CITY OF ST. ALBERT

INCLUSIVE & ACCESSIBLE PLAYGROUND STRATEGY

2025

Prepared by:

Invistec Consulting Ltd.

The City would like to respectfully acknowledge that this work took place on Treaty 6 territory, traditional lands of First Nations and Métis peoples. As treaty people, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, we share the responsibility for stewardship of this beautiful land and aspire to create places that are truly inclusive of all.

Executive Summary

The importance of play in the quality of life and development of children, youth, and young adults cannot be overstated. With a growing population (72,316 residents as of the 2024 Census, approximately one third of whom range in age from infants to young adults), high quality public play spaces are increasingly vital assets in supporting the health, development, and well-being of St. Albert communities. The City of St. Albert (the City) prides itself on prioritizing this public service, caring for 67 City-maintained outdoor playgrounds.

For community members with disabilities, quality play experiences can be a challenge to access, and there remains a need for more inclusive play options. In response to this need, the City has committed to improving inclusivity and accessibility in its playgrounds, with the Inclusive Playground Strategy (the Strategy) set to be an important tool in delivering on that commitment.

The aim of the Strategy is to provide recommendations for improved inclusive and accessible play provision, with consideration for applicable existing policy, inclusive play best practices, and current City demographics and inventory. The Strategy's goals, policy context, and scope are detailed in the *Introduction*, followed by those *Key Definitions* providing a foundation for understanding the Strategy's content. The *Background* elaborates on current best practices for inclusive playground design and allocation, as gathered from a cross-jurisdictional scan. Using these practices as a benchmark, the current state of the City's inventory and inclusive play provision is measured in the *Analysis*, forming the Strategy's recommendations.

Supporting existing City efforts to track playground condition and design elements—and the use of this information to prioritize playground development—the Strategy proposes an **expansion of City Data tracking**, adding elements relevant to inclusive playgrounds to paint a fuller picture of its inclusive and accessible play provision. Further, it recommends that this information is used to support **improved Public Data**—such as inclusive and accessible playground features and locations—allowing community members to make better informed decisions about where to play. Finally, the Strategy recommends that **new Inclusive and Accessible Playground Types** are developed such that a baseline level of inclusive play service can be reliably planned for and validated. These recommendations and the details relevant to their roll-out are contained in *Implementation*.

A NOTE ON LANGUAGE

Language used throughout this document prioritizes a person-first approach to addressing people with disabilities, rather than an identity-first approach, in keeping with both the *Accessible Canada Act* and the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. This approach centres shared personhood and uzses language such as "people with disabilities" or "persons with limited mobility." We acknowledge, however, that there are many perspectives on how to refer to individuals with disabilities, including within disability-related communities.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The City would like to thank and acknowledge everyone who contributed to the development of the Strategy, including consultants, subject matter experts, public engagement participants, and everyone who supported this work and to the community it serves. This work could not have been possible without their dedication, insight, and support.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

STRATEGY GOALS

The Strategy is intended as a road map toward providing greater inclusivity in City-owned playgrounds. It is understood that not all playgrounds are suitable for all users; however, improvements across the City's playground network offer opportunities to serve everyone better. To aid in decision-making for playground development and redevelopment, and to update municipal standards for inclusive play, the City selected Invistec Consulting Ltd. to develop this Inclusive Playground Strategy to provide:

- an overview report on regional, provincial, and national best practices as they relate to inclusive play
- recommendations (including relevant targets, standards, and guidelines) for City-lead provision of inclusive play in outdoor playgrounds
- recommendations for supportive infrastructure required for the successful implementation of inclusive play in outdoors playgrounds
- a prioritized list of playgrounds to develop or redevelop with greater inclusivity in mind, alongside timeframes for implementation

Taken together, these goals aim to improve the provision of inclusive play spaces throughout the City, providing a diverse range of play experiences for all abilities and ages.

POLICY CONTEXT

The following are important policies and regulations that apply to the City and have directly informed the work of the Strategy. A wide range of policies, guidelines, and documents from other jurisdictions were also considered in the development of the Strategy. Please refer to Appendix B for a complete list of resources.

Table 1. Municipal Policy Context

STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES	RELEVANT SECTIONS AND SOURCES
FLOURISH: GROWING TO 100K *(CITY OF ST. ALBERT MUNICIPAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN)*	11.2 Parks, Open Spaces, and Trails 11.3 Community Facilities 12.4 Accessibility and Comfort *Goals, policies, and strategic directions for the ongoing growth and prosperity of the City of St. Albert*
CITY OF ST. ALBERT MUNICIPAL ENGINEERING STANDARDS (2021)	Appendix F – Recreation Amenity Standards *Standards of development for physical infrastructure*
CITY OF ST. ALBERT PARKS AND OPEN SPACE STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES	Principle 3: Diversity & Inclusivity *Park classifications, amenity restrictions, etc.*
VARIOUS AREA STRUCTURE PLANS AND PARKS MASTER PLANS	*Directives for the siting and development of new public spaces in their respective neighbourhoods*
CITY OF ST. ALBERT BYLAWS	Land Use Bylaw 18/2024 Parks Bylaw 07/2022
CITY OF ST. ALBERT UNIVERSAL ACCESS PLAN	3.3.3 Universal Access Plan for Exterior Pedestrian Routes (E) 4.10 Recreation *Guidance for the implementation of universal access in all aspects of City operations*
CITY OF BURLINGTON ACCESSIBILITY DESIGN STANDARDS (2016) *(ADOPTED BY THE CITY)*	4.6 Outdoor Public Spaces 4.6.3 Outdoor Play Spaces *Standards for implementation of accessibility in public infrastructure*

Table 2. Provincial Policv Context

STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES	RELEVANT SECTIONS AND SOURCES
THE ALBERTA HUMAN RIGHTS ACT	*Basis for the legal protection of the dignity, rights, and responsibilities of all peoples within Alberta, including rights of access to services and facilities*
ACCESSIBILITY DESIGN GUIDE 2024	7.1 Wayfinding 7.5 Outdoor Spaces Design Considerations 7.6 Inclusive Play Space Design Considerations *Recommended best practices and design considerations for accessible built environments*

Table 3. Federal Policv Context

STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES	RELEVANT SECTIONS AND SOURCES
CHILDREN'S PLAYGROUND EQUIPMENT AND SURFACING *(CAN/CSA Z614:20)*	Annex H: Children's playgrounds and equipment that are accessible to persons with disabilities *National Standard*
ACCESSIBLE DESIGN FOR THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT *(CSA/ASC B651:23)*	Annex E: References for accessible outdoor recreational environments *National Standard*

SCOPE OF APPLICATION

This Strategy is an implementation document, intended to provide recommendations for the development of City-owned inclusive public playgrounds. This includes specific recommendations for how to build playgrounds more inclusively, as well as where to build them, and to what extent, based on a critical review of available best practices, City practices and policies, and public engagement. The Strategy will inform the design of new City-developed playgrounds in growing neighbourhoods, the re-design of select existing playgrounds to a more inclusive standard, and may be used as a reference for others who provide play opportunities within the City (e.g. school boards, private daycare centres, private developments). It does not replace individual site design, and its recommendations should be reviewed every four to five years to confirm their continued alignment with City plans and goals.

Key Definitions

The following are some key definitions worth noting before reading through the Strategy. As descriptions and definitions of inclusive play and playground design are not universal, other terms not listed here may be used throughout this document as well. Refer to the Appendix A for more definitions.

INCLUSIVITY | INCLUSION | INCLUSIVE

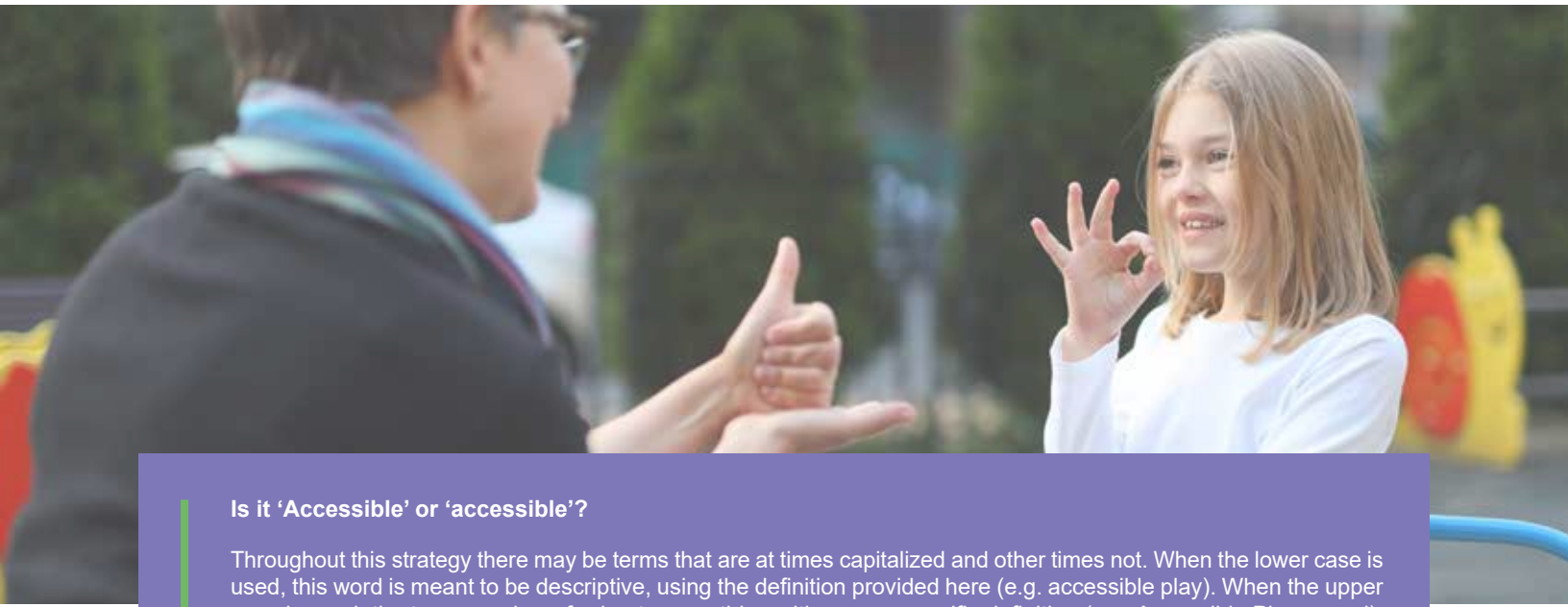
In the City of St. Albert, inclusion is defined as creating a culture that embraces, respects, accepts, and values diversity.

In the context of playground development, it means spaces are designed to welcome people of all ages and backgrounds, regardless of ability, and that users can play on their own terms, with a variety of opportunities for physical, sensory, and social play, and at different levels of challenge. Inclusivity extends further to those accompanying users, such as family members, friends, or caregivers.

ACCESSIBILITY | ACCESS | ACCESSIBLE

Accessibility, generally, is the design of environments that allow for the equitable use, participation, and inclusion of people of varying abilities and ages.

In the context of playground development, accessibility refers to the settings, initiatives, and services designed to support navigation of the physical environment.



Is it 'Accessible' or 'accessible'?

Throughout this strategy there may be terms that are at times capitalized and other times not. When the lower case is used, this word is meant to be descriptive, using the definition provided here (e.g. accessible play). When the upper case is used, the term may be referring to something with a more specific definition (e.g. Accessible Playground). When in doubt, refer to the Glossary.

PLAY TERMINOLOGY

Play and the design of playgrounds can be understood through many lenses, and the language used to describe them often revolves around skills development, sensory stimulation, and play experiences. To better understand how inclusion applies to play, it can be helpful to first understand the language of play.

SENSES, DEVELOPMENT, AND TYPES OF PLAY

Play is understood by the Canadian Public Health Association as an integral part of healthy development, supporting physical, mental, and social health, and improving motor skills, social behaviour, independence, and conflict resolution. It is a tool for self-guided learning, providing opportunities for challenge and exploring boundaries. Equipment is designed to support these outcomes, with specific sensory and skills development in mind. According to the Taylor-Trott Pyramid of Learning, stimulation of the sensory systems supports motor and cognitive development, and so play types are often broadly grouped according to the specific system targeted for development. In line with Creating Inclusive Playgrounds (Ross et al.), these groupings can be divided into Physical Play, Sensory Play, and Social-Emotional Play types.

> It should be noted that there is no one way to differentiate types of play. For example, Bob Hughes' A Playworkers Taxonomy of Play Types lists 16 play types based on activity, while the World Playground Research Institute's Designing Schoolyards for Different Play Types lists 5 types, based on higher level patterns or styles of play. The City's use of Social-Emotional Play as a type is sometimes broken out by others into Social Play and Cognitive Play. The variable ways of discussing play are not mutually exclusive and can often be related to each other in terms of the individual experiences and skills that are engaged by any type of play.

Physical Play is any play which engages both the external senses (typically auditory, tactile, and/or visual) and the internal senses (i.e. the proprioceptive and vestibular systems) in service of motor development and movement. Physical play is the type of play most commonly associated with traditional playgrounds.

Sensory Play is any play which engages the external senses in service of sensory system development. It is common practice to include only three of the "big 5" senses in playground design: hearing (auditory), touch (tactile), and sight (visual). For some, Sensory Play may be as or more important than other types of play due to differences in sensory processing.

Social-Emotional Play is any play which engages the mind in cognitive development. Social-Emotional Play is concerned with navigating social situations, engaging the imagination, and challenging the mind. This may include participation in games with rules, role play, parallel play, observation, creative play, story telling, or any number of other activities.

PLAY COMPONENT TYPES

Playground equipment can be categorized by Component Type, where each type refers to a specific kind of play. There are many ways to distinguish between Play Components. For the purposes of this Strategy, Component Types are categorized as sub-groups of the three Play Type groupings. Components can take many forms, and any one component may combine multiple Play Types.

Components supporting **Physical Play** are grouped by the style of physical activity or movement they support. **Sensory Play** Components support specific tactile, auditory, or visual stimulation. Components supporting **Social-Emotional Play** are designed for cognitive stimulation. The following lists detail key sub-groups commonly used to refer to Play Components, and examples.

PHYSICAL PLAY COMPONENTS

Balancing, supporting vestibular development in particular, as well as bodily coordination and risk perception, often using narrow or unstable surfaces with a range of supports to mediate challenge level, such as hand holds; examples include balance beams, disc challenges, and tight rope walks.

Brachiating (or Overhead), supporting movement patterns that primarily target the use of the upper body, including the arms and trunk; examples include overhead ladders and rings, sliding tracks, and nets.

Climbing, supporting movement over elevated surfaces and structures, in vertical and horizontal directions, and often with a wide range of possible challenge; examples include ladders, boulder walls, rope bridges, and nets.

Crawling, supporting movement at ground level, often using smaller or partially enclosed structures and typically geared toward younger users; examples include tunnels and structures for pulling oneself along the ground, from platform to platform, or up to standing, and is typically associated only with connective elements or playgrounds geared toward toddlers.

Rocking and Gliding, supporting linear motion and swaying, whether single-use or social; examples include spring riders, platform rockers, and flying foxes.

Sliding, supporting gravitational motion, in linear, wave-like, and spiraling directions; examples include open, tube, roller, and hill slides.

Spinning and Rotating, supporting movement about an axis, with rotation positioning the user some distance from the axis, and spinning has the user located on the axis; examples include dish spinners, carousels, and spinning climbers.

Swinging, supporting gravitational movement in a wide variety of directions from linear to rotational to spinning, and often in a pendulum-like fashion; examples include belt, bucket, saucer, and social swings.

SENSORY PLAY COMPONENTS

Auditory, engaging the exploration and processing of acoustic information, such as through producing and locating sounds by a range of means; examples include talking tubes, noisemakers, and musical instruments

Tactile, engaging experiences of touch, such as through differences in texture, pressure, temperature, vibration, and material; examples include contrasting surfaces (i.e. smooth versus rough, soft versus hard), a range of materials such as metal, plastic, stone, and wood, and dynamic fluids (i.e. sand or water tables)

Visual, engaging sight and supporting visual processing, such as through reading, distinguishing objects, motion tracking, and focusing; examples include mazes, matching games, kaleidoscopes, telescopes, and language boards

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL PLAY COMPONENTS

Social-Emotional Play Components support the use of imaginative and creative activities to explore and express emotions and navigate social situations. Examples include playhouses or components with interactive features like games.

PLAYGROUND SURFACES

Surface selection has a significant impact on playground access and navigation. Play surfaces can be made from a variety of materials, each differently affecting the experience of walking, running, crawling, or rolling through a play area, but generally they may be grouped into two broad categories: Unitary or Loose-Fill.

Loose-Fill Surfaces are surfaces composed of a dynamic, movable material, and are typically not considered accessible to mobility aids or wheeled implements without additional interventions such as regular maintenance or material binding; examples include engineered wood fibre (EWF), rubber mulch, pea gravel, and sand

Unitary Surfaces are surfaces which are fixed, continuous, and stable, offering a uniform surface suitable for all modes of mobility, whether walking, running, or rolling; examples include pour-in-place (PIP) rubber, rubber tile, and artificial turf

SUPPORTIVE AMENITIES AND PLAY AREA DESIGN FEATURES

Supportive Amenities are the infrastructure used to support a more enjoyable, comfortable playground experience. These amenities may support playground visits by providing rest and observation points for users and caregivers, or by allowing them to attend to certain personal needs without needing to interrupt their stay. Examples include seating, shade, washrooms, wayfinding, fencing, and more.

Play Area Design Features are elements that enrich the experience of the playground or better facilitate safety. These include things like creating a safe sense of enclosure to the overall play area (via structures, landforms, or other barriers), providing adequate lighting, ensuring accessible walkways between park entries and playgrounds, and providing access to nature.

PARKS AND OPEN SPACE TERMINOLOGY

Playgrounds are located within the City's parks system, whereby parks are defined and classified by factors including size, location, and intended use, among others. There are seven (7) such categories parks can be classified as. For this Strategy, only three (3) are typically relevant: **City Parks**, **Community Parks**, and **Neighbourhood Parks**.

Background

Foundational to the Strategy, the Background consists of a review of best practices, collected from multiple jurisdictions and guided by the principles detailed bellow. These practices are summarized in the following sections—along with notes relating them to core attributes of inclusive playgrounds and relevant local context—and form the foundation for the Strategy's later Analysis and Implementation.

> "We are a friendly and inclusive community of passionate equals, where everyone feels a sense of belonging. We believe that community starts with the person next door."
>
> – Cultivating Our Future, St. Albert's Community Vision

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The City believes in the advancement of a fair and equitable society that promotes respect for all citizens, strengthens the community, reduces causes of disadvantage and inequality and ensures that all citizens in St. Albert thrive and enjoy the best quality of life possible. Toward this end, this Strategy aims to align its values toward Diverse, Accessible, and Inclusive play for all.

These guiding principles are in line with the goals of the City's Municipal Development Plan (Flourish), Universal Access Plan (UAP), and Parks and Open Spaces Standards and Guidelines, among other City guiding documents. Flourish's Community Wellbeing goal aims to support the physical, mental, and social well being of residents through community services and neighbourhoods that foster healthy lifestyles, while its Accessibility and Comfort principle seeks a St. Albert that is accessible and inviting to everyone, in all seasons. The UAP holds the principles of equity, difference, and the dignity of risk, choice, and access for all, while the City's Parks and Open Spaces Standards and Guidelines champion the principles of diversity and inclusivity.

Taken together, the Strategy looks to support the development of inclusive play infrastructure that responds to the needs of the widest population range possible, enabling people of varying ages and abilities to play.

BEST PRACTICES

WHAT MAKES A BEST PRACTICE?

The design of a playground may be as unique as the site it is located in, and the best practices that apply to inclusive play are wide ranging in scope, so what is it that makes a practice "the best?" To better understand what these practices build to, the popular framework from Creating Inclusive Playgrounds suggests that successful inclusive playgrounds answer the following questions:

"CAN I GET THERE?" | ***"CAN I PLAY?"*** | ***"CAN I STAY?"***

"Can I get there?" asks first if it is possible to navigate to and through the playground and is answered by accommodating Access.

> ***Access*** is supported by ensuring accessible walkways, surfaces, and equipment are provided, including paths between the playground itself and the means of travel used to reach it (i.e. accessible parking, transit stops, and the active transportation network). It is also supported by ensuring that equipment is adequately sized and spaced such that users of all sizes can move through the site, and by providing accessible information about playground services for visitors to plan their trip.

"Can I play?" asks whether there are opportunities for people to use the playground in the manner that best suits them and is answered by accommodating by Diversity.

> ***Diversity*** is supported through the provision of a rich variety of play components, sensory stimulation, and levels of challenge. It is also supported by providing opportunities to meet and play with others, regardless of age, ability, or background.

"Can I stay?" asks finally whether the playground's features and surroundings support the user's visit—particularly by eliminating barriers that would cut their visit short—and is answered by accommodating Comfort.

> ***Comfort*** is supported by allowing playground users to stay as long as they would like, ensure features are present that allow for things like rest, personal care, and protection from the elements (e.g. seating, washrooms, and shade, respectively).

To identify design elements that contribute to Access, Diversity, and Comfort, the Strategy summarizes best practices from various jurisdictions according to key elements: Play Surfaces, Play Components, Supportive Amenities, Play Area Design, and Provision and Placement. These elements are presented separately, but successful implementation of each benefit from thoughtful consideration of the others.

> While many of these best practices may benefit any playground, not every practice will be well suited to every situation, nor does incorporating every practice guarantee that all visitors will feel included. As diverse needs require diverse supports, the City aims to provide a variety of experiences throughout its public playgrounds.

PLAY SURFACES BEST PRACTICES

Many surface varieties exist for playgrounds, differing in play value, safety, maintenance needs and accessibility; however, no one play surface is best in every situation. The choice of surface can depend on things like budget, desired play experience practice, and extent of maintenance. Using unitary surfaces throughout is considered best practice for wheeled accessibility, while mixed surfaces support diversity of play. When mixing surface materials, special consideration must be given to ensuring entry and exit points to accessible play components are located on Accessible Routes. Care must be taken to ensure that non-accessible surfaces like sand do not contribute to the segregation of "specialized" accessible areas away from the rest of the playground. Table 4 discusses the relative advantages and disadvantages of commonly used play surfaces.

Table 4. Playground surface type advantages and disadvantages

SURFACE	ADVANTAGE	DISADVANTAGE
ARTIFICIAL TURF	Low maintenance Soft feel Easy to install Durable / withstands high traffic use UV resistant / colourfast	Expensive install Cushioned underlay required for play Low to medium shock absorption / not recommended for fall zones Can be uneven without careful subgrade preparation
POUR-IN-PLACE (PIP) RUBBER	Withstands high traffic use Consistent impact absorption / opportunities for areas of greater absorption as needed Highly flexible for surface design UV resistant / colourfast Accommodates landforms in play area Repairable	Expensive to install Professional design and installation required Repair work will not be seamless
RUBBER TILES	Improved impact absorption with proper subgrade Individual tiles are long lasting and can withstand high traffic Multiple colours and designs available UV resistant / colourfast If damaged, can be replaced in pieces	Expensive to install Regular maintenance is needed to maintain cleanliness and quality at joints Professional design and installation required Can be uneven without careful subgrade preparation
ENGINEERED WOOD FIBRE (EWF)	Good shock absorption Least expensive of the accessible surfaces Durable and self-knitting Natural material	Requires frequent maintenance to keep tidy and level Requires deep volume to achieve high fall protection May decompose, requiring topping up and providing hiding places for insects / pests Requires curb cut / ramp entries and re-levelling to ensure accessibility

SURFACE	ADVANTAGE	DISADVANTAGE
PEA GRAVEL	Inexpensive Good impact absorption with sufficient depth Easy to install	Requires regular maintenance to keep tidy Risk of ingestion / children may place in nose or ears, etc. Requires occasional screening for buried hazards Inaccessible if made deep enough for fall protection / poor shock absorption is compacted enough for accessibility
RUBBER MULCH	Affordable Excellent shock absorption Easy to install Does not attract insects or decompose Available in a range of colours	Not considered accessible unless bound Requires extensive maintenance to keep tidy Raw rubber may stain clothing and skin Risk of ingestion Very light / may scatter in strong wind
SAND	Inexpensive Easy to install Good impact absorption Minimal microbial growth potential	Requires extensive maintenance to keep tidy Risk of ingestion Requires occasional screening for buried hazards Completely inaccessible to most mobility devices Difficulty of movement may contribute to user fatigue

Unitary Surface *Loose-Fill (accessible)* *Loose-Fill (inaccessible)*

Access | "Can I get there?"

Accessible surfaces are crucial for ensuring play components are accessible to those with mobility challenges, and the use of unitary surfacing in particular supports the ease of movement of users with mobility aids. Accessible Loose-Fill Surfaces require accessible points of entry, such as curb ramps.

Diversity | "Can I play?"

Loose-fill surfacing provides textural interest and opportunities for constructive and creative play, while unitary surfacing allows for play-focused surface designs such as painted games (e.g. hopscotch) or raised features (for dynamic movement). Colour, tonal, or textural contrast on surfaces may provide opportunities for user-led games and imaginative play.

Comfort | "Can I stay?"

Colour, tonal, or textural contrast enables those with visual impairments the means of more easily navigating the playground and may provide a sense of organization and predictability to those with neurodivergence or cognitive disabilities. Care must be taken when using contrasting features to account for differences in vision or sensory processing, such as colour-blindness or sensitivity to overstimulation.

LOCAL CONTEXT

Municipal

The City's Municipal Engineering Standards (Engineering Standards) currently include sand, engineered wood fibre, and rubber surfacing as acceptable surfaces, though the City may explore the use of artificial turf in the future. The City's Engineering Standards do not support the use of pea gravel or rubber mulch, and these materials are not under consideration for future development.

The City has also adopted the City of Burlington Accessibility Design Standards, which requires the following regarding surfacing:

- surfaces are to be firm, stable, level, non-abrasive, and drain rapidly, and
- transition curbs are used where surfacing is engineered wood fibre.

Provincial

The Alberta Accessibility Design Guide recommends outdoor play spaces to have ground surfaces that are firm and stable, with impact-attenuating properties for injury prevention. This indicates a clear preference for unitary surfacing, though the guide does list both EWF and rubber mulch as suitably accessible surfaces, if installed and maintained properly.

PLAY COMPONENT BEST PRACTICES

Play is essential to the development of physical, social, and emotional skills, and play components are the tools for that development. Best practices for inclusive play refer to the selection and qualities of play components for the ways they support different types of play. Factors impacting Play Component selection are detailed in Table 5.

Table 5. Decision points regarding Play Component selection impacting inclusive play

SELECTED COMPONENTS...	SUPPORT
ARE ACCESSIBLE	Independent access with minimal transfer support fosters independence Space is required for manoeuvring mobility aids or allowing others to aid in transfers, whether between components while on them
ARE DIVERSE	Greater diversity means greater opportunity to self-select activities matching user abilities and interests Diverse component types provide more opportunities to support healthy skills development across Physical, Sensory, and Social-Emotional Play Types Providing equipment that is appropriately challenging for those without mobility related impairments can be an important factor supporting groups with varying abilities enjoying the playground together
INCLUDE SENSORY PLAY	Sensory play and sensory design considerations are important factors in supporting users with sensory processing disorders, visual impairments, and mental disabilities Attention to component spacing—particularly between auditory play components—can help prevent overstimulation from crowding and noise
INCLUDE SOLITARY PLAY	Solitary play components / spaces provide safe escapes from more active areas for those who need it and offer the chance to relax independent of caregivers Solitary play can serve as observation points, allowing users to take in others playing before deciding if they would like to join in
ARE RECOGNIZABLE	Recognizable shapes, objects, and creatures used in playground design fosters creativity, using the familiar to provide opportunities for users of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds to relate to one another, spurring imaginative play While playgrounds with strong themes can be exciting, recognizable design should avoid being overly stylized where possible; for example, a highly stylized castle offers less versatility than a less stylized enclosed structure with windows and doors, which may by turns be a castle, a cabin, a storefront, etc.
ARE ORGANIZED IN A CIRCUIT	Circular design (or organizing equipment in a circuit, not necessarily a circle) creates connections between exit and entry points of different pieces of equipment, supporting “looping” patterns and intuitive use of equipment.

Access | "Can I get there?"

In Canada physical accessibility of play components (among other things) is standardized through the Children's playground equipment and surfacing standard, or CSA Z614:20 (CSA Z614).

Diversity | "Can I play?"

Individual components may be categorized by their Component Type, the Play Type they support, and other features, such as single-user vs. multi-user, ground-level vs. elevated, or by intended age group, addressing different levels of sociability or challenge. As playgrounds can vary in size and purpose, classifying components in these ways provides a means of quantifying diversity, and is a common tool for qualifying inclusivity.

There are benefits to using play structures that support a range of Play Types. For example, one structure may accommodate climbing, brachiating, and sliding components for Physical Play, as well as tactile and visual components for Sensory Play. Components designed in familiar shapes supports Social-Emotional Play, and may benefit either social or solitary play opportunities, depending on placement.

It is typical for components to be grouped together in pods or play areas by age group, reflecting shared levels of challenge. When designing play pods for different age groups, it is beneficial to consider the diversity of play equipment for each pod separately.

Comfort | "Can I stay?"

To support user comfort through experiences of integration, components specifically adapted for accessibility (e.g. specialized swings, rockers, spinners, etc.) are best spread throughout the playground, rather than isolated together. The use of colours and textures as safety markers—at elevation changes, for example—can support a more intuitive understanding of space and risk for all users, but especially for those with visual impairments. Including solitary play components and quiet areas can greatly improve user comfort for those needing breaks from high-stimulus environments.

LOCAL CONTEXT

Municipal

According to the City's Engineering Standards, all play equipment must be installed in compliance with CSA Z614 in its most current edition. Annex H of this standard is specific to the development of inclusive play but does not specifically guide play component selection. Where accessibility is the desired outcome, the City is directed by the City of Burlington Accessible Design Guideline.

Provincial

The Government of Alberta's Accessibility Design Guide notes that both sensory and active (physical) play components should be incorporated into the design of outdoor play spaces to best accommodate users and caregivers with various disabilities, reinforcing the preference for inclusive playground design to consider needs beyond physical access and mobility.

SUPPORTIVE AMENITIES BEST PRACTICES

Successful playground visits are supported by key amenities that make the stay more comfortable, eliminating barriers that might otherwise cut a visit short. The presence of some amenities may be determining factors in whether or not some people will choose to visit a playground. Due to the limitations of park size, serviceability, and surroundings, however, not every playground is able to accommodate every amenity. The following amenities are commonly suggested to ensure a comfortable, well-supported stay.

Access | "Can I get there?"

As with surfaces and components, all supportive amenities benefit from being made accessible, located on firm, flat surfacing, and connected to walkways without obstructing them. Access to parking and transit may be provided onsite in the form of a parking lot with accessible stalls or by street frontage, and benefits from being located as close to the playground as possible. Where playgrounds are located close to roadways, separation fencing may be used for safety and to minimize risk of wandering.

Additional accessible considerations may include ensuring seating has backrests, fountains are located at wheelchair height, and wayfinding is extended to guide visitors to the playground from park entrances. Where fencing is used, it benefits from the inclusion of accessible gates or open entries to allow playground users to navigate the space independently.

In situations where including a given amenity is not feasible, it is commonly suggested that playgrounds instead be located as close to them as possible; however, set distances are not usually specified.

Diversity | "Can I play?"

Play opportunities provided by satellite amenities such as sports courts and outdoor fitness can engage the whole family in a playground visit.

Comfort | "Can I stay?"

Supportive amenities are at the heart of providing for comfort during a playground visit, both for playground users and for caregivers. Seating, washrooms, shade, waste receptacles, and more allow users to attend to personal needs during their visit with minimal interruption to play. A minimum number of amenities to be provided is not typically specified and depends on both site conditions and community needs.

Fencing or other site features that provide a sense of enclosure can prevent sudden wandering and can add separation between playgrounds and nearby safety risks (e.g. roads), supporting caregiver peace of mind. Critics, however, argue that it can make play spaces feel restrictive, and can diminish the quality and freedom of play as a result. As such, the use of fencing benefits from balancing the needs and comfort of both playground users and caregivers.

Table 6. Amenities supporting inclusivity in play

SUPPORTIVE AMENITIES INCLUDE...	SUPPORT
ACCESSIBLE TRANSPORTATION	Accessible parking stalls, transit stops, and walkways connecting to the play area allow access for those with mobility needs.
ACCESSIBLE WASHROOMS	Washrooms benefit all visitors to play areas, but accessible washrooms are necessary for those requiring assistance in toileting, space to change clothing, and those using mobility aids
A VARIETY OF SEATING	Benches and tables located around a playground perimeter can facilitate improved surveillance of playground users by caregivers Extending firm, stable surfaces adjacent to seating options allows for mobility device parking without obstructing connecting pathways
A SOURCE OF SHADE	Shade structures offer reprieve from the sun—of particular importance for those who struggle with thermal regulation or who have light sensitivities—as well as protection from precipitation In lieu of permanent structures, shade may be provided by high canopied tree planting collocated with accessible seating and set some distance away from the playground edge to minimize leaf litter in the play area
FENCING	Fencing around the perimeter of a play area lowers risk of wandering Fencing benefits from being as visually permeable as possible, ensuring sightlines through the playground are maintained
INFORMATIONAL FEATURES	Wayfinding maps support navigation of the play area, including available supportive amenities Informational features benefit from taking many forms, including the use of braille, written language, and images to ensure information is available to people of all abilities.
SATELLITE PLAY FEATURES	Additional off-playground features such as loose parts play, sports fields, or outdoor fitness can greatly enhance the overall play experience, particularly for multi-generational group visits
WASTE RECEPTACLES	Promotes responsible stewardship of playgrounds by reducing littering Receptacle function benefits from being usable with only one hand and located a reasonable distance away from seating, near play area entries.
WATER FOUNTAINS / BOTTLE-FILL STATIONS	Staying hydrated can impact how long visitors are able to play, and may be used to support service animals as well as playground users.

LOCAL CONTEXT

Municipal

Outdoor City-owned playgrounds are located within the City's parks network, which has specific amenity guidelines based on park classification according to the Parks and Open Space Standards and Guidelines with playgrounds permitted in all park classifications except Connector Parks. As most existing playgrounds are located within City, Community, and Neighbourhood Parks, these three classes and the relevant amenity guidelines are summarized below. Note that there are no specific amenity guidelines detailing proximity to playgrounds.

Table 7. Amenity requirements and restrictions by Park Classification

PARK CLASS.	INFO. FEATURE	ACCESSIBLE WASHROOM	PARKING LOT	WATER FOUNTAINS	BENCH SEATING	WASTE BINS
CITY	Required	Required	Required	Optional	Required	Required
COMMUNITY	Optional	Incompatible	Optional	Optional	Required	Required
NEIGHBOURHOOD	Optional	Incompatible	Incompatible	Incompatible	Required	Required

The City's Engineering Standards require that all benches have concrete "wings" to facilitate accessibility. Other supportive amenities (such as shade structures or satellite play facilities) may be permitted but are not specifically required.

PLAY AREA DESIGN BEST PRACTICES

In addition to decisions on surfacing materials, component selection, and supportive amenities, inclusive playgrounds benefit from their thoughtful coordination and the design of their surroundings. Smart component layout, the use of landmarking, and making nature accessible can provide benefits for a wide range of play types and user needs. The following general design considerations are commonly suggested to support inclusive play.

Table 8. Table 8: Inclusive considerations for general play area design

PLAY AREA FEATURES INCLUDE...	SUPPORT
VISUAL / TEXTURAL CONTRAST	Surface printed information supports those with visual and cognitive impairments in navigating the playground; examples include: • colour contrasting play surfaces and/or equipment, • marking pathways between key playground elements (e.g. play pods and washrooms), and • high contrast used to warn of drop offs or other sudden changes Other considerations in design include adjusting for areas of high and low stimulation (i.e. less contrast in quiet areas) or avoiding colour mixes common in colour blindness
ACCESS TO NATURE	Natural features have proven benefits for nervous system regulation and supporting immune system function (e.g. sensory plantings offer unique opportunities to stimulate sense of smell) Canopies of larger trees can provide shade, help to block wind, and regulate temperature and air quality for the surrounding site; fruit trees are typically not recommended Changes in landforms and topography, such as berms and hills, offer additional ways to explore and add challenge to movement
OPEN SIGHTLINES	Play components and playground structures can minimize impacts to sight lines by making use of transparent materials or ensuring frequent openings in and between playground elements Uninterrupted sightlines facilitate easier supervision, and enable cross-playground communication for those with hearing disabilities
COMFORTABLE SPACES	As with a diversity of component types, a diversity of spatial formats allows users to access the spaces that are most comfortable for them: • wide open spaces benefit ease of movement for those with visual impairments, for whom cramped spaces can require being on high alert for risk of injury • confined or enclosed spaces (e.g. equipment enclosed on multiple sides) has been shown to promote the highest levels of social, motor, and language behaviours across playground users
APPROPRIATE SIZING	While there are no explicit best practices for tying playground size to inclusive play, generally, bigger is better; there are, however, multiple considerations to balance: • a larger play area allows for a greater number and diversity of Play Components and Supportive Amenities • larger play areas typically also require larger park spaces and budgets to accommodate them • more play area also means more ongoing maintenances

Access | "Can I get there?"

Ensuring natural features are accessible to all supports engagement with the natural environment, something of particular value to people with disabilities which may normally prevent them from having access to nature. Using wayfinding techniques can also be an important support in allowing users with certain visual or cognitive disabilities the freedom to navigate the play area independently.

Diversity | "Can I play?"

Access to nature play opportunities may supplement the more conventional play opportunities provided by playground equipment both in terms of sensory play (e.g. access to planting) and physical play (e.g. elevation changes and uneven terrain supporting tumbling, etc.).

Comfort | "Can I stay?"

Designing for ease of navigation, supervision, and use of the space minimizes discomfort and confusion for play participants and caregivers alike. Adequate spacing between elements facilitates this ease by allowing for greater freedom of movement and improving sightlines. Locating amenities in areas that better support supervision is another strategy.

LOCAL CONTEXT

Municipal

The City does not currently track design features as listed in the above table in relation to playgrounds.

The adopted City of Burlington Accessibility Design Standards require playground elements and potential obstacles to be identified by colour or tonal contrast, where an "element" in this case may refer to any playground component, supportive amenity, or architectural feature.

Provincial

The Alberta Accessibility Design Guide lists four kinds of wayfinding: orientation, direction, identification, and general information. The guide points to the benefits of using wayfinding to make spaces logical and intuitive, using textural and tactile cues, acoustics, and colour and brightness contrast.

PROVISION AND PLACEMENT BEST PRACTICES

Inclusive playgrounds benefit from being sited in densely populated areas or areas of major activity, both to provide access to inclusive play to the largest population possible and support the creation of a central community destination. Few resources identify a minimum number of inclusive or accessible playgrounds play based on population, service area, or proximity, and approaches vary widely for those that do.

For example, the City of Calgary seeks to provide one inclusive play space or recreational opportunity within a 5 km radius of every Calgarian, while the City of Medicine Hat seeks to provide 2 accessible playgrounds per service zone, with each zone serving approximately 15,000 citizens. For examples further away, MidCoast, Australia's Playspace Strategy requires inclusive play only of regional playground development. The United Kingdom's Developing Accessible Play Space Guide recommends general play provision targets based on distance from residents but says nothing of specific inclusive play targets.

> Select examples from other jurisdictions (e.g. US, UK) use proximity measures for playgrounds more generally, identifying local play areas as within a 5-minute walk and neighbourhood-level play areas as within a 10- to 15-minute walk. This indicates that the distances between residences and playgrounds typically relate to the level of service provided by that playground, providing context for the placement and expected service levels of inclusive and accessible play.

This lack of consensus on how much inclusive play is enough is reflective of the general lack of inclusive playgrounds provided worldwide. As best practices for playground design are adopted more broadly, similar practices for minimum service levels may develop.

Access | "Can I get there?"

Playgrounds are best located near accessible parking, transit connections, and an active transportation network, allowing for users to arrive at the playground in the mode of their choosing.

Diversity | "Can I play?"

Consider proximity to other playgrounds, such as those available at school sites, when determining the extent of playground development; keeping in mind that school playgrounds will vary in how inclusive their designs are and may not always be publicly accessible (i.e. during school hours).

Comfort | "Can I stay?"

Playgrounds are well served by being close to public services and amenities to minimize impacts from trip times and visit interruptions.

LOCAL CONTEXT

Municipal

The City requires every residence to be no further than 400 m unobstructed walk (or an estimated 5-minute walk) from a park or open space, with almost all residential areas of the City exceeding this standard. There are currently no specifications for distance to playgrounds.

The City transit system includes both a standard service and a handibus service, accessible to those who cannot use the standard transit system for reasons related to their disability. The transit system is not designed around parks and playgrounds, however where larger parks are placed, there is a relationship between transit availability and access to those parks.

ANALYSIS

STATE OF PLAY

With 67 public playgrounds dotting the City (not including those provided by school boards) there is a wide range of playgrounds available to St. Albert residents. The state of existing City-owned inventory and the level of service it provides is compared to census data to understand how well positioned inventory may be to support redevelopment for inclusive play. Each of these playgrounds varies in size, age, and condition, and each is equipped with different surfacing types, equipment, and amenities. These factors and more are explored here to provide a snapshot of the state of play in the City and determine how well current play provision aligns with best practices.

DEMOGRAPHICS

St. Albert is a predominantly residential city, with a population of over 70,000. According to the 2024 Census, youth aged 0 to 14 make up approximately 16%, with the largest populations located (in descending order) in Lacombe Park, North Ridge, The Gardens, Deer Ridge, Erin Ridge, Erin Ridge North, and Akinsdale. Approximately 4,700 residents of St. Albert identified themselves as having a disability in the 2024 Census, accounting for around 7% of the total population. Of those identified, approximately 540 were children aged 0 to 14.

Population numbers, both by total and by specific age group, have been used by various jurisdictions to determine a minimum number of playgrounds required to serve communities. This typically works out to about 1 playground per 1,000 residents, or 5 per 1,000 children. While these ratios have not historically been used for the development of inclusive or accessible play, they can indicate how well existing inventory matches up with meeting needs for play, and these can put potential targets for the provision of inclusive playgrounds in context.

It is worth reinforcing that while the intended age groups of playground users are typically for children and young adults, people of all ages access playgrounds, both as users and as caregivers. Wherever population is a factor in decision making for inclusive play, residents of all ages should be considered.

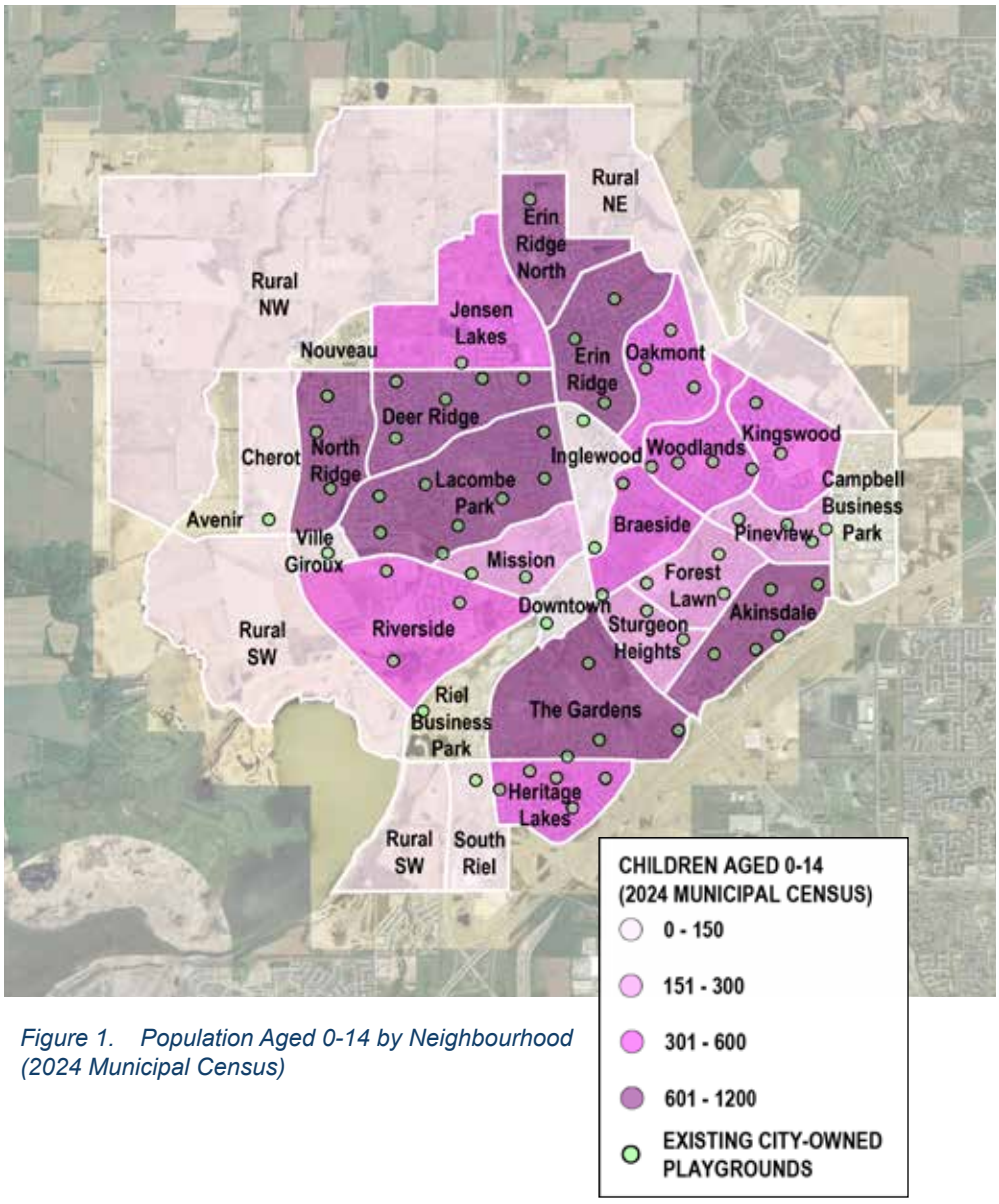


Figure 1. Population Aged 0-14 by Neighbourhood (2024 Municipal Census)

In terms of population growth, the largest growth changes between the 2018 and 2024 census' in specific neighbourhoods have been in Jensen Lakes and Riverside, each of which have some of the youngest populations in the City. Erin Ridge North saw substantial growth as well, and Cherot may expect the same, both of which also have low average ages. This indicates that the northwest of the City is currently experiencing growth in the number of young families living there, suggesting it should be a priority area for future development. While populations remained stable in The Gardens and Lacombe Park neighbourhoods, their significant population (approximately 20%, taken together) and known density of youth also suggest higher priority for play provision.

Table 9. Summary 2024 Census Data

NEIGHBOURHOOD	NO. OF RESIDENTS	% CHANGE (2018-24)	NO. OF CHILDREN	CHILDREN % OF TOTAL	AVERAGE AGE	% 2024 POPULATION
AKINSDALE	4,794	-1.0%	725	15%	43.05	6.6%
BRAESIDE	2,803	0.4%	380	14%	42.32	3.9%
CHEROT	64	-	10	16%	29.74	0.1%
DEER RIDGE	5,833	-2.8%	950	16%	40.80	8.1%
DOWNTOWN	708	22.1%	15	2%	64.05	1.0%
ERIN RIDGE	5,531	-6.4%	850	15%	43.15	7.6%
ERIN RIDGE NORTH	3,384	62.3%	730	22%	36.34	4.7%
FOREST LAWN	2,597	-4.0%	295	11%	44.72	3.6%
THE GARDENS	7,450	2.3%	1080	14%	43.63	10.3%
HERITAGE LAKES	3,713	-1.0%	540	15%	42.37	5.1%
INGLEWOOD	1,433	1.4%	150	10%	48.77	2.0%
JENSEN LAKES	1,855	724.4%	500	27%	28.54	2.6%
KINGSWOOD	2,504	-0.6%	315	13%	45.24	3.5%
LACOMBE PARK	7,905	4.7%	1110	14%	44.29	10.9%
MISSION	2,465	4.3%	230	9%	55.73	3.4%
NORTH RIDGE	5,647	0.7%	1110	20%	35.61	7.8%
OAKMONT	3,860	10.4%	445	12%	46.85	5.3%
PINEVIEW	1,749	0.2%	300	17%	44.83	2.4%
RIVERSIDE	2,713	418.7%	530	20%	33.39	3.8%
RURAL	130	-	30	23%	35.88	0.2%
SOUTH RIEL	253	-	10	4%	39.94	0.3%
STURGEON HEIGHTS	1,787	-0.7%	255	14%	41.71	2.5%
VILLE GIROUX	637	99.7%	30	5%	49.16	0.9%
WOODLANDS	2,501	-2.8%	400	16%	42.94	3.5%
TOTALS	**72,316**	**9%**	**10,990**	**15%**	**42.63**	**100%**

HOW MUCH INCLUSIVE PLAY IS 'ENOUGH'?

While "how many playgrounds is enough" has been considered by many, the question of "how many playgrounds should be inclusive" is both recent and unanswered. In an ideal world, there would be a balance of play experiences available offering options to play to all people, regardless of ability or background, and all playgrounds would have inclusive and accessible elements. Still, the study and development of inclusive play practices across the globe is somewhat recent, with previous efforts having mostly focused on accessible play without consideration for disabilities other than those impacting mobility. As such, inclusive play is not universally defined, and its provision is minimal. The following table provides a snapshot of inclusive and accessible play across the province as a comparator for existing City inventory.

Table 10. Inclusive playground statistics, top 10 Albertan cities by population

MUNICIPALITY	TOTAL POPULATION	OUTDOOR PLAYGROUNDS	NO. LISTED AS ACCESSIBLE	NO. LISTED AS INCLUSIVE
ST. ALBERT	**72,316**	**67**	**2 (3%)**	**2 (3%)**
CALGARY	1,569,133	1,137	30 (3%)	20 (2%)
EDMONTON	1,190,458	668	114 (17%)	4 (1%)
RED DEER	112,917	168	3 (2%)	1 (1%)
LETHBRIDGE	111,400	21	6 (29%)	1 (5%)
STRATHCONA COUNTY	105,218	114	20 (18%)	1 (1%)
AIRDRIE	88,471	84	8 (10%)	1 (1%)
WOOD BUFFALO	80,598	108	3 (3%)	0 (0%)
GRANDE PRAIRIE	69,377	152	1 (1%)	3 (2%)
MEDICINE HAT	67,909	101	6 (6%)	1 (1%)

Table 10 shows Calgary leading the way in providing inclusive play by total count, Lethbridge by percent, while most other municipalities indicate approximately 1% of their infrastructure as being inclusive. In keeping with the longer history of study and standards development for accessible play, the provision of accessible playgrounds around the province is typically higher.

It is worth noting that 'accessible' and 'inclusive' used in this table are according to local definitions used by each municipality, and do not necessarily align with the Strategy or with each other. The City's current provision of "accessible" and "inclusive" play is most similar to Airdrie and refer to "fully accessible surfacing" and "inclusive features present," respectively.

EXISTING INVENTORY

ACCESS | "CAN I GET THERE?"

Providing equitable access to playgrounds is a multifaceted effort. It requires consideration for multiple modes of transportation, for accessible pathway connections between playgrounds and other infrastructure, for proximity of playgrounds to prospective users, and even for access to information about what playground services are available. Is there adequate and accessible parking nearby? Can I get there by walking, wheeling or rolling? Upon arriving, can I get to the equipment?

Access by Active Transportation

As discussed in best practices for provision and placement, inclusive playgrounds benefit from being located where the action is and are best considered as destinations. Typically, destinations serve larger areas than local playgrounds, often requiring a vehicle to access. Still, connections to active transportation networks are vital supports for those seeking independent access by walking, rolling, or taking transit.

When considering playground walkability, proximity is usually the determining factor for whether a resident will make the trip. While the City promises access to park space within a 400 m or 5 minute unobstructed walk from every residence, there is currently no proximity requirement for playgrounds. Generally, beyond distances of 1 to 1.5 km or (10 to 15 minutes walk), driving tends to be favoured over active transportation. Most City residents are currently within a 10- to 15 minute walk of Community or City Park playgrounds, in line with recommendations for playgrounds expected to serve wider neighbourhoods. Playgrounds according to Park Classification are illustrated in Figure 2.

Bolstering typical walkable ranges, transit connections bridge distant portions of the City's active transportation system, allowing some playgrounds to serve more of the City's residents. Nearly one third of City-owned playgrounds currently have strong transit connections, rising to one half if considering only playgrounds in Community and City Parks. These connections position certain playgrounds as better candidates for inclusive and accessible play.

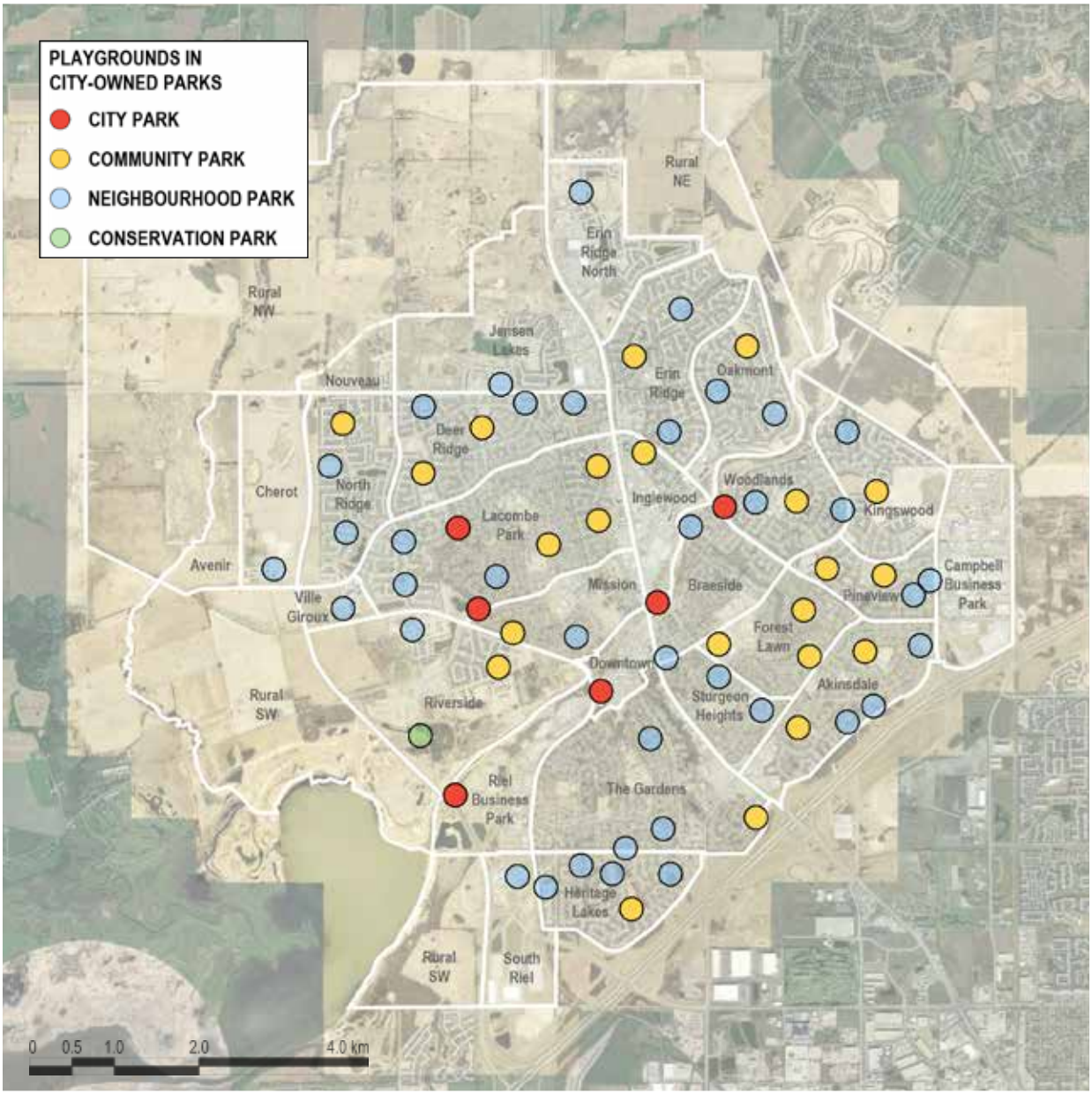


Figure 2. Playground locations by Park Classification

Accessible Parking

Public parking is available at four (4) playgrounds in City Parks (Lacombe, Lions, Rotary, and Woodlands), and at eight (8) playgrounds in Community Parks (Alpine, Attwood, Deer Ridge, Fountain, Gloucester, Liberton, Natalia, and Willoughby). Notably, parking at Deer Ridge, Gloucester, Lacombe and Liberton is located some distance away from the playground (indicated by small red dots on Figure 3), and the remaining playgrounds may have street parking, but no space for permanent accessible stalls.

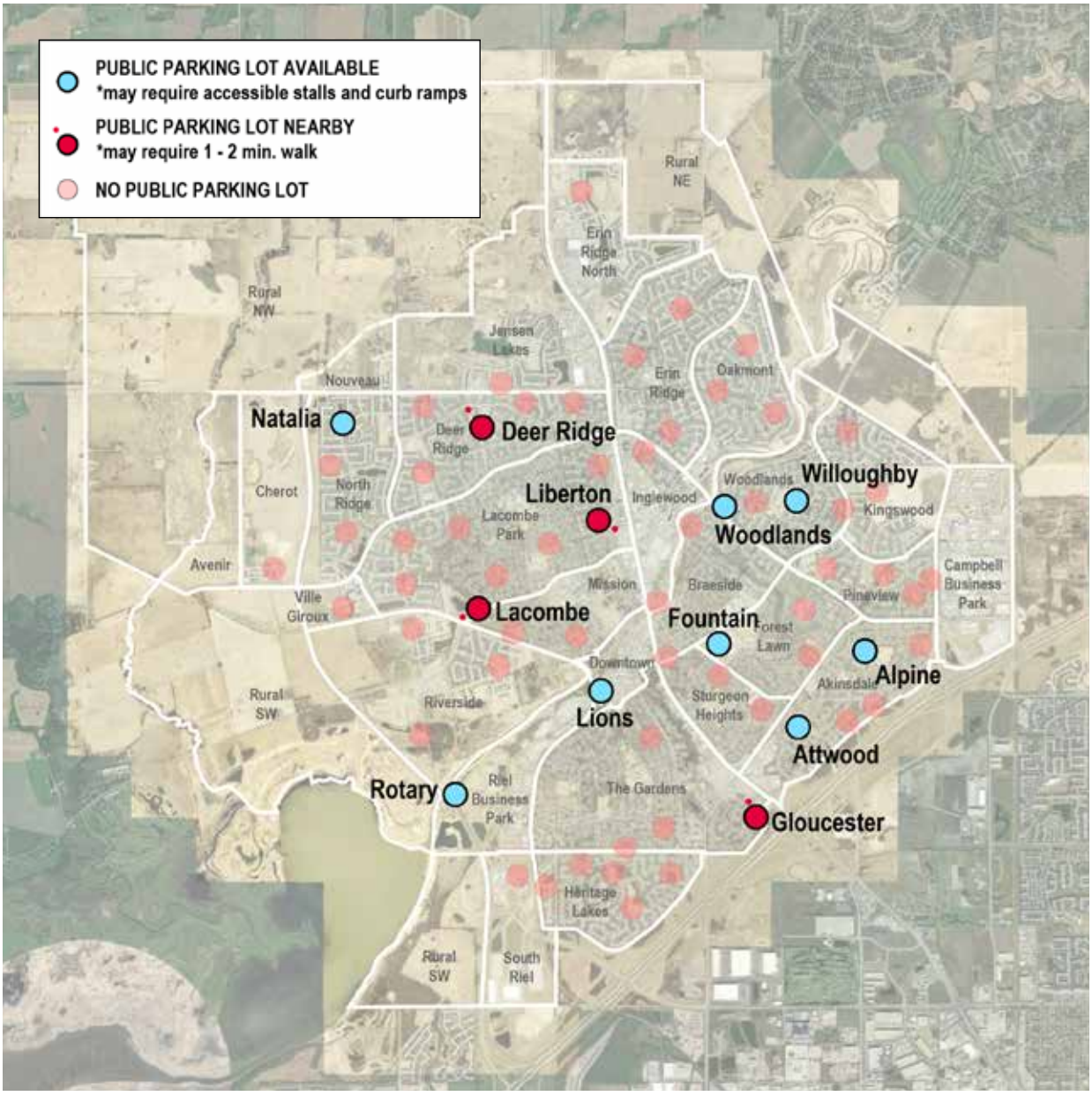


Figure 3. Playground proximity to parking

Accessible Surfaces

The majority of City playgrounds currently use sand as a surfacing material. It is important to consider that while sand has some play benefit, this surfacing poses a major obstacle for children who use wheelchairs, walkers, or other mobility aids, or who may otherwise have mobility challenges or difficulty with unstable or shifting surfaces. This may be sufficient for some playgrounds but may not be acceptable for playgrounds expected to serve a diverse range of users.

There are no existing examples of mixed PIP and EWF. Opportunities to replace sand with EWF may supplement access in these playgrounds while still using a loose-fill material, provided regular maintenance is undertaken.

The City preference is for PIP to be in use where accessibility is a high priority. As City-owned playgrounds currently have limited accessible surfacing in use, most playgrounds proposed for inclusive development will require surfacing replacement with PIP or mixed materials. As many playgrounds with sand also use timber curbing, their boundaries may need reconfiguration and/or replacement with concrete curbing to accommodate any required unitary surfacing.

Although beyond the scope of this strategy, it should be noted that many school board-owned playgrounds offer a variety of surfacing, including several with partial PIP and EWF options. These factors may be considered when determining the order of development of City-owned infrastructure but are considered supplementary to City-provided play areas recommended through this strategy.

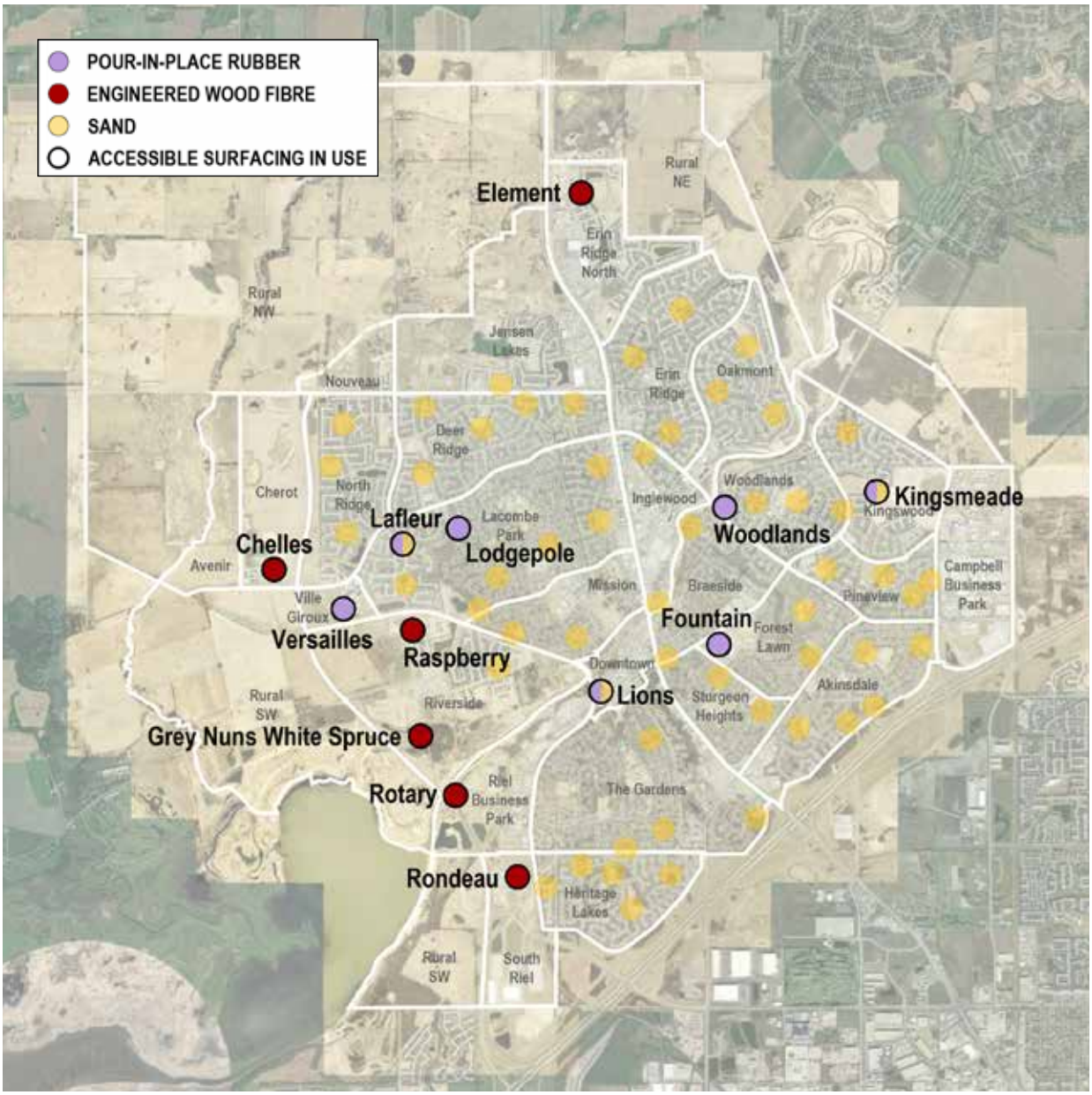


Figure 4. Playground surfaces

Accessible Components

City asset data does not track the accessibility of individual components or the number of ground-level or elevated accessible components in each playground. These data are necessary for determining whether a playground adheres to Annex H of the CSA Z614 standard, and so either they or over all compliance with the standard should be tracked on a site-by-site basis.

Planning for a Playground Visit

The City currently has limited public information available about City playgrounds, creating an opportunity to address this information gap while including data relevant to inclusive play. New additions to publicly available information may include playground status (i.e. as 'inclusive' or 'accessible') or what inclusive features users can expect (e.g. types and/or number of accessible and inclusive play components, available supportive amenities, and site features).

DIVERSITY | "CAN I PLAY?"

Accounting for access, a diversity of play opportunities at a range of challenge levels is essential for allowing all playground users to select the play that is best for them. Providing diversity is a multifaceted challenge and requires special attention to accommodate factors like age-grouping, differences in physical ability, and sensory and cognitive needs.

Age Grouping

Regarding age-grouping, Annex H of the CSA's Children's playground equipment and surfacing standard encourages the grouping of playground into two broad categories: 18 months to 5 years (toddler), and 5 years to 12 years (child). It is worth noting that these categories are functional classifications for play elements and rely on estimations of challenge and body size that are consistent with neurotypical development in the 95th percentile.

Approximately half of City playgrounds are currently providing play experiences suitable for a range of age groups, with another quarter each of the playgrounds favouring either younger or older users. Geographically, the spread of playgrounds across all age groups is even, leaving no major gaps. Regardless, all future playground developments should aim to provide suitable play experiences for both CSA-designated age groups where possible. Specialized play areas such as natural playgrounds or outdoor fitness areas are not the subject of playgrounds in Annex H and are considered separately.

Table 11. Playground counts by age group served

AGE GROUP RANGES	NUMBER OF PLAYGROUNDS
18 months to 5 years	14
5 years to 12 years	17
18 months to 12 years	33
Specialized	6 (3 Adult Fitness Parks, 3 Natural Playgrounds)

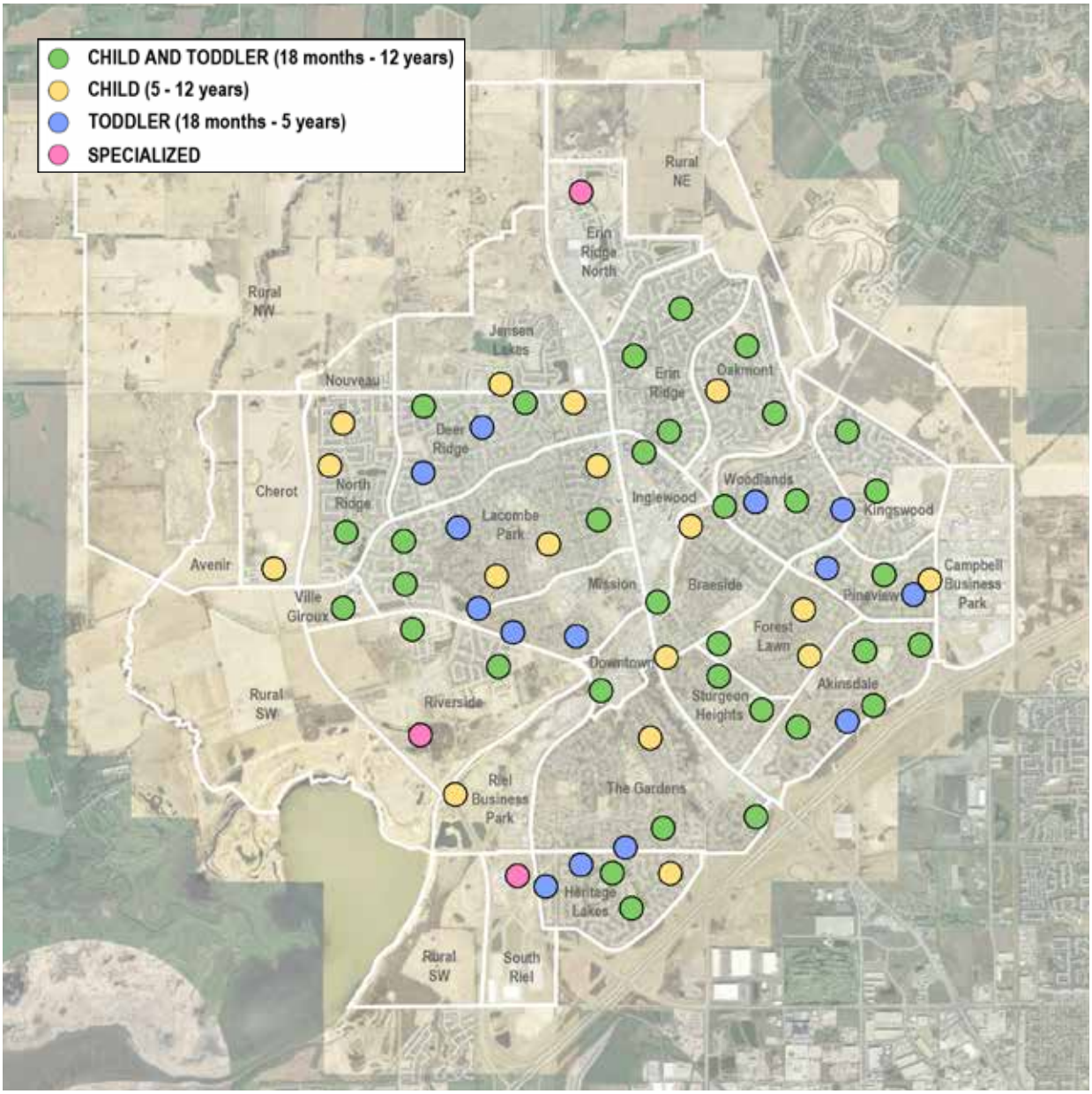


Figure 5. Playgrounds by CSA age grouping

Surface Diversity

While select sites have mixed materials used for playground surfacing, supporting different experiences of play, the majority exclusively use loose-fill surfacing. Only unitary surfacing, however, allows for certain play-based design strategies, such as surface patterning providing support for child-led games and imaginative play. Playground surfaces in the City's current inventory do not generally allow for the use of these strategies.

While these strategies are to be encouraged in future development, the City recognizes that they should not contribute to minimum requirements for high-quality inclusive play overall, as they explicitly rely on unitary surfacing and larger playground footprints to make use of open space as a kind of play component, and space and budget restriction may make these strategies cost prohibitive.

Component Diversity

Regarding play diversity, City inventory data currently captures 6 of the 7 Physical Play Components (rockers are not represented) and indicates whether there are Social-Emotional Play Components included onsite. It does not indicate specifically whether sensory components are present (previously captured as part of Social-Emotional Play data), or whether there are dedicated solitary play opportunities. Inventory data also does not currently contain information on the quantity of any component type on a given site, nor how many of them are accessible (whether at ground level, by ramp, or by transfer platform.

Comfort | "Can I stay?"

Once barriers to accessing playgrounds are removed and diverse play opportunities are provided, playground users may still have their visits cut short if certain supportive features are not present. Are there accessible washrooms available nearby? Is seating provided for caregivers where there are open sightlines to facilitate supervision? Is there shade onsite, or even in the playground itself?

While all best-practice amenities would benefit any playground, choosing which amenities to implement—and how many—depends on factors including expected intensity of use, site size, fiscal feasibility and neighbourhood considerations. The suitability of certain amenities also depends to some extent on the Parks Classification system. As Neighbourhood Parks are intended to support local users and shorter duration visits, a complete host of supportive amenities would not be well aligned with their intended use. More amenities may be reasonable for inclusion in Community Parks, and more still in City Parks, in keeping with the relative size of their service areas and their intent.

City inventory currently tracks many of the identified supportive amenities, including public washrooms, bench and picnic seating, waste receptacles, and shade shelters. There are no public water fountains provided in the City's parks, though potable water is available at permanent washroom facilities. Whether any of these amenities are accessible is not currently reflected in the inventory, although as sites are upgraded over time, these amenities are required to meet accessibility standards according to the Universal Access Plan. Fencing is currently used in only two playgrounds: Woodlands, as an extension of the spray park, and Lacombe, though only between the roadway and the park space. Continued use of fencing should be considered on a case-by-case basis, preferentially for larger playgrounds with the potential for longer-duration visits.

PAYGROUND REPLACEMENT PRIORITY INDEX

The City currently tracks the condition of public playgrounds in a tool called the Playground Replacement Prioritization Index (PRPI). The PRPI is one tool among many used by the City to track playground assets and identify which playgrounds are prioritized for redevelopment, much of which was used for the prior analysis. **This tool is not intended to measure inclusivity and accessibility; however, it may be adapted to serve this purpose in the future (see Recommendations)**. Considering its use in playground planning, the PRPI has been analyzed to determine how this data and its application can benefit the development of inclusive playgrounds.

The total PRPI score is made up of four criteria: Lifecycle (age of the equipment), Condition (wear and tear), Play Value (diversity of equipment), and Subjective Factors (community context). Currently, over half of the PRPI score comes from Lifecycle and Condition criteria, which are tightly correlated to each other. Notable exceptions include Lions, Rotary, and Alpine Park playgrounds, whose condition factors have outpaced their lifecycle, possibly indicating their popularity (i.e. increased wear likely stems from heightened use).

Play Value, which largely measures play component diversity, is the metric that comes closest to assessing inclusive play. In its current form, however, it has limitations. The absence of data about select play components and amenities, and the exclusion of surface types as a consideration, make the current metric inadequate for measuring the level of inclusivity of a playground. PRPI data also does not currently track the number of play components of a given type, so there is no way of differentiating between the diversity of play provided by playgrounds of different sizes. It may be generally assumed, however, that larger playgrounds provide a greater diversity of components.

Subjective factors, the last PRPI metric, are intended to balance the replacement of any given playground against community needs, including public feedback, distribution of recent playground replacements, and overall provision of play within a neighbourhood. While this value may have some utility in ensuring the public voice—including those with specific needs related to play—can be assessed within the overall context of the playground network, there is little opportunity to use this criterion to reflect specific and systematic development of inclusive play.

For these reasons, age and overall condition may be the best determinants of whether a given playground should be replaced, while **what it should be replaced with** may be better addressed by a separate system, making use of expanded inventory tracking, as previously discussed in the State of Play and explored in Implementation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As the City looks to future growth and the redevelopment of its outdoor playgrounds, the question is not “should we build inclusive play,” but “where, when, and to what extent?” The City recognizes that not every playground can be made fully inclusive or accessible due to many factors, including the desire to meet the needs of a very broad range of playground users of all ages and abilities, the typically higher costs and sizes required compared to conventional playgrounds, the large number of existing playgrounds in City inventory, and the intended outcomes for the park spaces that host them. Making decisions about what should be developed is an exercise in balancing known best practices against budgets, site constraints, and community needs.

These recommendations represent key directives supporting improved opportunities for users of all abilities, interests, and backgrounds to play. Overall, they focus on improving Access, Diversity and Comfort and reflect an approach that treats the provision of playgrounds as a network of play opportunities distributed across the City. This network is intended to provide a diversity of play opportunities that, taken together, ensure all residents have access to play that meets their individual needs while recognizing that it is not feasible to have every site meet every need. More specifically, and in alignment with cross jurisdictional scanning, best practice research, engagement with experts and playground users and the City’s current playground approach, the focus is on providing meaningful inclusive and accessible play opportunities, in spaces that can best answer the questions of “can I get there,” “can I play,” and “can I stay?”

Ensuring that play provides for the development of all Play Types, whether Physical, Sensory, or Social-Emotional, and that no part of the playground is completely inaccessible, provides the greatest opportunity for those with disabilities to fully integrate into play at the level of their choosing.

	RECOMMENDATIONS	CAN I GET THERE? (ACCESS)	CAN I PLAY? (DIVERSITY)	CAN I STAY? (COMFORT)
1.	Update **City Data** (i.e. GIS, PRPI, asset inventories, and other playground data sources) to track information relevant to inclusive play best practices including:			
	• Accessible parking and washrooms • Accessibility of inclusive elements (by ground, ramp, or transfer system) and number of each accessible play component type • Presence of rocking, auditory, tactile, and visual play components, as well as solitary play or quiet areas	☑	☑	☑
3.	Develop accessible **Public Data** detailing playgrounds according to Playground Type, key features and inclusive infrastructure, helping community members locate play that best suits their needs.			
a.	Provide publicly accessible information on the availability of accessible connections such as parking or nearby transit. Playgrounds to be made more inclusive should incorporate an overall site map to help orient users on arrival.	☑		
b.	Accessible online playground information should reflect key features supporting diverse play opportunities, such as high demand play equipment, the use of ramps or transfer systems, surfaces in use, and target age group.		☑	
c.	Provide publicly accessible information on supportive amenities, including parking, washroom access, shade, and other key features.			☑
2.	Define **Playground Types**, detailing the minimum level of accessible or inclusive service provided by a playground of that type.			
a.	Establish a relationship between new Playground Types and existing Parks and Open Space Classifications such that New Development is consistent with the goals of this Strategy.	☑	☑	☑
b.	Determine how Existing Playgrounds are to be categorized by Playground Type such that their service area provides broad coverage for a range of play opportunities across the City.	☑	☑	☑

Implementation

To ensure this Strategy can be actioned into existing City processes, and to inform both short- and long-term capital planning, this section details specific actions that road map the development of an inclusive and accessible network of playgrounds over the next twenty years. This section should be considered guidance for City decision making and will require review, adaptation, and updating as the City grows and changes.

CITY DATA

To aid administration in ensuring different playgrounds meet the criteria for their Playground Type, this Strategy recommends that the City track criteria-relevant data points in connection to playgrounds. While certain data is already tracked, the following is recommended in addition:

- Number of accessible Ground-Level Play Components
- Number of Elevated Play Components accessible by ramp
- Number of Elevated Play Components accessible by transfer system
- Presence of the following Physical Play Component Type:
  - *Rocking/Gliding*
- Presence of each of the following Sensory Play Component Types:
  - *Auditory, Tactile, and Visual*
- Presence of Solitary Play Component(s) or Low-Stimulus Play Area(s)
- Accessible parking
- Accessible permanent washrooms
- Communication board

> Currently asset inventory data is tracked in a range of formats and locations. To ensure this data is both centralized for ease of tracking and broadly available for a range of uses, it is recommended that it be compiled as part of a comprehensive asset inventory and management system.

Data already tracked by the City:

- Surface types in use
- Age group served
- Presence of the following Physical Play Component Types:
  - *Balancing, Brachiating (Overhead), Climbing, Sliding, Spinning/Rotating, and Swinging*
- Presence of Social-Emotional Play Type Component(s)
- Accessible benches
- Accessible tables
- Accessible shade structures
- Fencing

PUBLIC DATA

Key playground characteristics and services are to be detailed on the City's website, aiding community members in identifying the inclusive play opportunities and supportive amenities available to them. For each playground in the City's inventory, the following information is to be made publicly accessible:

- Playground Type
- Surface Type(s)
- Age Group Served
- Inclusive Elements
- Accessible Supportive Amenities
- Fencing

PLAYGROUND TYPES

The following Playground Types detail differences in intended service, minimum criteria required per Playground Type, and—for planning purposes—recommended service area and playground size. From Generalized through to Inclusive, these playground types increase in their minimum required support for accessible or inclusive play, as well as their intended service area. A fourth type, the Specialized Playground, is additionally proposed to account for playgrounds providing specialized play experiences and may coincide with other Playground Types as conditions allow.

Generally speaking, Accessible Playgrounds ensure the core attributes of Access and Diversity are accounted for, while Inclusive Playgrounds provide for these as well as the core attribute of Comfort. It is important to note that regardless of the intended Playground Type, the City strives to meet as many of the Strategy's best practices as feasible.

GENERALIZED

- Serving immediate area or single neighbourhood
- No inclusive or accessible features required

ACCESSIBLE

- Serving multiple neighbourhoods
- Minimum diversity of accessible play
- Minimum accessible surface requirement

INCLUSIVE

- City-wide destination
- Minimum provision of supportive amenities
- All criteria met for Accessible Playgrounds

SPECIALIZED

- Providing specialized outdoor recreation opportunities
- May simultaneously be any of the other Playground Types, concurrently

GENERALIZED PLAYGROUND

Generalized Playgrounds are intended to support the day-to-day play needs of nearby residents, with shorter duration recreation and independent social gathering for families and youth living nearby. No minimum criteria for accessibility or inclusivity is applied, though these features may be present as budget, park size, and local needs allow. Generalized Playground sizes may be highly variable, reflecting the specific needs of the neighbourhoods they serve, with no minimum recommended size in recognition of their smaller service area, although generally these playgrounds should be anticipated to have a smaller footprint than other, more inclusive-focused play areas. Planning for Generalized Playgrounds is out of scope for this Strategy.

New playgrounds located in Neighbourhood Parks are to be categorized as Generalized Playgrounds as a default, with the option to include accessible or inclusive elements or to be developed to a higher standard if there are site- or neighbourhood-specific considerations, such as Accessible Playground service area coverage.

ACCESSIBLE PLAYGROUND

Recommended service area: 1.5 km

Recommended minimum size: 400 m²

Accessible Playgrounds are intended to provide a range of accessible play options to a large service area than Generalized Playgrounds. These playgrounds may have a mix of accessible surface types and play components at varying elevations. In addition to the requirements of the CSA's Children's Playground Equipment and Surfacing Standard (required of every playground in the City), Annex H: Children's Playspaces and Equipment that are Accessible to Persons with Disabilities shall also apply. While Annex H can be applied to playgrounds of any size, a minimum size of 400 m2 is recommended for new developments to ensure a reasonable diversity of equipment can be provided.

New playgrounds located in Community Parks are generally to be developed to the Accessible Playground standard, such that a 1.5 km service area centered on the playground provides reasonable coverage for those areas not yet served by existing or otherwise planned Accessible Playgrounds. Where coverage is provided by another Inclusive or Accessible Playground within 1.5 km, another Playground Type may be selected, at the City's discretion.

MINIMUM ACCESSIBLE CRITERIA:

- A minimum of 50% of playground surfacing is to be unitary
- Annex H of CSA Z614:20 (or its most recent edition) shall apply, including all rules and recommendations for the number and diversity of Ground-Level and Elevated Play Components, their number to be located on Accessible Routes, as summarized by the following (see Appendix D for more details):
  - One of Each Type: At least one (1) of each Play Component Type provided at ground level must be on an Accessible Route.
  - A minimum number of Ground-Level Play Components are required relative to the number of Elevated Play Components provided, as per Table 12
  - If ramps provide access to at least 50% of Elevated Play Components—which must include at least three (3) different Play Component Types—then additional Ground-Level Play Components are not required
  - At least half of all Elevated Play Components (50%) must be on an Accessible Route, either by ramp or by transfer system, as per Table 13

Table 12. Ground-Level Play Component count requirements

Number of elevated play components provided	*Minimum number of ground-level play components required to be on accessible route*	*Minimum number of different types of ground-level play components required to be on accessible route*
1	Not applicable	Not applicable
2 to 4	1	1
5 to 7	2	2
8 to 10	3	3
11 to 13	4	3
14 to 16	5	3
17 to 19	6	3
20 to 22	7	4
23 to 25	8	4
More than 25	8 plus 1 for each additional 3 over 25, or fraction thereof	5

Table 13. Elevated Play Component ramp requirements for Accessible Playgrounds

NO. OF ELEVATED PLAY COMPONENTS	NO. OF ELEVATED PLAY COMPONENTS ACCESSIBLE BY RAMP
Less than 20	Optional
20 or more	Min. 25%

Supplementing to the requirements of Annex H, the following will be provided at a minimum, in all cases:

- One (1) each of the following Physical Play Component Types:
  - Balancing, Brachiating, Climbing, Rocking/Gliding, Sliding, Spinning/Rotating, and Swinging
- One (1) each of the following Sensory Play Component Types:
  - Auditory, Tactile, and Visual, provided on an Accessible Route
- One (1) each of the following, provided on an Accessible Route:
  - A Solitary Play Component or Low Stimulus Play Area
  - A Social-Emotional Play Component
  - A Communication Board

Consideration will additionally be given to the following, with rationale provided if deemed not feasible or appropriate:

- An accessible permanent shade structure, or shade provided by tree canopy on accessible surfacing

INCLUSIVE PLAYGROUND

Recommended service area: Citywide

Recommended minimum size: 600 m^2

Inclusive Playgrounds are meant to provide a high level of inclusive play, with opportunities for people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds to play together, alongside supportive amenities that encourage a high degree of Access and Comfort. In addition to the minimum criteria for Accessible Playgrounds, Inclusive Playgrounds require that all Play Components are accessible, that additional informational features, accessible parking, and accessible washrooms are provided, and that additional playground design strategies and site features are considered. In light of the need for additional infrastructure, it is recommended that the minimum size of Destination Inclusive Playgrounds be larger.

New playgrounds in City Parks are preferably to be developed to the Inclusive Playground standard. If an Inclusive Playground already exists within the park, no following playgrounds are required to be Inclusive. Playgrounds in Community Parks may also be considered for Inclusive development under the right conditions.

MINIMUM INCLUSIVE CRITERIA:

- Copy of All Minimum Accessible Playground Criteria are met
- All Elevated Play Components (100%) must be located on an Accessible Route, either by ramp or by transfer system, as per Table 14

Table 14. Elevated Play Component ramp requirements for Inclusive Playgrounds

NO. OF ELEVATED PLAY COMPONENTS	NO. OF ELEVATED PLAY COMPONENTS ACCESSIBLE BY RAMP
Less than 20	Min. 25%
20 or more	Min. 50%

- Accessible parking is provided and connected via an Accessible Route
- An accessible permanent washroom is available within the park site
- An onsite map is installed identifying supportive infrastructure

Consideration will additionally be given to the following, with rationale provided if not feasible or appropriate:

- An accessible permanent shade structure, or shade provided by tree canopy on accessible surfacing
- A surface design for navigation, on-ground games, themed patterning, etc.
- Colour and/or textural contrast for visual landmarking, avoiding common colour combinations associated with colour-blindness

> Note that not all components are required to have the same level of accessibility; for example, a slide at a higher elevation must be accessible by transfer system but may still require extended effort for some.

SPECIALIZED PLAYGROUNDS

Specialized Playgrounds are intended to accommodate valuable, specialized play experiences that may not have an inclusive focus. Existing examples include Natural Playgrounds and Outdoor Fitness, with others possible in future development. This Playground Type is intended only to identify playgrounds that provide these unique services and may be applied in conjunction with any other Playground Type as conditions support.

Specialized Playgrounds may be associated with any Park Classification except Connector Parks and are generally chosen to support a specific and defined outcome. They may also meet criteria for any other Playground Type and have a City-wide service area unless otherwise specified.

Specialized Playgrounds alone do not impact service area considerations for other Playground Types.

NEW & EXISTING PLAYGROUNDS

Inclusive Playgrounds are best suited for City Parks, where necessary supportive amenities can be provided with the space to pride them. Accessible Playgrounds are preferred in Community Parks, though other playground types may be considered under the right circumstances.

Known future growth areas, such as in Cherot and Jensen Lakes (Phase 2), will contribute to overall service coverage provided by Accessible Playgrounds, as per Figure 6. To round out this coverage, at least one more Accessible or Inclusive Playground will be required in each of the Rural NW and the NE Area Structure Plan future growth areas, with additional playground development supporting the recommended service area coverage detailed for Accessible Playgrounds.

The following table details the existing City-owned playgrounds to be designated as either Accessible or Inclusive. All other playgrounds are to be designated Generalized or Specialized, at the City's discretion.

Table 15. Proposed Accessible and Inclusive Playground Types for Existing Playgrounds

PLAYGROUND TYPE	PARK CLASSIFICATION	PLAYGROUNDS IMPACTED	NO.
ACCESSIBLE *service area: 1.5 km*	City	Lodgepole, Rotary	2
	Community	Attwood, Erin Ridge, Fountain, Kingsmeade, Natalia, Versailles	6
	Neighbourhood	Havenwood	1
INCLUSIVE *service area: Citywide*	City	Lacombe, Lions, Woodlands	3

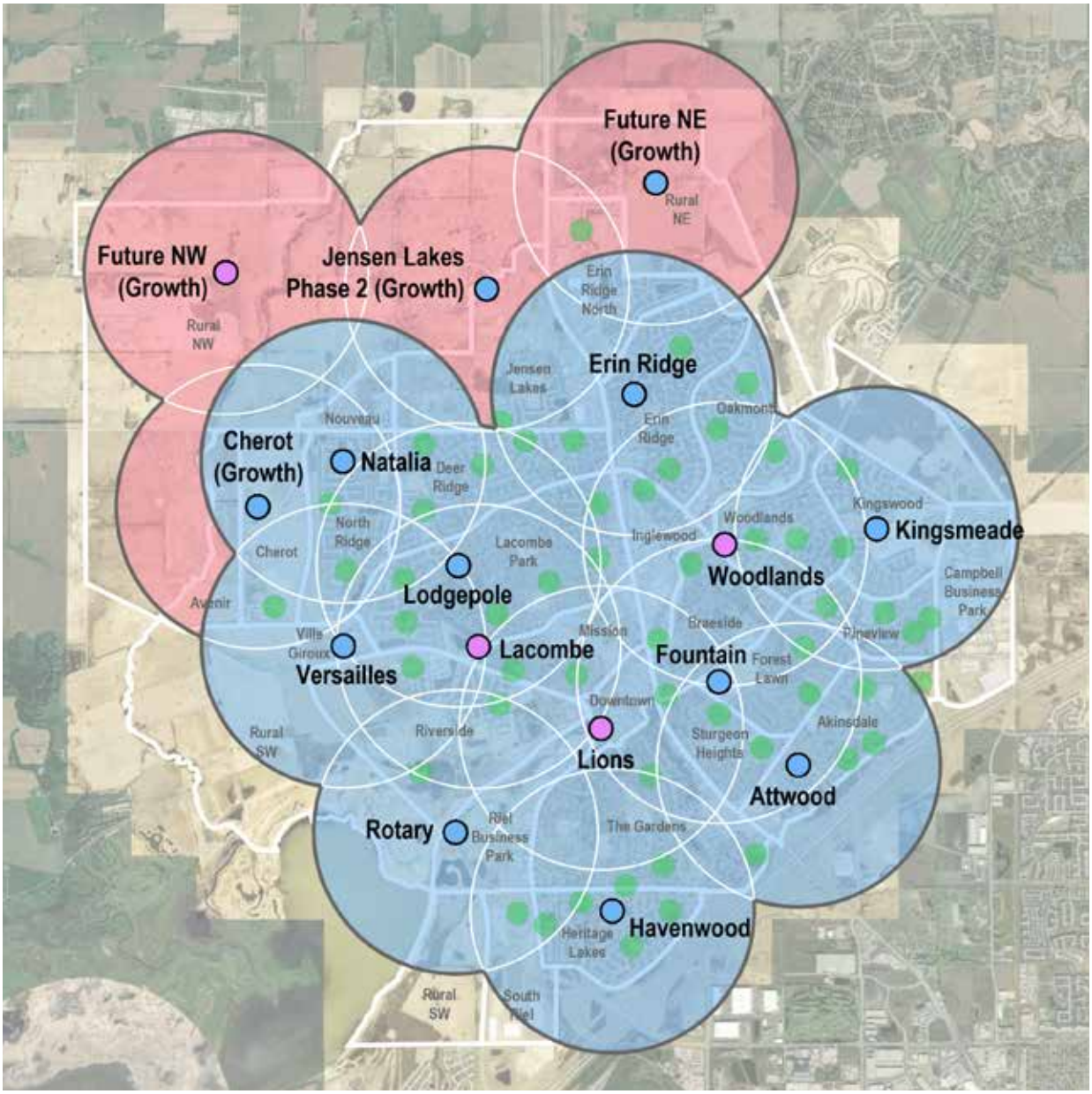
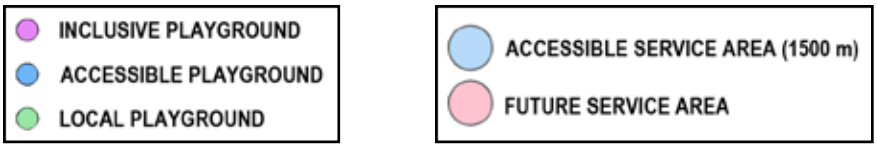


Figure 6. Accessible and Inclusive Playgrounds showing Accessible-level service area



Appendix A - Glossary

TERM	DEFINITION
Access *(core attribute)*	A core playground attribute that ensures playground users can navigate both to and through the play area; it answers the question, “can I get there?” by accounting for accessible surfaces, equipment, spacing, and information.
accessible	Accessibility, generally, is the design of environments that allow for the equitable use, participation, and inclusion of people of varying abilities and ages. In the context of playground development, accessibility refers to the settings, initiatives, and services designed to support navigation of the physical environment.
Accessible Playground *(Playground Type)*	A playground type which aims to provide a range of accessible play options to a neighbourhood-wide service area, with a focus on supporting the **core attributes** of Access and Diversity.
Accessible Route *(Annex H)*	A continuous unobstructed pathway from the perimeter of the use zone to the equipment, as defined in Annex H, and can be either elevated (i.e. by ramp) or at ground level (i.e. by surface); accessible routes between play areas and supportive amenities are defined by the CSA standard B651
Accessible Surface *(Annex H)*	Able to be navigated by children who uses wheelchairs, walkers, or other mobility aids without any obstacles.
active transportation	Any form of transportation that is powered by human energy such as walking, cycling or wheeling (skateboard, scooter), and may include public transit as an extension of these modes.
Age Group *(Annex H)*	The recommended age range to be served by a playground, typically in the ranges of 18 months to 5 years and 5 years to 12 years.
Annex H	The accessible addendum to the CSA’s Z614, “Children’s playgrounds and equipment that are accessible to persons with disabilities.”
Auditory *(Sensory Play, Component Type)*	A play component that engages the sense of hearing through exploring and processing acoustic information, such as by producing and locating sounds using a range of means; examples include talking tubes, noisemakers, and musical instruments.
Balancing *(Physical Play, Component Type)*	A play component that supports vestibular development, as well as bodily coordination and risk perception, often using narrow or unstable surfaces with a range of supports to mediate challenge level, such as hand holds; examples include balance beams, disc challenges, and tight rope walks.

TERM	DEFINITION
barrier	Anything that prevents a person with a disability from fully participating in an aspect of society because of their disability.
berm	Raised hilly landform, offering variation in elevation and angle of surfaces for a range of movement-related challenges; often located in grassy areas, but may also be accommodated in areas using unitary surfacing.
Best Practice	Known inclusive practices across industry, advocate, and academic literature supporting experiences of inclusive play; often understood through a framework of questions: “can I get there,” can I play,” and “can I stay?”
Brachiating *(Physical Play, Component Type)*	A play component that supports movement patterns that primarily target the use of the upper body, including the arms and trunk; examples include overhead ladders and rings, sliding tracks, and nets.
braille	A tactile language, enabling some with visual impairments to read.
City	The City of St. Albert.
City Park *(Park Classification)*	A classification of St. Albert Parks and Open Spaces, providing unique recreation opportunities and containing features that are not found in community or neighbourhood parks.
Climbing *(Physical Play, Component Type)*	A play component that supports the movement over elevated surfaces and structures, in vertical and horizontal directions, and often with a wide range of possible challenge; examples include ladders, boulder walls, rope bridges, and nets.
Comfort *(core attribute)*	A core playground attribute that supports playground users and caregivers by eliminating barriers that would otherwise cut a playground visit short; it answers the question, “can I stay?” by supporting rest, personal care needs, and protection from the elements
Communication Board	A board with icons, images, and words, providing support for nonverbal individuals or those with speaking difficulty to communicate with others.
Community Park *(Park Classification)*	A classification of St. Albert Parks and Open Spaces, providing structured recreation amenities such as ball diamonds, outdoor rinks, sport fields, tennis courts etc.
Component Type	A way of categorization components according to the specific style of play they aim to support, e.g. spinning, tactile, imaginative, etc.
composite play structure	Two or more Play Components that are connected or functionally linked to form one integrated unit, offering multiple play activities.

TERM	DEFINITION
Conservation Park *(Park Classification)*	A classification of St. Albert Parks and Open Spaces, to conserve environmentally sensitive areas and natural areas; may provide appropriate low-impact and low-density outdoor reaction opportunities.
contrast	The way one element exists in relation/oppositions to another, usually by texture, colour, tone, etc.; higher contrast means greater difference in element qualities and lower contrast means element qualities are more similar.
core attribute	The three main attributes (Access, Diversity, and Comfort) embodied by successful inclusive playgrounds, affirmatively answering the questions: “can I get there,” “can I play,” and “can I stay?”
CSA	The Canadian Standards Association, a not-for-profit organization that produces national standard frameworks for a variety of industries, governments, and consumers in Canada and internationally.
development *(senses)*	The process of change or growth in the physical, sensory and cognitive skills of humans.
disability	An umbrella term, covering impairments arising from interactions between a person’s body or mind and the society and environment in which they live; disability can be congenital or acquired, permanent or temporary, and may worsen, stay the same, or improve over time.
Diversity *(core attribute)*	A core playground attribute that supports a wide range of play experiences, allowing playground visitors to use the playground in the way that suits them best; it answers the question, “can I play?” by providing a diversity of options across play types, surfaces, and levels of challenge.
Elevated Play Component	A Play Component that can be reached from above or below the ground and is part of a larger play structure with multiple connected parts, offering different play activities together.
Engineering Standards	The City of St. Albert Municipal Engineering Standards.
EWF	Engineered Wood Fibre surfacing.
fencing	A separation used for safety and to minimize risk of wandering; may have open sightlines, facilitating easier caregiver supervision and thereby supporting peace of mind.
Gliding *(Physical Play, Component Type)*	A play component that supports linear motion and swaying, whether single-use or social; examples include spring riders, platform rockers, and flying foxes.

TERM	DEFINITION
Ground Level Play Component	A Play Component that can be accessed and exited at ground level.
impairment	A difficulty created by a difference in body function or structure, or a challenge in executing or participating in a task, action, or situation as a result of a physical or cognitive difference.
inclusive	In the City of St. Albert, inclusion is defined as creating a culture that embraces, respects, accepts, and values diversity. In the context of playground development, it means spaces are designed to welcome people of all ages and backgrounds, regardless of ability, and that users can play on their own terms, with a variety of opportunities for physical, sensory, and social play, and at different levels of challenge; inclusivity extends to those accompanying users, such as family members, friends, or caregivers.
Inclusive Playground *(Playground Type)*	A playground type which aims to provide a high level of inclusive play to a citywide service area, embodying all three inclusive core attributes by providing access to diverse opportunities for people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds to play together, alongside supportive amenities that support a high degree of comfort.
informational features	A Supportive Amenity providing details and/or navigation support; may include site information, programming, or wayfinding, and may employ braille, icons, images, written language, etc.
landmarking	A visual or textural difference in the environment, often used to detail transitions between uses of a space or mark edges for safety; may provides benefits for a wide range of play types and user needs, supporting those with visual and cognitive impairments in navigating the playground.
Local Playground *(Playground Type)*	A playground type which aims to provide shorter duration recreation and independent social gathering for families and youth living nearby, with a focus on hyper-local service and no minimum accessible or inclusive criteria.
loose-fill *(Surface Type)*	A surface type composed of a dynamic, movable material, and typically not considered accessible to mobility aids or wheeled implements without additional intervention, such as regular maintenance or material binding; examples include EWF, rubber mulch, pea gravel, and sand.
low-stimulus	A state of reduced activity, brightness, contrast, sound, or any other sensory input; low-stimulus areas (quiet areas) or equipment are considered restful in comparison to their high-stimulus (e.g. active, bright, jarring, loud) environments
mobility aids / devices	A term that refers to various assistive devices for people with mobility challenges or physical disabilities, such as wheelchairs, scooters, canes, and crutches.

TERM	DEFINITION
natural playground	A playground using natural or nature-like elements as a core theme; natural playgrounds are typically not developed in a way that prioritizes accessibility, due to the nature of the components used, which is not to say that they can't be made accessible with care.
Neighbourhood Park *(Park Classification)*	A classification of St. Albert Parks and Open Spaces, providing unstructured active and passive recreation opportunities for a variety of ages that aim to meet the interests of residents in the neighbourhood.
Outdoor Fitness	An outdoor feature supporting the physical wellbeing of users by providing public equipment for exercise; may enhance the experience of visiting a playground as a satellite feature, particularly for friends, family, and caregivers not directly participating in play.
Overhead *(Physical Play, Component Type)*	See Brachiating.
park	Land developed for various recreational uses, offering amenities like playgrounds, paths, and picnic areas to serve the community leisure needs.
Park Classification	Classifications used to categorize greenspaces according to the City of St. Albert Parks and Open Space Standards and Guidelines; classifications detail differences in park size, location, and intended use, among other features, requirements, and restrictions.
Physical Play *(Play Type)*	A type of play which engages both the external senses and the internal senses in service of motor development and movement.
PIP	Pour-in-Place rubber surfacing.
play	The recreational process of engaging the senses in the development of physical, mental, and social health, and improving motor skills, social behaviour, independence, and conflict resolution through games, imagination, and challenging activity.
play area / space	An outside area or space designed for children to play in; may include playground infrastructure and surfacing, as well as surrounding areas such as natural features and supportive amenities.
Play Component	A piece of infrastructure intended to encourage play, socializing, and/or learning; it can be man-made or natural and can either be a standalone feature or part of a bigger play structure.

TERM	DEFINITION
Play Type	A category of play, supported by various Play Components grouped by style of movement or sensory development they support, such as Physical Play (internal and external senses, motor skills), Sensory Play (external senses, sensory processing), and Social-Emotional Play (imaginative, social, and cognitive skills).
Playground Type	A defined playground status resultant from the Strategy, detailing the level of service provided by that playground. Includes Accessible, Inclusive, Local and Specialized.
proprioceptive system *(sense)*	One of the body's internal senses, the proprioceptive system is responsible for providing information about the body's position and movement relative to itself, and is associated with muscle awareness, articulation, and motor planning.
PRPI	The City of St. Albert's Playground Replacement Priority Index.
quiet area	Areas of low-stimulus, offering a safe escape from high-stimulus areas, of particular importance for those with sensory processing disorders; see also solitary play.
ramp	A walking surface that has a running slope no greater than 1:20 (an incline of 5% or less).
Rocking *(Physical Play, Component Type)*	A play component that supports linear motion and swaying, whether single-use or social; examples include spring riders, platform rockers, and flying foxes.
Rotating *(Physical Play, Component Type)*	A play component that supports the movement about an axis, with rotation positioning the user some distance from the axis (see also, Spinning); examples include dish spinners, carousels, and spinning climbers.
senses	The body's systems responsible for relaying information about the body and its environment to the brain, allowing it to perceive the world and use that information for cognitive and motor planning (thinking, responding, imagining, moving, etc.); the body uses seven (7) core senses to perceive the world, though only five (5) systems are typically supported by playground activities: • auditory / hearing, • proprioceptive / body awareness, • tactile / touch, • vestibular / spatial awareness, and • visual / sight
Sensory Play *(Play Type)*	A play type which engages the external senses in service of sensory system development.
service area	The theoretical maximum geographic area a playground is expected to serve.

TERM	DEFINITION
shade structure	A permanent piece of infrastructure, inside or adjacent to a playground, providing shade for users.
sightline	The uninterrupted line of sight between a person and the subject of their view; open sightlines are required for effective supervision of playground users by caregivers and foster a greater sense of security.
site	A well-defined area or piece of land marked by a property line or known boundary.
Sliding *(Physical Play, Component Type)*	A play component that supports gravitational motion, in linear, wave-like, and spiraling directions; examples include open, tube, roller, and hill slides.
Social-Emotional Play *(Play Type)*	A type of play which is concerned with navigating social situations, engaging the imagination, and challenging the mind; this may include participation in games with rules, role play, parallel play, observation, creative play, story telling, or any number of other activities.
solitary play	A type of play that provide safe escapes from more active areas, for those who need a break from high-stimulus activity and/or the chance to relax independent of caregivers.
Specialized Playground *(Playground Type)*	A playground type which aims to provide specialized play experiences and may coincide with other playground types as conditions allow.
Spinning *(Physical Play, Component Type)*	A play component type that supports movement about an axis, with spinning positioning the user on the axis (see also, Rotating); examples include dish spinners, carousels, and spinning climbers
Strategy	The City of St. Albert Inclusive Play Strategy.
Supportive Amenity	The infrastructure used to support a more enjoyable, comfortable playground experience by providing rest and observation points for users and caregivers, or by allowing them to attend to certain personal needs without needing to interrupt their stay; examples include seating, shade, washrooms, wayfinding, fencing, etc.
Surface Type	A way of differentiating surfaces by material (e.g. EWF, PIP, sand) and/or quality (i.e. unitary or loose-fill).
Swinging *(Physical Play, Component Type)*	A play component that supports gravitational movement in a wide variety of directions from linear to rotational to spinning, and often in a pendulum-like fashion; examples include belt, bucket, saucer, and social swings.

TERM	DEFINITION
Tactile Play *(Sensory Play, Component Type)*	A play component that engages the sense of touch, such as through differences in texture, pressure, temperature, vibration, and material; examples include contrasting surfaces (i.e. smooth versus rough, soft versus hard), a range of materials such as metal, plastic, stone, and wood, and dynamic fluids (i.e. sand or water tables)
transfer system	Platforms, handles, and other equipment that helps individuals transfer from a wheelchair or mobility aid to play components or composite play structures.
UAP	The City of St. Albert's Universal Access Plan.
unitary *(Surface Type)*	Surfaces that are uniform, continuous, and stable; typically, though not always, flat and/or level.
vestibular system (sense)	One of the body's internal senses, the vestibular system provides information about the body's position and movement in space and is associated balance and spatial awareness.
Visual Play *(Sensory Play, Component Type)*	A play component that engages the sense of sight and supports visual processing, such as through reading, distinguishing objects, motion tracking, and focusing; examples include mazes, matching games, kaleidoscopes, telescopes, and language boards
wandering	Sometimes referred to as "elopement," it is the sudden user departure from the playground; wandering poses safety risks when playgrounds are nearby unsafe features such as roads, drop-offs, bodies of water, etc., and is typically mitigated with fencing.
wayfinding	The infrastructure supporting (or process of using) sensory cues to understand one's location, identify a destination, and/or navigate to or from these places.
Z614	The CSA standard for playgrounds, "Children's Playground Equipment and Surfacing."

Appendix B - Resources

LOCAL JURISDICTION

Municipal

Flourish - Growing to 100k: City of St. Albert Municipal Development Plan, 2021

Parks Bylaw 7/2022, 2022

Land Use Bylaw 18/2024, 2024

Municipal Engineering Standards - Appendix F: Recreation Amenity Standards, 2021

City of St. Albert Parks and Open Space Standards and Guidelines, 2023

City of St. Albert Universal Access Plan, 2018

St. Albert Census: 2024 In-Depth Analysis, 2024

Playground Asset Inventory & Replacement Prioritization Index, ND

Playground Lifecycle Photo Inventory, 2020

Annual Playground Inspection Report, 2024

Cherot East: Parks Master Plan, 2024

Erin Ridge North Phase 2: Parks Master Plan, 2021

North Ridge Phase II: Parks Master Plan, 2023

Ville Giroux: Parks Master Plan, 2021

Riverside Park: Master Plan Update, 2021

Jensen Lakes: Parks Master Plan, 2021

Provincial

Government of Alberta, Ministry of Municipal Affairs, *Accessibility Design Guide*, AB, Canada, 2024

Government of Alberta, *The Alberta Human Rights Act*, 2000

Federal

Government of Canada, *A Way with Words and Images: Guide for communicating with and about persons with disabilities*, 2024

Government of Canada, *Guidance on the Accessible Canada Regulation: Consulting persons with disabilities, Annex: Inclusive language considerations*, 2022

CSA/ASC B651:23, *Accessible Design for the Built Environment*, 2023

CAN/CSA Z614:20, *Children's Playground Equipment and Surfacing*, 2021

OTHER JURISDICTIONS

Municipal

City of Burlington, *Accessibility Design Standards*, Burlington, ON, 2016

City of Calgary, *Inclusive Play Spaces Implementation Plan*, Calgary, AB, 2018

City of Calgary, *Inclusive Playgrounds - Report Back: What We Heard*, Calgary, AB, 2023

City of Grande Prairie, *Parks, Trails & Orchards*, Grande Prairie, AB, ND

City of Grande Prairie, *Playground Strategy*, Grande Prairie, AB, 2024

City of Lincoln Nebraska, *Outdoor Inclusive Play*, Lincoln, NB, USA, 2022

City of Medicine Hat, *Playground Management Plan*, Medicine Hat, AB, 2021

City of Regina, *Adapted Recreation Plan* - 2022-2025, Regina, SK, 2022

City of Toronto, *Child Engagement Toolkit*, Toronto, ON, 2019

MidCoast Council, *Playspace Strategy*, MidCoast Council Area, NSW, Australia, 2023

Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, *Parks Master Plan*, RMWB, AB, 2019

Provincial / State

Accessible Playgrounds Ontario, Accessible Playground Directory, ON, Canada, ND

Government of Indiana, *Accessible Playground Toolkit: Ideas and information to help Indiana communities create accessible playgrounds for all users*, IN, USA, 2019

Government of New South Wales, Everyone Can Play: A Guideline to Create Inclusive Playspaces, NSW, Australia, 2023

Government of South Australia, *Inclusive Play: Guidelines for accessible playspaces*, SA, Australia, ND

Federal

Government of the UK, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, *Developing Accessible Play Space: A good practice guide*, UK, 2003

ADVOCATES AND INDUSTRY PARTNERS

American Society of Planning, *Standards for Outdoor Recreational Areas*, USA, 1965

Canadian Coalition for Accessible Playspaces, *Accessible Playspaces in Canada: A guidebook for children's playspaces that are accessible to persons with disabilities based on CAN/CSA Z614-07 Annex H*, Canada, 2007

Canadian Disability Participation Project, *Evidence-Informed Recommendations for Designing Inclusive Playgrounds to Enable Participation for Children with Disabilities*, Canada, 2021

Canadian Disability Participation Project, *"What Makes a Playground Inclusive?"*, Canada, 2022

Canadian Disability Participation Project, *A Blueprint for Building Quality Participation in on Playgrounds for Children with Disabilities*, Canada, 2023

Canadian Disability Participation Project, *Play Finds a Way Through Playgrounds*, Canada, 2023

Canadian Public Health Association, *Accessibility and Usability of Play Spaces*, Canada, 2019

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