

1 The Parks and Open Space Strategy

Planning for the Next Decade

Richmond Facts

Land Area	130 sq. kilometres
Population	205,000
Number of Islands	17
Km of shoreline	80
% of Land Area within the Agriculture Land Reserve	38%
% of Land Area City Parks	5%

1.1 Experience Richmond

The City of Richmond is an island city located in the Fraser River Estuary with over 80 kilometres of shoreline. Lulu Island, Sea Island and the 15 smaller islands that are within the city boundaries were first settled for agriculture and the salmon fishery but the construction of perimeter dykes and the internal drainage network has shaped the City. The city that has developed, since it was incorporated in 1879, has a mix of rural life, historic village, suburban and urban neighbourhoods, and industrial lands with strongly defined waterfront edges and protected agricultural land boundaries.

Richmond is experiencing dramatic change. It is growing rapidly with a current population of 205,000 that is projected to reach 280,000 by 2041. It is an increasingly diverse community where over 50% of residents are immigrants. The city is also experiencing dramatic change with the arrival of the Canada Line rapid transit line and the Richmond Olympic Oval, a legacy of the 2010 Winter Olympic Games. As a result, Richmond's downtown is redeveloping according to the vision of the City Centre Area Plan to become a walkable community complete with a diversity of housing, jobs, and public amenities.

Parks & Trails Facts

<i>Number of parks</i>	<i>121</i>
<i>Total area</i>	<i>685 ha.</i>
<i>Number of Neighbourhood Parks</i>	<i>80</i>
<i>Number of Community Parks</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Number of City-wide Parks</i>	<i>33</i>
<i>Number of Sport Fields</i>	<i>100</i>
<i>Trail Kilometres</i>	<i>50</i>

The parks and open space system in Richmond has evolved over the course of over 100 years to serve the needs of the community and encompasses the landscapes and special places that make Richmond unique. City-owned parks, from small neighbourhood parks to large natural areas, make up the majority of the system while other types of public open space (e.g. streets, plazas and other outdoor amenity spaces) are increasingly augmenting parks where higher density urban development is occurring. The city's many waterfront destinations, including the dyke trails, piers and floats, are an integral part of Richmond's identity and are of regional significance. Further, the City has made considerable progress in developing a network of trails, greenways and neighbourhood links in an effort to develop connections between neighbourhoods, parks, community facilities, and major destinations. The system is continually being expanded and diversified in order to meet the needs of a growing and changing community.

The City of Richmond's many services are aligned with the Corporate Vision for Richmond to be "the most appealing, livable, and well-managed community in Canada". In the spirit of the City's vision, this Strategy celebrates the commitment by the community and the City to building the parks and public open space system, resulting in the priceless legacy of over 685 ha (1695 acres) of park land and over 50 km of trails. It looks forward to the challenges that will be faced over the next decade and provides a plan to guide decision making and allocation of resources so that Richmond's parks and open space system will continue to be valued by the community and offer excellent service to all Richmond residents.



City Centre Plaza on No. 3 Rd.



Middle Arm Waterfront Park at the Boaters' Row Amphitheatre and Sound Garden Play Area

1.2 Shaping the Future

As the City's first comprehensive strategic plan for its parks and open space system, this strategy represents a significant milestone. It traces the evolution of the system from the first playground to the current sophisticated, interconnected system of places and spaces that are integral to the quality of life in Richmond. It describes the services provided by the Parks Division, the vital role of our community partners, and the standards that have been established to meet community need. And it clearly defines the priorities and desired outcomes for sustaining and expanding a high quality system for the next decade.

Over the next decade the parks and open space system will:

- Provide more opportunities for people to feel connected to their community and to be physically active;
- Celebrate and showcase the City's great places and offer vibrant urban parks, complemented by an engaging urban realm;
- Provide an expanded trail and greenway system that significantly improves the walking, rolling and cycling network at the neighbourhood and city-wide levels;
- Integrate ecosystem services across the system and develop eco-corridors along trails, greenways and streets;
- Build on our Island City heritage to develop more unique waterfront destinations, focus on increased recreational access to internal waterways (sloughs and canals), and celebrate water in innovative ways in the urban environment;
- Incorporate a greater diversity of activities and functions to both accommodate changing and diversifying community needs and to advance the City's sustainability objectives; and,
- Operate with increasing efficiency and effectiveness through the adoption of innovative practices and new technologies.

Historic Plans and Strategies

1957: "Parks and Schools for Richmond", Lower Mainland Planning Board

1977: "1977 - 82 Parks and Leisure Services Comprehensive Plan", Richmond Parks and Leisure Services

1979: "Richmond Trails Plan", Department of Leisure Services

2003: "2010 Richmond Trail Strategy", Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Division

2005: "Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services: A Masterplan for 2005 - 2015", Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Division

1.3 Building the Strategy

The strategy is based on an understanding of the needs of the community and the benefits that are derived from the parks and open space system as well as an understanding of the shifts that are occurring.

1.3.1 Quality of Life and the Parks and Open Space System

What would the city be like without its parks and natural areas? And what would the community be like without places to play and socialize together? Parks and public open spaces are places people love, where they go to take pleasure in the companionship of friends and family, or to relax and enjoy moments of solitude.

A well-designed, well-connected system of parks and trails, greenways and streets, plazas and squares, waterfront and waterways, significantly contributes to individual and community wellness. In the last decade, greater diversity and multi-functionality have been introduced into the parks and open space system in Richmond in recognition of the following vital social, cultural, environmental and economic benefits the system provides:

- **Community building** – Parks and public open spaces help to build community by providing space for social interaction and providing activities and events that bring people of all ages and backgrounds together.
- **Improved physical and psychological health** – There is strong evidence that proximity to parks and access to nature is related to higher levels of physical activity and therefore better health outcomes as well as improved psychological health.
- **Ecosystem Services** - A healthy city environment is supported by key ecosystem services such as food production, water purification, clean air and protection of biodiversity.

- **Green Infrastructure** – From rainwater management systems to wastewater treatment to district energy utilities, parks and open spaces are increasingly becoming an integrated part of a more sustainable approach to urban infrastructure.
- **Climate Change Adaptation**– Parks and public open spaces can help mitigate the effects of climate change, increasing natural carbon storage (e.g., through bogs and the urban forest), contributing to flood mitigation and moderating the heating of urban areas.
- **Tourism** – Signature parks and public open spaces contribute to a city's unique identity and attract visitors bringing economic benefits to the local community.
- **Attracting business** – Businesses may choose their locations based on proximity to a park or open space where the quality of life is important for attracting employees.
- **Increased property value** – Parks have been shown to directly increase property values and stimulate investment in higher quality development in the areas surrounding them.

Over the next decade, the focus will be on delivering these benefits in the context of a changing community and an increasingly complex environment.

1.3.2 Trends and Change in the Parks and Open Space System

Richmond has gone through periods of profound change in the past and is in the middle of a transformational period now. In order to understand future needs and anticipate evolving uses, an understanding of the trends that will have the greatest influence on how services will be delivered in the future is essential. The most significant shifts that are occurring are identified below:

Demographic Trends

- **Richmond is growing** – Population growth and related development generates the need to expand the parks and open space system and increase the services offered.
- **Richmond residents are getting older** – With an ageing population, use of parks and public open spaces is changing, and the physical abilities of the elderly must to be met with innovative and targeted park and open space design.
- **Richmond is becoming more ethnically diverse** – Richmond's population continues to diversify culturally, bringing new expectations of the role of the Parks and Public Open Space System.
- **Physical inactivity** – Inactivity, especially among children and youth, is associated with rising levels of chronic diseases. Providing convenient access to safe and engaging parks and public open spaces is one of the measures required to encourage people to lead healthy, active lives.
- **Changing leisure trends** – People are increasingly choosing more informal, individualized activities and are seeking more experiential and educational opportunities.

Urban Development Trends

- **Richmond is becoming more urban** – With a shift to higher density urban development, especially in the City Centre, public open space plays a more important role in the lives of residents living in these neighbourhoods.
- **Focus on diversity and quality** – The limiting factors of cost and availability of land for parks and public open space is leading cities to focus on diversifying uses and increasing the quality of parks and public open spaces to meet growing community need. Accompanying this is an evolving definition of open space, where non-traditional open spaces such as rooftops, streetscapes and private amenity areas provide services complementary to parks and public open spaces.
- **Focus on walking, rolling and cycling** – With increasing knowledge of what makes a “complete community” and increasing awareness of the health benefits of alternative transportation modes, the importance of walking, rolling and cycling has been growing in Richmond and around the world.

Environmental Trends

- **Loss of Ecosystem Services**
– Rapid population growth and extensive development means that the parks and open space system has an increasingly vital role to play in providing the services that will contribute to a healthy city environment.
- **Local Food and Urban Agriculture**
– As people have placed a greater value on local food production, interest in the use of parks and public open spaces for urban agriculture uses have increased.



Terra Nova Rural Park volunteers working at the Sharing Farm

Resource Management Trends

- **Rising Maintenance Costs** - As the system grows and becomes more complex, operations and maintenance costs are increasing. The City will be challenged to develop strategies for shifting resources and adapting maintenance practices and to explore alternative funding sources to address rising costs.
- **Ageing Infrastructure** – Replacement of ageing infrastructure is an issue cities around the world are facing. Retrofitting and replacing park infrastructure (e.g. utilities, buildings and sports facilities) add considerably to the demands on operating budgets, which are typically structured to address regular maintenance activities.
- **Urban Forest Management** – The impacts of urbanization on the urban forest (e.g., loss of natural areas and the reduction of tree cover) place the challenge for sustaining a healthy urban forest into the realm of the streets, parks and public open spaces. As the urban forest on public land grows, managing for long-term health becomes imperative in order to manage costs.

1.3.3 Methodology and Process

Because the benefits of the parks and open space system can have such a positive effect on the quality of people's daily lives and because the system is so interconnected with many of the other services provided by the City, this strategy is written to reflect multiple interests and to invite continuing participation by all in realizing the outcomes.

The strategy has been developed for four main audiences:

1. **Residents and Community Partners** –The strategy proposes recommendations to resolve issues that have been identified by residents and sets directions for strengthening relationships with community partners.
2. **Developers and Landowners** – The strategy ensures that there is a clear understanding of the relationships between new development (residential, commercial and industrial) and the parks and public open space system.
3. **Council** – The Strategy has been developed to reflect Council priorities and to assist Council with decision-making, particularly through the 10-year Implementation Plan.
4. **Administration and Staff** – The strategy proposes directions and actions to address issues and emerging trends that will require collaboration between departments.

This strategy has been developed through the collaborative efforts of staff across all the divisions of the Community Services Department and across multiple city departments; Policy Planning, Transportation Planning, Engineering Planning, Sustainability and District Energy. That collaboration has yielded seven strategic focus areas along with a series of outcome statements, forming the strategy framework.

City of Richmond Council endorsed the strategy framework on March 14, 2011. Subsequently, the City solicited community input on the focus areas and outcomes at a series of neighbourhood meetings held in May and June of 2011. The meetings were used to gain insight into what people valued most about Richmond's parks and open space system and to confirm that the strategy framework resonated with the community.

Further work was completed on an update of the inventory of the system and an analysis of the system's strengths and weaknesses. Together with the preceding work, a 10 year Implementation Plan has been developed that will guide the Parks Division's actions and provide direction for the effective use of City resources as the community evolves.

Best Practice



Emery Barnes Park is Vancouver's newest downtown park. At 0.85 hectares in size, it functions as the neighbourhood's outdoor living room. It combines active uses like a children's playground, an off-leash dog park, space for games like soccer or Frisbee, along with gardens and seating areas. The most engaging feature in the park is the water feature, which runs the length of the park. The water splashes over rocks, runs along a channel with to its dramatic end in a plaza with continuous water display. The park was designed and constructed for \$5.5 mil.

1.4 The Strategy Framework: Focus Areas and Outcomes

Health and Wellness: Places and programs for physical, social and spiritual wellbeing

Convenient access to parks and open spaces is a strong indicator for healthy levels of physical activity and community cohesiveness. Access to places to walk, the most common reason people cite for visiting parks and trails, is a critical service the system can provide. Contact with nature and even simple green spaces with grass and trees have been shown to have profound psychological and physical benefits.

Community cohesiveness is stronger where there is an opportunity to engage in informal social contact, to play together, and where people of diverse ages and backgrounds can engage in shared experiences. The sports fields, playgrounds, places to walk dogs, community gardens, and public plazas play a central role in fostering a strong sense of community.

Achieving equitable and convenient access to parks and public open spaces for all residents is key to delivering the greatest benefit. In areas not currently well served with parks and open space, new parks, greenways and trails, and public squares must be secured to provide the same benefits to future residents.

Outcome #1

Our Parks and open space system is inviting and welcoming to residents and visitors of all ages and backgrounds

Outcome #2

Residents of every neighbourhood have equal access to safe, appealing places to engage in healthy, active lifestyles

Outcome #3

The diverse interests of the community are reflected in the range of spaces and programs offered by the Parks and open space system

Great Places and Experiences: Promoting a vibrant and a 'distinctly Richmond' parks and open space system

Great places, where special experiences are shared, are an important aspect of the city's identity and community life. They motivate residents to get out and enjoy the city, to be active and to participate in community events, and they attract visitors from the region and beyond thereby contributing to the local economy through tourism. The vibrancy of Steveston Village and the iconic West Dyke Trail are treasured by Richmond residents and are some of Richmond's most popular tourist destinations. They are places that are rooted in the specific character of local cultures and landscapes, imparting a uniqueness and authenticity that is the signature of great places in other cities. In the future, the City will strive to protect those parks and public open spaces that capture Richmond's uniqueness and at the same time, will be challenged as the city grows and changes, especially in the City Centre, to create new places that are 'distinctly Richmond'.

Outcome #1

The rich variety of great places, features and activities in the parks and open space system contribute to the city's vibrancy and identity

Outcome #2

The parks and open space system enhances Richmond's status as an exceptional local, regional and international destination

Outcome #3

The city's unique landscape, food, arts, culture and signature events are supported and showcased

Outcome #4

Richmond's natural and cultural heritage are brought to life through active engagement, education and interpretation

Best Practice



Chicago's Millennium Park is a 10 hectare urban park that is one of the most popular tourist destinations in Chicago. The park features a variety of grand outdoor rooms containing monumental architecture and sculpture that animate the spaces and support year-round programs. The most notable aspects of the park are the Jay Pritzker Pavilion performance venue, iconic public art that is engaging and interactive, an outdoor dining and exhibition space that is converted into a free outdoor skating rink in the winter, and the quiet, contemplative Lurie Garden. The total construction budget was \$490 mil. The park is operated by a non-profit corporation whose annual operations and maintenance costs, including security services, were \$6,000,000 in 2009.

Best Practice



Qinhuangdao Red Ribbon Park in the Heibei Province of China is built along a reclaimed river corridor. The 20 ha. greenway provides access to the river's edge for walking, jogging, fishing and swimming and incorporates natural habitats along with recreation and education facilities. The central feature of the greenway is a 500 metre long red ribbon that integrates seating, environmental interpretation, lighting and a boardwalk. Four pavilions, in the shape of clouds are distributed along the ribbon, which provide protection from the weather, meeting opportunities, and visual focal points.

Connectivity: Linking people, community and nature

Cities and neighbourhoods that are well connected by pleasant, green pedestrian and cycling routes provide opportunities for people to lead healthy lifestyles, and improve the vibrancy and environmental quality of city life. Dense, mixed use neighbourhoods with a connected network of streets are primary determinants of walkability and neighbourhoods that also have a high number of parks and open spaces see more people walking to their daily destinations. Cycling increases the distance people are able to travel for their daily trips (e.g., 5 km.) versus using the car and when cycling routes are separated from traffic, more people are comfortable with riding regularly. Richmond, a city that is becoming increasingly urban, has the opportunity to close the gaps that exist in the current system of sidewalks, greenways, neighbourhood links and trails and to build a complete system of neighbourhood and city-wide connections.

Outcome #1

There are well established pedestrian and cycling connections between every element of the city (neighbourhoods, schools, civic spaces, neighbourhood service centres, parks, natural areas, streets, commercial areas and industrial parks)

Outcome #2

The system is inviting, accessible, and safe, enabling residents and visitors to feel comfortable and connected to the community

Outcome #3

The system promotes a culture of walking and cycling and supports a range of active transportation modes

Green Network: Creating a green, healthy and resilient cityscape

The words “green” and “natural” are used to describe everything from a simple park environment with grass and trees to a complex bog ecosystem like the Richmond Nature Park. That people desire contact with and benefit from experiences in green and natural environments is clear from a growing body of scientific research as well as the City’s own surveys and community consultations.

The green network, including urban parks, natural areas and the corridors that connect them (e.g., trails, greenways), offer benefits to human health and provide ecosystem services for a healthier urban environment. Natural areas in parks give people access to nature at the same time as supporting fish and wildlife. The urban forest, composed primarily of trees in parks and along streets, absorbs air pollutants, stores carbon and moderates the amount of heat absorbed in urban environments. The marshes along Sturgeon Banks provide flood protection.

Traditionally, natural areas have been viewed as separate from the city but in considering the benefits and services provided by the green network, it will be increasingly important that ecosystem services are integrated within the urban fabric through the parks and open space system.

Outcome #1

Nature and natural areas are recognized as fundamental building blocks of a liveable and healthy city.

Outcome #2

The parks and open space system includes a range of green spaces that support recreation, social interaction and psychological and spiritual renewal.

Outcome #3

The parks and open space system contributes significantly to the health of the ecological network

Best Practice



Tanner Springs Park, in Portland’s Pearl District, is a 0.93 acre natural oasis in the city. All of the rain water that falls within the park boundaries is collected in a wetland that is the central feature of the park. The park is planted with native trees and grasses representing local native landscapes. A variety of seating options including stepped seating edges and benches distributed throughout the park provide very public observation areas and intimate gathering places. A floating boardwalk crossing the wetland brings visitors alongside a public art piece that incorporates salvaged railroad tracks referencing the former uses of the site. The park was constructed for \$3.6 mil. and was opened in 2002.

Best Practice



The recently developed Southeast False Creek Neighbourhood introduces multiple forms of connection to water and incorporates multiple public amenities for water-based recreation. A wetland in Hinge Park makes use of rainwater collected from the neighbourhood providing habitat and also integrating children's play. Along the waterfront is a 650 m. continuation of Vancouver's seawall providing access to an aqua bus stop, floats for recreational paddling, multiple view points and places to be at the water's edge as well as a naturalized shoreline featuring the very successful Habitat Island.

Blue Network: Transforming and celebrating our waterfront and waterways

The Blue Network is a fundamental part of Richmond's "Island City" identity. The Fraser River and its estuary defines the city's edges, and the network of internal waterways (sloughs, ditches and canals) are part of the city's physical, economic and cultural heritage. While the perimeter dykes and the drainage function of the internal waterways are fundamental to the city's flood protection, there is increasing focus on the waterfront and waterways for their rich natural environments and for recreational amenities, as evidenced by the popularity of the city's waterfront parks and dike trails, some of Richmond's most renowned destinations. The Middle Arm Waterfront Park, Terra Nova Rural Park and Garden City Community Park bring water and the waterfront into the experience and function of those parks. The success of these places highlights the need to explore opportunities to expand the role of the Blue Network in the parks and open space system.

Outcome #1

The recreational and ecological values of the waterfront and waterways are celebrated and protected

Outcome #2

Richmond's world class waterfront provides a variety of activities and multiple destinations

Outcome #3

Experiences of the waterfront and waterways reflect the cultural and ecological uniqueness of our island city heritage

Outcome #4

Our parks and open space system integrates water into the urban fabric in creative and innovative ways

Diversity and Mult-Functionality: Meeting and integrating multiple community objectives and uses

The parks and public open space system plays many roles in the city, from providing social and recreational venues, routes for civic infrastructure and providing ecological services. City-owned parks are among the largest of the City's land holdings and are an increasingly valuable and irreplaceable investment for future generations. In addition, the urban realm (i.e., greenways, plazas and neighbourhood links) provides complementary services and connections to the parks system.

While parks in Richmond have traditionally served primarily recreational functions, people are increasingly seeking greater diversity in the types of recreational activities (e.g., community gardens, off-leash dog parks, places to practice Tai-chi) and opportunities for social interaction. At the same time, working landscapes like the urban forest, stormwater ponds and urban farms are being introduced into the system to improve the city's sustainability. Integrating this diversity of roles and services while protecting the integrity of the parks and open space system requires a balanced approach that will protect the community's investment for the future and serve current community objectives.

Outcome #1

The system provides a variety of diverse open spaces that are flexible and able to respond to changes and community need

Outcome #2

Community objectives are met while the finite resource of park land and public open space are protected

Outcome #3

The City's sustainability is improved by the green infrastructure provided by the parks and open space system

Best Practice



Portland's Pioneer Courthouse Square is an urban plaza that is also connected to a major transit hub. The plaza is heavily programmed but also functions as the central downtown gathering place. Complementing the public programming are commercial activities including food services and other types of retail businesses. The square is operated by a non-profit entity that directs revenues from commercial rent to programming, maintenance, security and promotion.

Best Practice



New York City's "High Performance Landscape Guidelines" and "21st Century Parks for New York City" acknowledges that given the challenges presented by expanding roles and finite resources, integration of park and open space planning, design, construction and maintenance practices is necessary. The guidelines identify three critical tasks to be addressed:

1. *Understanding the biophysical context of each park (e.g. soil, water, and vegetation) at a scientific level, where each component is optimized for maximum performance and ecological benefit.*
2. *Responding to the changing cultural and recreational preferences of each community, and engaging and educating local communities as stakeholders not just in the design process but also in resource management.*
3. *Collaborating with operations staff and other agencies to design resilient parks that save labour, reduce annual expenses, and require less frequent capital replacement.*

Resource Management: Responsive and collaborative stewardship

The parks and open space system is dynamic, with patterns of use and levels of demand changing with the seasons and as a result of changes in the community (e.g., demographic and cultural shifts, increasing density). Effective resource management means responding in a timely manner to emerging issues or changing community needs while maximizing results within the available budgets with the appropriately skilled staff. The operational budget, which is derived from property taxes, user fees, grants and donations, must be allocated to a growing inventory of parks and open spaces and increasingly specialized services (e.g. artificial turf sports fields, community gardens). To ensure the quality of service is sustained in the future, the Parks Division has shifted from assigning resources by maintenance activity to individual parks or defined use areas (e.g., trail section). This approach coordinates regular maintenance activities with the specific character and function of each location. The focus in the future will be on measuring the outcomes of this shift in resource management to improve and sustain the quality of the parks and open space system.

Outcome #1

Our Parks and open space system is managed by a responsive organization that meets community needs

Outcome #2

Richmond's Parks division is innovative and efficient in its management of resources

Outcome #3

Our Parks and open space system inspires shared stewardship among multiple stakeholders to foster pride, purpose and a sense of community