

Engagement Process & Outcomes

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MILL LAKE
PARK

City of Abbotsford
Mill Lake Park Master Plan
2025



4 Engagement Process & Outcomes

4.1 Engagement Process

The first round of public and stakeholder engagement for Stage 1 of the project occurred in summer 2021. This included an online stakeholder workshop, a virtual public open house, a survey, and four in-person pop-up events at Mill Lake Park and Abbotsford Farmer’s Market.

The second round of public and stakeholder engagement for Stage 2 of the project occurred in the summer and fall of 2023.

Stage 3 in process and will be updated.

4.2 Who We Engaged With

Engagement was conducted with the general public and stakeholders. Input was also obtained from various City departments through the Development Application Review Team (DART) review process.

4.3 Engagement Opportunities

Opportunities for public and stakeholder engagement were provided in Stages 1 through 3 of the project to initially confirm opinions about the existing physical condition of the park and recreation activities that people wanted to conduct in the Park and then to obtain opinions regarding the alternative concept design options for the Park.

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4.3.1 Engagement Stage 1

The purpose of the first stage of engagement was to gather feedback on the draft vision and guiding principles as well as local knowledge, concerns, needs, land use history and significance. As part of the first stage of engagement, the following tools were used:

- The Let’s Talk Abbotsford website;
- Online Amenities Map allowing geolocated comments;
- An online survey;
- An online stakeholder engagement event (via Zoom and MURAL);
- An online public open house (via Zoom); and
- In-person pop up events in Mill Lake Park and at the Abbotsford Farmer’s Market.

The strong message from the community is that the Park is a vital urban amenity.

4.3.2 Engagement Stage 2

There were multiple opportunities for stakeholders and the general public to submit feedback on the three concept options for Mill Lake Park. These opportunities included:

- Stakeholder Sessions – staff in-person meetings and a virtual engagement event;
- Let’s Talk Abbotsford virtual Q&A;
- Online survey;
- In-person “Open House” events at Mill Lake Park;
- Direct e-mail or mail-in comments to Abbotsford Parks, Recreation, and Culture staff.

Engagement Conclusions

The volume of responses to the Mill Lake Park Master Plan Stage 2 public engagement, with over 1,000 survey responses and hundreds of attendees at the open houses in the Park in fall of 2023 indicate that the future of the Park is near and dear to Abbotsford residents. The Park is used throughout the year by locals to fulfill daily outdoor walks, and attracts visitors from across the City and region.

The strong message from the community is that the Park is a vital urban amenity, that helps keep Abbotsford residents of all ages and abilities active. It serves many needs, and will continue to do so as Abbotsford’s dynamic and diverse population grows, urbanizes, and broadens. The Park has a legacy as a gathering place for generations that offers unique events that are integral to Abbotsford’s civic identity.

Key Takeaways

The top five most discussed topics and corresponding takeaways from the Stage 2 engagement are:

1. Boardwalk: there is strong community support to maintain and improve the boardwalk
2. Pool: there is a strong desire to keep the pool or improve it (covered/indoors)
3. Parking & Access: parking solutions must consider a variety of factors (ability, safety, alignment with programming demands)
4. Ball Parks: ball diamonds are a priority in Abbotsford, and there is a desire for better facilities
5. Paths & Trails: Safety and maintenance are prominent concerns, and widening the path may address conflicts between various users

Related detail regarding the takeaways from the engagement are listed below.

Central Location Makes Mill Lake a Hub

Mill Lake Park is located at the heart of Abbotsford’s City Centre, next to a large commercial property, and conveniently close to many neighbourhoods. This makes it the default Park for many residents, as well as an accessible location for families, seniors, and individuals to access recreation services. There is a need for gathering places of different types, from large community events to small get-togethers with families and friends.

A Variety of Different Users Require Balance

Park users of different ages and abilities, who move at different paces and are attracted by various activities all use the Park. Allocation of Park space should have a wide variety of different users in mind, and make sure that their competing needs do not conflict or impede on one another’s.

Sports and Recreation

Abbotsford has a high demand for sports and recreation facilities, and Mill Lake Park helps meet this need. Losing vital sports and recreation facilities would create a negative impact on community members, particularly youth and seniors. The community wants to see sports and recreation infrastructure well maintained, improved, and expanded. In instances where Mill Lake Park is not the best long-term solution for locating sports facilities or equipment, there should be a seamless, timely transition that is well communicated to residents and user groups that offer better amenities and room to accommodate the growing needs in Abbotsford.

Connection to The Water and Ecosystem

Mill Lake is a unique attraction in the Park. From its history as an industrial site to the important role it will play in the future with stormwater management and ecosystem enhancement, Mill Lake itself provides a valuable view and experience for people of all ages. The community wants to see the health of Mill Lake and surrounding ecosystem maintained for the long-term and ensure that it remains a usable place for urban boating, wildlife watching, and access to nature in the city centre. Mill Lake Park is home to fish, turtles, eagles, and a variety of tree and plant species that offer access to nature in its urban setting.

Getting Around The Lake

The lake loop is vital to many users of the Park. Walking around Mill Lake is a draw for many people, and the boardwalk offers an engaging perspective over the water from which fish and turtles can be seen. However, the boardwalk poses accessibility and connectivity issues as it ages. Upgrades to the Park’s pedestrian and bike paths should include a fully accessible lake loop with elements that allow people to continue to walk out over the water, maintaining the special character of the boardwalk while promoting inclusivity for all. Any changes to the boardwalk should be clearly communicated, and should secure the long-term function of the lake loop and its role in providing locals with access to nature and seamlessly circling Mill Lake.

Multi-Generational User Needs

Mill Lake Park is a popular destination for seniors’ outdoor activities, as well as families with young children. The variety of playgrounds and low-impact sports cater to those needs, as well as passive activities including nature trails. Spaces where inter-generational families can enjoy together, such as the pool, picnic shelters, a café patio, or open spaces are highly valued here and have helped make Mill Lake Park an integral part of Abbotsford’s community spaces, and residents want to see that continued for the long term.

Safety & Accessibility

Improvements to the Park design, lighting, and pathways can significantly improve access to the Park, and extend the usable time of the Park throughout the winter. Lighting near amenities, pathways, and entrances will make the Park safer.

Overall, the provision of high-quality urban recreation activities and the unique aspects of Mill Lake Park are priorities for the community. As the social fabric of Abbotsford changes, Mill Lake Park will need improvements and changes to meet the needs of the community over the next 20 years. Many residents voiced the vision and concerns they see for Mill Lake Park as the Master Plan is updated.

4.3.3 Engagement Stage 3

Stage 3 engagement began with focusing on clarifying the community’s perspective on items which arose during Stage 2 - Exploring Options community consultation. City staff held discussions with key stakeholders, presented at Council advisory committees and developed an online questionnaire which sought clarification from the community about unifying elements of the Stage 2 Preferred Concept Plan. Over 1,700 responses were recieved. The remaining Stage 3 engagment has yet to take place.