



The Corporation of the City of Courtenay

# Staff Report

**To:** Council

**File No.:** 6100-05

**From:** Director of Recreation, Culture, and Community Services

**Date:** May 21, 2025

**Subject:** Woodcote Park Playground Replacement and What We Heard Report

**PURPOSE:** To update Council on the status of the Woodcote Park Playground Replacement Project and endorse the Preferred Concept Plan to proceed to detailed design and construction.

## BACKGROUND:

Woodcote Park is a four-acre community park located in West Courtenay, located at 1281 17<sup>th</sup> Street bounded by Cumberland Road, Willemar Avenue, 17<sup>th</sup> Street, 16<sup>th</sup> Street and Tull Avenue. The adjacent properties are mostly single-family residential properties. Current features in the park include mature hedging and trees on the perimeter of the park, a washroom building, an aged playground and basketball court, and a playing field. The park is within a ten-minute walk to two schools (K-9), one of which currently does not have a playground, the Wachiy Friendship Centre, and a 40-unit affordable housing complex prioritizing Indigenous Elders and individuals and people living with disabilities with low to moderate incomes.

Based on the City's condition assessment and asset management registry, Woodcote is a priority for playground replacement. The existing playground is thirty years old and at the end of its useful life.

On September 11, 2024, Council adopted the *Let's Play, Courtenay!* Park Playground Design Standards. These standards provide guiding principles and best practices for improving Courtenay's new and replacement park playgrounds.

At the January 15, 2025 Council Meeting, Council resolved the following in response to the Comox Valley Masters Soccer Club's request to collaborate on a timber frame pavilion in Woodcote Park.

*THAT Council direct staff to consider the location for the proposed timber frame pavilion through the Woodcote Park Playground Upgrade design process; and*

*THAT Council delegate authority to the Director of Recreation, Culture and Community Services to determine the terms and conditions of the agreements to be entered into for the project; and*

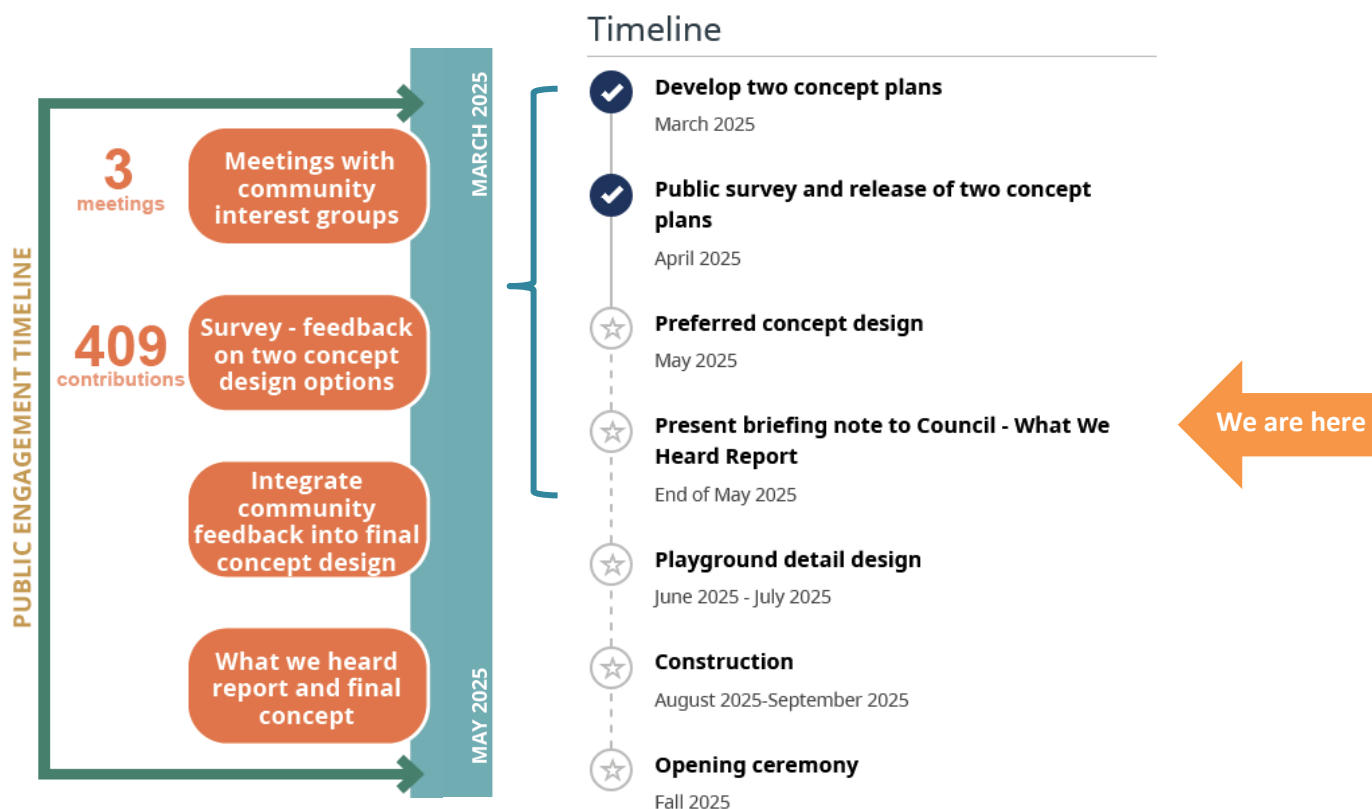
*THAT the Director of Recreation Culture, and Community Services be authorized to execute the agreement(s) on behalf of the City; and*

*THAT the City contribute up to \$30,000 towards the project through Partners In Parks funding, subject to the Comox Valley Masters Soccer Club agreeing to the location of the proposed timber frame pavilion through the Woodcote Park Playground Replacement Design process.*

## DISCUSSION:

In February 2025, staff kicked off the Woodcote Park Playground Replacement and Upgrade Project - the first community park to be designed utilizing the *Let's Play, Courtenay!* Park Playground Design Standards. PWL Partnership Landscape Architects was engaged to deliver the park playground plan for this project. The project includes the following key project milestones as illustrated in the following timeline (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Public Engagement Timeline and Project Timeline



The process included a review of the City's strategic planning documents such as the Official Community Plan (2022), Parks and Recreation Master Plan (2019), *Let's Play, Courtenay!* Park Playground Design Standards (2024), Urban Forest Strategy (2019), and Strategic Cultural Plan (2025). These documents informed the development of the two draft concept plans presented to the public for feedback.

## Timber Frame Pavilion

Due to an April 1<sup>st</sup> project completion deadline for the Canadian Dermatology Association grant of \$7,500 for the proposed timber frame pavilion, staff requested PWL to prioritize determining the best location for the timber frame structure that would benefit all users in the park. PWL identified two potential locations (see orange stars in Figure 2):

1. Past the existing basketball court at the northeast corner of the sports field, or
2. Between the playground and the sports field.

*Figure 2: Proposed locations for Timber frame pavilion*



PWL recommended these locations, between the field and the playground or field and basketball court as they would offer the greatest use to the most park users (i.e. playground, field, basketball court, and park users alike). It could serve as a gathering spot for multi-generational family picnics and children's birthday parties and be closer to the park's supporting amenities, such as the new playground and the washrooms, while also offering sports groups a gathering place before and after games and practices.

Comox Valley Master's Soccer Club (the Club) decided not to proceed with the project as their preferred location remained mid-field on the north side of the sports field (blue star in Figure 1). The Club preferred a structure located close to both teams, where players could gather and take shelter during and after games. They believed the proposed locations were not ideal for the soccer teams.

Staff relayed to the Club that although the City and the Club weren't able to collaborate on this project, the City would continue to include the Comox Valley Master's Soccer Club as an interest holder in future sport field planning projects.

It's important to note that there was feedback through the project survey regarding the need for a pavilion that was close to the playground to support gatherings. As such, a separate optional line item has been included in the budget for a pavilion for consideration in future park development initiatives at Woodcote Park.

## Public Engagement Process

The engagement strategy for the development of the concept plan for the Woodcote Park Playground replacement was customized to reflect the recent extensive community engagement conducted to create the *Let's Play, Courtenay!* Park Playground Design Standards.

Utilizing the recommendations from the *Let's Play, Courtenay!* Park Playground Design Standards PWL developed two concept plans to share with the public for feedback:

- Option 1: Playing Among the Clouds - see Attachment 1, and
- Option 2: Playing Among the Trees – See Attachment 2.

Both concept plans were posted on the Engage Comox Valley project page, and a supporting survey was open between April 8 – April 28. In addition, two public information boards displaying the concept plans with a QR survey code were installed on site at the park, adjacent to the existing playground. The two concept plans were also posted at the Lewis Centre and the LINC Youth Centre. After scanning the QR code, participants were directed to the Engage Comox Valley project page, where they could complete an online survey. Hard copies of the survey were also available at City Hall, the Courtenay Library, the Lewis Centre, and the LINC Youth Centre. The survey collected demographic data, presented each concept option, and included a series of questions to prioritize play equipment themes, identify the preferred option, and gather open-ended feedback on any missing elements or additional considerations. The City received 409 survey responses—408 submitted online and 1 in hard copy.

The engagement strategy also included online discussions with key focus groups:

- Principals from two local elementary/middle schools (2 participants),
- A representative from the Wachiay Friendship Centre (including a child), and
- Representatives of the Comox Valley Child Development Society (2 participants).

The following is a summary of the engagement results and feedback, with more fulsome information and details in the What We Heard Report (Attachment 3).

### *Survey Results Demographics*

#### Residency:

- 82% of the respondents lived in the City of Courtenay of which:
  - 33% were within a 5-minute walk,
  - 21% were within a 10-minute walk, and
  - 28% were more than a 10-minute walk.
- 17% of the remaining respondents lived either in the Town of Comox (6%), Village of Cumberland (2%) or the Comox Valley Regional District Electoral Areas A, B or C (9%).

#### Age Breakdown

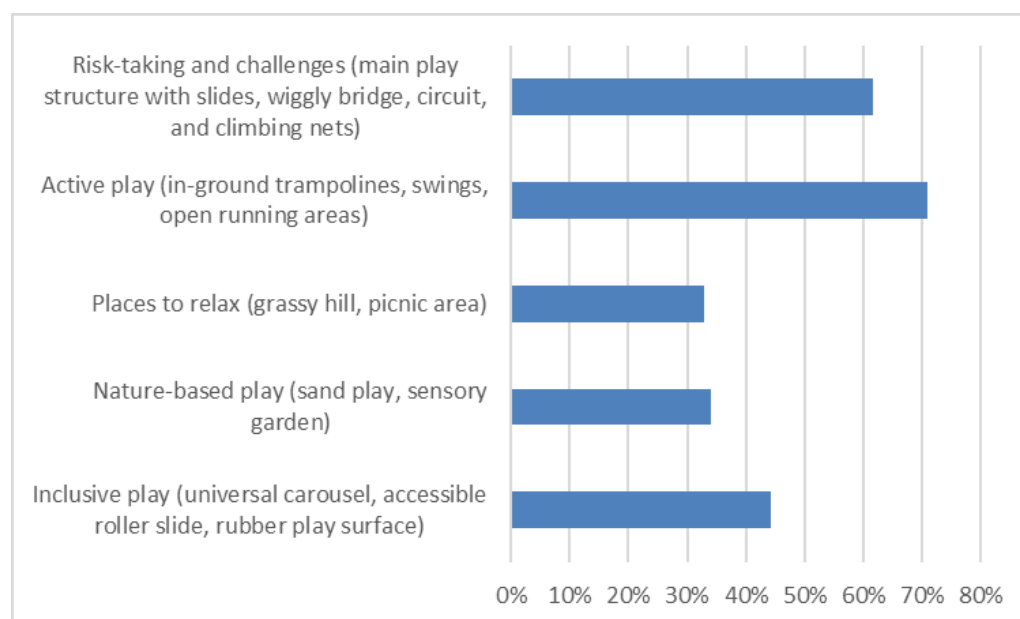
- 75% of the respondents were 18 and older
- 13% of the respondents were 17 years old or younger, and
- 12% were 12 years old or under.
- 63% of respondents indicated they were a parent or caretaker of a child under 12.

### *Survey Respondent Feedback on the Concept Plans*

#### Feedback on Option 1: Playing Among the Clouds (Figure 3):

- The top three key themes preferred by respondents in Option 1 were:
  - Active play elements with 71% of the responses,
  - Risk-taking and challenges with 62%, and
  - Inclusive play with 44% of the responses.
- When asked what was missing from Option 1, the highest responses included:
  - Nothing! (27%),
  - More risk taking (24%), and
  - More space for gathering (14%).
  - Monkey bars and shade were common responses when asked what other things were missing.

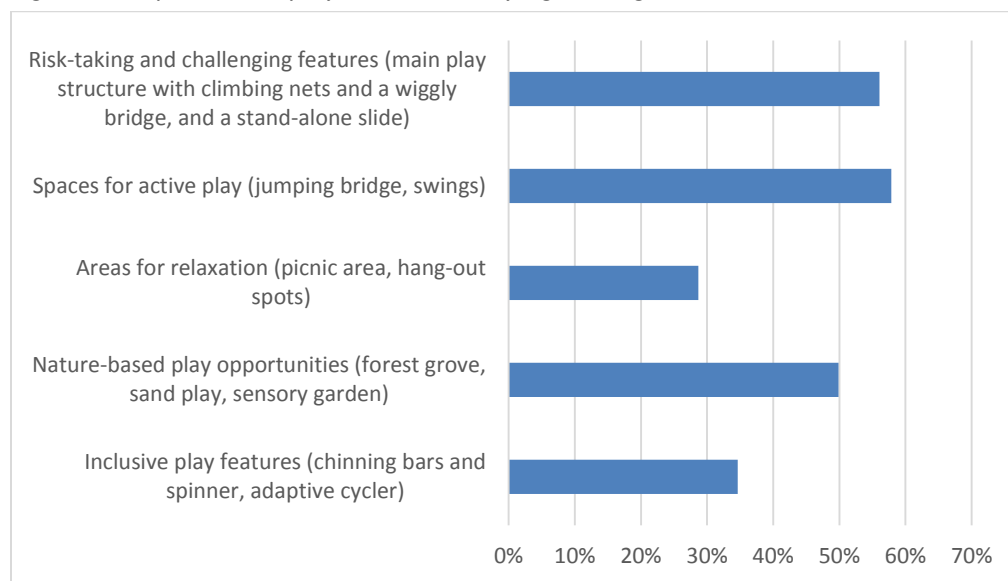
*Figure 3: Top 3 chosen play themes in Playing Among the Clouds*



#### Feedback on Option 2- Playing Among the Trees (Figure 4)

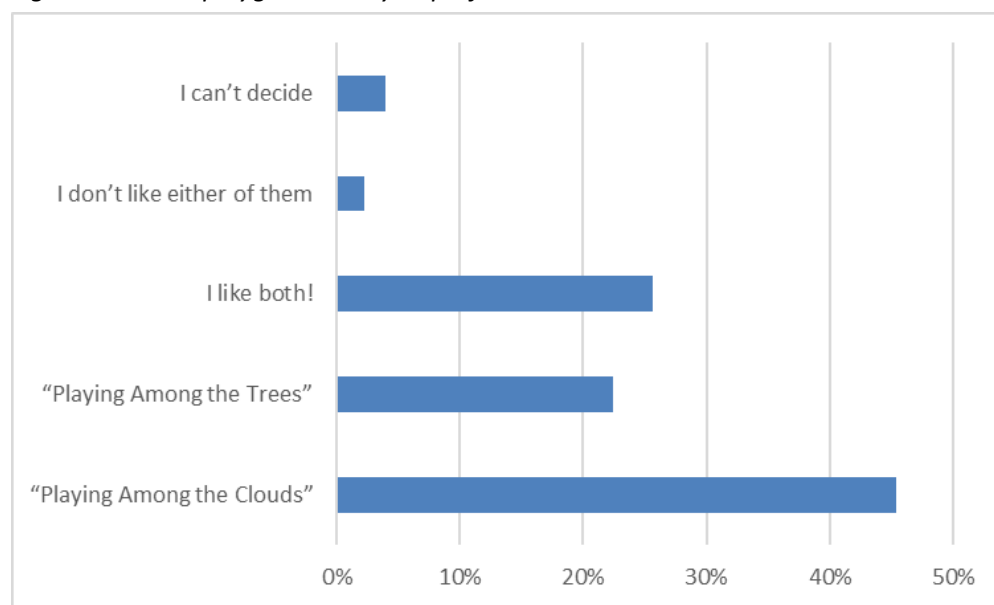
- The top three key themes preferred by respondents in Option 2 were:
  - Spaces for active play with 57% of the responses,
  - Risk-taking and challenges with 55%, and
  - Nature play with 49% of the responses.
- When asked what was missing from Option 2, the highest responses included:
  - More risk taking (28%),
  - Nothing! (21%), and
  - More space for gathering (12%).
  - Zip lines, water park/water play elements, and monkey bars were common responses when asked what other things were missing.

*Figure 4: Top 3 chosen play themes in Playing Among the Trees*



When asked which option was preferred (Figure 5), Option 1 – Playing Among the Clouds was the most popular response at 46%, followed by both options at 26%, then Option 2 – Playing Among the Trees at 22%.

*Figure 5: Which playground do you prefer?*



Respondents also expressed a strong preference for a blended playground concept that combines the natural elements of Playing Among the Trees—such as trees, boulders, and logs—with the inclusive play features and rubber surfacing of Playing Among the Clouds, which was praised for its accessibility and suitability for all ages and abilities. There was consistent concern about visibility and safety, particularly near park exits and adjacent roads, with requests for better separation and fewer hidden areas. Many respondents emphasized the importance of multi-generational spaces with accessible pathways, seating, shade, picnic

areas, and water play (spray park or wading pool). Playing Among the Trees was especially appreciated for its toddler-friendly features, though respondents called for more comfortable, shaded, and safe play areas for young children, including play elements designed to support children with neurodiversity. Additionally, a significant number of respondents raised concerns regarding the safety and cleanliness of sand features.

### *Interest Holder Focus Group Feedback*

Below is a summary of feedback received through the online focus groups sessions with the two schools, Wachiya Friendship Centre, and the Comox Valley Child Development Association:

- To enhance accessibility and engagement, the playground should incorporate natural (wood) and sensory elements such as logs, boulders, music features, and tree stump circles, along with cultural additions like Indigenous language scavenger cards.
- Prioritizing all-resilient rubber surfacing throughout the area will eliminate barriers caused by uneven transitions and wood chip overflow.
- To better serve older children, additional basketball hoops should be installed to accommodate small group play, as the basketball courts are a popular feature.
- The playground's current poor condition has led to underuse by nearby schools, but upgrades would significantly increase usage.
- Inclusive design is essential, with equipment accessible from the ground for children of all abilities.
- Adding more shade and a variety of upper-body and active play features—such as ziplines, monkey bars, slide poles, Gaga ball pits and inclusive swings—will broaden the playground's appeal.
- Consider incorporating Indigenous artwork in the playground design.

### **Next Steps**

Based on the significant and valuable feedback received in the engagement process, staff recommend the playground design to proceed with the "Playing Among the Clouds" concept, incorporating popular elements from the "Playing Among the Trees" concept. Key features are expected to include inclusive play equipment usable from the ground, monkey bars, a net swing, nature-based sensory play elements, and expanded resilient rubber surfacing for better accessibility. The sand play area will be smaller and relocated for safety. The final concept design will include consideration for additional trees, a possible shade structure, informal seating, fencing for safety, and a new water play runnel. These adjustments and recommendations are reflected in the preferred concept plan (Attachment 4).

The scope of the Woodcote Park Playground Replacement Project is limited to playground equipment and amenities, as such proposed improvements to the basketball court (improvement to the current surfacing and replacement of the current and addition of two new hoops) and the installation of a new pavilion or picnic shelter are recommended for future consideration as time and resources allow. The project will include costing for these elements to support the City's consideration of these recommendations for inclusion in future financial plans.

It is important to note that the current playground replacement design focuses on amenities for toddlers, children, and pre-teens up to age twelve. The engagement with community partners and survey results demonstrate a need and interest to explore further park improvements that respond to the needs of youth ages 13 and over. Engagement with this demographic should be conducted to inform the future design of the basketball court and pavilion/shelter, with a particular focus on the needs of teenage girls as studies

have shown that teenage girls frequently outgrow standard playground equipment and are not typically drawn to basketball courts, which are often designed with teen boys and men in mind.<sup>1</sup>

It is recommended that the playground replacement project now proceed to detailed design, including a cost estimate update, based on the preferred concept plan. Following the update to the cost estimate coming out of detailed design, a final design will be confirmed, and the project is expected to proceed to procurement in June, with construction expected to begin in summer for a fall completion and grand opening ceremony. Minor changes to the final concept plan may occur following detailed design based on finalized costs to ensure the project remains within the allotted budget; should the design change significantly due to budget constraints staff would return to Council for direction.

#### **POLICY ANALYSIS:**

##### *Official Community Plan (OCP), 2022*

###### Building and Landscapes:

- Objective 6: Municipal buildings and site design demonstrate leadership in building performance, accessibility, and design.

###### Parks and Recreation:

- Objective 1: Parkland in the form of natural areas, open spaces, and outdoor recreation is of sufficient amounts, is well-connected, equitably distributed, and is of high quality to enhance liveability throughout the city.
- Objective 2: Recreation amenities, services, and programming are expanded and enhanced to support increased health, wellness, and social connections for all residents.
- Objective 4: The parks and recreation system exemplifies leadership in reconciliation, climate action, equity, and community well-being through its services, programs, and partnerships.
- Objective 5: Partnerships are in place to achieve parks and recreation objectives.

###### Social Infrastructure

- Objective 1: All Courtenay residents experience equitable access to services.
- Objective 3: Physical spaces are designed with the needs for social connection and accessibility in mind.

##### *Parks and Recreation Masterplan, 2019*

###### 3.2.1 Apply the design guidelines below to the design of new and upgraded parks:

- Use universal design principles to welcome all park visitors, including some pathway loops that are fully accessible in City-wide parks, and other parks where possible
- Encourage parks to include gathering places, with seating and spaces appropriate for picnics and group activities according to the type and size of the park
- Plant trees in parks to the degree possible for shade and as a contribution to the urban forest
- Use Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles, balancing these with the need to protect and enhance habitats
- Provide seating in all parks with significant levels of use
- Design parks with the goal of increasing creativity and interest, e.g., more interactive play

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<sup>1</sup> [womeninurbanism.ca – How to Build Public Spaces for Teen Girls: Case Study 19 – Sharee Hochman](https://womeninurbanism.ca/how-to-build-public-spaces-for-teen-girls-case-study-19-sharee-hochman)



environments and equipment, allow children to experience more nature in parks, and provide options for all ages of children, youth and adults

- When planning and designing new parks, consider life cycle cost analysis and water and energy consumption
- Celebrate local artists in parks, with more public art such as murals, mosaics, and sculptures

#### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:**

The project is funded through the Province of BC Growing Communities Fund (GCF) with a total project budget of \$575,000: \$75,000 design and \$500,000 for playground supply, install and construction (the project construction budget). Staff also applied and were successful for a grant through Tire Stewardship BC for \$30,000. The \$30,000 grant will be applied towards expanding the resilient rubber surfacing as per public feedback, effectively increasing the project construction budget to \$530,000. Additional funding opportunities through community contributions may also be possible as staff are in active discussions with community partners about potential funding in support of this project.

The current Class D cost estimate for project construction is:

Total cost before civil works:	\$460,274
Contingency @ 30%:	<u>\$138,082</u>
Total Class D Cost Estimate:	<u>\$598,356</u>

The contingency is in place as cost estimates for civil works are not yet complete and will be done through the detailed design process. Through the costing of the final detailed design, some changes may be needed to reduce the scope of the design to address budget constraints.

#### **ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS:**

The Woodcote Park Playground Replacement project is part of the 2025 Recreation, Culture, and Community Services work plan. RCCS will be the strategic lead on the project, with Operational Services providing project management oversight and contract administration over the delivery of this capital work.

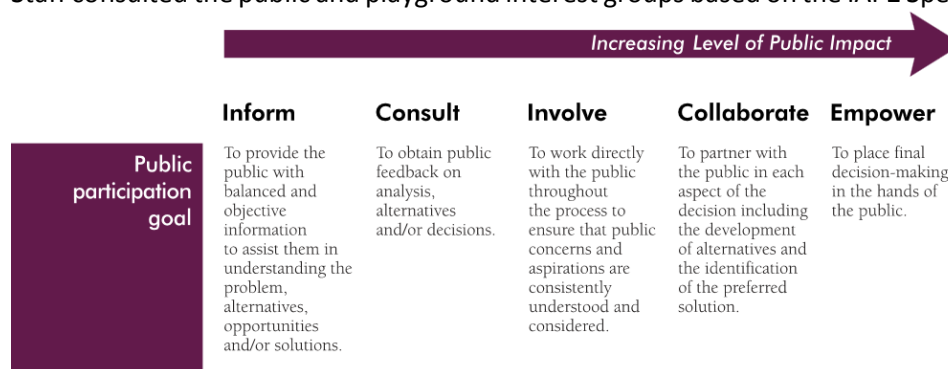
#### **STRATEGIC PRIORITIES REFERENCE:**

This initiative addresses the following strategic priorities:

- Parks and Recreation - Optimize active public spaces to respond to density increases and increased park use
- Parks and Recreation - Review recreation programs and engage with community on current and future needs, changing demographics
- Good Governance - Explore and establish a partnership approach with SD71 on mutual interest topics: active travel and traffic planning, shared facilities, community use of schools, climate, reconciliation, child care and youth engagement

## PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT:

Staff consulted the public and playground interest groups based on the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation:



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## OPTIONS:

1. THAT Council receive the "Woodcote Park Playground Replacement and What We Heard Report" staff report; and  
THAT Council endorse the Preferred Concept Plan (Attachment 4), with minor changes to be approved by staff as required.
2. THAT Council provide alternate direction to staff.

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Reviewed by: Susie Saunders, Director of Recreation, Culture, and Community Services

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Kyle Shaw, Director of Operational Services

Concurrence: Geoff Garbutt, M.Pl., MCIP, RPP, City Manager (CAO)

## Attachments:

1. Option 1 - Playing Among the Clouds
2. Option 2 - Playing Among the Trees
3. Woodcote Park Playground Replacement Project - What We Heard Report
4. Preferred Concept Plan