

Attachment 4:

Jurisdictional Review: Recent Alcohol in Parks Pilot Programs in Canada

Introduction

In response to City Council direction, a jurisdictional review of Canadian cities was conducted to understand how alcohol in parks pilots were approached in different contexts and to identify best practices to inform options for Toronto. The jurisdictional review involved a document analysis and meetings with representatives from select Canadian municipalities that have implemented alcohol in parks pilot programs within the last three years. Consultation meetings were focused on understanding how cities designed and implemented their pilots, issues that emerged and were addressed during the pilots and any impacts.

Recent Pilot Programs in British Columbia and Alberta

Objectives and Designs

Beginning in 2020 and 2021, at least 18 cities in British Columbia and Alberta launched pilot programs to allow the consumption of alcohol in some city parks (see Table 1). In many cases, the pilots were planned and implemented with the objective of addressing immediate heightened demand for outdoor spaces for social gatherings during the COVID-19 pandemic. A pilot approach enabled the cities to manage risk by learning from short-term, small scale initiatives, prior to making permanent program decisions. None of the cities conducted formal public engagement in advance to help inform the design or implementation of the pilot programs.

All of the pilot programs involved a small number of parks; no city conducted a pilot involving all the parks in the municipality. A common format for the pilots was to designate picnic tables or to designate zones within a park for alcohol consumption. These designated zones were usually located a minimum distance from playgrounds, schools, pools and swimming beaches, sports fields and programmable spaces. Some cities designated an entire park or parks for alcohol consumption, with some restrictions for sensitive uses, such as near swimming pools.

Pilot Evaluations

Most pilot programs were evaluated using some or all of the following components:

- public surveys, during and/or after the pilot
- data on enforcement/compliance (e.g. number of tickets issued)
- data from 311, first responders, hospitals (e.g. ER visits), and program administration (e.g. number of bookings)
- cost estimates (e.g. waste bins, portable toilets, signage, staffing)
- observations from field staff (e.g. condition of park, washroom cleanliness)

Pilot Outcomes

Overall, the pilot programs were found to be successful, in terms of generating acceptance among park users and the public, with few complaints or incidents arising. Minimal impact on parks operations and minimal compliance issues (especially after the initial launch period) were reported. Across the pilots, the majority of park visitors who chose to drink, behaved responsibly and respectfully toward other park users and the surrounding community. Most compliance issues occurred in the early weeks of the pilots and were attributed to lack of understanding of the new rules. In particular, cities that designated a picnic table or zone where drinking was allowed found that where a person could or could not consume alcohol was sometimes not well understood. The cities' primary response to compliance issues was to provide education and information to park visitors. Very few tickets were issued for non-compliance and, in some pilots, no tickets were issued at all. In cities where the data were collected, alcohol-related interactions with police and alcohol-related emergency room visits originating from a pilot park were found to be minimal. None of the cities evaluated the population health impacts of introducing the pilots.

Based on the positive results of the pilot programs, most cities have extended pilots or transition to permanent programs including Vancouver, Calgary and Edmonton.

Table 1. Alcohol in Parks Programs, based on Recent Pilots* (British Columbia and Alberta Cities over 100,000)

City and Population (2021 Census)	Model	Site Selection/Exclusion Criteria	Comments
Calgary, AB 1,306,784	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pilot in 2021 • Made permanent in 2022 • Designated picnic tables, picnic sites, large areas, winter fire pits in parks • 54 parks • Year-round 	Exclude: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Areas with intense child focus • Parks where personal alcohol may conflict with business or festivals • Major natural areas • Parks operated by a partner or have a significant partner operation on site • Culturally significant parks • Parks with current user conflicts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pilot was considered a success • Sites were well-used, based on booking data • Feedback on pilot: participants wanted simpler booking system • Booked picnic tables were most popular in high density areas • No additional resources for pilot or permanent program
Edmonton, AB 1,010,899	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pilot in 2021; 2022 • Made permanent in 2023 • Designated picnic areas in parks • 16 parks • Year-round 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safety • Accessibility • Visitor experience • Honouring existing park users • Inclusivity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pilot was considered a success • During pilot, Peace Officers (existing staff positions) conducted proactive inspections to provide education • Most participants were compliant with rules; violations resulted in a warning • No additional resources for pilot or permanent program
Vancouver, BC 662,248	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pilot in 2021; 2022 • Made permanent in 2023 • Entire parks, with restrictions for sensitive uses • 48 parks • Year-round or seasonal • Introduced beaches on pilot basis in 2023 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High visibility, non-remote locations • Emergency vehicle access • Geographical distribution across the city • Nearby washrooms, recycling/litter bins • Features and amenities for socializing • Pedestrian, cycling, public transit access • Nearby parking, food and beverage services • Minimal impacts to natural areas or programmable spaces • Minimal impacts/ disruptions to neighbours • Minimum distance from playgrounds • Not adjacent to schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pilot was considered a success • During pilot, a designated areas model was implemented, with additional site visits by Park Rangers (existing staff positions) and additional waste bins in some areas • During pilot, Park Rangers (existing staff positions) reported mostly respectful and responsible behaviors; however designated areas were not observed • For permanent program, an 'entire parks' model was adopted due to challenges enforcing designated areas; Park Ranger visits returned to normal; increased park maintenance provided as required

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid bathing beaches (Note: the 2021 and 2022 pilot programs did not include beaches) • Avoid primary special event venues 	
Coquitlam, BC 148,625	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No pilot • Implemented a permanent program in 2022 • Entire parks, with restrictions • 54 parks • Year-round 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Park shared with a school • Pool facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Added waste and recycling pick-up on weekends
Delta, BC 108,455	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pilot in 2021 • Made permanent 2022 • Designated areas in parks • 3 parks • Year-round 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Geographical distribution across the city • Popular gathering locations • Washrooms, solid waste collection • Transit/walkability access 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pilot sites were monitored; no significant issues
Strathcona County, AB 103,186	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pilot in 2021 • Made permanent in 2022 • Designated picnic tables/sites in parks • 5 parks • Year-round 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proximity to existing recreation/park facilities • Parking available • Visible from street • Minimal noise for adjacent residents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing program; no significant issues