

Funding and organizing projects in parks



Great neighbourhoods start with you.



How to reach us

EMAIL AND PHONE

✉ neighbourhoods@waterloo.ca

☎ 519-742-8772

NEIGHBOURHOODS WEBSITE

Check out the [neighbourhoods website](#) to find more how-to guides, find your neighbourhood and subscribe to the e-newsletter.

ACCESSIBLE FORMATS

This material is available in alternative accessible format upon request. Please contact us a minimum of 3-5 business days before it is required.

GUIDE VERSION

This guide was last updated November 2025.

What is this?

Local parks and greenspaces are used for community recreation, fitness, connection to nature, socializing, and other leisure opportunities. These outdoor spaces are a common place for community connection and involvement. To become more involved in parks and greenspaces, there are many ways community members can contribute to projects in local parks. Across Waterloo, there are great examples, including:

- neighbourhood-led community art
- little libraries
- playground equipment
- seating

This guide will help interested community members understand the requirements for neighbourhood park projects in the City of Waterloo.



There is a [Partners in Park](#) program mentioned in this document that provides additional specifics for certain projects.

Step 1: Consider project requirements

DURABILITY

Community projects take time and money. To best support these efforts, items included in local parks need to withstand park conditions. Project ideas, materials, and construction will consider:

- safety
- all-season weather
- vandalism
- heavy use and traffic
- use by various age groups

SPACE

Every community space requires planning to ensure interested users can enjoy amenities. Landscape architects follow particular design processes to ensure there is enough space in parks for activities such as kicking soccer balls around on a field, moving and jumping at playgrounds, and completing needed maintenance. Some spaces are buffers or safety zones, so they may look available but are necessary for other purposes.

ACCESSIBILITY

Supporting a variety of individuals and abilities is part of being a welcoming community. Accessibility should be considered in the early stages of project planning. City staff will help provide guidance on particular projects that have accessibility guidelines from the Accessibility of Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) or through the local Grand River Accessibility Advisory Committee. Examples of accessibility considerations include:

- width of pathways or areas of travel
- high colour contrasts for persons with visual disabilities
- sensory opportunities for various abilities
- access to elements and areas of the park

PROJECT TIMELINES

Projects typically need to be planned and organized a full year before construction or implementation could occur.



Some park projects will be coordinated through the Partners in Parks program. For these specific items, submit an application one month in advance for one-time stewardship activities or follow the timelines for long-term projects (March 31st deadline for a spring/summer project or May 31st for a fall project).

City staff will help identify appropriate timing based on the project goals, budget, park location, and details. Contact neighbourhoods@waterloo.ca early to share your idea.

Step 2: Community involvement

Community support is essential to project success. Involving neighbours helps spread the project news and creates a team of people to contribute ideas and support tasks. Make sure to involve neighbours in all stages of the project, which can include:

- brainstorming ideas
- information sharing and promotion
- fundraising
- project planning and organizing
- hosting a celebration event
- taking photos
- thanking sponsors or donors



If connecting with neighbours is new to you, we are here to help! Contact neighbourhoods@waterloo.ca for samples and possible support.

Suggestions for contacting and promoting the idea to neighbours include:

- neighbourhood social media
- flyers in neighbourhood mailboxes
- posters in neighbourhood common areas such as coffee shops, businesses, long-term care homes, community message boards, and recreation spaces
- lawn signs or window stickers at neighbourhood households
- sidewalk chalk messages
- school announcements

Consider connecting with established groups or organizations in the neighbourhood such as:

- faith-based organizations like churches or mosques
- local school(s)
- neighbourhood association
- local businesses
- community organizations such as service clubs, arts collectives, or recreation groups

Step 3: Project ideas and costs

Once neighbours are involved and committed to organizing a project together, deciding what the project will be is the next step. A few ideas and estimated cost ranges are included below to help with decision-making.

LOW COST PROJECT IDEAS (\$50-\$2,000)

- Bike parking
- Large trees
- Little library
- Community art such as:
 - mural
 - painting projects
 - temporary installation (attachments to a fence or other creative expressions)
- Community seating such as:
 - armour stone
 - picnic tables

MEDIUM COST PROJECT IDEAS (\$2,001-\$8,000)

- Bike fix-it station
- Community seating and benches
- Community message board
- Community art such as:
 - artist-led sidewalk or pathway painting
- Community vegetable gardens such as:

- new community garden
- garden plot additions
- community garden shed
- Playground improvements such as:
 - gaga ball pit
 - accessible swing on existing swing set

HIGH COST PROJECT IDEAS (ABOVE \$8,000)

- Playgrounds and play structures
- Outdoor exercise equipment
- Metal shade structures
- Sculpture installations
- Games tables such as:
 - table tennis
 - checkers or chess



The costs provided are estimates only. The group will work with city staff to consider possible suppliers or equipment options that are suitable for the project.

PROJECT IDEAS THAT ARE NOT ELIGIBLE:

- enclosed structures and gazebos
- water stations (fountains/bottle filling)
- water features such as splash pads or spray pads
- park amenities not supported by the Parkland Strategy
- infrastructure that supports high risk activities such as axe throwing, archery, or high ropes courses



All community park projects or installations should be welcoming and inclusive.

FEASIBILITY

Each park project is unique, but every project will need some time for feasibility considerations. These explorations may include:

- safety
- rules and legislation
- insurance requirements
- Municipal parks by-law
- arts and culture procedures

- access for construction
- maintenance costs
- volunteer commitment for projects requiring long-term operation and care
- connection to [Parkland Strategy](#)

Contact neighbourhoods@waterloo.ca to discuss your ideas. Organizers will also be connected to other city staff members who can help explore the project idea.

Step 4: Funding

Organizers are encouraged to consider City of Waterloo [neighbourhood grants](#) for project funding. The Neighbourhood Fund is available for up to \$7,500 and mini grants for up to \$300.

Grants from [other sources](#) are also available depending on the project details. Read the grant writing tips below to help guide considerations for various grant opportunities.

Consider exploring these organizations for current grant and funding opportunities:

- Kitchener-Waterloo Community Foundation
- Ontario Trillium Foundation
- Region of Waterloo Community Environmental Fund
- Libro Credit Union



A variety of companies and employers offer community support for eligible volunteer projects. Connect with your employer to determine if this is an opportunity for funding or in-kind support.

Friends Groups are another model of funding and support for park infrastructure, programming, and environment. Typically, these groups operate as non-profit organizations separate from day-to-day operations and management of the park. Check out information on [Friends of Ontario Parks](#) or [Friends of Waterloo Park](#) for examples of this model.



The best approach to funding is very dependent on the commitment of involved volunteers. It is strongly encouraged that groups start small to balance other commitments of community members and gain experience. Once one project is completed, you can start dreaming up another idea!

TIPS FOR GRANT WRITING

1. Read the application requirements

- Each grant will have unique elements, processes and timelines.
- Ask questions to staff members at granting organizations to ensure your application is as strong as possible.

2. Consider scale and related expectations

- Neighbourhood scale vs. international scale grants will have different applicants and different expectations of project detail and innovations.
- Review successful past projects, where possible, to help you understand the grant.

3. Demonstrate strong community support

- Outline how you have involved the community, local organizations, or appropriate staff members.
- Consider how to engage community members who may face barriers to participation such as youth, individuals with English as a second language, persons with disabilities, seniors, newcomers, and other valued members of the neighbourhood.

4. Think about unique data and statistics

- Stories from neighbours about the possible outcomes from the new feature are great ways to outline need and impact.
- Statistics tend to be important to support applications to larger granting organizations. Consider statistics about the neighbourhood such as income, culture, distance from other amenities, age, and other available data.
- Organizers can consider collecting their own data in the neighbourhood through an online or paper survey. If interested, plan several months for this step from start to finish.
- Possible sources of data to consider are:
 - Statistics Canada
 - Region of Waterloo
 - Canadian Index of Wellbeing
 - local universities
 - other credible sources

Step 5: Project implementation

PROJECT AGREEMENTS

Each project will require a written agreement that outlines the responsibilities of the organizers, the City, and any other partners involved.

Project agreements will include information regarding:

- funding (or cost sharing if applicable)
- ownership by the City of Waterloo
- operation
- ongoing maintenance and upkeep requirements
- monitoring for vandalism, graffiti, or damage
- removal in the event it poses hazard or no longer performs the function it was intended for

City staff will prepare the agreement. Lead organizers and the Director of Environment and Parks sign the document prior to installation of the new park feature.

PROJECT INSTALLATION

Project installation is coordinated and overseen by city staff to ensure that all processes meet city standards including procurement, materials, and implementation. Staff supporting the project will communicate with the project contact person(s) to keep them informed.

Step 6: Project celebration

When the project is ready, it is time to celebrate! Consider hosting a grand opening or community gathering to bring neighbours together around the new park item.



Food, activities, entertainment, and/or prizes are some ideas to encourage neighbours to attend and connect at the park.

Organizers should consider planning needs and safety measures such as event insurance, volunteer support, rain date, age-appropriate activities, and current public health guidelines during the pandemic. Contact neighbourhoods@waterloo.ca for support.

Local neighbourhood examples

MARY ALLEN PARK

The Mary Allen Neighbourhood Association has organized many great examples of neighbourhood-led park features, such as:

- Additional playground equipment during the development of the new park
- Community message board and little library
- Native pollinator garden bed
- Neighbourhood art project created by a local leader and painted by neighbours
- Tree dedication to recognize key community leaders who have contributed to the park and neighbourhood involvement



AUBURN PARK

Community members in the area of Auburn Park were disheartened when their local playground was vandalized. The group fundraised and applied for a Neighbourhood Matching Fund to help make the new playground project more unique and entertaining for the neighbourhood. The playground space and timeline created some challenges for funding, but the group worked with city staff to consider new ideas for enhancing the park and implemented:

- A new gaga ball pit for additional fun and activity
- Additional seating for community members to gather
- An increase in the value of play equipment on the playground

PINEBROOK PARK

The Lakeshore North Neighbourhood Association led the addition of a community message board in Pinebrook Park. This project helped:

- Reach community members who were not on social media or who may not be aware of current opportunities for neighbourhood connection
- Provide high visibility of neighbourhood activities in an area near a park playground, pathway, and potential school route



ROSELEA PARK

Lincoln Heights community members wanted to make the new playground at Roselea Park as engaging and exciting and possible. Neighbours came together to:

- Fundraise over \$7800 towards new playground equipment through GoFundMe and local sponsorships
- Organize a community message board for neighbourhood information sharing
- Apply for a Neighbourhood Fund grant to support further play elements in the playground design
- Inspire others to be involved in fundraising, information sharing, connecting with neighbours, and building a sense of community



For other ideas and guides in parks, check out [Parks People](#).
