



West Hillhurst Off Leash Natural Area

Stakeholder Report Back: What we Heard
December 2021

Project overview

The Natural Area and Off-Leash Park adjacent to 19 ST NW in West Hillhurst provides a beautiful place for a short walk with views of the Calgary skyline. The park currently struggles with erosion and trails that are not accessible.

This park also features a spot where citizens have provided their own low-cost seating. The West Hillhurst Community Association has identified this as a priority improvement project.

Goals for the design of the West Hillhurst Off Leash Natural Area include:

- Grades of proposed trail do not exceed 4% if possible (maximum 8%).
- Timber Staircase includes handrails.
- New sidewalk provides curb cut for wheelchair ramp in NW corner.
- Seating area at lookout is comfortable and adds vibrancy and placemaking elements.

Engagement overview

Due to Covid-19 restrictions, engagement was conducted entirely online with opportunity to provide input by visiting engage.calgary.ca/kensingtonarea/west-hillhurst-leash-natural-area or calling 311. Public feedback was accepted from August 31 until September 19, 2021.

What we asked

Citizens were asked to comment on design options which illustrated potential park improvements with the goals of improving park accessibility and community gathering amenities at the West Hillhurst Off-Leash natural area adjacent to 19 Street N.W. Citizens had the opportunity to provide qualitative feedback on the following three questions:

- What do you like about this design option?
- What would you do to improve this design option?
- Do you have any additional questions about this design option?

What we heard

Stakeholders identified this park as an important, well used community amenity and investment at this location was supported. Participants were generally supportive of measures that would increase park accessibility and minimize impact on the natural elements and plant life the park. Stakeholders offered diverse opinions on the off-leash nature of the park with some expressing that the park should remain off-leash and contain added dog-focused amenities (e.g. waste bag distribution units) and others suggesting dogs being untethered presents problems for other park users. A group of stakeholders preferred for the



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park to stay as natural as possible with minimal changes while others were enthusiastic about enhanced gatherings areas containing chairs and firepits.

Stakeholders expressed concerns in the following key areas:

- Signage and dog amenity enhancements
- Accessible and safe design
- Minimize cost and site changes
- Ensure multi-use nature of the park (e.g. tobogganing area for children)

For a detailed summary of the input that was provided, please see the [Summary of Input](#) section.

For a verbatim listing of all the input that was provided, please see the [Verbatim Responses](#) section.

Next steps

The public feedback received during this phase of engagement will be used in conjunction with technical analysis and cost considerations to select which projects will be carried forward for implementation. Phase 3 Engagement will include the presentation of refined design drawings of the projects that were selected through the Phase 2. The public can expect the Kensington Area Improvements Project Phase 3 to launch in the winter of 2022.

Summary of Input

In total, 80 participants responded to the first question: What do you like about this design option?

Category	Response summary
General support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stakeholders identified the West Hillhurst off-lease park area as an important community asset utilized by a diverse user set and provided comments of support toward the park improvement efforts. Explicit support was directed toward natural preservation efforts and the enhancement of the park as a gathering space for visitors and residents.
Landscaping, accessibility, and amenity additions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Installation of steps to increase access was generally supported. Stakeholders communicated a preference for landscaping and amenity additions to be as natural as possible and minimize impact to the natural landscape. A group of respondents indicated support for features such as enhanced wayfinding signage and waste removal bags.
Prioritize natural elements and trees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stakeholders indicated a preference that existing natural features and trees were preserved to the greatest extent possible. Several responses cited enthusiasm for the preservation of “the middle tree”.
Not change required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants in this category felt the park already met its objective as a recreation and green space and that no further investment was required. A few comments indicated erosion support was acceptable, but nothing beyond the soil mitigation was worthy of investment.
Erosion mitigation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants were generally supportive of erosion mitigation tactics which enhanced the parks resiliency. Erosion prevention was cited as a priority due to the increasing popularity and usage of the project.
Miscellaneous and design feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stakeholders posed a few specific design questions such as the cost of stair installation and ongoing maintenance. A few comments suggested this design was too manicured and took away from the existing natural feel of the park. A few respondents questioned how vagrancy issues would be mitigated at the park with specific attention to benches and seating area.
Continue off-leash designation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants in this category were clear on their desire to see the project continue to be an off-leash dog park and serve dog owners. There were favourable comments attributed to the signage illustrated in the conceptual plans and suggestions that the signs could speak to pet owner etiquette.

In total, 102 participants responded to the second question: What would you do to improve this design option?

Category	Response Summary
Signage and dog amenity enhancements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants indicated an improvement to the proposed design option would include relevant signage (e.g. dog owner etiquette and waste removal), waste bag distribution units, and garbage reciprocals for dog poop. Respondents in this category were generally in favour of the park staying entirely off-leash (versus certain areas of the park becoming on-leash required).
Accessible and safe design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stakeholders pointed to the importance of the park remaining accessible for a variety of demographics. Respondents communicated the many forms of use that take place at the park and wanted that considered in this project: people running and biking, dog walking, kids playing and families tobogganing. Bench and seating area were generally supported, but a few stakeholders inquired if these amenities could attract social disorder and expressed safety concerns.
Minimize cost and site changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stakeholders in this category felt that changes to the park were largely unnecessary and that the park functioned well in its current state. A few respondents indicated other proposed projects in the West Hillhurst area would be a better use of funds.
Specific design feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants offered specific design feedback such as moving the staircase away from the tree, ensuring potential routes can be navigated by mountain bikes and that a playground should be integrated into project plans.
Minimal impact to natural features and landscape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stakeholders expressed concern that proposed changes or overdevelopment could infringe of the natural beauty and quality of the park.
Certain areas should require leashes/dog control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants emphasized the multi-use nature of the park. There were report conflicts between park users and dog owners who did not have proper control of their pet. Dog waste removal was reported as an ongoing issue at the park.
General support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comments made by this segment of participants indicated there was no further improvements necessary to the proposed concept.
Prioritize gathering space, seating and firepit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants in this category expressed enthusiasm for the development of a formalized gathering point within the park including the bench and firepit features included in the proposed illustration.

In total, 46 participants responded to the third question: Do you have any additional questions about this design option?

Prioritize naturalization and minimize site changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stakeholders inquired how the maximum amount of natural conservation would be managed. A few comments addressed the addition of a staircase which was viewed as a substantial alteration to the parks landscape.
Planning for multi-use public space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants wanted the project team to consider the multi-use potential of the park and not The usage of the park by children and families for activities, such as biking and tobogganing, was cited as a reason to expand focus from more than.
Continued focus on off leash and potential for fencing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants asked the project team to consider conditions that would make the experience for dog more pleasant and safe, such as removing spear grass and installing fencing.
Accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants posed questions related to park access during times of construction. Stakeholders asked if the sign could attract more people to the park, making a crosswalk addition necessary to avoid jaywalking.
No more questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants indicated they had no further questions or comments regarding the proposed design.
Encourage family tobogganing and minimize interference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tobogganing activity was a priority for a group of participants, and they communicated the importance of keeping space clear at the bottom of the hill and minimizing change on the west side of the park.
Minimize changes and maintenance costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Respondents asked how park safety and cleanliness would be maintained in the long term and sought clarification regarding the associated costs of the proposed changes. Comments in this category acknowledged the simplicity and natural beauty of the park as it currently exists.
Focus of park can be greater than just dogs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comments in this category were often correlated to the multi-purpose nature of the park and recommendations that areas of the park require leashed dogs.



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Verbatim Comments

Verbatim comments presented here include all feedback, suggestions, comments and messages that were collected online and in-person through the engagement described in this report. All input has been reviewed and provided to Project Teams to be considered in decision making for the project.

Any personal identifying information has been removed from the verbatim comments presented here. Comments or portions of comments that contain profanity, or that are not in compliance with the [City's Respectful Workplace Policy](#) or [Online Tool Moderation Practice](#), have also been removed from participant submissions.

Wherever possible the remainder of the submissions remains. No other edits to the feedback have been made, and the verbatim comments are as received. As a result, some of the content in this verbatim record may still be considered offensive or distasteful to some readers.

What do you like about this design option?

- I think signage of this space as a dog par would be helpful. I like the idea of having steps it really gets quite slick in the winter. This space is vital to dog owners in the community and I it is important that this space will continue to serve as so.
- Preventing erosion is important as people continue to take more and more space reducing the natural foliage footprint.
- I do not see the need for this work at all. this area has been fine for 60 years and will be fine as a natural area well into the future. There is no need to create more traffic in this area and as a resident these are unwanted so-called improvements.
- Retaining wall only if needed.
- I like how the park is made accessible and there are steps to climb instead of dirt paths, which can get very muddy. I also like that the tree in the middle will be protected.
- This is not a necessary improvement. It is possible to access the view without climbing the hill vertically by parking at the end of 10th Ave and walking horizontal to the trail. The cost of installing stairs and the ongoing maintenance is too much.
- Resilient features
- Would prefer no changes to the park, not all parks need to be manicured. The plaza on 10th is a nice addition
- Splendid, lol around.
- All of it - this park is so in need of rejuvenation
- I didn't know there were trails!
- Great idea!



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- Love the look of the public gathering space, and the improved accessibility. When I walk to this park from the east side the entrance is very inaccessible even for someone with no mobility issues!
- The stairs are an excellent idea. As are the lookout and plaza.
- Very user friendly and helpful to reduce the many eroded trails
- I wouldn't do anything at all to this area. It is just great as it is. No need to spend tax payers money here!
- the primary focus of this park should be for offleash dogs/owners followed by a winter sports hill for kids. there were many families tobogganing and skiing down the hill. therefore am concerned about so many stairs and official paths.
- Improves accessibility to the park for all users.
- This park is quite treacherous in the winter and has a lot of erosion. I would be excited about an upgrade
- I love the seating area! Great idea to build on the grassroots chairs that are already up there
- I like that the tree will remain and be protected - it's my favourite tree in Calgary. This is such a special park, it really feels like the grasslands Calgary once was. I am supportive of a new gravel trail so long as it is low impact.
- This looks great. Please make sure this remains an off leash area.
- Steps will reduce erosion. Seating/lookout will encourage people to enjoy the setting and mingle.
- I like the timber stairs
- i love the improvements to the area
- It would add additiional access for people with less mobility.
- It would fix a lot of current problems in the area and make it more user friendly
- I like that this design will improve accessibility and will address erosion. I also like that it does not remove the tree or drastically change the park.
- It's great, I support it
- Generally looks like a good design.
- I like the visual design and the safety. Dogs will love it as well
- Nothing - the park is fabulous as is. Please no paths or asphalt as that will only increase erosion - the city cannot manage it and it goes to pot. What Inmean is the re is never any maintenance money available - just 'fix up' and 3 years later -looks bd
- Great mix of formalized path with the existing trails.
- I think all the enhancements suggested look amazing! It can be a challenge to use this amazing natural area after a rain, or when extremely dusty. This natural area has an absolutely spectacular view of downtown Calgary and should be celebrated.
- Formalizing trails is needed, should include a NE/SW diagonal to reflect use patterns.
- Erosion protection makes sense and a few benches; Too extensive Question value for cost.
- Great idea!
- Do not proceed. When discussing this path with my neighbours and users, it's the natural state of the park that people love. Leave the park as it is.

- I also get attacked by dogs when i run through here. (same with mchuff bluff). need to enforce dog control in these areas. I have never seen a peace officer at either of these locations. off-lease sites are unsafe - I can't take my kids here
- This is actually quite a nice design.
- I love the lookout!
- Love it!
- Widened established pathways will make this much nicer to walk through. Actual entrances will make it much easier to access. It is scary right now to enter and walk in the winter.
- Stairs and seating
- I love the trail, benches, etc at top of park.
- Timber staircases would be great!
- I've taken my dog here 1,000 times. Improvements are fine, as long as the high school kids can still come and smoke dope in their cars at the lookout. Some traditions are just too important!
- I love the idea of the stairs. I am getting older, and my balance is not as great as it once was. I need a hand railing
- I like all the proposed additions and changes.
- As a senior, I like the concept of the timber steps and handrail...and very much appreciate protecting the big tree.
- Looks good
- As a long term resident and dog owner, I have used this park daily for 20 years. I love this park as a natural area and personally don't think it needs improvements. Additional users must understand and accept this is an OFF-LEASH park for dogs
- Our family uses this area almost daily and I like the ideas proposed.
- Preservation of the natural landscape.
- As a regular dog walker in this area, cool! I imagine the stairs will make winter walking much easier.
- Pleased with the stairs to mitigate the large scale erosion!
- Excellent - thank you for this! Much needed improvements for safety and the preservation of the slope. ESPECIALLY - thank you for leaving the West slope without steps.
- Stairs will greatly improve winter walking safety as it gets so icy/slippy.
- Everything
- Much more user friendly
- The lookout, safer gravel path at the top, the benches, and the wheelchair ramp all add accessibility and high use value.
- I like the gravel trails and rest areas, and perhaps look out area at the top.
- Love it! Popular neighbourhood park and improving would be wonderful.
- Increased useability
- I like the addition of steps in the steep section in the east end of the park and I love the benches.
- I like that it would make the park more of a gathering place and easier for all folks to get around



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- Keeps the big tree, provides seating to enjoy views, stopping erosion, nicer and more accessible entrance off 19th street.
- Nothing. Leave this park alone
- I like the improvements proposed, including a trail at the top of the hill and the timber staircase.
- Great idea to improve accessibility of the park.

What would you do to improve this design option? Please tell us why.

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Do you have any additional questions about this design option?

- i Keep it natural. How much does this cost? I don't think we can afford this. It is a nicety

- Try and keep natural and keep the many different paths so people can social distance and avoid dogs if needed etc. Note: this is not just an off-leash area. It is used by kids to play and others to walk and enjoy the lovely views. Look out is nice.
- how will park safety and cleanliness be maintained?
- I thought the area was protected from any modifications that would change the natural aspects of the space. Introducing steps, having a constructed lookout space and a wide gravel trail all constitute modifications to the natural area.
- I have been in the park many times this summer and haven't seen any signs discussing a redesign. The engagement so far has been minimal. When would there be meaningful engagement?
- Why can't it continue to be used for small kids tobogganing exploring riding Adults walk and run. Cause dog owners aren't paying attention to or cleaning up after their dogs
- The land was not donated for an off lease area. It was a green space for the whole community it should be a multi use area. Kids love exploring it
- It's great area for kids to tobaggan on. Ride their bikes
- It should stay more natural. Get rid of the park entry sign. It should be a community area. It wasn't always a designated dog area and shouldn't be an off lease area
- My concern would be about access during the upgrades, it would be ideal if community members and their fur friends had access to the park throughout.
- Folks ride their bike through this space, kids like the shape of the landscape for sledding in the winter, how will CoC ensure this isn't lost?
- I do not agree with most of the improvements as this is an off leash park, not a playground, and most people with no dogs would not go there.
- ensure it remains an off-leash park please!!
- No, this looks great.
- IT shouldnt be exclusive for dog owners - ITs a great space for everyone in the area
- Is is possible to add more trees?
- no
- Any ways this can become a 100% enclosed dog park?
- No
- Little benefit to the entry sign, especially at a less used entrance. Would this increase pedestrian traffic there and encourage jaywalking on the busy, steep, hill? Is a crosswalk being considered? It would be a tough place to force cars to stop.
- Not at this time. Very impressed
- not sure this should be wheelchair accessible given the terrain and the usage of the park. pls keep it more natural. please plant more trees
- I enjoy the historical plaque and would love more information on the history of this site.
- Why is it off leash? Do the dogs enjoy the view
- Will this remain off-leash?

- What about security cameras? Better park access will further encourage indigents who already frequent the area at night (and contribute to crime)?
- The number of benches along the top seems excessive as users tend to congregate at the bottom where all the dogs can run.
- Will the trail be wide enough to accommodate to people and their dogs passing? The current trails have multiple path (two or three) side by side because of dogs and owners traveling.
- Are you planning to put in an entry from the eastern cul de sac? Currently, it's very limited
- more room for comments! Has a BIA been done to inform facility locations and restoration? It does not appear to be the case. Will this meet the City's biodiversity goals?
- Seems costly and extensive for type of use, if create "gathering area" concern is the push to then not be off leash.
- This project is a waste of tax dollars. In 8 years of living across the alley from the park I have never noticed any erosion issues, never seen anyone struggle to navigate the slope.
- A lot of people drive to this park and create pollution. It should be like Riley Park with paid street parking.
- The smaller paths that run diagonals, do they have entrances/exits at the edges of the park? Difficult to know where to enter right now.
- Please don't make this park kid friendly. It's for pets. If there are kids, the pets will not take priority. The rest of the city is for children...
- Let's hope this happens sooner than later.
- Where exactly will the timber staircase start in the laneway, behind which properties? Please do not put it behind 2220 as there is already too much disruption with people cutting through the property to access the park and disturbing the residents.
- As long term resident of 7th ave, do have some concerns of overdevelopment.
- No
- Yes, please address/remove the speargrass in the area that is dangerous for dogs, considering this is a designated off-leash area.
- This is a much loved community off leash area. Please don't make any changes that would impact it's use as an off leash area.
- lots of kids sled on the west side of the park, so please keep that in mind for any changes
- will there be a garbage at area 6, I can imagine people leaving behind bottles/ cans in this spot
- Can they incorporate "fun for children" or some hillside recreation option for children.
- No. Looks good
- Probably not a top priority, but nice project for the future.