

URBAN PARKS PROGRAM QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q. What is the main distinguishing difference between the re-established program and previous Urban Parks programs?

A. Most notable in this proposal is that there are no provincial funds for ongoing park operations and maintenance included in this proposal. Also, this program proposal represents an opportunity for all incorporated cities and special municipalities with urban populations to participate.

Q. What are the “broad goals” of the program?

A. The first goal is to ensure every urban resident has a place to go for a walk, toss a ball or to simply look at and enjoy open space. We want to ensure we maintain the “Alberta Advantage” in providing citizens with active, vital sustainable urban centres. The second goal is to improve the overall quality of our urban environments by ensuring sensitive, unique or historically significant urban natural areas are preserved. Finally, this program will allow a greater emphasis on physical activity than past programs. Not only will the program emphasize integrated trail systems, but it will also encourage the development of sports fields and outdoor play areas.

Q. If this is a partnership between the municipalities and the Province, why is the province paying all the costs. Shouldn't there be a municipal matching component as with CFEP or other programs?

A. The Province is being asked to fully fund the capital costs of acquisition, development and/or restoration. The municipalities must, however, agree to operate and maintain the parks once completed. Depending on the situation, the costs the municipalities incur can equal the contribution of the Province in as little as 5 years. Over the long term, the operating costs will undoubtedly be greater than the cost of capital development. Municipalities may decide to “top up” the costs of development and in many cases contribute the land for their projects.

Q. If the Province funds this program, will the municipalities lose funding from other sources such as CFEP or 2005 Centennial Grants funding?

A. In the proposals to the Province, we have made it very clear that we are proposing that “new” dollars fund this program. In discussions we have had with provincial officials to date, we have relayed concerns that municipalities do not want other initiatives that they have been pursuing, (for example recreation centres, through 2005 Centennial grants) to be lost due to the potential funding of this program.

URBAN PARKS PROGRAM QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q. What will be the limits for use of the funding?

A. We have proposed that the program be as flexible as possible to best meet local needs. As proposed, each eligible municipality may allocate the funding as they see fit, within the broad goals and operating parameters of the program. All of the capital funds (100%) could go to actually building park and recreation infrastructure. However, if planning is required, up to 15 % of the money could go to planning and design. If land must be bought, up to 40% of the money could go to buy land. If administration of the urban park program is onerous to the existing city administration, up to 4% of the total grant could be used for administration. We have suggested that where the situation warrants, municipalities may request relaxation of the limits. ***NOTE: As this is a proposal, all the program terms and conditions will ultimately be set by the Province to ensure that their goals are met (i.e. it is very conceivable that the province could endorse a "modified" program).***

Q. How was the program funding formula determined?

A. The funding formula took into consideration factors related to the early termination of Phase III of the Urban Parks Program in 1995 and, established a base grant that would provide sufficient yet substantial dollars for park development projects based on input received through a survey of urban municipal officials. The funding formula also incorporates, for purposes of enhanced equity, a per capita allocation based on municipal urban population.

Q. Is this an Alberta Recreation and Parks Association Proposal?

A. ARPA has taken the leadership to support the overall development of the proposal. However, it is really a proposal from a much broader base. First, the development of the proposal was jointly funded by most of the Urban Park Cities. As well, the proposal meets the goals of a resolution passed by the Alberta Association of Urban Municipalities (AUMA). AUMA has accepted an invitation to be part of, and supportive of, ARPA's presentation to the Standing Policy Committee on Health and Community Living on October 15, 2002.

Q. What is being done to get this program adopted by the Province?

A. Various elected officials and administrators were consulted during the conceptual development of the proposal. The proposal has been presented to the Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Minister responsible for Alberta Community Development. As referenced earlier, we are scheduled to present the proposals to the Standing Policy Committee on Health and Community Living. As well, ARPA officials and other advocates have met with other elected officials and senior administrators of other Provincial departments to gain their advice and support. We are putting together a list of key government decision makers that need to be contacted. It is our intent to approach each of the members of the aforementioned Standing Policy Committee, and to have contact initiated with all of the urban centre MLA's.

URBAN PARKS PROGRAM QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q. What supportive action can you take with respect to elected provincial officials?

A. It is vital that each of you initiate a local advocacy strategy that would, first and foremost, develop awareness building and program support from your local MLA(s). This program proposal readily responds to agenda items of the provincial government (i.e. healthy living and improved health, environmental stewardship and vital, sustainable communities).

Q. What support can the local elected officials offer to this endeavor?

A. First of all, they need to be committed to their responsibilities outlined in the proposal including project development and ongoing maintenance. Secondly, it is very important that they use the influence they have to make these proposals successful. For instance, they likely know an influential member of government and can commit to voicing their support for the program (you can provide them with the support). Finally letters of support to the Province, AUMA and AAMD&C are key. The local elected officials may know of other people who have an influence with the Province. They may be able to solicit their help to sell the values of this program.

Q. The Urban Parks Program is directed exclusively to incorporated cities and special municipalities (Strathcona County and Wood Buffalo); What is being proposed for other municipalities?

A. ARPA is proposing a parallel "Countyside Parks and Recreation Areas Program" be developed which would have all other incorporated municipalities being eligible for program funding.

Q. What might be the major perceived constraint(s) to program approval by the Province?

A. The principle constraints, as we currently see it, are:

- (i) the availability of funds given the Province's ongoing fiscal restraint objectives
- (ii) should funds be available (in whole or in part), then timing and access may be an issue
- (iii) other infrastructure initiatives with higher priorities
- (iv) inability to secure political support – i.e. MLA's