We recommend that the new program owner develop a performance management framework for the Community Projects in Neighbourhood Parks Program. The framework should ensure all required documentation is maintained in a central location and all pertinent information is tracked electronically.

Management Response

Accepted

The recommended performance management framework outlines the goals, targets and measures that will be used to determine the overall program's success.

Tracking mechanisms for other measures such as Community (non-City) projects (i.e., no City funding, and not on property that is City owned or operated/maintained) have not been contemplated previously. Administration would be able to expand its monitoring and increase its reporting activities through greater involvement in partner projects. Administration would also review the opportunity to expand the current targets and measures to include new ones that provide a more holistic indicator of the overall program health.

As it relates to Project Management performance of City led projects, Integrated Infrastructure Services continues to advance efforts to enhance project management for City owned and funded capital projects. A pivotal component of this work includes the development of a Project Management Information System (PMIS) that will consistently provide a repository of various pertinent information on projects including schedule, financial, and other control documents. Performance management as it relates to Project Performance will be captured under this tool and is scheduled to be implemented by end of 2018.

Implementation Date: December 31, 2019

Responsible Party: Program Owner



How can the program be improved?

Completing a neighbourhood park project is a shared responsibility between the City and the community group. Based on the results of our survey of community league members, our interviews with City staff and community league members, and our review of program and project documentation there are areas to improve the program.

Survey Results

51% of community league members who responded to our survey were **satisfied with the overall process**.



Positive comments included:

- *Neighbourhood Resource Coordinator is fantastic and supremely helpful*
- *Process is valid*
- *Neighbourhood Resource Coordinator was helpful*
- *Some document reviews took days (compared to months)*
- *Project ran smoothly*
- *Manuals and Guides are clear enough*

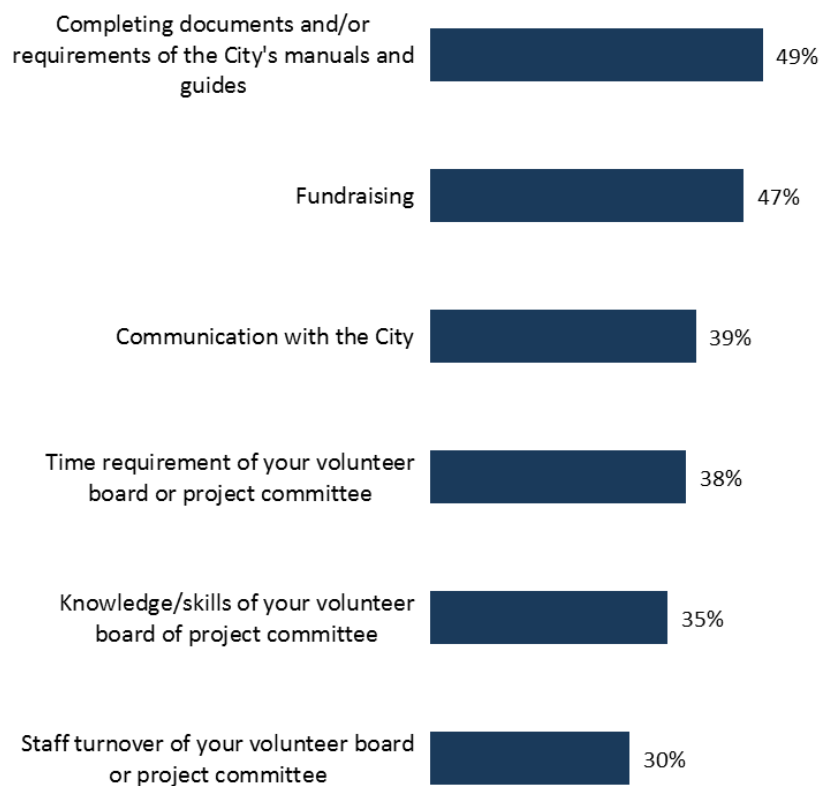


Negative comments included:

- *Process should be easier*
- *Process must be streamlined*
- *There seems to only be one process for projects, big or small*
- *Constantly changing process*
- *City project management changed throughout the process*
- *Difficult to get information and connect with the right people within the City*
- *Some document reviews took months*
- *An expectation from the City that community leagues are paid workers, everyone on the board works full time and no one has the capacity to do (volunteer) work during the day.*

Community groups such as community leagues face various challenges throughout the Community Projects in Neighbourhood Parks process. These challenges can be both internal within the community group or with the Process developed by the City.

The **biggest challenge** for community league members we surveyed was **completing documents and/or requirements of the City's Manuals and Guides**.



Based on the results above, there are opportunities for the City to work with the communities to address some of their challenges with the program. Suggestions made by community leagues and City staff included conducting workshops and training sessions between the City and the community group.

Documents and manuals

50% agree Manuals and Guides are **easy to understand**

From our review, the Manual and the Guide do provide clarity and understandability on the process, but there is room for improvement. This is also shown in the survey as only 50% agree the Manual and the Guide are easy to understand. The issue is with the amount of work required of a volunteer group to complete the requirements. This has not been addressed in the updated Manual and Guide.

Based on the survey comments, our interviews with stakeholders, and our review of the Manual and the Guide, we determined improvements can be made in the following areas.



Scalability of the process

The City uses the same process for all projects regardless of size and complexity. The City should determine if the process can be scalable while ensuring the quality of all projects adheres to standards and community satisfaction. Additionally, the Guide does specify that not all deliverables are required for small projects but it does not say what is not required.



Guidance for templates

The City provides templates to assist in the completion of documents such as public involvement plans. The City should ensure requirements on how to complete the work are better defined. (e.g., guidance for completing public consultations).



Calculation of project cost

The definition and calculation of costs (administrative and overhead) should be better defined. In addition, it should be clear which costs are the responsibility of the City in its entirety and which requires the Community Group to match or pay outright.

The City should consult with the community groups to determine and improve the Guide and the Manual to ensure there is better clarity and understandability.

Communication with City

62% agree that the City communicated well throughout the project

Our survey results showed that 62% of respondents fully or somewhat agreed that the City communicated well. Interviews with City staff and community league members provided the following additional context relating to issues around communication with the City:



Turnover of City staff

After a working relationship is established, frustration can occur when City staff change. There is a potential to provide inconsistent or contrary instructions to the community group.



Changing of primary contacts as the project progresses

The community group's primary contact person for all issues is the Neighbourhood Resource Coordinator. This person assists with the strategy phase of a park project. They are not involved in the other 4 phases of the project. Communities go through at least 2 project managers as their project moves through the remaining 4 phases. This can cause frustration for community league members as they have had difficulty in knowing who to contact, who to obtain information from, and/or they have received contradicting information from the City.

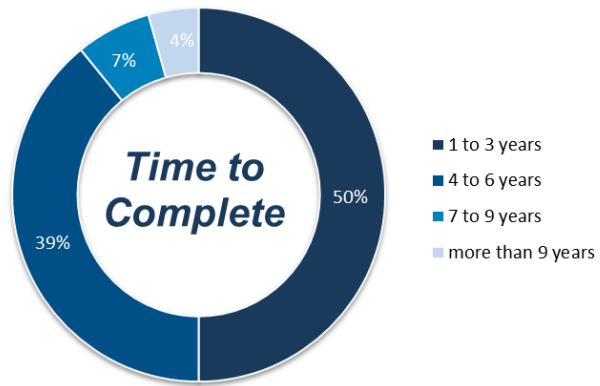
The City should consult with the community groups to determine the best methods of communicating throughout the process.

Time commitments

38% felt that the time requirements of the volunteer board or project committee was a challenge

Community projects in neighbourhood parks vary in size, scope and complexity, therefore the length of time to complete each project will vary. Currently the City is not tracking the length of time a project takes to complete from the start through to completion. Management estimates that an NPDP project requires approximately 2.5 to 4 years to complete. We did not find any documented estimates for Community Group Led projects.

50% of community league members said their community project(s) took **3 years or less** to complete.



It is a partnership between the City and the community group to complete a project. Some of the challenges faced by community groups are internal and can increase the time required to complete a phase. For example the length of time required to fundraise, turnover in the volunteer board, and the knowledge and skills of the volunteer board.

The City should consult with community groups in addressing these challenges. The City should also provide training to community groups to ensure they are aware of the time commitments required to complete a neighbourhood park project in order to manage the expectations of the community groups.

Recommendation 3

Improve program

We recommend that the new program owner works with the community stakeholders to improve the Community Projects in Neighbourhood Parks Program. This will include:

1. Determining if the process is scalable for projects of lesser complexity and providing guidance for requirements of small versus medium versus large projects in the Guide and the Manual.
2. Providing training opportunities to community groups and City staff to ensure expectations (e.g., time requirements, expectations for completing documents/public consultations, communication methods between community groups and the City) are clear and communicated.
3. Providing clarity for the definition and calculation of administrative costs and overhead costs. Guidelines should also be provided to specify which costs are the responsibility of the City and which costs are paid by the community group.

Management Response

Accepted

Earlier this year, Administration initiated a working group in collaboration with community members (volunteers) and the Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues to proactively provide objective feedback and support the advancement of recommendations from this report that are citizen focused.

1. Administration included a previous recommendation with report CR_4918 Community League Projects to review options to scale the submission and screening requirements related to various project submissions. This work will advance with the support of the working group described above.

2. Administration included a previous recommendation with report CR_4918 Community League Projects to develop and deliver public sessions and workshops. The first sessions have already been completed within Administration. The intent is to leverage this work to create training and learning opportunities with external community groups. The working group will be able to support to ensure a citizen focused perspective is included.

3. Guidelines will be documented, enhanced, and reconciled to ensure consistency and awareness of eligibility requirements of projects costs as it relates to the grant funding provided by both the Community League Investment Program (CLIP) and Neighbourhood Park Development Program (NPDP).

Any changes that are made for the processes related to community projects in neighbourhood parks may need to be evaluated for consistency with other similar programs.

Implementation Date: December 31, 2019

Responsible Party: Program Owner



Conclusion

The purpose of this audit was to assess whether the Process for completing community project in neighbourhood parks was well defined, whether the Process is effective and efficient, and whether the program is being managed effectively.

We found that the Process was well defined. The Manual and the Guide provide instructions to completing the Process for all five phases, including describing the roles and responsibilities between the City and the community groups. However, we found some areas where the Manual and the Guide can be improved in order to provide better clarity. In addition, our survey and interviews indicated that training and/or education to community groups should be conducted in order to provide the community group with a better understanding of the Process.

In general, the Process is effective and efficient, however improvements can be made. Based on survey results, the majority of community leagues were satisfied with the Process. Also, 50% of respondents mentioned that their project was completed between 1 to 3 years. However, improvements to further enhance the Process include reviewing the requirements for small vs medium vs large projects in order to make the Process scalable. Also, further clarity should be provided on the definition and calculation of administrative and overhead costs including who is responsible for paying these costs.

In order to determine whether the program is being managed effectively, the City needs to determine who owns the program as a whole and develop a performance management framework for the program. This would include a centralized data tracking system to record all pertinent information starting from the strategy phase of a project to the end of the build phase of the project. As well, documentation should also be kept in a central location in order to be easily accessible.

We thank the staff in the Community Standards and Neighbourhoods Branch, Social Development Branch, Infrastructure Planning and Design Branch, and Infrastructure Delivery Branch for their cooperation and openness during this audit.



Risk Assessment & Methodology

Methodology

We used the following methods to conduct this review:

- Reviewing related policies, Guides and Manuals.
- Discussions with City staff including management, project managers, landscape architect, Parkland & Amenity Resource Coordinator (PARC) and Neighbourhood Resource Coordinators (NRC).
- Analysis of data relating to the community projects in neighbourhood parks.
- Testing samples of projects for the required documentation as per the Guide and the Manual.
- Discussions with selected members of 7 community leagues and the Edmonton Federation of Community League.
- Survey all 157 community leagues in the City of Edmonton. We received 82 completed responses, 70 community leagues were involved in a project and 12 were not.

Risk Assessment

During our risk assessment work we identified the following potential risks for the process of completing community projects in neighbourhood parks.

- Many stakeholders including the City, as well as community leagues.
- Complaints relating to the process taking too long to complete.
- The Guides and Manual may not be understandable and clear.

These risks formed the basis of our audit objectives and audit program.

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