

High Park

High Park is a new rooftop park and event space in Calgary's Beltline, and an exciting destination for residents and visitors alike. The park originated as part of a community-led adaptive re-use project that has successfully converted the underutilized top floor of a multi-level parkade into one of Downtown Calgary's most vibrant new public spaces and a highly valued community asset. The signature park reimagines the 90,000ft² rooftop of the Centre City Parkade while addressing a deficit of public park space in one of Calgary's most densely populated communities. Initially designed and implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic in response to a changing urban landscape, the park continues to evolve under new development phases guided by ongoing community engagement and feedback.

In October 2020, High Park Phase I was opened to the public, including a 200m long wooden boardwalk running east-west across the length of the site connecting a series of parklets that now occupy the parking lot's old stalls. Each colourful parklet is framed by a sign panel with a positive phrase designed to be shared, photographed, and used as inspiration to bring people together, both physically and virtually. A single painted picnic table at each parklet was re-designed for social distancing. Reclaimed artificial turf areas provide space for more active uses, and painted arrows invite people (not cars!) to circulate around the park. Murals were painted on the interior and exterior of the parkade in collaboration with the BUMP Festival to visually transform the structure and support wayfinding to the site. Designed as an engagement hub, it initiated conversations about how single-use structures for cars can creatively serve the community. QR codes placed throughout the park allowed visitors to share ideas and contribute to the conversation.

Designed in response to this feedback and installed in September 2021, Phase II includes a stage with a shade structure for small concerts and events, active elements requested by the community including a seesaw, swinging benches, ping pong table, corn hole, tetherball, and long jump, as well as a firepit, additional seating and lounging spaces. Each element is designed to be the size of one parking stall so that if vehicle parking needs to be reinstated, they can be reassembled in street parking spaces throughout the neighbourhood. Both phases were fabricated remotely to limit install time on site to about four days per phase.

High Park has played host to innovative arts and culture events with live music and outdoor cinema programmed by the Sled Island Music & Arts Festival, and over 20 murals have been painted at High Park as part of the ongoing collaboration with the BUMP Festival.

High Park has captured the imagination of Calgarians and people from around the world seeking creative inspiration for reinventing urban spaces. Successfully built on a limited budget, this project serves as an example of how communities can help lead the transformation of our cities into more livable spaces and how we can repurpose existing, single-use infrastructure built for cars into spaces for people.