

PARKS BYLAW

# What We Heard Report

Prepared  
for



Sturgeon  
COUNTY

Prepared  
by



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# 1 Introduction

The provision of parks and open space is an essential service, and through recent initiatives Sturgeon County has demonstrated its commitment to enhancing its system of parks available for both residents and visitors alike. Initiatives have involved building on the County's Strategic Plan, Parks and Open Space Master Plan (and its recent update), the Municipal Development Plan, and other statutory and non-statutory plans in the past few years.

## 1.1 The Project

Sturgeon County identified the need to focus its attention on developing a stronger network of parks through the completion of a feasibility study, to thoughtfully plan for programming needs across parks, and to identify usership of existing amenities.

The purpose of this project is to create a concept and management plan for future county-wide parks, building on the success of current amenities, including Cardiff Park and Bellerose Park. This initiative will establish recommendations for a county-wide parks system that enables the provision and distribution of parkland and amenities across the County. As a secondary objective, this project will identify locations where additional parks and open space could be developed, assessing the impacts of these amenities on residents.

## 1.2 This Report

This report is intended to provide a summary of the engagement conducted to date and document the outcomes of the Parks Bylaw engagement as part of the larger Parks Feasibility Study.



## 2 Engagement

Engaging residents and County staff provides valuable insights into how people currently use parks, trails, and open spaces and what is missing or could be improved. This input helps identify unique cultural, social, and recreational preferences so that the Parks Feasibility Study can reflect the needs, values, and priorities of the community it aims to serve. It also helps to situate the County's programming needs and limitations in this study.

Key engagement groups were:

- Residents;
- Business Owners;
- Landowners;
- Staff and administration; and
- The travelling public.

The level of engagement and the purpose of engagement were catered to each specific group identified so that each unique perspective, need, and priority, is captured and considered.

### 2.1 Focus Groups

The project team sent a call out to specific groups to hear their thoughts about programming within parks and the Parks Bylaw. The purpose of gathering each focus group was to understand how different user groups utilize Sturgeon County parks, trails, amenities, and open spaces. Each group was chosen to bring similar organizations or interest types together for more directed conversations. In relation to the Parks Bylaw. These groups included:

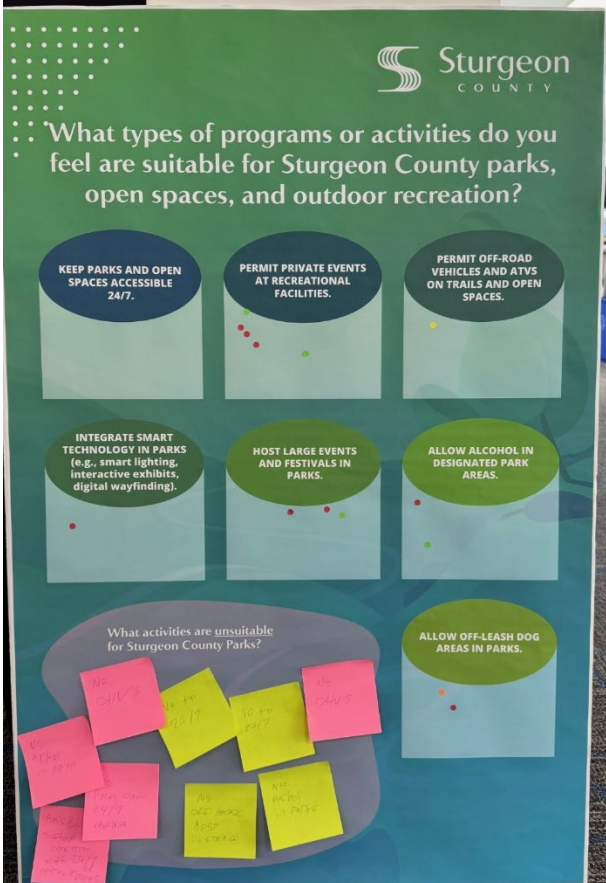
- Seniors' groups; and
- Protective Services.

#### 2.1.1 Seniors Groups

Instead of having an online focus group session, the project team adapted to Sturgeon County's programming and set up a booth at the Seniors Conference to gain seniors' perspectives on parks and open spaces. The conference was held on October 3, 2024, and the booth was set up for seniors to visit for two hours. At the booth, seniors could speak to the project team about the project and share their thoughts by interacting with the engagement boards or answering the same questions in an online survey format.

While the primary list of questions was designed for general users, some questions were related to the Parks Bylaw. A summary of these questions is shown in *Table 1*.

Table 1. Seniors' focus group engagement.

ENGAGEMENT BOARD & QUESTION	OVERALL THEMES
<p>What types of programs or activities do you feel are suitable for Sturgeon County parks, open spaces, and outdoor recreation?</p> 	<p>Participants indicated which programs and activities were suitable for Sturgeon County parks, open spaces, and outdoor recreation.</p> <p>Most participants indicated that permitting private events at recreational facilities was suitable. Others thought hosting large events and festivals in parks, allowing alcohol in designated park areas, and allowing off-leash dog areas in parks were also suitable.</p> <p>Some participants also highlighted activities they thought were unsuitable for Sturgeon County parks. Participants were opposed to keeping parks and open spaces accessible 24/7, permitting Off Highway Vehicles (OHVs) in park spaces, and permitting alcohol in parks because of safety reasons. This showed a mix of opinions.</p>



### 2.1.2 Protective Services

Input from Protective Services is critical for identifying potential risks, such as wildfire hazards, vandalism, or unsafe trail conditions, and developing strategies to mitigate these issues. Protective Services also provides insights into the design of parks and programming to enhance viability, access for emergency vehicles, managing activities, and safe usage for all users.

This focus group was held online on October 24, 2024. The Protective Services group highlighted their main concerns with safety in parks, which revolved around illegal activities such as the usage of recreational firearms (such as paintball and airsoft guns), dumping, fireworks, camping, and trapping. The group shared that access issues have been a barrier for emergency vehicles and residents, resulting in the illegal cutting of trees.

The Protective Services group hopes the Parks Feasibility Study incorporates strategies to increase safety. Some items on their “wish list” include education programs about what is allowed and not allowed in different parks and open space areas. This can be supplemented by creating one comprehensive community standards bylaw, as the County currently has a handful of bylaws that address different topics related to community standards, such as the Cardiff Park Bylaw, Dog Control Bylaw, Animal Control Bylaw, the current Community Standards Bylaw, etc. Refining one standardized bylaw with different levels of designation, such as the Parks Bylaw that the project is proposing, can help make the rules and regulations for parks and open spaces easier to understand and enforce.

Other safety initiatives proposed were:

- Incorporating Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (such as lighting and video surveillance);
- Establishing emergency phones in remote park areas;
- Providing resources and regulations to enjoy the land for ATVs; and
- Posting QR codes on signs for safety complaints in parks.


Across different municipalities, there has been a trend to keep parks open 24/7 and allow for alcohol consumption. For the Protective Services group, setting operating hours for parks and open spaces has made potential crime in parks manageable. Alcohol consumption for rented sites or special events with liquor licensing is not an issue; however, there are concerns about the lack of public transportation in areas that permit alcohol consumption for the risk of drunk driving. The Protective Services groups shared that proactive patrolling in major parks and highly visited trails has helped manage nuisances and crime.

#### KEY TAKEAWAYS

The Protective Services focus group provided insightful feedback on the issues they currently have with park usage and recommendations for improvements from a safety perspective. When developing park concept plans, the County can consider access for emergency vehicles to enable public safety and effective emergency responses. Additionally, simplifying and consolidating regulations would make them easier for residents to understand and for authorities to enforce.

Beyond enforcement, the Parks Feasibility Study can enhance park safety through proactive strategies and infrastructure improvements. Recommendations such as incorporating Crime Prevention Through





Environmental Design (CPTED) principles can deter crime and improve the sense of security for park users. Although taking on trends seen in other municipalities can keep Sturgeon County's parks and open spaces competitive, it is important to note that setting operational hours is preferable to address nuisances and reduce crime. The County can explore potential safety and nuisance concerns to provide mitigation measures if it chooses to permit alcohol consumption in parks through the Parks Feasibility Study.

## 2.2 User Intercept

As part of the public engagement process, the project team conducted user intercept activities at popular parks and open spaces across the county. These sessions involved short, targeted discussions with 3-5 key questions designed to address the “big questions” relevant to park planning. The team tailored conversations to the users who stopped by, engaging cyclists on trail networks and asking parents and children about their preferences for park features and amenities. Topics included the appropriateness of off-leash areas, OHVs, alcohol, and camping in parks, so a diverse range of voices and perspectives were captured to inform the Parks Feasibility Study. Six user intercept engagements occurred throughout October at different times during the day, to capture various users. Responses from intercepted users related to the Parks Bylaw are highlighted in this section.

### 2.2.1 Lamoureux Trail

This group of participants expressed a desire for alcohol restrictions in parks, but they are open to private events and dog-friendly areas.

### 2.2.2 Redwater Provincial Recreation Area

The project team was positioned at the Redwater West Loop parking area to converse with users visiting the area for off-roading purposes. While a handful of OHV riders were on their way to use the park, the project team only spoke to eight users. Most users came from Edmonton, two from Fort Saskatchewan and one from Sherwood Park. The users who participated indicated they would travel far (2-5 hours) for amenities that allow for off-roading or other activities that require a proper recreation area for the activities, such as boating and quadding. The participants come to this park specifically for off-roading, quadding or biking, and camping, where users visit on average two times a month.

The general consensus of this group of participants was not open to the idea of alcohol consumption in parks. They were agreeable to designated off-leash areas for dogs. A handful of users highlighted that people should not walk around off-roading areas for safety.

### 2.2.3 Bellerose Park

Users generally agreed to dog parks and private events; however, opinions were divided on alcohol in parks and 24-hour park times.

### 2.2.4 Cardiff Park

This group of participants were open to alcohol in parks if it is well enforced and private events as long as the event does not use the entire park area. None of the participants in this group were open to 24-hour park times.

#### KEY TAKEAWAYS

Participants expressed mixed opinions on alcohol consumption in parks, with some groups opposing it entirely while others were open to it if properly enforced. There was general support for private events and designated dog-friendly areas. Off-roading users at Redwater Provincial Recreation Area emphasized the importance of maintaining safe zones and expressed concerns about pedestrians in off-roading areas. At Bellerose Park, opinions were split on alcohol and unrestricted park hours, while Cardiff Park users were more accepting of alcohol under strict enforcement but opposed 24-hour park times.

## 2.3 Survey

A general survey was posted on Sturgeon County's website and ran in Fall 2024 that collected comments from anyone interested in parks. Five questions were asked, and there were 29 respondents. Because the questions were open-ended, the responses were thematically coded to help extract qualitative insights. For the purpose of the Parks Bylaw, we have highlighted the question relevant to this study (Question 5).

Question 5 asked, "What activities or programming do you think are inappropriate in parks in the County?". Many of the respondents interpreted the question in different ways. Some interpreted the question as what is appropriate in parks, while others responded to what is inappropriate in parks. Out of those who responded with activities appropriate for parks, a handful of respondents stated that nature conservation is important, and that the natural environment should be protected when there are activities nearby. Alcohol and ATVs are noted as appropriate in specific areas, and some respondents indicated the need for more diverse programs.

Other respondents felt the following activities are inappropriate in parks:

- ATVs;
- Dogs in non-off leash areas;
- Alcohol; vendors; and
- Fireworks.

#### KEY TAKEAWAYS

The mixed responses related to alcohol and ATV use suggest that clear regulations and designated areas for these activities should be considered in future park planning. Concerns about conservation and protecting the natural environment indicate a need for careful land-use planning and sustainable development practices. By addressing these insights, Sturgeon County can develop a comprehensive parks strategy that balances recreational opportunities with environmental stewardship and community preferences.



### 3 Conclusion

Engagement efforts, including focus groups, user intercepts, and surveys, provided insights into how different user groups interact with park spaces and what improvements they would like to see. Key themes from these engagements include mixed opinions on alcohol consumption, support for private events and dog-friendly areas, and concerns over safety, particularly regarding off-highway vehicles (OHVs) and enforcement challenges. Protective Services emphasized the need for clearer regulations, better access for emergency responders, and proactive safety measures such as improved lighting and signage.

Public feedback also highlighted the importance of environmental conservation and sustainable park planning. While some participants supported alcohol consumption in designated areas, others opposed it due to safety concerns. Similarly, opinions on OHVs were divided, with some advocating for designated areas while others viewed them as inappropriate for park spaces. The study's findings will inform Sturgeon County's future park policies by balancing recreational needs, safety concerns, and environmental preservation, making for a well-managed and accessible park system for residents and visitors.

