

**A PILOT STUDY FOR COMPARING TWO INNER-CITY EDMONTON  
PARKS IN WINTER**

**by**

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# *A Pilot Study for Comparing Two Inner-City Edmonton Parks in Winter*

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Public spaces have the potential to be neighbourhood assets that provide year-round social, economic, and cultural benefits for a community. Yet, many cities struggle to animate public spaces in the winter months. In Edmonton, Alberta, the northernmost major city on the continent, long winters with short days, cold temperatures, wind, and snow present challenges for creating successful year-round outdoor spaces. This Master's Report examines the issue by evaluating and comparing two inner-city public park spaces, Beaver Hills House Park and Paul Kane Park, and suggests recommendations for improvements that will allow user's needs to be met in all seasons. Within a winter context, uses, activities, access, linkages, comfort, image, and sociability are assessed.



**Downtown and Oliver Neighbourhood Containing Beaver Hills House Park (white) and Paul Kane Park (yellow)**

## **DESIGNING FOR WINTER**

There are several techniques that can minimize winter's negative impacts and emphasize positive aspects, thereby maximizing benefits from outdoor spaces. These include:

- Conducting regular, efficient, and creative snow/ice removal and disposal
- Maintaining solar access
- Creating wind blocks
- Providing overhead shelter and warming huts
- Supplying heat sources
- Using colourful lighting
- Creating an aesthetically pleasing environment with bright colours, art and landscaping
- Ensuring a variety of suitable activities and amenities are available

## RESEARCH METHODS

To conduct a comparative evaluation of the two cases, a modified Project for Public Spaces (PPS) approach for evaluating and creating successful public spaces was utilized. This approach entailed the use of winter-specific evaluation criteria from four categories that are key to the success of public spaces. Below are the criteria categories:









- **Uses and Activities** – Are people engaged in activities within the space?
- **Access and Linkages** – How well is access provided to and within the site?
- **Comfort and Image** – How attractive and comfortable is the space?
- **Sociability** – How well does the space foster social interaction?

Data was collected with the methods listed below during six 25-minute observation periods in each park. These sessions took place in the morning, afternoon, and evening on weekdays and weekends in December 2013 and January 2014. The analysis, and a review of context and relevant winter city literature, resulted in the assignment of ratings for each criterion, and the subsequent ranking of each park by category from “*Poor*” to “*Excellent*”.

Evaluation Criteria Categories and Associated Data Collection Methods	
Criteria Category	Data Collection Methods
<b>Uses and Activities</b>	Behaviour Mapping, Counting, Tracking, Trace Measures, Evaluation Charts
<b>Access and Linkages</b>	Behaviour Mapping, Counting, Tracking, Trace Measures, Evaluation Charts
<b>Comfort and Image</b>	Behaviour Mapping, Counting, Evaluation Charts
<b>Sociability</b>	Behaviour Mapping, Counting, Trace Measures, Evaluation Charts

## EVALUATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The evaluations for each criteria category formed the basis of recommendations for improvements in design, maintenance, operations, programming, and overall use of each park. Evaluations and accompanying recommendations for improvement are provided in the table below. While each park had slight differences in performance, similar improvements would be beneficial for both spaces.

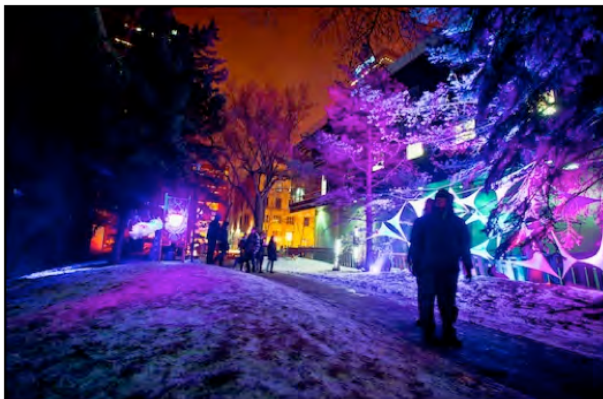
Evaluation and Recommendations Summary		
Criteria Category	Evaluation	General Recommendations
Uses and Activities	BHHP:  Fair	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Animate park spaces with a variety of activities</li> <li>• Incorporate unique winter-specific uses and activities</li> <li>• Create reasons for coming to the specific park</li> <li>• Increase compatibility with nearby uses</li> <li>• Programme spaces throughout the year and provide a schedule of events</li> </ul>
	PKP:  Fair	
Access and Linkages	BHHP:  Very Good	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase accessible winter paths through the parks</li> <li>• Increase connectivity and permeability across park borders</li> <li>• Improve walking surface and entrance maintenance, and use creative snow disposal techniques</li> <li>• Create a more connected public realm</li> <li>• Strengthen access for all transportation modes</li> </ul>
	PKP:  Good	
Comfort and Image	BHHP:  Good	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase comfortable, movable seating options</li> <li>• Increase safety</li> <li>• Add vibrant and playful colours and lighting</li> <li>• Provide thermal comfort amenities in both parks</li> <li>• Reduce wind with additional wind blocks</li> <li>• Maintain solar access</li> <li>• Increase overhead shelter</li> <li>• Provide additional amenities</li> </ul>
	PKP:  Good	
Sociability	BHHP:  Good	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase socially comfortable seating</li> <li>• Create spaces that accommodate group activities</li> <li>• Encourage community involvement</li> </ul>
	PKP:  Fair	

Beaver Hills House Park = BHHP

Paul Kane Park = PKP

The analysis concluded that Beaver Hills House Park performed better overall on the evaluation of the four criteria categories, even though Paul Kane Park was more successful than Beaver Hills House Park on certain individual criteria, such as solar exposure and the feeling of safety. Thus, there is room for improvement in both parks, and this can be achieved through the implementation of the recommendations provided above. Due to the relatively short data collection period (two weeks), temperatures that were slightly below normal overall, and constrained data collection techniques related to limited resources and feasibility, this project should be viewed as a pilot study for winter park space evaluation.

This research also conveys the importance of year-round public spaces and the unique considerations that are required when planning for spaces that serve the community throughout the winter months. As Edmonton strives to build its reputation as a world-renowned winter city, it should design and program its smaller parks with its climate in mind, and use winter as an asset.



**Winter Activities, Socializing, Comfort, and Lighting in Edmonton and Saskatoon (top right)**