

Staff Report

Report To: Community Services Committee
Report From: Eckhard Pastrik, Manager of Parks & Open Spaces
Meeting Date: June 25, 2025
Report Code: CS-25-062
Subject: Design Elements - Owen Heights and Comm-er-ette Park

Recommendations:

THAT in consideration of Staff Report CS-25-052 respecting Design Elements for Owen Heights and Comm-er-ette Park, the Community Services Committee recommends that City Council approve the design and layout generally as presented.

Highlights:

- The 5-year Capital Plan (2026-2030) prioritizes the renewal of Parks and Open Space infrastructure. The City has 21 playgrounds with 71% beyond their lifecycle and significant budget allocated per playground.
- Owen Heights and Comm-er-ette Park playground designs were shaped by community feedback and include accessible play components, exterior paths of travel, a playground access ramp, seating area and picnic space, drainage (as required), engineered wood fiber protective surface and curb edging.
- Designs adhere to the AODA and Integrated Accessibility Standards for the Design of Public Spaces and incorporate sensory and active play components. The designs will be presented to the Grey County Joint Accessibility Advisory Committee on July 17, 2025.

Strategic Plan Alignment:

[Strategic Plan](#) Priority: Safe City.

Climate and Environmental Implications:

This supports the objectives of the City's Corporate Climate Change Adaptation Plan by creating conditions to minimize health and safety risks.

Previous Report/Authority:

[CS-24-061 Parks Capital Projects – Proposed Amendments and Adjustment to the Capital Plan](#)

24D.47 - Owen Heights Playground Capital Project

24D.45 - Comm-er-ette Playground Capital Project

[CS-25-050 Proposed Amendments and Adjustments to the 2025 Parks and Open Space Capital Plan](#)

Background:

The City has an approved 5-year capital plan for the renewal, replacement and upgrade of City assets that covers the period from 2026-2030. In 2024 and 2025, the Committee and Council considered amendments to the capital budget to focus on renewing existing Parks and Open Space infrastructure and ensuring capital projects meet the accessibility standards for the built environment that includes public spaces such as exterior paths of travel, trails, outdoor eating areas and play spaces.

It was noted at the May 21, 2025. Community Services Committee Meeting that the capital cost associated with the replacement of playgrounds has seen significant inflationary increases and scope expansion to address the regulatory requirements of the Design of Public Spaces Standards of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA). Given this, the budget for each playground was increased to \$147,500.

The City has 21 playgrounds. 71% of the playgrounds are beyond their lifecycle.

The two playgrounds addressed in this report are in Neighbourhood Parks. Neighbourhood Parks are generally small open space areas intended to serve 2,000-3,000 people and contain recreation facilities and complimentary services primarily for younger children and their caregivers.

Staff worked with Park-N-Play Design to establish a standard neighbourhood playground consisting of a play structure and swings that cater to both junior

(18 months to 5 years) and senior (5 years to 12 years) age groups. The new playgrounds will be compliant with Canadian Standards Association (CSA) standards set out in CSA Z614:20, *Children's Playground Equipment and Surfacing*. The playground and play equipment used will also be compliant with Annex "H" of CSA Z614:20 which lays out the minimum requirements for accessibility for persons with disabilities in public-use playgrounds. The new playgrounds will include accessible and sensory play components, a firm access pathway to the playground, a hard surface area for two benches and an accessible picnic table, utilization of engineered wood fibre protective surface, a defined curbed playground boundary and sub-surface drainage (where necessary based on site conditions).

Two open houses were organized and notices sent to all residents within 800 metres of each park (considered the distance a person would walk to access a neighbourhood park). The open houses were promoted through a media release and social media.

The open houses were held in each park from 4:00 pm to 6:30 pm. Approximately 40 people attended the Owen Heights Open House and 35 people attended the Comm-er-ette Open House. Feedback was also solicited in an online survey on the City's OurCity page and promoted as part of the open house promotion.

At the open house, panels with 2 basic playground configurations and layouts within the park were presented and those attending were asked to complete the survey online or complete a paper survey onsite. The playground layout options that were presented at the open houses are outlined in Attachment 1 - Open House Design Layout Options. There were 143 responses submitted through the survey (for both parks).

Analysis:

The playground design options presented explored two playground configurations that included a consolidated playground (both junior and senior play components in one play structure) and another option with the junior and senior play structures separated. In both configuration options, a bay of swings was included that involved a pair of junior bucket swings and a pair of senior swings. As part of the basic playground configuration, a number of associated elements have been included to address accessibility standards, minimize maintenance requirements and extend the life of some of the playground elements. They include:

1. Access Path – an asphalt pathway has been included that brings visitors to the playground from the edge of the park (curb edge along perimeter of park) to address integrated accessibility standards related to the exterior path of travel under the AODA. The exact layout of the access pathway will be refined through the detail design stage and is intended to provide an accessible route into the park to the playground.
2. Gathering Area – a 25 square metre concrete pad will be established as a gathering area and linked to the access pathway and playground. This area will serve as a circulation hub, provide direct access and smooth transition to the playground ramp and into the playground. An accessible picnic table will be situated on the gathering area pad to meet accessible component requirement for public space.
3. Curbed Playground Edge – a concrete curb edge has been included around the perimeter of the playground. This hard edge is critical in maintaining a defined separation of the engineered wood fibre from the adjacent grassed area. The hard edge has significant operating implications as it dramatically reduces maintenance needs and protects the engineered wood fibre from encroaching grass.
4. Drainage Pipe – drainage pipe has been included and will be integrated where required to drain the playground pit and protect the integrity of the engineered wood fibre (EWF) in it. Excessive moisture and poor drainage of the EWF pit dramatically reduces the lifecycle of the EWF.
5. Seating Area – benches have been included and integrated to support opportunities for seating and social interaction for park/playground users.

Based on the feedback received at the open house and online survey, the following changes were made to create one final playground layout concept for each park:

Owen Heights Park Playground

1. Playground Layout - The Option 1 layout was preferred which involves one composite play structure for both age groups. Feedback received requested that additional separation between the junior and senior components by extending the platform

between them. This has been accommodated in the final playground layout concept.

2. Playground Component Modifications
 - a. There was a strong desire expressed for the inclusion of a tire swing like the one that currently exists in the park. Unfortunately, this could not be accommodated within the budget envelope.
 - b. A zero-g swing will replace one of the tot swings based on an identified need in the neighbourhood. This was accommodated within budget envelope.
 - c. Request was made to swap out the double slide with one 360-degree slide. This was accommodated within the budget envelope.
 - d. Sensory rings were removed based on open house feedback and the cost of the component was reallocated to support inclusion of a 360-degree slide.
3. Playground Orientation – The new playground will be oriented north-south which is consistent with the current playground. The playground will be situated further east toward the centre of the park. Drainage will be required and will discharge via gravity to the west within the park.

Comm-er-ette Park Playground

1. Playground Layout – The Option 2 layout was preferred which involves a separate junior and senior play structure. The junior play structure will be repositioned on the north side of the senior play structure and the swings to the south. This would avoid having kids potentially moving behind/in front of the centrally located swings between the two play structures.
2. Playground Component Modifications
 - a. The style of playground and the associated colour palette was modified to get away from the traditional red and yellow (common colours used by older playgrounds).
 - b. Relocate the playground ramp entrance so it provides access between the senior and junior play structures.
3. Playground Orientation – new playground will be oriented north-south which is consistent with the current playground configuration.

The playground will be situated further west toward the centre of the park in a more visible location from the frontage of 2nd St. A West and at the northern terminus of 5th Ave. West. Drainage tile will be required and will discharge via gravity to the south and discharged into either a gravel basin or an existing stormwater manhole.

The exact placement and grades for the playgrounds and its associated supporting infrastructure will be confirmed during detail design using a topographical survey base map of the park. The final playground layout concepts are included in Attachment 2 – Proposed Final Playground Layout Concepts for Comm-er-ette Park and Owen Heights Park.

Integrated Accessibility Standards for the Design of Public Spaces and Outdoor Play Spaces

A new playground is required to address the regulatory requirements of the Design of Public Spaces Standards of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA). The AODA applies to newly constructed or redeveloped outdoor play spaces, outdoor paths of travel and public use eating areas (gathering area with picnic table). In addition to consulting with the neighbourhoods that the playground will service, there is a requirement under the legislation to consult with the Grey County Accessibility Advisory Committee (GCJAAC). These two playground projects will be presented at the GCJAAC on July 17, 2025.

The AODA requirements for outdoor play spaces requires municipalities to:

1. incorporate accessibility features, such as sensory and active play components, for children and caregivers with various disabilities into the design of outdoor play spaces; and
2. ensure that outdoor play spaces have a ground surface that is firm, stable, and has impact attenuating properties for injury prevention and sufficient clearance to provide children and caregivers with various disabilities the ability to move through, in and around the outdoor play space.
3. Exterior paths of travel must have a minimum width of 1,500 mm and have a running slope of not more than 1:20.
4. Curb ramps (at the connection to the street) must have clear width of 1,200 mm and the running slope be a maximum of 1:8 and have tactile warning surface and have a high tonal contrast.

The playgrounds and the associated elements as defined within the final concept layout have been developed to satisfy the Design for Public Spaces Standards as defined within the AODA.

Financial Implications:

The budget for each playground is \$147,500.

This is in the approved Capital Plan for 2025.

Communication Strategy:

Mail outs to residents, media release and social media posts.

In person Open Houses were held at Owen Heights Park on May 20, 2025, and at Comm-er-ette Park on May 22, 2025, from 4:00pm to 6:30pm.

Online engagement using OurCity platform.

Consultation:

Significant consultation has been completed as part of the design process and the feedback has been incorporated into the final playground layout concepts.

The final playground layout concepts will be presented at the July 17, 2025, Grey County Joint Accessibility Advisory Committee meeting.

Attachments:

Attachment 1 – Open House Design Layout Options

Attachment 2 – Proposed Final Playground Layout Concepts for Comm-er-ette Park and Owen Heights Park

Recommended by:

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Pamela Coulter, Director of Community Services

Submission approved by:

Tim Simmonds, City Manager

For more information on this report, please contact Eckhard Pastrok, Manager of Parks & Open Space at epastrok@owensound.ca or 519-376-4440 x 1221.