

ActiveParks

Design Guide



Photos taken at The Creditview Activity Hub, City of Brampton

Healthy Communities Series
peelregion.ca/healthy-communities

Table Of Contents

Foreword	2
Multigenerational: Design spaces for all-ages	3
Maximize Space: Make the most of outdoor space	5
Multi-seasonal: Encourage year-round use	6
References	8

Foreword: Moving People with Active Parks

Parks play a key role in supporting more active and healthier lifestyles. The stats are alarming:

- 64% of adults in Peel are overweight or obese*
- Diabetes rates in Peel are 44% higher than Ontario rates**
- Only half of Peel adults (51%) and less than half of children (44%) are considered “active” according to the Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines*

This guide focuses on maximizing the potential of parks and greenspaces to promote physical activity in the community.

About this Guide

The Active Parks Design Guide is a tool to help experts and advocates plan, build and champion parks that get people moving.

Existing guides related to park design primarily focus on constraints relating to location, size and accessibility. This guide is unique in that it focuses on creating active design features that encourage movement. This guide does not replace existing requirements and standards related to construction, safety, accessibility and maintenance when planning and building parks and open spaces.

This guide provides a comprehensive summary of the top evidence-informed recommendations available. Insights are based on review

Parks with more interactive features encourage more physical activity²

of available grey literature, including two guidelines, one review study, six observational studies and three non-synthesized literature reviews. Findings from other literature reviews were included to supplement gaps in information.***

Parks with paved trails are 26 times more likely to encourage activity than unpaved trails³

Three Pillars of Active Park Design - The 3 M's

Evidence shows that the following three approaches promote more active parks:

Multigenerational design: Parks with all-age assets, such as a mix of playgrounds for children, recreational and natural paths for teen/adult exercise and accessibility features for older adults, increase overall activity.

Maximize space: Large parks with several different features increase how frequently parks are used and how long visitors stay.

Multi-seasonal: Parks with year-round features, such as a skating trail in the winter that turns into a walking and cycling path in the warmer months, encourage physical activity throughout the year.

Region of Peel – Public Health: Healthy Community Advocates

Find out how we can support you in planning a more health promoting park, greenspace, playground or public space. To learn more, call us at 905-791-7800 or visit Peelregion.ca/healthy-communities.

* Reference: Canadian Community Health Survey, 2015/2016, Statistics Canada. Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care.

** Reference: Diabetes Incidence and Prevalence, 2015, Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences.

***The supporting evidence is limited in terms of study design and quality, and therefore should be used with caution

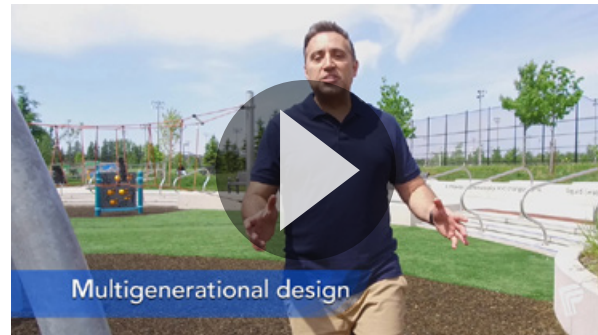
1 Multigenerational: Design spaces for all-ages

STRATEGIES

- Design parks and open spaces with a multigenerational lens and to complement the cultural preferences of the local population.

Children

- Preserve or create natural environments to support children's outdoor play. For example, make a hill to climb or cycle around; and add boulders, tree stumps or sand.⁵
- Ensure the play-equipment is age-appropriate, current as well as mentally and physically stimulating.⁴
- Encourage active and imaginative play among children through simple interventions, such as colourful ground markings, playground equipment that includes moveable parts and playscapes for children of all abilities.⁵



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Youth

- Schedule supervised activities (i.e., a person in charge to manage activities like a lifeguard, park staff or coach) for youth.
- Organized park programs and supervision may increase physical activity, particularly among youth.³

Adults

- Provide constructed and natural trails, as well as fitness zone and exercise areas for adults.⁴



Older Adults⁶

- Create multi-purpose areas to accommodate a variety of activities (e.g., tai-chi, yoga, picnicking).
- Design walking paths that offer an array of visual and sensory experiences – different lengths and levels of difficulty.
- Planners and designers can create attractive and ability-appropriate walking paths to interesting destinations (e.g., a fountain, a vista).
- Provide equipment for active recreation – from low-impact to more strenuous activities.
 - Encourage use of outdoor equipment by organizing group exercise classes.

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2 Maximize Space: Make the most of outdoor space

STRATEGIES

- Plan for large open area rather than separating space into smaller areas.¹
- Creating a large space will serve as a hub for families to access multiple forms of recreation in one location.
- Provide a variety of facilities to support play and recreation, for example, paths, trails, running tracks, playgrounds and sports facilities.
- Number of park features was found to be a significant predictor of physical activity in parks.²
- Parks with paved trails were 26 times more likely to be used for physical activity than unpaved trails.³
- Provide park amenities that support physical activity, even if indirectly, such as barbecues, seating, water fountains, picnic tables, and bathrooms.⁴

Levels of moderate and vigorous activity are highest in parks that contain a mix of courts, playgrounds, sport fields and paths.³



Photo taken at The Creditview Activity Hub, City of Brampton



3 Multi-seasonal: Encourage year-round use

STRATEGIES

Organized Activities

- Schedule programming, organized sports activities and events to attract park users and spectators.

Marketing On-Site

- Market park programs, sports events and other community events using marketing materials, such as banners, posters and signs.
 - Research indicates that presence of marketing materials is associated with an increase in park use and an increase in moderate-vigorous physical activity.⁷

Way-finding

- Provide maps and signage for park users – with mileage and key destination points in the area.⁵
- Identify dedicated areas for sports and multi-use when designing playgrounds.¹



Seasonal Use

- Offer different options for sitting – in the sun and shade, more open and more enclosed areas.
- Create different climate environments to support activity in all season and weather conditions.
 - In cold climate, use elements to minimize glare from sun (e.g., umbrellas, kiosks, arbors).
 - In hot weather, appropriately situate shade-providing devices to encourage physical activity.⁴
 - In windy area, situate parks or elements in parks to protect from winds

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- Provide drinking fountains to encourage water consumption, and support longer play.⁵
- Provide water features, such as splash pads with fountains, nozzles and spray pipes on no-slip surfaces to help families stay active, even in hot weather conditions.⁵

Condition

- Encourage park use through regular maintenance to avoid uneven ground or playing surfaces, lack of grass/too long grass and poor quality sidewalks.⁴

Safety

- Use design elements and materials to reduce risk of falls, especially among older adults
- Provide lights on sidewalks, trails and active play areas to encourage physical activity into the evening.¹

Feeling safe is key! Citizens are less likely to use parks that illicit a fear of crime or appear disorderly (e.g. parks with graffiti and litter).³



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