

CIVIC SPACES

In conjunction with Street Corridors, Civic Spaces, including parks, help create a strong framework for the urban fabric of the City. They create destinations, focal points, and public places for social and cultural activities, bringing the community and the public together. Seamless integration of Street Corridors and Civic Spaces is important to the success of both.

Civic Spaces create a sense of community and identity. Without such spaces, people often feel less connected to each other and their community.

Successful Civic Spaces have many amenities, and the opportunity for multiple activities in all seasons. Different Civic Spaces have different purposes and a mix of these throughout the City are important to provide a balance of public destinations and activity opportunities.

“When cities and neighbourhoods have thriving civic spaces, residents have a strong sense of community; conversely, when such spaces are lacking, people may feel less connected to each other. Great civic spaces are . . . recognized and valued in their cities and towns as places with their own special flavor that relate to and nurture the large community and bring the public together.”¹

TYPES OF CIVIC SPACES

Currently , parks are the only identified Civic Space and a permitted use in some districts of the current Land Use Bylaw. Civic spaces are broader than just parks, and Form-based zoning identifies six different types of civic spaces that could be used in the framework of the public realm, suitable for different types of development.



The **Parkway** is a specialized linear park running the full length of a select street with a mixture of hard and soft surfaces and variety of activities.

A **Plaza** is a smaller urban style civic space with primarily hard surfaces and surrounded on two or three sides by buildings. It would have a variety of uses and activities



A playground could be found in any of the civic spaces, but it could be part of a small neighbourhood **Pocket Park**.

A **Square** is a larger urban style park with a mix of hard and soft surfaces and a variety of amenities and potential activities. It's generally surrounded on most sides by streets.



A **Natural Area** may be preserved for minimal use, if it's a sensitive area, or partially developed for informal uses in certain areas.



A **Green** is a larger open space that would include playing fields or dog parks.

CIVIC SPACES AND IDENTITY

Civic Spaces can represent a city, like Stanley Park in Vancouver or Rockefeller Centre or Central Park in New York City. Or smaller civic spaces may be cherished by the local residents as a place where the people who live and work there experience their neighbourhoods, find opportunities for exchange and a multitude of activities. Civic spaces create pride and ownership and give a community a sense of character. They are a forum for public activities, or anchors and destinations.



Red Willow Park is representative of St. Albert. Much of the annexed land does not have natural features like this, so different kinds of civic spaces need to be developed to complement Red Willow Park.

The locals spend time there, and no visitor misses St. Peter's Square in Rome. This key civic space is an important part of the city's identity.



Source: saintpetersbasilica.org

CIVIC SPACES AND ACTIVITIES

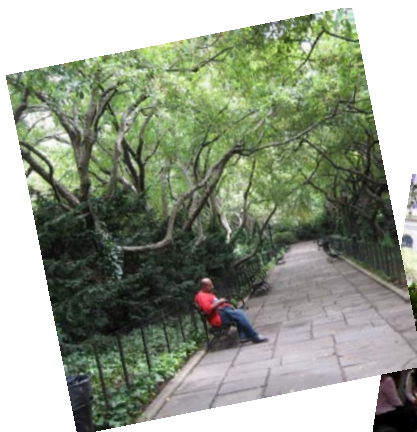
Projects for Public Spaces suggests a successful public space offers people up to 10 different activities.

Urban-style spaces are able to accommodate 450-800 people per hectare per day, while suburban-style parks tend to accommodate 100-600 people per hectare per day.²

Trails in suburban parks generally accommodate about 20 people per hectare per day, while urban trails accommodate more like 400 walkers per hectare per day.² Walking is the most popular recreational activity.³



Concerts in the park, bring a community together, create memories and spark impromptu activities like a waltz.



Places for visiting, eating, sitting quietly, or people watching are all activities to incorporate into civic spaces.



Source: [sixtrain on www.flickr.com](http://sixtrain.on.flickr.com)

Civic spaces should be useable all year long. Walking trails can become cross-country ski trails in winter.

CIVIC SPACES AND DESIGN

Design is a critical component in the success of Civic Spaces.



Having buildings frame a square provides 'eyes on the street' which improves security. Lighting and the placement of trees are also important.

Lighting, benches, garbage cans are all important elements to consider. Features that serve more than one purpose such as a ledge that also serves as seating are great elements to include.



CIVIC SPACES AND ZONING

Conventional zoning - what we do now

Currently parks are considered a use that is permitted in certain land use districts. It is not clear exactly what a park consists of, as the term 'park' is not defined in the Land Use Bylaw. The Public Park Land Use District provides a bit more clarification for the purpose of that district including providing places for public recreation and to conserve and enhance the Sturgeon River Valley.

With each subdivision, the provincial Municipal Government Act allows the City to take 10% of the developable land for Municipal Reserve land. The expectation is that this MR land will be used for park development, preservation of significant natural areas and school sites, which is what the City of St. Albert does.

Form-based zoning - what we're proposing

The 10% MR land would continue to be taken and allocated for the development of Civic Spaces. In Form-based zoning, Civic Spaces are elevated to become an integral part of the public realm framework of the city, rather than just another use. By clarifying the different types of 'parks' or Civic Spaces, it makes it easier for the City to maximize the development of the most appropriate types of Civic Spaces for different types of development. For instance, a Square is a very appropriate Civic Space for a higher-density node, while a Natural Area is most appropriate along Carrot Creek on the City's west side. It also is clear to residents and developers what different types of Civic Spaces are being developed.

REFERENCES

¹Projects for Public Spaces. *What is a Great Civic Space?* Accessed July 5, 2008 on www.pps.org

²Baud-Bovy, Manual and Lawson, Fred. *Tourism and recreation handbook of planning and design*. 1998.

³Department of Tourism, Parks and Recreation. *2008 Alberta Recreation Survey*. Government of Alberta. 2008.