



Report to: General Committee

Meeting Date: October 2, 2017

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**SUBJECT:** Parks Renaissance Program Update  
**PREPARED BY:** Tanya Lewinberg – Public Realm Coordinator  
Raymond Law – Manager, Business and Technical Services

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**RECOMMENDATION:**

- 1) THAT the report dated October 2, 2017 entitled “Parks Renaissance Program Update” be received; and
- 2) THAT Staff be authorized and directed to do all things necessary to give effect to this resolution.

**PURPOSE:**

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with an update on the Parks Renaissance program, and outline potential future improvements to be implemented through the program.

**BACKGROUND:**

The Parks Renaissance Strategy builds on the principles from *Shared Places, Our Spaces* – Markham’s Public Realm Strategy, with a focus on the needs of older parks in the City.

In May 2016, Council approved the Park Renaissance Strategy, establishing a framework and program for the re-imagination of and reinvestment in Markham’s existing parks and open spaces.

The principles of the Parks Renaissance Strategy are to be:

- *Inclusive and Diverse* – Support opportunities for all demographics and encourage community engagement.
- *Connected* – Deliver projects that facilitate a connected community and City.
- *Innovative and Beautiful* – Create diverse, vibrant and memorable spaces.
- *Responsive* – Support a range of activities that respond to leisure and cultural needs and interests.
- *Sustainable* – Support the protection, enhancement and continued health of natural features and enhance stewardship and education.
- *Flexible* – Consider multi-functional spaces and future adaptability to changing needs.
- *Fiscally Responsible* – Consider long-term operational impacts as well as capital costs.

Guided by these principles, the Park Renaissance program implements improvements to existing parks to meet current standards, and the diverse recreational and leisure needs of

Markham residents, workers and visitors. The improvements of older parks and related infrastructure employ light touches that are impactful and represent the needs of changing neighbourhoods. Park improvements are limited to a maximum of \$100,000 per park but are generally minor in scope, being between \$5,000 and \$35,000 per park.

## **OPTIONS/DISCUSSION:**

### **GOALS**

In alignment with the vision prescribed in the Public Realm Strategy, the goals of the Parks Renaissance Strategy are:

- *Made in Markham innovation and design* – Reviewing our existing spaces: improving design, innovation and accessibility.
- *Keep Markham Beautiful* – Preserving and enhancing our heritage assets, and maintaining our green assets.
- *Create Gateways and Destinations* – Developing green and cultural assets as destinations, and showcasing public art.
- *Harmonize our efforts and share our resources* – improving partnerships, sponsorships, and joint ventures.
- *Animate our neighbourhoods and districts* – interpreting our City, and engaging our community.

### **ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY**

Staff initiated the Park Renaissance program by meeting with the Ward Councillors to identify existing parks needs in their wards, ensuring that Councillor feedback and input was integrated into the program. The meetings assisted in identifying the initial improvement projects of the program.

Input on various aspects of the program was provided by internal business units including Operations – Parks, Parks and Open Space Development, Corporate Communications and Community Engagement, and Recreation Services. These groups expressed support for the program and assisted in identifying opportunities for parks improvements.

A survey was created and distributed to the public, to collect feedback on the parks system. A copy of the survey is included as Attachment “A”. The survey was made available on the City website, at the Contact Centre, and at library branch locations from March to July 2017. Residents were asked to evaluate up to two parks in their area, and provide feedback on the condition, time and frequency of visits, desired park improvements, and suggestions to increase park usage. The survey allowed residents to express their interest in volunteering in parks, and over 100 respondents identified themselves as interested. Staff will work with the Adopt-A-Park program team to engage these potential volunteers.

Staff engaged other stakeholders, including ratepayers associations, seniors’ groups, York Region District School Board (YRDSB) and York Catholic District School Board (YCDSB) staff, through meetings and discussions resulting in partnerships that extended the reach of the survey. For example, the partnership with YRDSB staff had teachers at

schools promote the survey to students and parents. Additionally, a member of a seniors' group volunteered to translate the survey into Chinese, so that a greater number of members within the group could participate.

To raise public awareness and promote the survey, Staff attended the Unionville Festival and the Markham Village Music Festival, and distributed information cards with a link to the online survey. The Corporate Communications and Community Engagement department promoted the survey through several social media updates and advertisements in Markham Life magazine.

Of the 625 responses to the survey, the most popular time to visit the park was in the evening. Of the users surveyed, 44 per cent attended parks several times per week. Time of day and frequency are important factors when considering programming, planning and management.

The survey asked about improvements users want to see in their parks, in several different categories: education, entertainment, fitness, and environmental. Comparing the combined responses in all four categories, the results indicate a strong desire for shade structures across the City (selected by 466 respondents), followed by an interest in educational and musical play equipment (selected by 302 respondents), and facilities for exercise in the parks (circuits and exercise equipment selected by 228 and 225 respondents, respectively). A summary of responses to the survey is included as Attachment "B".

#### PARK ANALYSIS AND PROJECT IDENTIFICATION PLAN

In addition to the aforementioned public outreach, Staff initiated evaluations using the following criteria:

- *Park conditions* – Consider general aging of the park infrastructure, amenities, or facilities of all parks ten years or older.
- *Recreation needs* – The improvement fulfills an identified need in the integrated leisure master plan, or the existing facilities or infrastructure are under-utilized.
- *Population or socio-demographic changes* – The improvement is responsive to demographic changes in service area, as a result of an aging neighbourhood or cultural shifts.
- *Park usage* – Community use of the park or nature of park use has changed, particularly if it impacts the physical or social capacity of the park to support new activities or current policies and programs (e.g. Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) compliance)

The evaluations considered included park amenities, their condition, and existing vegetation. The park evaluations assist in determining the type and location of park amenities required in the City. This information will also be used to evaluate differences between parks of varying ages. High-level benchmarking was also undertaken to compare the park amenities offered by other municipalities.

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### PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

Based on feedback collected from Council, Staff, and the public, combined with benchmarking and evaluation data, the following park improvements were implemented or will reach substantial completion by the year's end:

- Installation of additional seating at Green Lane Park. Through coordination and alignment with Operations – Parks, Staff have added benches as a need was identified.
- Creation of Felix Opatowski Park. The transformation of a small area of green space associated with the hydro corridor into a simple seating area with plantings, provides a gathering place for the community.
- Installation of upgrades that are AODA compliant in Glencrest Park. AODA compliance was coordinated for the overall project, which includes accessible play structure elements and the pathway and connecting curb aprons.
- Installation of educational play boards at William Robb Park for small children. The placement of the play boards adjacent to the benches surrounding the play area allow small children a place to play, close by their caregivers, and also provides children with difficulty walking in sand an activity on a hard surface.
- Installation of two games tables at John Stegman Woods Park, and the relocation of existing park furniture to make the games tables accessible for wheelchairs and strollers. One of the tables incorporates an International Chess board, while the other has a Chinese Chess board.
- Installation of a shade structure at Ashton Meadows Park to provide shelter to a variety of users including those who use the park for exercise, visitors of the sports fields, and visitors of the 100 Tree Memorial. Shade structures provide visitors with reprieve from the sun and rain, and also provide a gathering place within the park, extending the daily and seasonal usage of the park.
- Installation of adult exercise equipment in eight parks across the City. The largest enhancement the team has initiated is the installation of adult exercise equipment. Unlike other installations of adult exercise equipment in the City where exercise equipment is grouped together, pieces of exercise equipment are arranged along a path, spaced through the park, creating an exercise circuit. Park users can integrate the use of the exercise equipment into their other activities at the park. Installations at Alma Walker Park and Wismer Park are complete. Installations at E.B.F. Robinson Park, Featherstone Park, Highgate Park, Simonston Park, John Button Park, and Monarch Park are currently underway and expected to be completed this year.

### FUTURE IMPROVEMENTS PLANNING

Staff will continue to utilize feedback and evaluation data collected to develop future park improvements. The following are improvements that Staff have initiated or will be initiating in the near future.

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- Install exercise signage in parks with suitable pathways, creating full body workouts with exercises, without the equipment stations. This is a lower cost alternative to additional circuits with adult exercise equipment.
  - Install exercise signage at the adult exercise circuits, providing instructions for warm up and cool down, as well as additional exercises that can enhance the adult exercise equipment circuits to become full body workouts. The additional signage with exercises will be installed along the pathways between the equipment stations.
  - Reconfigure Annswell Park. Annswell Park is a small historic park in Thornhill commemorating Holy Ann's well. The park is named after Holy Ann Preston, whose well and prayer shed is replicated in the park. The reconfiguration will connect these features and better integrate them into the park. The work planned for Annswell Park was developed with input and support from the ward Councillor, and the Society for the Preservation of Historic Thornhill. Input was also provided by the Thornhill Garden and Horticultural Society, who have volunteered to plant and maintain the perennial plantings at the reconfigured park.
  - Install additional play equipment to accommodate older children at Millennium Park and Green Lane Park.
  - Install a full-size basketball court at Benjamin Marr Park.
  - Install a wood carving peg sculpture and ring bench at a park – location to be determined.
  - Plant pollinator gardens in parks throughout the City – locations to be determined.
  - Create a Shinrin Yoku in a woodlot or forested area of a park by developing seating areas within woodlots. Shinrin Yoku is a Japanese concept that encourages the connection of people with nature and the positive effects it has on health and well-being – location to be determined.

Further park improvements will be developed based on feedback and continued evaluation of park needs. Through the Park Renaissance program, other park needs will continued to be identified, such as trees, seating, waste/recycling receptacles, which will inform other City programs.

As an additional important aspect of the Park Renaissance program, the team reached out to Park People. Park People is a non-profit organization that works with community groups that are interested in being more engaged by helping them identify a vision for their parks and creating a plan for the community to reach their parks-related goals. Staff are exploring opportunities to partner with Park People to further engage the community.

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**FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS:**

The following table provides a summary of the financial status for capital project 16170 – Growth Related Park Improvements (Parks Renaissance).

Approved Budget	1,179,400
Expenditures & Commitment To-Date	422,615
Budget Remaining	756,785

**HUMAN RESOURCES CONSIDERATIONS:**

Not applicable.

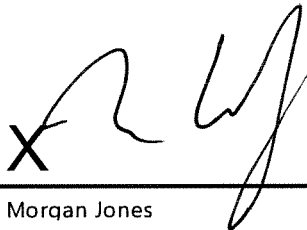
**ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:**

The Parks Renaissance program is aligned to the City's areas of strategic focus for Municipal Services; Parks and Diversity, including Accessibility.

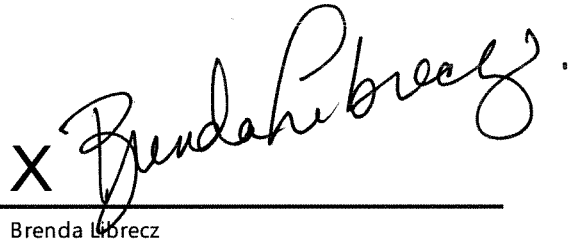
**BUSINESS UNITS CONSULTED AND AFFECTED:**

Corporate Communications & Community Engagement Department  
Recreation Services  
Parks and Open Space Development

**RECOMMENDED BY:**

X 

Morgan Jones  
Director, Operations

X 

Brenda Librecz  
Commissioner, Community & Fire Services

**ATTACHMENTS:**

Attachment "A" – Parks Renaissance Survey  
Attachment "B" – Parks Renaissance Survey Results

Park Renaissance Project Survey (web)

Personal information on this survey is collected under the authority of the Section 94 of Municipal Act, 2001, c.25, as amended. The personal information you have provided will be used for future communication about Park Renaissance program and volunteer opportunities. If you have questions about this collection or further comment, please contact PublicRealm@markham.ca.

Please complete the following survey to improve our park development and recreation program.

What is your age group? (v your answer)

- ☐ 20 and below    ☐ 21-30    ☐ 31-40    ☐ 41-50    ☐ 51-60    ☐ 61 and above

Marriage status (v your answer): ☐ married ☐ single

How many people in your household? \_\_\_\_\_ How many children? \_\_\_\_\_

How old are the children? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you bring your pet(s) to the park with you? (v your answer)

- ☐ YES    ☐ NO

Please pick two (2) existing parks from the ward list and map to answer the questions below.  
Park(s) location can be verified on markham.ca, Online Service/Map/Parks and Pathways Map. Or  
City of Markham mobile app (Please download at [www.markham.ca](http://www.markham.ca))

PARK # 1: \_\_\_\_\_

How would you rate the current condition of this park (v your answer)?

- ☐ EXCELLENT 😊    ☐ SATISFACTORY 😐    ☐ NEEDS IMPROVEMENT 😞

How often do you visit this park with your family and/or friends?

- ☐ Several times each week    ☐ Monthly  
☐ Weekly    ☐ A few times a year

What time of day do you prefer to visit the park?

- ☐ MORNING    ☐ AFTERNOON    ☐ EVENING

If the City of Markham were to introduce a new outdoor elements to this park, which of the following ideas would you be most interested in (can be more than one).

EDUCATION – Interpretive Signage for History, Geography and Environment. Additional Play Panel and Site Furniture.

- ☐ Educational Play Panel    ☐ Musical Play Panel  
☐ Interpretive Signage    ☐ Game Table

ENTERTAINMENT – Community Facility needs

- ☐ Shade Structure    ☐ Picnic Table    ☐ Bench

FITNESS

- ☐ Adult Fitness Equipment    ☐ Group Exercise \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ Outdoor Self Circuit Training

ENVIRONMENT

- ☐ Pollinator Garden / Butterfly Garden    ☐ Tree Planting  
☐ Perennial/ Herb Garden with signage    ☐ Open Green / Play area

PARK # 2: \_\_\_\_\_

How would you rate the current condition of this park?

- ☐ EXCELLENT 😊      ☐ SATISFACTORY 😐      ☐ NEEDS IMPROVEMENT 😞

How often do you visit this park with your family and/or friends ?

- ☐ Several times each week      ☐ Monthly  
☐ Weekly      ☐ A few times a year

What time of day do you prefer to visit the park?

- ☐ MORNING      ☐ AFTERNOON      ☐ EVENING

If the City of Markham were to introduce a new outdoor program to this park, which of the following ideas would you be most interested in (can be more than one).

**EDUCATION – Interpretive Signage for History, Geography and Environment. Additional Play Panel and Site Furniture.**

- ☐ Educational Play Panel      ☐ Musical Play Panel  
☐ Interpretive Signage      ☐ Game Table

**ENTERTAINMENT – Community Facility needs**

- ☐ Shade Structure      ☐ Picnic Table      ☐ Bench

**FITNESS**

- ☐ Adult Fitness Equipment      ☐ Group Exercise \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ Outdoor Self Circuit Training

**ENVIRONMENT**

- ☐ Pollinator Garden / Butterfly Garden      ☐ Tree Planting  
☐ Perennial/ Herb Garden with signage      ☐ Open Green / Play area

**Suggested ideas and activities**

How can we increase the usage at park #1?

**Suggested ideas and activities**

How can we increase the usage at park #2?

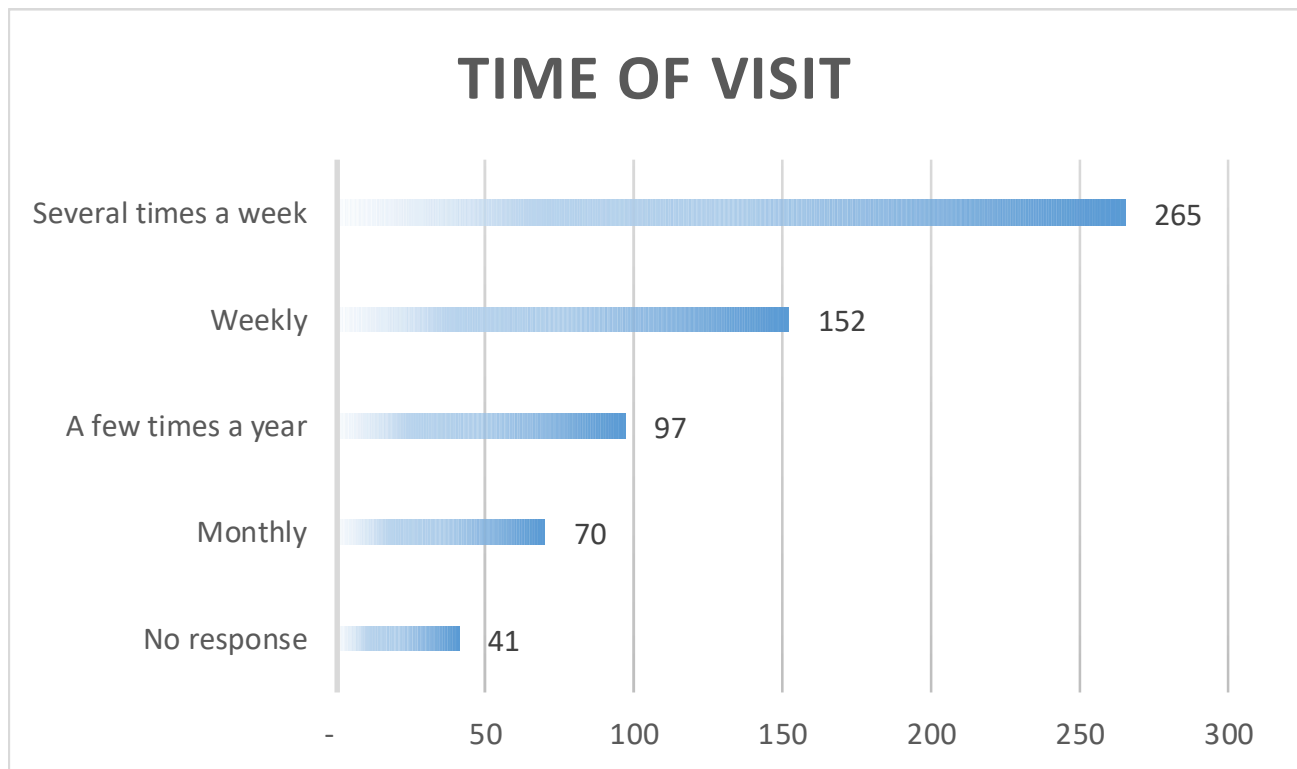
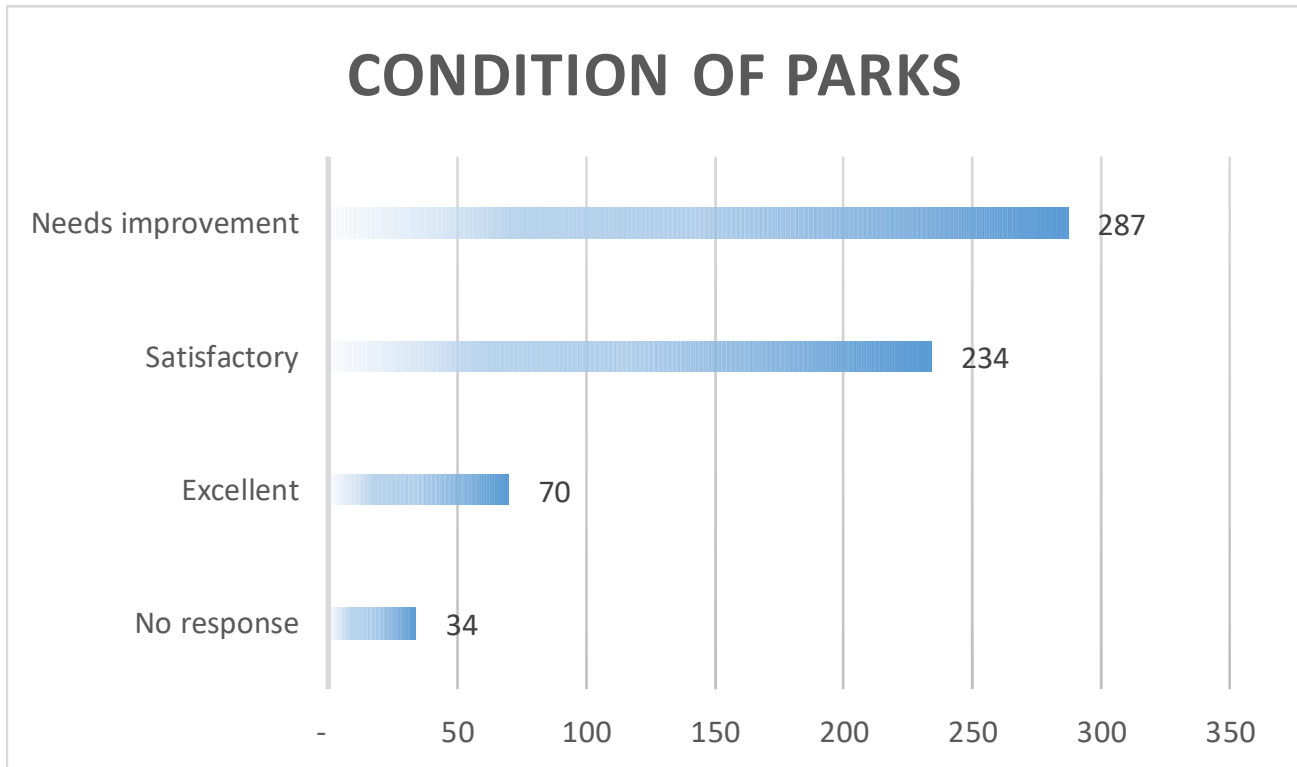
Are you interested in volunteering to assist our parks?

- ☐ NO      ☐ YES    Name : \_\_\_\_\_    Contact Number: \_\_\_\_\_    Email: \_\_\_\_\_

The City of Markham acknowledges and appreciates that the communication of personal information is extremely sensitive and it recognizes the need to protect the personal privacy of individuals who interact with the City of Markham through various means of communication. The City of Markham is subject to the provisions of the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection Act (MFIPPA). The first part of MFIPPA states that all government records should be available to the public with the exception of specifically enumerated types of information. The second part of the MFIPPA provides for the protection of personal information. The MFIPPA requires that a local government protect the privacy of an individual's personal information that exists in the governmental records and that it follow a privacy protection scheme that includes rules regarding the collection, retention, use, disclosure and disposal of personal information in its custody or control. For more information, visit the Ontario Information & Privacy Commission web site at [www.ipc.on.ca](http://www.ipc.on.ca) External link.

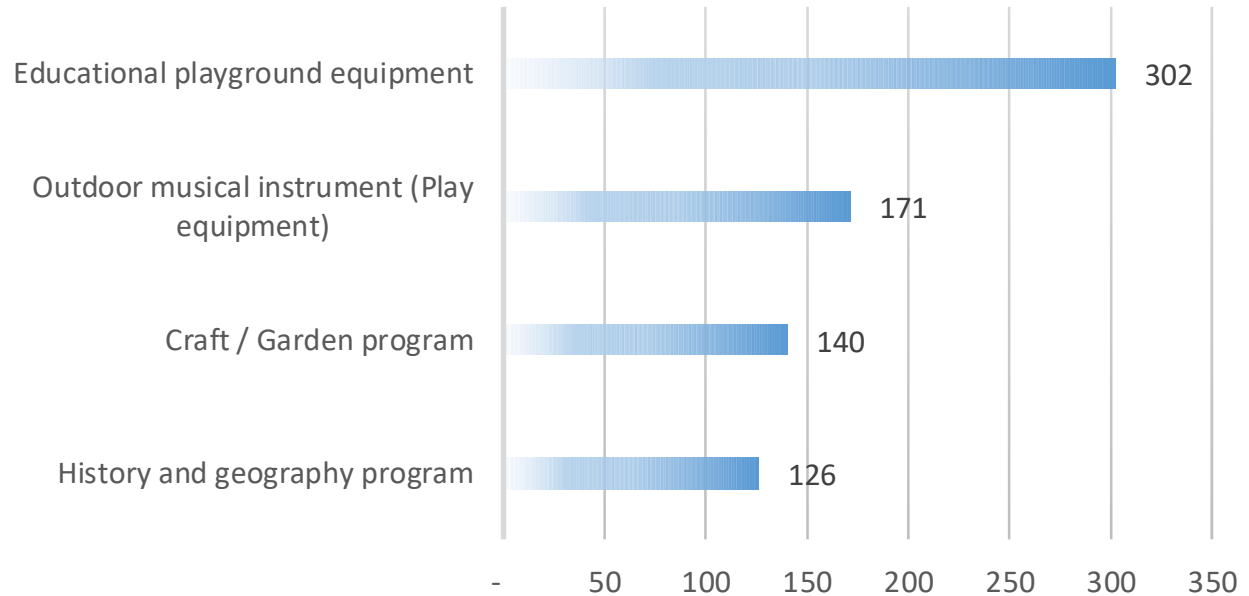


## Parks Renaissance Survey Results

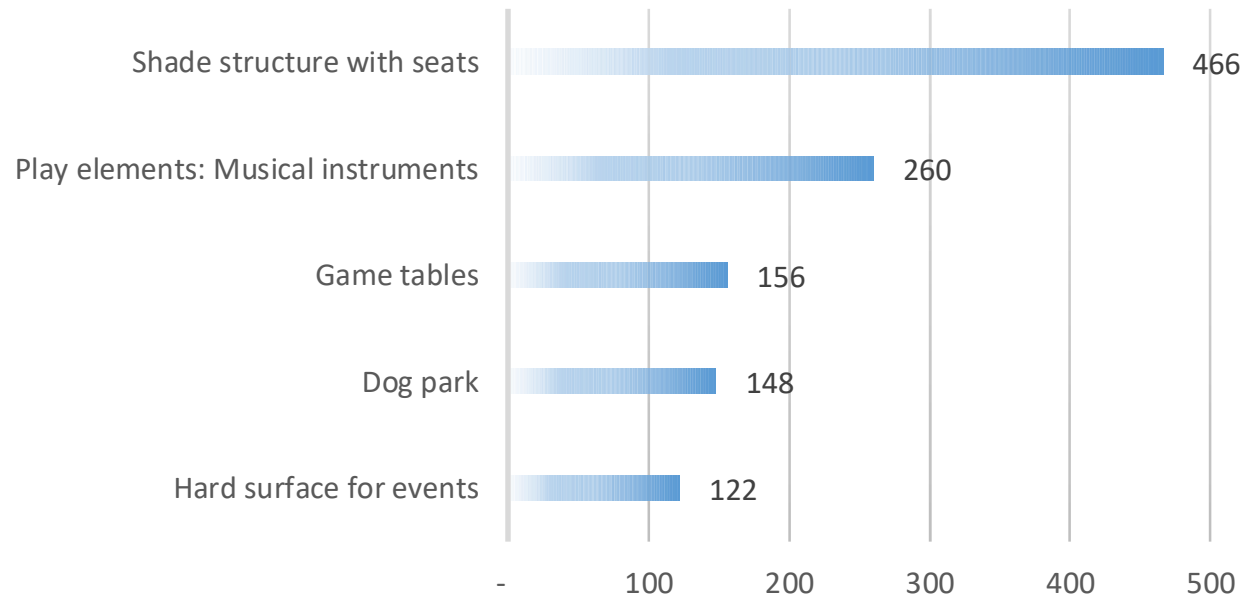


## Parks Renaissance Survey Results – cont’d

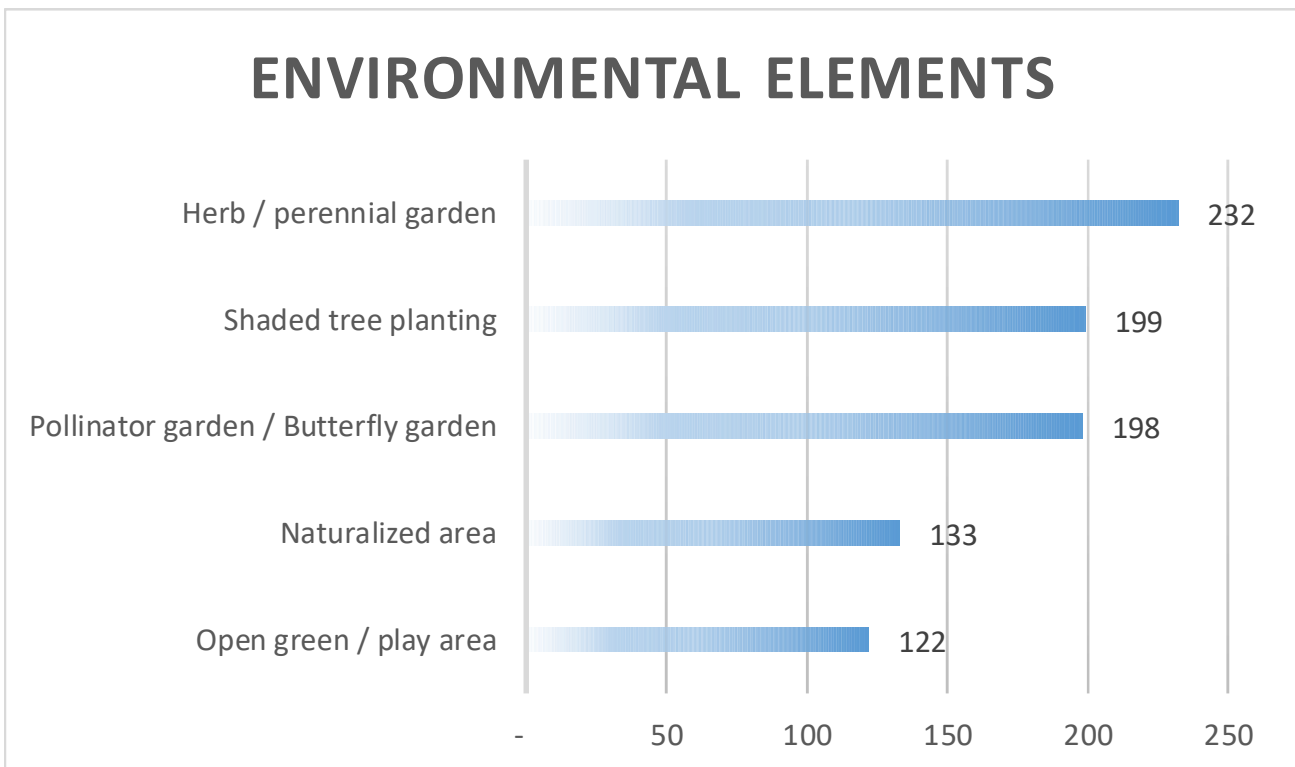
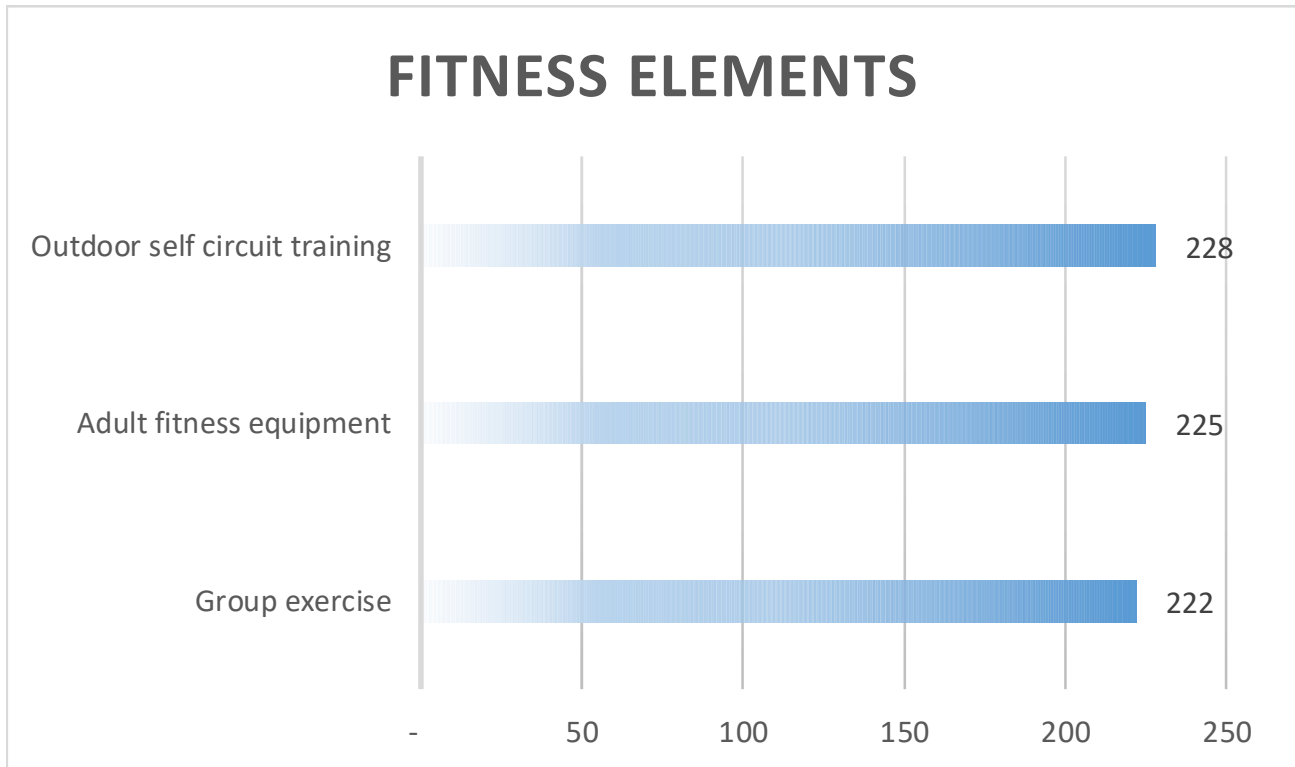
### EDUCATIONAL ELEMENTS



### ENTERTAINMENT ELEMENTS



## Parks Renaissance Survey Results – cont’d



## Parks Renaissance Survey Results – cont’d

