

City of Waterloo
Parkland Strategy

Consultation Summary
February 2019

DILLON CONSULTING

In association with:
Monteith Brown Planning Consultants
Domis Consulting

THE CITY OF Waterloo

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION 1
1.1 Purpose of Waterloo Parkland Strategy 1
1.2 Overview of Consultation Initiatives & Methodology 1
3. ONLINE ENGAGEMENT 2
3.1 MySocialPinpoint 2
1.3 Survey 4
4. PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT 15
4.1 Pop-Up Events 15
4.2 Public Open House #1 16
4.3 Park User Consultation 17
5. KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS 18
5.1 City Staff / Council 18
6. STAKEHOLDER FOCUS GROUPS 21
6.1 Waterloo Park Committee & Friends of Waterloo Park Staff Liaison 21
7. SUMMARY OF COMMON THEMES 22
8. NEXT STEPS 23

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of Waterloo Parkland Strategy

The City of Waterloo is undertaking a comprehensive city-wide Parkland Strategy to help guide decision making for its growing inventory of parks for the next 10 to 15 years. The Strategy will look to update policies related to parkland acquisition, development and use as well as to inform capital budget allocation. The City's 134 parks include neighbourhood, community, urban, cultural and sports parks as well as natural areas. This impressive amount of parkland is a significant part of the City's assets and is highly valued by the community. The infrastructure in these parks is beginning to age and requires upgrades. As well trends are changing what service delivery in parks looks like particularly in response to population growth and changing demographics, climate change, intensification and redevelopment and new trends in leisure.

The Strategy will build on existing plans and policies already in place (City's Strategic Plan, Official Plan, Recreation and Leisure Master Plan 2008, Outdoor Sports Field Strategy 2012, Action Sports Strategy 2013, and the Neighbourhood Strategy 2018).

1.2 Overview of Consultation Initiatives & Methodology

Effective and strategic consultation is the key to the success of the Parkland Strategy. In coordination with the City a list of stakeholders and key staff were identified and given opportunities to provide meaningful feedback. Tools used for consultation and engagement were selected to be effective, accessible, and efficient for all users.

The Waterloo Parkland Strategy provides an exciting opportunity for residents, stakeholders and City Staff to help shape the vision of Waterloo's Parkland system. Engagement is crucial for successful planning. The following activities were used during the first half of the study which was dedicated to the majority of the engagement for the project. There were several rounds of consultation with different groups. The first round included stakeholder interviews and meetings with the following groups:

- City Councilors & The Mayor
- Core Management Team
- Directors of Integrated Planning & Public Works
- Managers of Parks Operations
- Directors and Managers of Community Services
- Community Services Key Staff
- Friends of Waterloo Park & Waterloo Park Advisory Committee

There were also several in person events which occurred in Phase 1. There was one traditional Public Information Centre (PIC) and two Pop-Up style events where there was a project presence at a previously scheduled city event. City staff also consulted park users throughout the summer months and the project team completed a number of Park Intercept Surveys with park users during site investigations at 35 of Waterloo's parks.

Neighbourhood Strategy

An additional resource which kickstarted the consultation was the parks related feedback received during consultation efforts for the Neighbourhood Strategy. There was a great deal of engagement done during the process of the

creation of this report and some of the information pertained to parks. That information was shared with the project team. The high level summary of parks related comments from the Neighbourhood Strategy are summarized below:

- Opportunities for community placemaking efforts in new parks and renovated parks.
- Flexible and responsive to changing demographics in neighbourhoods.
- Increase capacity for neighbourhood parks to hose community events and activities.
- Improve lighting for parks and trails.
- Improve park maintenance.
- Assess park rental fees for community affordability.
- Provide more off-leash areas.
- Consider costs for waste management (garbage/recycling).
- Assess options for enhanced neighbourhood engagement (adopt a park, "friends of" park programs with participatory budgeting).

2. ONLINE ENGAGEMENT

2.1 MySocialPinpoint

As part of the online engagement, a MySocialPinpoint page was set up to run in June, July and August of 2018. My Social Pinpoint is an interactive mapping tool which allows participants to drop pins in particular areas to leave geographically specific comments, in this case within Waterloo's parks. In addition to this, there is also a survey tool which was activated to allow participants provide more information on their standpoint regarding parkland in waterloo.

The City of Waterloo Parkland Strategy MySocialPinpoint page was located at the following link: https://share.mysocialpinpoint.com/waterlooheartsparks#/

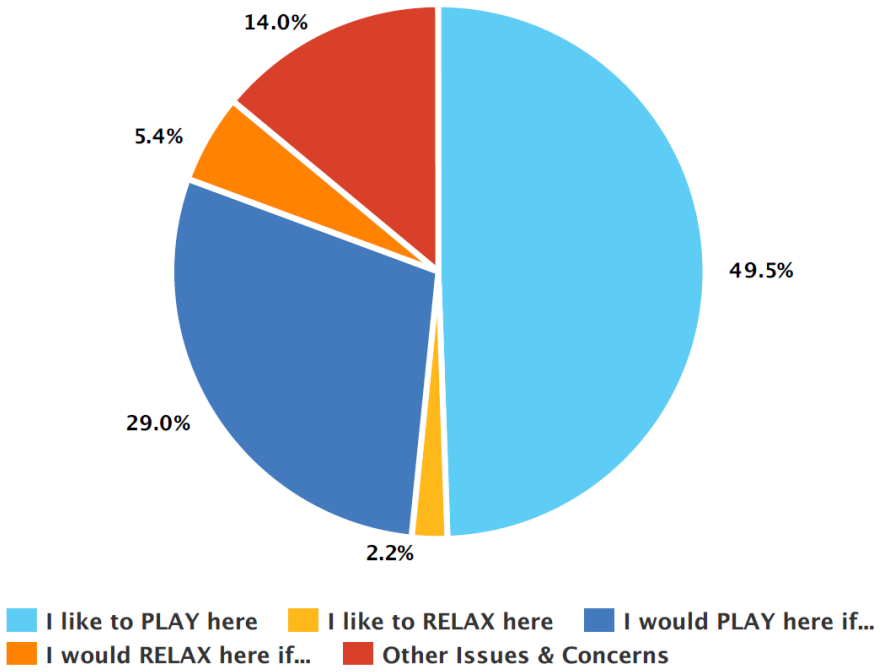
Below is a list summarizing the activity on the page:

- 423 unique users to visit the site
- 99 comments received on the interactive map
- 35 responses to the survey on the webpage.

For the map exercise, participants had five different pins that they could place on the map. They each had descriptive lead in text and once the pin was placed they were invited to elaborate on their comment. The options are listed below:

- I like to play here…
- I would play here if…
- I like to relax here…
- I would relax here if…
- Other issues and Concerns

The following chart breaks down the number of comments received according to each option:



The comments were largely complementary of the parkland in Waterloo, however there were suggestions for specific parks on what the members of the community are interested in implementing.

The following parks had multiple comments / entries on the interactive web page:

Bechtel Park, Kaufman Flats, McCrae Park, Millen Woodlot, Uptown Square, RIM Park, Waterloo Park and Westvale Park.

For the parks which received comments on the map, some of the issues and improvements included, but are not limited to:

- Community Gardens
- Natural Play Spaces
- Shaded Seating Area
- Fountain/Water Features
- Mountain Bike Trail
- Cross Country Ski Trail
- Fishing Opportunities
- Playground Improvements (lifecycle/accessibility)
- Playgrounds for different age groups
- Outdoor Pool
- Splash Pad
- Picnic Tables
- Playground Improvements
- Outdoor skating
- Parking
- Washrooms
- Trail Maintenance (summer/winter)
- Trail expansion in parks
- Hose bib (for flooding in winter for skating).
- Beautification/natural plantings
- Pedestrian crossing safety
- Shade
- Vegetation management
- Safety netting for fields
- Drinking fountain/bottle filling station
- Pedestrian bridge
- Outdoor fitness equipment
- Improved access to parks (trails, sidewalks, crosswalks, entry points)

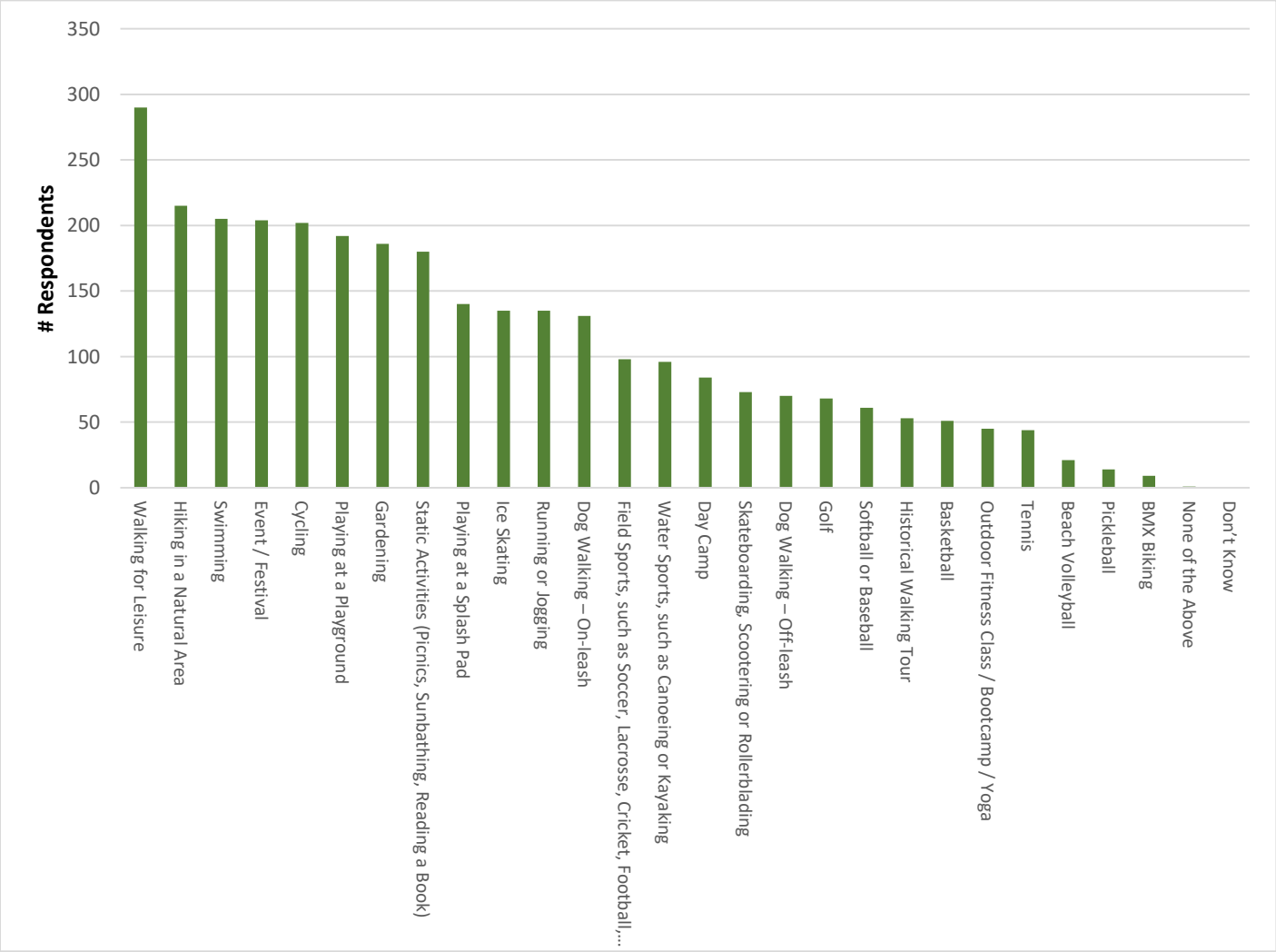
1.3 Survey

In addition to the interactive map exercise a survey was also developed and conducted. There were two versions of the survey to serve both the online and the in-person audience. For consistency sake, both the online and the hard copy survey contained the same information. It should be noted that the findings from both the hard copy surveys and the online surveys have been consolidated for this consultation summary. There were 11 hard copy surveys completed from the Pop-Up events and PIC #1, and there were 306 online surveys completed through Survey Monkey, totally 317 survey respondents. The majority of respondents were Couples with Children, followed by Couples living together.

The survey consisted of ten questions, the first 8 pertained to types of use of the parks, which parks, frequency of visits, potential improvements to encourage use, potential programs to encourage use, ranking importance of types of parks, rating level of satisfaction in types of parks, and options for improvement. The last two questions asked participants for more detailed information such as targeted locations for improvement, and generally any other information they'd like to share regarding parks in Waterloo. Finally participants were asked to provide demographic information to help categorize their household. Refer to ***Appendix A*** for a copy of the survey.

The first question asked respondents about their recent outdoor recreation activities and that of their household over the past 12 months. ***Figure 1***

Figure 1 – Q1 – Recent Outdoor Recreational Activities (Past 12 months)



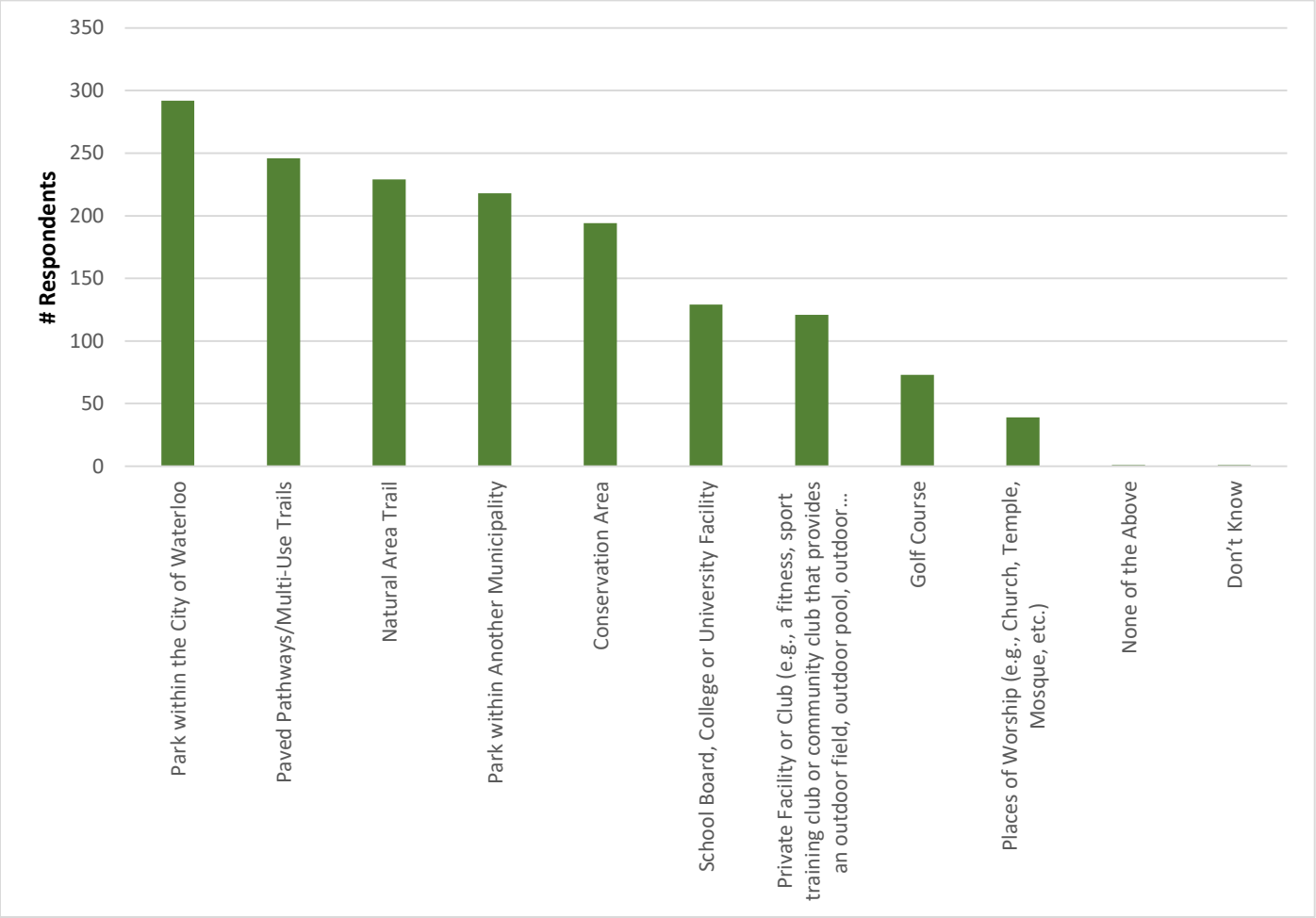
The most popular activities (>150 responses) in which more than half of respondents participated were:

- Walking for Leisure
- Hiking a Nature Trail
- Swimming
- Attending an Event/Festival
- Cycling
- Playing at a Playground
- Gardening
- Static Activities (sunbathing, reading a book).

The next question asked where respondents had participated in these outdoor recreation activities.

Refer to ***Figure 2*** for the results.

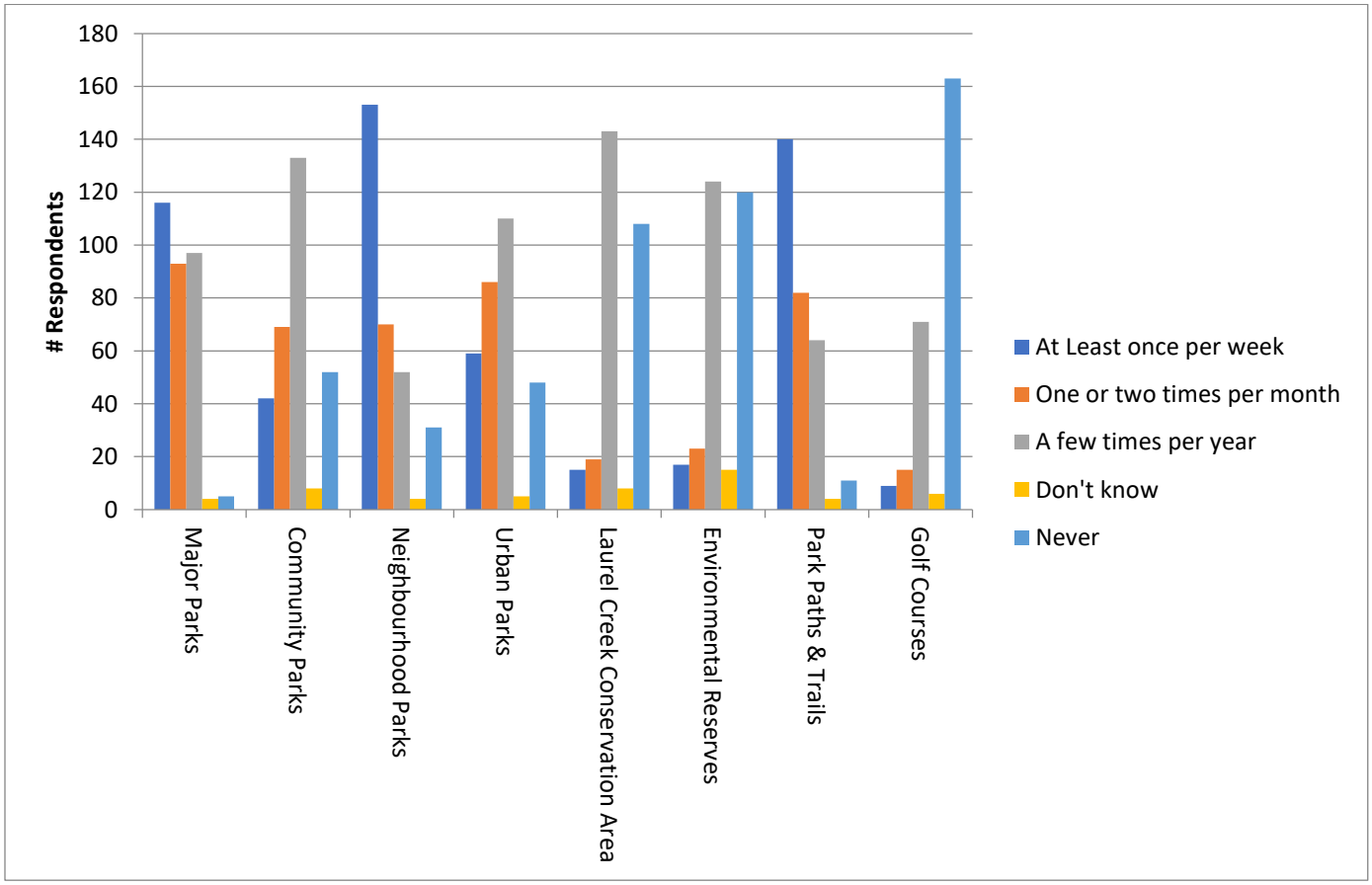
Figure 2 – Q2 – Location of Outdoor Recreation / Leisure Activities



The majority of respondents participated in these outdoor recreation activities within Waterloo's parkland, within another municipality's parkland, on Paved Pathways / Multi-Use Trails and Nature Area Trails.

The third question aimed to determine the frequency of use for the different types of parks. ***Figure 3*** illustrates which parks are used more frequently.

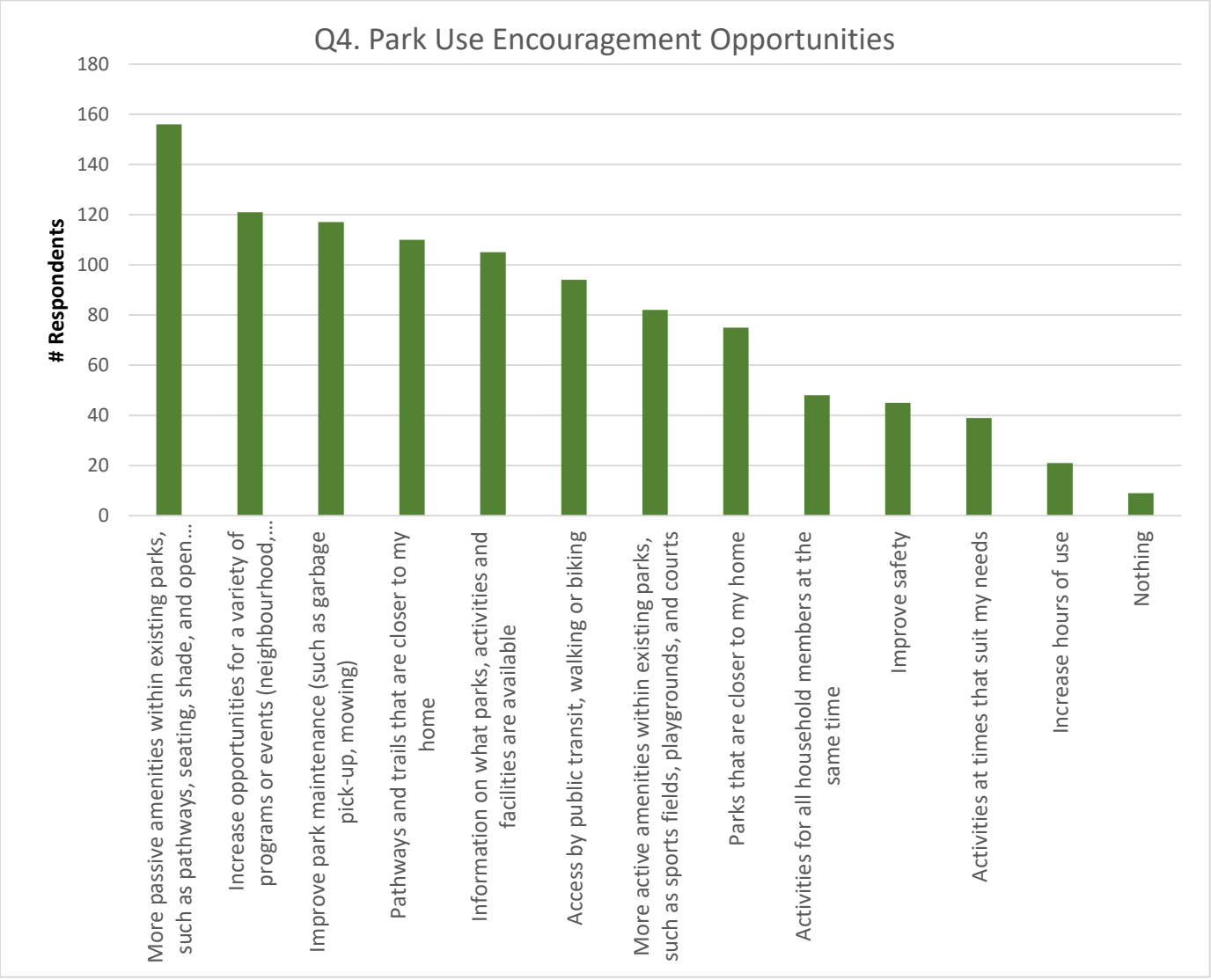
Figure 3 – Q3 – Frequency of Use by Park Type



The chart illustrates that **Major Parks**, **Neighbourhood Parks** and **Park Paths and Trails** are generally used at least once a week. Community Parks, Urban Parks, Environmental Reserves and Laurel Creek Conservation Area are generally visited a few times a year by most people. A large number of respondents almost never visit golf courses. There was a consistent number of respondents who visit a number of the different types of parks one or two times a month including Major Parks, Community Parks, Neighbourhood parks, Urban Parks and Park and Paths and Trails.

The fourth question asked respondents about which potential opportunities they were in support of to encourage park use. ***Figure 4*** highlights the results.

Figure 4 – Q4 – Park Use Encouragement Opportunities



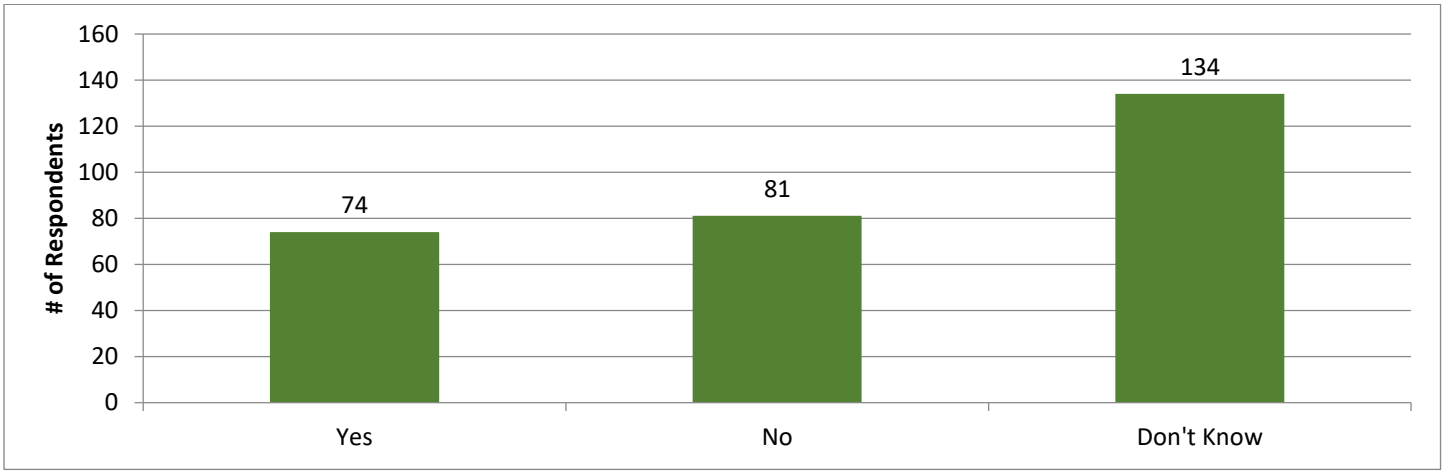
The most popular opportunity noted by respondents is ***provision of more passive amenities within existing parks*** (pathways, seating, shade, open space), followed by: ***increased opportunities for a variety of programs and events; improved park maintenance; improved park activities and facilities information;*** and, ***access by public transit***.

Some other opportunities reported by respondents include:

- More options for dogs (dog parks).
- More tree planting and shade opportunities in existing parks and public spaces.
- Improved trail quality (paving), maintenance and better connections.
- Water features in parks.
- New animation programming in existing parks (outdoor games, fitness, community gardens)
- More washrooms.
- Improvements to existing playgrounds.
- Hydration opportunities.
- More seating.

The fifth question asked if there were any programs (recreation/sports) or activities that aren't currently available that respondents would like to see offered. Refer to ***Figure 5*** for the results of Question 5.

Figure 5 – Q5 – Need for Additional Programs or Activities not Currently Available



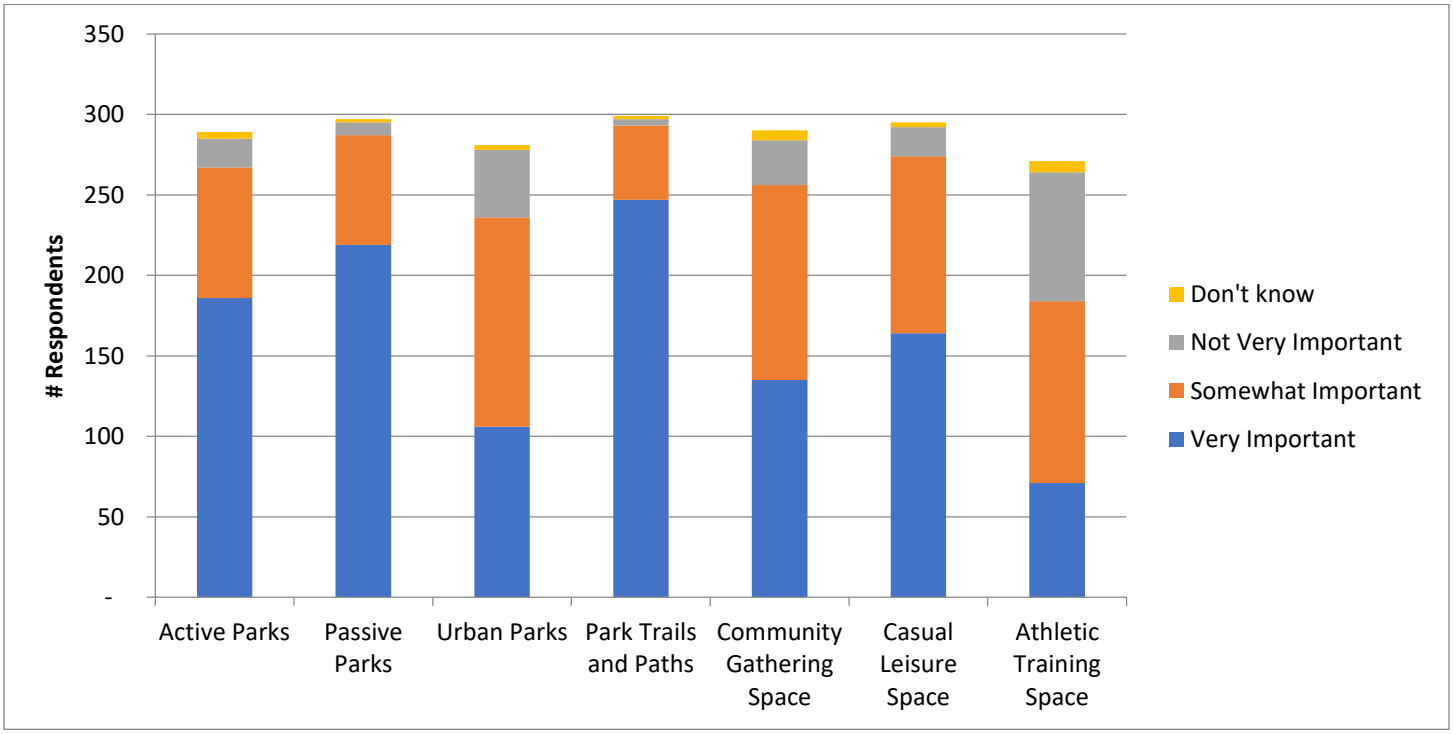
134 respondents responded "Don't Know", 81 respondents says No, and 74 responded Yes.

From those responding Yes, some program opportunities were mentioned including:

- Informal programming (outdoor fitness circuit, group rides/runs/hikes, community gardens)
- Formal programming (tai chi, outdoor yoga, disc golf, pickleball, beach volleyball, swimming pool, concerts, literature readings, green area stewardship workshops, programs for young children.

The sixth question asked about the importance that different types of parks and open space held with the respondent, with ranking from very important to not very important. ***Figure 6*** highlights the results.

Figure 6 – Q6 – Importance of Parks by Type

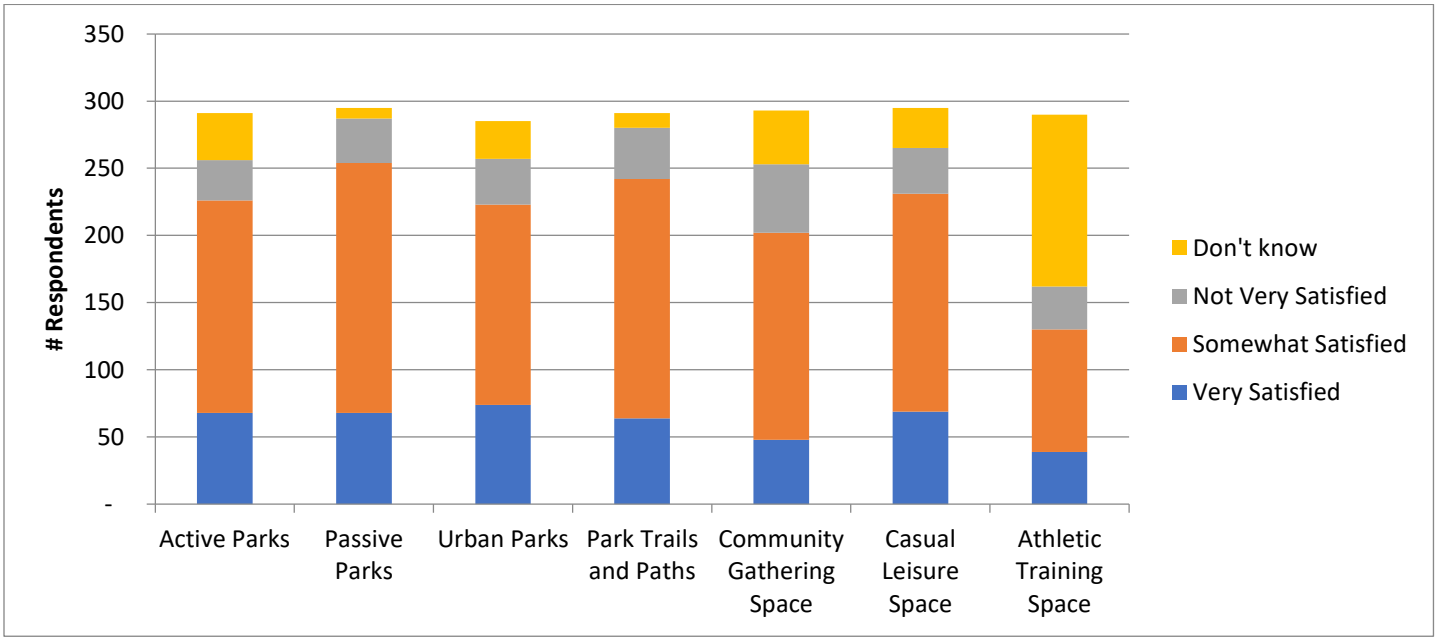


According to the results the following is a list of the parks by type that were designated as Very Important starting with the highest:

1. Park Trails and Paths;
2. Passive Parks;
3. Active Parks;
4. Casual Leisure Space Opportunities;
5. Community Gathering Space;
6. Urban Parks; and,
7. Athletic Training Space.

The seventh question is similar to the previous one, however this time respondents were asked about their levels of satisfaction regarding existing parks by type. Please refer to ***Figure 7.***

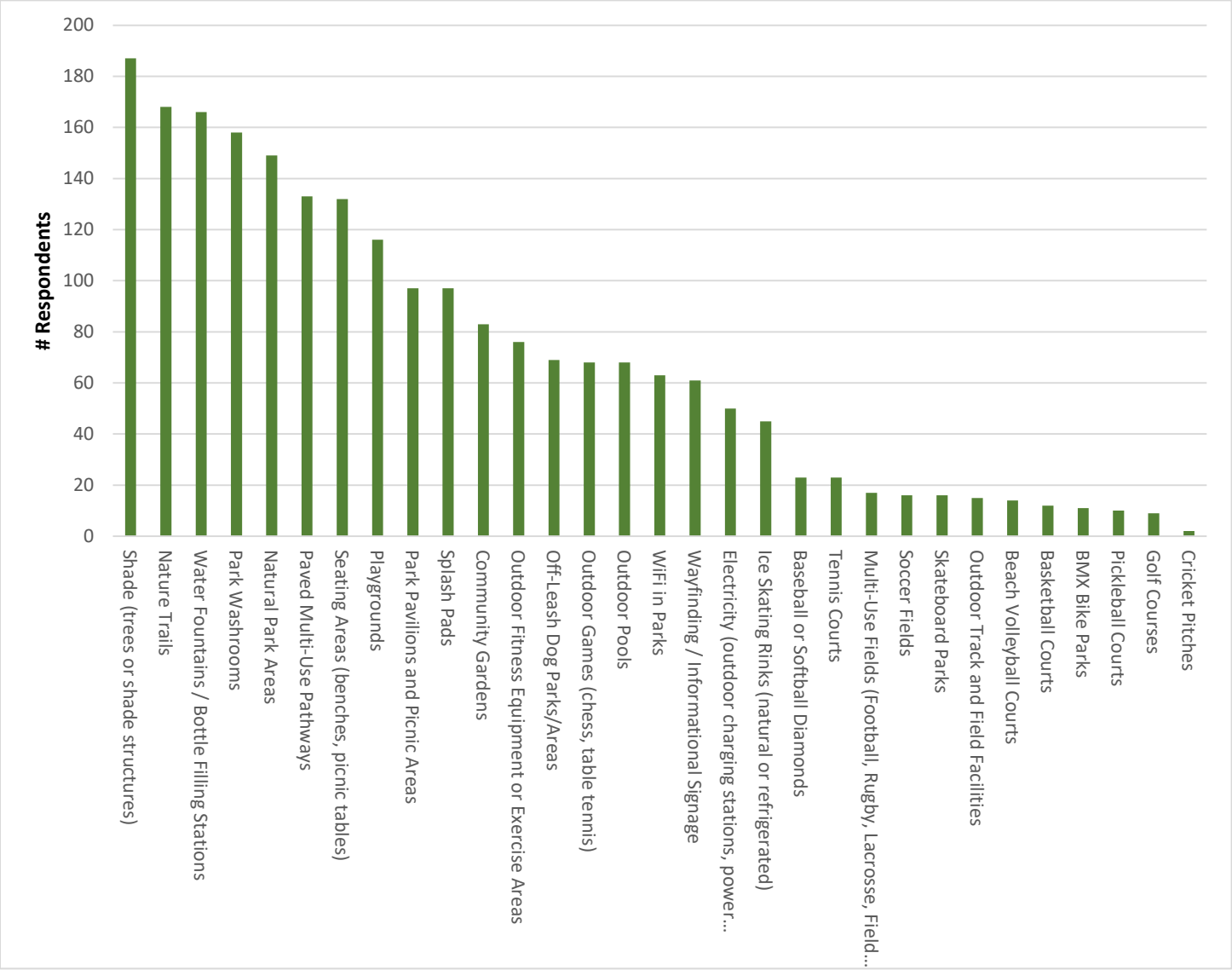
Figure 7 – Q7 – Satisfaction of Parks by Type



Across all parks, respondents were generally ***'Somewhat Satisfied'*** regarding all types of parks.

The last question gave respondents a list of possible park improvements and they were asked to select up to 10 of the priorities that they felt should be incorporated into the park system. ***Figure 8*** illustrates the responses.

Figure 8 – Park Improvement Priorities



From the responses received, it would appear that the top 10 priorities for park improvements are:

1. Shade
2. Nature Trails
3. Water Fountains / Filling Stations
4. Washrooms
5. Natural Park Areas
6. Paved Multi-Use Pathways
7. Seating
8. Playgrounds
9. Park Pavilions & Picnic Areas
10. Splash Pads

Other outdoor facility priorities which were mentioned by respondents were:

- Improve park maintenance (garbage collection, dog waste collection,
- Park lighting
- Dog friendly areas
- Amphitheatre / bandshell

An open ended question at the end of the survey asked respondents for specific locations within the park system for improvements. The list of parks or areas mentioned is as follows:

Existing Parks

Ainsworth Park (Improve wayfinding.)

Alexandra Park (Upgrade.)

Allen Street Park (More natural plantings.)

Anndale Park (Shade, playground improvements.)

Ashberry Park (Vegetation management.)

Bechtel Dog Park (Maintenance, Amenities for Dogs (dog waste pickup, agility course.)

Bechtel Park (Upgrade playground, Off leash trails.)

Blue Stream Park (Add pathways.)

Breithaupt Park (Pathway lighting.)

Carriage Crossing Park (Add Splashpad, Shade.)

Cornerbrook Park (upgrade)

Culpepper Park (Seating areas.)

Eastbridge Green (Trail Maintenance/Paving/Lighting, Playground improvements, Seating opportunities, Washrooms.)

Mary Allen Park (Improve Safety/Vandalism/Drug Use, Water Feature, Shade.)

McCrae Park / Rummelhardt (Add trails.)

Millen Woodlot (Access to water for outdoor skating, Add trails.)

Moses Springer Park (Add trails, Improve playground.)

Pinebrook Park (Upgrade.)

Regency Park (Improve parking and washrooms.)

Roselea Park (Upgrade.)

RIM Park (Trail connection to Kaufman Flats.)

River Ridge Park (Upgrade.)

University Downs Park (Upgrade.)

Waterloo Park (Update splash pad, Rehabilitate Silver Lake, Upgrade Washroom, Hydration station, Improve picnic area, Add Dog Park.)

Waterloo Public Square (Water feature, Add shade, Add animation.)

Westmount sports field (Add Dog Park.)

Westvale Park / Crater Park (Improved access, Add small sports field, Update Playground, Add outdoor fitness, Improve park maintenance.)

Potential Parks / General Improvements

Add small neighbourhood park in ***Clair Hills.***

Add playgrounds, Shade and Seating to ***Columbia Forest Neighbourhood*** parks.

Add splash pad in ***East Waterloo.***

Creek area off ***Frieburg Drive*** (Formalize green space for park use.)

Add dogs off leas area in ***Uptown Waterloo***.

Add shade, splashpads to parks in ***Westvale*** neighbourhood.

Add dog park in ***West Waterloo***.

Lastly respondents were asked about any other comments they had regarding Waterloo's Parkland. The following is a summary of comment responses:

- Build new or upgrade existing playgrounds (interactive, diverse, modern, safe, accessible).
- Add / upgrade seating in neighbourhood parks.
- Add interactive water features (pools, splash pads).
- Install lighting along park pathways.
- Add informal interactive elements (chess tables, table tennis)
- Add informal recreation elements (outdoor fitness)
- Add hydration opportunities (water fountains)
- Gathering opportunities (picnic shelters, pavilions)
- Better wayfinding (park and trails).
- Improved vegetation management (invasive species, forest management)
- Improved park maintenance (garbage removal, moving.)
- More shade opportunities (shade trees, shade structures).
- Trail improvements (pave multiuse trails, trail grading, winter maintenance, better connections.)
- More natural planting (trees, natural areas)
- More off-leash opportunities for dogs.
- Park designs should be flexible and accommodate intensification.
- More programming (a range of ages, opportunities)
- Streamlined booking process for events.
- Better access to information (park information, event information, opportunities for businesses.)

3. PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

There were several events where the public was engaged during the first phase of the project. They are outlined in the sections below:

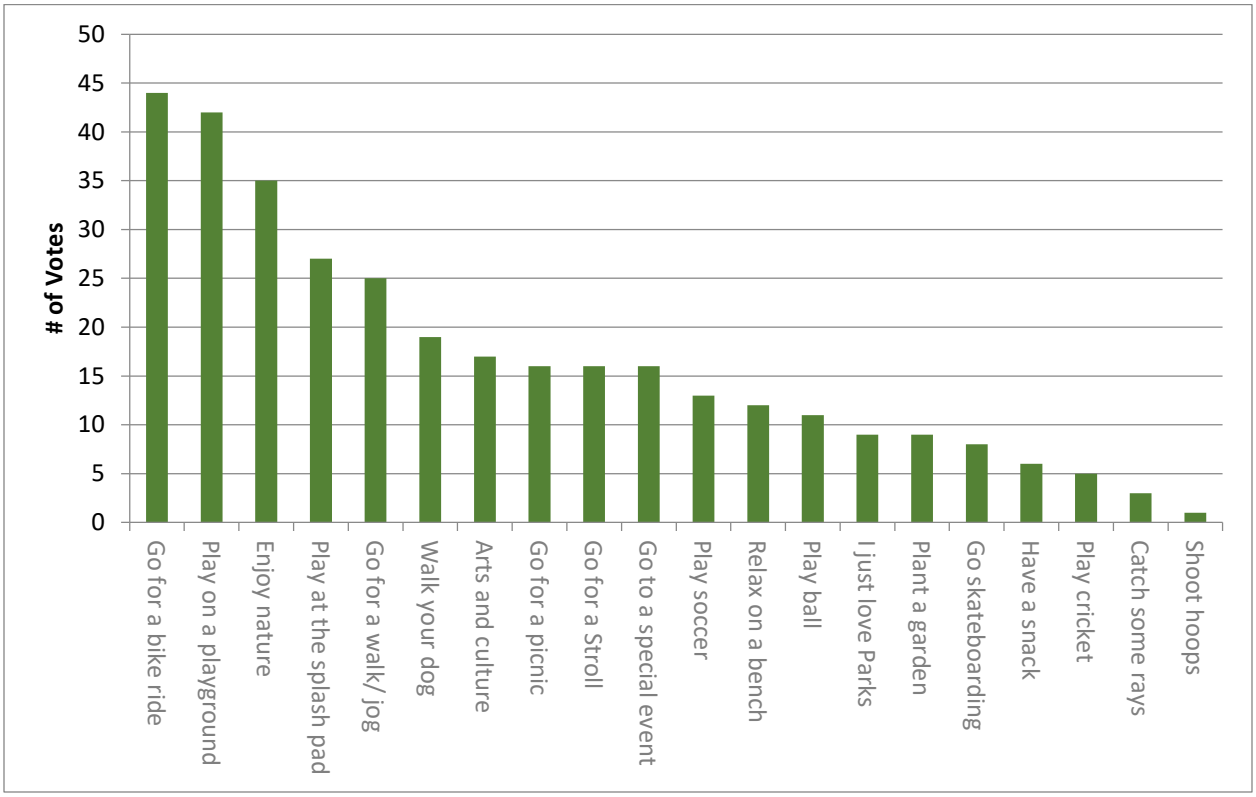
3.1 Pop-Up Events

Two pop up open houses were conducted during this first phase. The first occurred on June 9th, 2018. A booth was set up during the City of Waterloo's annual Service Centre Open House. This first pop up was meant to be the kick off for the project. Project post cards, project branded wristbands and buttons were handed out to visitors; participants were given the option to fill out the hard copy survey. Colouring pages were provided to visiting children, and there was a bean counting poll / game where participants were asked their favourite aspect of parks from a number of different options. They were asked to place their pebble in the jar corresponding to their favourite part of parks.

The second pop up event occurred on August 19th 2018. A booth was set up during the Open Streets Waterloo Park Event. Project and city staff handed out the project branded items (buttons, wristbands, postcards), and conducted hard copy surveys. The purpose of both pop up events was to introduce and drum up interest in the project and garner participation.

The bean counting game was also performed during Public Open House #1, the results of all three events can be found in ***Figure 9***.

Figure 9– Summary of Bean Counting Activity



3.2 Public Open House #1

The City posted information for the event using two (2) newspaper ads leading up to the PIC, as well as using ads in Facebook and posting information in other social media platforms. Information about the event was also posted on digital screens at all city facilities.

All contacts who had signed up to be on the Waterloo Parkland Strategy contact list were notified. City staff with existing contact lists were asked to send invitations to running groups, sports groups, Neighbourhood Associations and participants of the Neighbourhood Strategy. The Grand River Conservation Authority, the University of Waterloo, Laurier University, Conestoga College and school boards in Waterloo were also invited to PIC #1.

Staff liaisons for the following committees were asked to send their membership invitations to PIC #1:

- Advisory Committee on Culture
- Uptown Vision Committee
- Sustainability Advisory Committee
- Waterloo Advisory Committee on Active Transportation
- Waterloo Economic Development Advisory committee
- Waterloo Park Committee
- Friends of Waterloo Park Advisory Committee
- Municipal Heritage committee
- Age Friendly Waterloo
- Grand River Accessibility Advisory Committee

Public Open House #1 was held on June 19th at RIM Park, 2001 University Avenue East, in room 207. The room was divided into two different zones. The first was the information zone, which included a welcome and sign in area where guests were greeted. A presentation area was set up with a looped presentation containing background information about the project including: the study purpose, process and schedule; relevant planning policy documents; the city's strategic priorities; statistics about Waterloo; about Waterloo's park system; and the purpose of the PIC and activities. Next to the presentation area was a series of panels with project information including: study purpose, process and schedule; an overall map of Waterloo's parkland; the City's Active, Passive, Natural and Urban Spaces; a panel with Waterloo's parkland at a glance with inventory information; information from the Neighbourhood Strategy; and, Next Steps.

The activity zone contained the interactive elements for the PIC. As noted before there was a bean counting activity as well as a station set up for participants to complete the online survey on site.There was also a series of panels that contained interactive activities. The first set asked participants to indicate on the maps using sticky dots which parks they like to visit, and why using sticky notes, as well as which parks need improvements and why. The second set of panels depicted a number of activities and facilities that are typically in parks. Participants were asked to place a sticky dot beside the photo of the amenities they would like to see in Waterloo's parks.

Images of the interactive panels can be found in ***Appendix B***.

3.3 Park User Consultation

Over the summer of 2018 there were coordinated efforts by both the project team and City staff to visit the parks and engage with the public.

Park User Intercept Surveys

Between July 25th 2018 and August 8th 2018 the project team visited approximately of 25% of the parks in Waterloo, totalling 36 parks. During these visits the project team completed a high level visual assessment of the park and they also conducted a park user intercept survey with people using the parks at the time of the assessment. From the 36 park visits, a total of 41 park user intercept surveys were completed. Parks were visited during the week in the afternoons, and the larger parks were visited during the day on a Saturday when it was anticipated that more people would be using the parks.

Park users were greeted and then asked six questions:

1. How frequently do you come to this park?
2. What type of activities do you participate in here?
3. What types of activities/facilities/improvements would make you want to use this park more?
4. What other parks in Waterloo do you use regularly?
5. Where do you live? (immediate neighbourhood, elsewhere in Waterloo, outside of waterloo)
6. How many are in your household?

Majority of respondents were visiting from the immediate neighbourhood, and they visited their parks once to a few times a week. The most popular activities in these parks included: using the park trails and paths; playing on the playground; playing active field sports; playing active diamond sports; dog walking; and, sitting/passive viewing of nature and sports.

Activities/facilities/improvements which would entice participants to visit more included: more trees/shade; benches/picnic tables; improved maintenance/upkeep (weeds, trail surfacing, parking lot maintenance); upgrades to equipment (playgrounds, diamonds, bleachers); equipment for different age groups (climbers/obstacles/sandbox); water fountain/filling stations; splashpad; lighting for safety; new/cleaner washrooms (near dog parks); baseball safety fence/screens for foul balls; more pathways; add informal basketball court; better signage.

Staff Engagement with Park Users

Frontline city staff also went out to parks in Waterloo to engage with park users. Between July 17th 2018 and August 24th 2018, city staff visited six (6) locations on eight (8) separate occasions within the park system:

1. Spur Line Trail, Mary Allen Park
2. Waterloo Park
3. Hillside trail
4. Uptown Public Square
5. Central Promenade
6. North East Trails – RIM Park to Eastbridge Green

A total of 170 individuals were surveys by city staff. The following is a summar of typical comments and concerns received during engagement with park users:

- Accessible playground equipment – specifically swings

- Outdoor gym equipment
- More off leash dog parks – including those with separation for small and large dogs
- Increase bench frequency along trails
- Shade provision in parks
- Splash pads needed, especially in the east side of the City.
- Park specific comments – swings too high, etc.

4. KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

4.1 City Staff / Council

In Spring/Summer of 2018 members of the project team met with select City Staff as well as Council to discuss the successes and accomplishments of Waterloo's park system over the past 5 years; how park use is changing; major issues; response to LRT; quick wins, and short term priorities; local important initiatives or opportunities to be considered; and what must the Strategy accomplish to be considered successful.

Below is a summary of the common themes from what was discussed during the interviews.

Successes

- Parks and trails are generally well situated and well used.
- Some parks have received upgraded equipment.
- Some efforts have been made to improve maintenance and management (winter clearing, invasive species).
- Programming efforts have been made (community gardens, active programming).
- Community as well as council recognize parks as highly important, and place high value on parks and environmental areas.
- Construction of new parks (Westmount Sports Park), community fundraising for amenities (Clair Lake Park playground).

Changes in Park Use

- Communities are constantly changing (intensification, demographics, children, seniors, diversity/new Canadians, level of income).
- Fluctuating student populations.
- Increase in population of dogs (residents as well as students).
- Some parks have unfavorable activities occurring (loitering, vandalism, drugs).
- Parks are being used by businesses (bootcamps, sports programs).
- More active participation by Neighbouhood Associations.
- Technology in parks (pickup hub, trail apps, WiFi, park operations with use of GIS/GPS).
- Parks are used by high density residential as their open green space.
- People have higher expectations for park maintenance.
- Infilling and redevelopment will be happening more as greenfield parks are less available.
- Shift away from traditional sports (ultimate Frisbee, Frisbee golf, beach volleyball.)

Major Issues

- Inaccessibility for some residents (new Canadians, below poverty line)
- Lack of amenities for youths and teens.
- Lack of awareness of park system.

- Complaints about management / maintenance (dog waste, vegetation overgrowth, invasive species, waste collection).
- Demand for more shade in parks (trees/shade structures)
- Demand for more splash pads/ interactive water play.
- Demand for more seating opportunities in parks.
- Demand for picnic / sheltered areas with washroom access and open space. Only space for bookable picnic space is in Waterloo Park.
- Safety issues in parks (vandalism, drug use)
- Trail maintenance issues.
- Parks and playgrounds are aging and require upgrades.
- Encroachment from private property.
- Imbalance of parks across the City. Perceived imbalance in funding for parks.
- Need to strategically purchase parkland where system gaps are present.
- Parks being constructed with elements that often don't go maintained.
- Attention needed on upgrading and maintaining existing parks and amenities versus new parks and amenities.
- Biggest pressure is the need for staffing to complete maintenance.
- Little parkland acquisitions currently available.
- Sometimes community events slated for neighbourhood parks are too large for the space.
- Conflicts between sports groups and neighbourhood associations for fields and diamonds.

Intensification

- Make sure parkland is secured in intensification areas (parkland dedication, purchasing previously residential lots, vacant land.)
- New urban parks should feel public and promote gathering and provide seating, shade, and facilitate access and connectivity.
- Parks adjacent to businesses should allow some commercial spillover.
- Parks and open space planning should be incorporated into Station Area Planning.

Quick Wins

- Programming in existing parks for increase participation.
- Upgrade existing equipment.
- Finish Waterloo Park plans.
- Install better wayfinding to help get people to parks.
- Involvement of community (events, fundraising, tree planting).
- Install more seating along park trails.
- Improve internal process for handling event bookings. Develop overall events policy for parks. Centralized contact for bookings (Waterloo Park and RIM Park have their own personnel for bookings.)
- Investigate potential of establishing a stewardship coordinator to help with park awareness and maintenance.
- Install permanent informal programming elements in existing parks (chess, exercise gear.)
- Plant more trees.
- Freedom for Neighbourhood Associations to develop placemaking efforts in their parks, making them unique. Partner with groups that unofficially maintain parts of parks to get more formally involved.
- Utilize forgotten parkland (parkettes).
- Continue to accommodate sport, potential to extend playing seasons with artificial turf.

What needs to be accomplished?

- Develop prioritization for redevelopment of parks.
- Establish publicly accessible formal service standards for parks/fields.
- Potential funding opportunities (bequeathing, partnerships).
- Establish partnerships (public private partnerships, partner with Laurel Creek Conservation, sports groups).
- Establish better relationships with school boards (shared use agreements).
- Establish asset management of parks and amenities / complete inventory of parks and facilities.
- Improve overall park maintenance (garbage, landscape, dog waste), develop strategy for ongoing maintenance.
- Improve vegetation management (access, visual access, CPTED).
- Develop diverse programming, events and activities for residents in parks and open spaces (all ages and abilities, events, farmers markets)
- Protect / develop open spaces for flexible and informal use.
- Support trail connections through parks.
- Encourage parks as outdoor community centres, spaces for community to gather.
- Develop cost effective solutions for parks.
- Parks should be high quality (art / cultural heritage). Public art to be functional and interactive.
- Develop policy for lighting parks and trails.
- Rethink cash in lieu vs. dedication. Parkland to complete gaps in the system. Land banking.
- Parks needed on the west side of the City.
- Possibility of the use of cash-in-lieu for recreation versus parks.
- Provide water sources, potable water, electrical hookups and storage boxes in parks for events / users. Servicing for winter outdoor rinks and community gardens.
- Incorporate urban forests into the parks. Develop park tree inventory, currently street tree inventory in GIS, not for parks.
- Include Park Operations at beginning stages for feasibility and management for designs.
- Develop naturalization strategy which incorporates invasive species management and future management to avoid overgrowth.
- Complete digital inventory of parks and park assets (some in GIS, others not.)

5. STAKEHOLDER FOCUS GROUPS

5.1 Waterloo Park Committee & Friends of Waterloo Park Staff Liaison

The project team met with a volunteer who sits on both groups, as well as a staff liaison from each group. The theme of discussion was centred around: successes and accomplishments; trends, gaps and opportunities; and priorities & strategies.

Below is a summary of the key themes from the discussion:

- Some features have been completed so far. New entry feature and improved visibility for main entrance on Father David Bauer, park frontage is important. Development of LRT stops within the park for better accessibility.
- Need better awareness of aspects of the park.
- Park will come under pressure due to intensification, condo dwellers as personal open space.
- Proposed features – interior walkway/central promenade to improve east-west connections through the park.
- Potential opportunities – closing gaps in trail system, improved wayfinding signage, park marketing strategy, better visibility for parks (signage, website info, park app), partnerships/subsidies for local businesses to allow park users to use facilities (washrooms, water bottle filling). Partnership/subsidy with GRCA / Laurel Creek for residents to use at no cost. Partnerships with school boards and post-secondary.
- Potential for commercial activities (food and beverage services, food trucks, semi-permanent concessions.)
- Potential for off leash area during certain hours of the day in Waterloo Park.
- Elements should be multi-purpose and flexible.
- Opportunity to incorporate technology – WiFi hotspots, solar powered phone chargers.
- Need appropriate funding for park operations.

6. SUMMARY OF COMMON THEMES

Throughout this phase a number of topics emerged that were repeated from respondents across all engagement platforms. They are captured in the word cloud below, ***Figure 10.***

Figure 10 – Summary of Common Themes



Paths and Trails were mentioned often and were near the top for priorities for improvement. Paving well used trails, grading trails to avoid spring flooding and connecting gaps in the network were all mentioned. Walking for leisure and hiking a nature trail were the most popular answer when asked their recent outdoor activities. Having a high quality, efficient and connected path and trail system is one way to make a small improvement to a park that is highly visible and appreciated.

Maintenance was one of the most common issues brought up during consultation. Comments related to the need for better maintenance of parks including dog waste removals, garbage pick up, mowing, management of overgrown vegetation, invasive species management etc. Some parks received praise for their amenities but received criticism for their lack of maintenance.

Playgrounds received a fair bit of attention as well. For the most part there is a good number of existing playgrounds throughout the City, however many are at or near the end of their lifecycle and are aging visibly. Residents are looking for upgrades to playgrounds that are past their shelf life, and are looking to upgrade the infrastructure with something that is more modern and interactive and can accommodate different ages and abilities.

Dogs Off Leash areas were also very popular answers during consultation. There is only one formal dogs off leash area in the City of Waterloo located at Bechtel Park, which some have commented also requires more attention and maintenance. There was interest in having a dogs off leash area in the Uptown Core especially with the influx of future population related to intensification. There was also interest in located a dog park in northwest Waterloo.

Waterplay or splash pads were of high interest as well. There were many open response comments calling for the improvement of Lion's Lagoon, the only splash pad in Waterloo. There were also comments about needing more, since we can expect temperature changes relating to climate change.

Shade was the top priority which came out of the online survey. Planting more shade trees along park paths, and beside amenities like playgrounds and near benches will help create pockets of relief during the summer months. In more heavily used parks, or parks that are more urban shade structures or shelters should be investigated as well. Climate change calls for higher temperatures and stronger radiation from the sun. Providing shade will help residents continue to use the parks throughout the summer months.

Equity was noted during consultation. Equity is considered twofold. The first is location. There isn't an equitable distribution of parks in terms of geography. Some neighbourhoods have more access to parkland than others. The other is in terms of social justice. Areas with higher concentrations of new Canadians and lower income residents have less access to parkland and are less able to travel longer distances to participate in parks and recreation activities. Locating parks and amenities in these neighbourhoods would go a long way to improving the social justice of the area.

Informal Play amenities were mentioned as a way of improving the usability of many spaces, as well as making them more appealing to more than one age group. Many parks have a child's playground with a path. Having informal play infrastructure can help to attract a wider group of users. Amenities could include the following: chess boards, outdoor table tennis, outdoor fitness equipment etc.

Hydration facilities were of interest in parks. This is also in line with the need for shade as well as waterplay facilities. Having opportunities for users to hydrate while in park will increase their comfort level in parks and allow them to stay and play/recreate longer. Also if possible to having hydration stations be multi-use so adults can drink, fill bottles, and also allow dogs to drink.

Accessibility there is interest in increasing the accessibility of playgrounds. There currently are only 2 fully accessible playgrounds in Waterloo. Investing in and creating universally accessible play spaces will help to increase usership for all users. Having accessibility includes not just those with physical disabilities, but older adults, and mothers with strollers therefore allowing more access to playgrounds for a wider group of users. Access also means removing barriers and creating better entrances to parks, having multiple entry points into a park will increase safety as well as increase usership.

Programming was noted as needed in parks for a variety of ages and abilities. Some examples include: outdoor fitness circuit, group rides/runs/hikes, community gardens, tai chi, outdoor yoga, disc golf, pickleball, beach volleyball, swimming pool, concerts, literature readings, green area stewardship workshops, programs for young children. Programming done by the City will get people out and using the parks.

Flexibility was noted as important, especially as communities evolve over time. Parks and their facilities should have elements that are able to shift and provide interaction for a wider group of users. Having spaces that are flexible for use as the neighbourhood evolves will help to improve the longevity of parks.

Seating was another popular request. Having benches placed along park pathways and near amenities such as playgrounds and sports fields while also

Wayfinding

Animation

Naturalization

Education

Safety

Placemaking

Information

All-season

Washrooms

Picnic areas

Shade (shade trees, shade structures, shaded areas by playgrounds and for watching spectator sports)

Water (water fountain / filling stations, water for events, water for ice rinks / gardens, interactive water features, more splash pads, outdoor pool)

Seating (benches along paths, benches by playgrounds, picnic tables in parks)

Washrooms (near sports fields, near dog parks, near playgrounds)

Informal Play (adult fitness equipment, open space for informal play, basketball courts, ping pong, chess)

Accessibility (accessible trails and paths into parks, accessible dog parks, accessible playground equipment, pedestrian bridges over watercourses, fill in trail gaps, maintain public access to water courses)

Wayfinding (better signage between parks, better signage at entrances to parks)

Safety (lighting at trail and park entrances, vegetation management for sightlines, CPTED, pedestrian crossings, lower speeds at park entrances, safety netting for baseball fields)

Events (clarified process for bookings, ability to book events in neighbourhood parks)

Sense of Place (neighbourhoods want to make their parks unique, people want to participate and have a greater role in their parks (taking charge of winter ice rinks, weeds etc.), art, community gardens)

Animation (food and beverage, beer gardens, art, lighting, interactive elements, Wi-Fi, multi-season programming (ice skating))

Field Sports (field improvements, unsupportive of removal of diamonds at Waterloo Park)

Cemeteries (landscaping improvements to enhance cemetery)

Education (waterfowl management & education for public, more readily accessible park information)

7. NEXT STEPS

The consultant team will use all comments received from the survey, the interactive mapping tool, and from the information gathered during the various park visits will help to identify the most requested improvements as well as potential locations for specific changes.

The input gathered during the community engagement process will form the basis for the development of a ***Vision and Goals*** for the Parks Strategy. The vision and goal statements that will be formulated through this process will be consistent with the directions contained in the City's Strategic Plan, and draw inspiration from relevant industry documents.

The information from this consultation report along with other analysis (sociodemographic analysis, benchmarking and trends, recreation amenity and gap analysis) will form part of the next deliverable for this project: the Research, Analysis and Visioning Report.

Need to determine criteria for prioritization – social equity, low income areas, areas with major gaps .

Appendix A – Online Survey

Appendix B – Public Engagement Materials