CITY OF NANAIMO
THE HARBOUR CITY

Staff Report for Decision

File Number: D1-2-79

DATE OF MEETING June 19, 2023

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SUBJECT **PARK AVENUE CONCEPT PLAN - 933 PARK AVENUE (DRAFT - JUNE 2023) - LAND USE OPTIONS**

OVERVIEW

Purpose of Report

To present land use options for the Park Avenue Concept Plan - 933 Park Avenue (Draft - June 2023) for Council consideration, and to receive direction to proceed with Phase Two consultation.

Recommendation

That Council receive the Draft Park Avenue Concept Plan - 933 Park Avenue (Draft - June 2023) and direct Staff to proceed with a Phase Two public review and input process.

BACKGROUND

The property at 933 Park Avenue was purchased by the City of Nanaimo in 2019 to meet several complementary community benefits identified by Nanaimo Foodshare Society (NFS) and City Staff. "*NFS and City Staff have identified a number of potential uses. These may include food production, a farmers market, wetland restoration, public nature park, and affordable housing. All of these uses would be further investigated through a public planning process should Council decide to acquire the Property."* The property purchase was funded from the City Property Acquisition General Fund to support affordable housing on two acres, and from the City's Parks Development Cost Charge Fund, to facilitate community recreation, environmental protection, and food security on the remaining three acres.

A consultation process to guide the development of a Concept Plan for the property at 933 Park Avenue began in the summer of 2022. The phase one community engagement included a guided site tour and charrette workshop to gather input from community members and representatives from other interested parties. A link to the phase one community engagement report is in Attachment A.

At this time the NFS currently has a licence to use a portion of the property as an education centre, community garden, and urban farm (including operating a farm stand for food and produce sales and farm tours) until 2023-DEC-31. The existing house on the property has been rented to a family.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of the draft Concept Plan is to guide the future park use and improvements for the benefit of the immediate and wider community. Guiding principles for the draft Concept Plan were drawn from community engagement; Council's objectives for purchasing the property; the *City*

Plan: Nanaimo ReImagined; the Harewood Neighbourhood Plan; and, the Five Acres Farm Project: Land Use & Environmental Planning Report (MABRRI, 2018).

The Park Avenue Concept Plan - 933 Park Avenue (Draft - June 2023) contains four land use options for consideration, with variations being primarily related to the location and extent of the proposed affordable housing parcel (Attachment B). The draft Concept Plan outlines six goals:

1. **Protection of the Natural Environment** (protect the wetland, arable land, heritage trees)
2. **Recreation** (passive recreation including trails, gathering space, nature play area)
3. **Food Security** (small scale farming, community market, workshops)
4. **Affordable Housing** (ground-oriented townhouse units, maximum three storeys)
5. **Education** (agriculture and food related education and gathering opportunities)
6. **Connectivity** (neighbourhood pedestrian and bike path connections)

Assessing the Four Land Use Options

A preliminary analysis of the pros and cons of the four draft Concept Plan land use options is provided in Attachment C. The analysis is based on the City's policy and bylaw requirements in relation to the parcel at 933 Park Avenue. To accommodate affordable housing, it is anticipated that a rezoning and development permit application would be required, as well as subdividing any future area for housing from the parent parcel. When reviewing a proposed rezoning, development permit and subdivision application, compliance with the following policies and bylaws is required: *City Plan – Nanaimo Re-Imagined*, General Development Permit Area Guidelines, Zoning Bylaw, and Subdivision Control Bylaw (including the City's Manual of Engineering Specifications and Standards – MOESS).

City Plan – Nanaimo ReImagined

The property at 933 Park Avenue is designated 'Suburban Neighbourhood'. In the 'Suburban Neighbourhood' designation ground-oriented multi-unit dwellings are supported including triplex, fourplex, and townhouses, to a maximum of three stories.

General Development Permit Area (DPA) Guidelines

The following are relevant DPA guidelines that should be considered when assessing a parcel's suitability for proposed affordable housing use:

- "A presence or prominence of homes or businesses on the street contributes to the security of the public and results in a blending of the edge between public spaces and private spaces. Designers can position units, windows, and entries, and prescribe paths of movement and areas of activity so as to strengthen the building's relationship with the street. This makes the street an interesting and secure urban space."
- "To ensure infill development in existing neighbourhoods contributes to the preservation of neighbourhood character. To preserve and protect existing neighbourhood identity, the design of new construction must complement and be sensitive to the neighbourhood context. Building setbacks, height and building character should respect existing adjacent development forms to create an integrated streetscape."
- "Development of a walkway network is encouraged that provides access to important onset and off-site destinations."
- "Building mass should be compatible with adjacent buildings and the streetscape."

- "Entrances should front on main streets and be emphasized by building design"
- "Building heights should be designed in consideration of views from overlooking properties, access to sunlight of adjacent properties, and provide for privacy from overlooking adjacent uses."

Zoning Bylaw

The parcel is currently zoned Single Dwelling Residential (R1). To achieve the land use objectives of the City Plan 'Suburban Neighbourhood' designation a rezoning to Low Density Residential (R6) is recommended. The R6 zone provides for a mixture of low density ground-oriented multi-unit developments on lots compatible with other residential development in the area. The minimum parcel size in the R6 zone is 1500m^2, and the parcel frontage is required to be 15m, and the parcel depth is required to be 30m.

Subdivision Control Bylaw (and MOESS)

When reviewing a proposed new parcel, the Approving Officer considers factors such as driveway access, land use, parcel shape, environmental impacts, and servicing. During the review of a proposed new parcel it is typical to expect adjustments to proposed property lines to accommodate for new information that arises in the review process, and to ensure the best design for the long term. For example, a large sanitary sewer main runs from Alpen Way to Boardwalk Avenue, that would be costly to move, thus must be considered when reviewing proposed new parcel lines and building footprints. Note that with all four proposed land use options road frontage improvements along property frontage(s) may be required, in accordance with the MOESS, potentially impacting some land area along the frontage(s) of the parcel.

Next Steps

Staff are recommending that Council receive the Draft Park Avenue Concept Plan - 933 Park Avenue (Draft - June 2023), and direct Staff to proceed with a phase two public review and input process. Following the phase two review and input process a revised Concept Plan will be presented to Council for consideration of endorsement.

OPTIONS

1. That Council receive and endorse the Park Avenue Concept Plan - 933 Park Avenue (Draft - June 2023) and direct Staff to proceed with a phase two public review and input process.

    - The advantage of this option: Allows Council an opportunity to confirm the proposed land uses in the draft Concept Plan prior to proceeding with the Phase Two public review and input process. The land uses in the draft Concept Plan reflect the intention for purchasing the property to achieve several community benefits. The proposed lands uses are consistent with the *City Plan: Nanaimo Re-imagined* goals and land use designations.
    - The disadvantage of this option: Council may wish to eliminate one or more of the land use options in the draft Concept Plan prior to proceeding with the Phase Two public review and input process.
    - Financial Implications: The Phase Two public review and input process for the draft Park Avenue Concept Plan is within the City's 2023 budget.

2. That Council provide alternative direction on the proposed land uses in the Draft Park Avenue Concept Plan – 933 Park Avenue (June 2023).
    - The advantages of this option: Allows Council to provide alternate direction regarding the proposed land uses for the property at 933 Park Avenue prior to proceeding with the Phase Two community engagement on the draft Concept Plan.
    - The disadvantages of this option: Further changes to the draft Concept Plan will require additional resources to amend the draft, and delay opportunities for community engagement on the draft Concept Plan.
    - Financial Implications: The lands at 933 Park Avenue were purchased following Council direction, using funds from different City sources related to the community needs the lands were intended to support. Changes to the proposed land uses in the draft Concept Plan may require a change to the City's financial reporting and assignment of funds used to purchase the property.

SUMMARY POINTS

- The property at 933 Park Avenue was purchased by the City of Nanaimo in 2019 to meet several complementary community benefits.
- During the summer of 2022, a public engagement process (involving community members and other interested parties) was completed to inform a draft concept plan for City-owned land at 933 Park Avenue.
- Based on public input, Council objectives for purchasing the site, and supporting policy documents, a draft Concept Plan has been completed with four land use options for the affordable housing site.
- Staff are recommending that Council receive and endorse the Park Avenue Concept Plan - 933 Park Avenue (Draft - June 2023) and direct Staff to proceed with a Phase Two public review and input process.

ATTACHMENTS:

ATTACHMENT A: Link to Park Avenue (933 Park Avenue) Engagement Summary
ATTACHMENT B: Park Avenue Concept Plan - 933 Park Avenue (Draft - June 2023)
ATTACHMENT C: Review of Land Use Options in the Draft Park Avenue Concept Plan

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ATTACHMENT A

Link to “Park Avenue (933 Park Avenue) Engagement Summary”:
https://www.nanaimo.ca/docs/recreation-parks/parkavenueengagementsummary.pdf/

ATTACHMENT B

Park Avenue Concept Plan

DRAFT - June 2023

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INTRODUCTION

In 2019, the City of Nanaimo purchased 933 Park Avenue to meet several complementary community benefits. This property is designated Suburban Neighbourhood in City Plan – Nanaimo ReImagined (City Plan), and is identified as a potential park in the Harewood Neighbourhood Plan.

BACKGROUND

The property at 933 Park Avenue lies within the Traditional Territory of the Snuneymuxw First Nation who have many significant ancestral village sites through the city. In 1863, Captain Horace Douglas Lascelles and Dr. Alfred Robson Benson purchased 9,000 acres of Crown land in the area and formed the Harewood Coal Company. Settlement in Harewood began in 1886, when Samuel Roberts of the Vancouver Island Coal Mining and Land Company subdivided this area into five acre parcels so the company's miners could provide for their families. The park site is one of the last remaining 5-acre parcels in the neighbourhood with approximately a third of the property serving as a natural wetland. The farming legacy has continued on this parcel through operations by private owners and community groups.

Figure 1: Site Map | 933 Park Avenue

PARK GOALS

The following park goals were identified by the neighbouhrood residents, interest groups and City staff in the engagement process as community priorities for uses on the site.

1. Protection of the Natural Environment
2. Recreation
3. Food Security
4. Affordable Housing
5. Education
6. Connectivity

COMMUNITY VISION STATEMENTS:

A place where people with diverse abilities can live, grow, and feed their communities while celebrating our shared histories and environment.

Family friendly environment that supports local food production and education positive by integrating service, space, and residences more deeply.

This will remain a working farm and historic site that keeps the historic significance in place, recognize Indigenous values, food, medicine and provide education and food sovereignty for the community.

A green space, preserved for community use that meets the needs for residents and also provides a mitigating effect for inevitable climate change through preservation of wetlands and wild spaces, with agricultural land preserved secondarily.

Park Ave Park is a community gathering place that inspires celebration and diverse engagement to establish a valued and sustaining healthy relationship with food and well being.

A gathering place promoting community and sharing.

A community farm, where the soil, land, water, plants and animals and the human community work together to enhance food sovereignty for each new generation to come.

5 acre park serves as a place for the community to come together to connect with biodiversity and community diversity.

The Five Acres Farm can be a community gathering place that promotes and educates the public on food security issues through hands on learning.

PLAN DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

As part of the public engagement for this project, a guided site tour and community charrette was held in August 2022 at 933 Park Avenue (the project site) and Park Avenue Elementary School. The intent of the community charrette was to gather input on guiding principles and site recommendations from the surrounding community and organizations which currently utilize the site. In addition, City Staff were consulted and background research was reviewed to support the Park Avenue Concept Plan Options (Figure 3).

Supporting documents included:

- City Plan,
- Harewood Neighbourhood Plan,
- Five Acres Farm Project: Land Use & Environmental Planning (MABRRI, 2018)

What did we hear?

31
Participants

- 17 Neighbourhood Residents
- 1 from Nanaimo Association for Community Living
- 2 from Growing Opportunities Farm Community Co-op
- 3 from Vancouver Island University
- 2 from Nanaimo Foodshare Society
- 1 from Nanaimo Community Gardens Society
- 1 from Snuneymuxw First Nation
- 3 from Harewood Neighbourhood Association
- 1 from Nanaimo and Area Land Trust

PARK RECOMMENDATIONS

1

Protection of Natural Environment - The site's natural assets are highly valued by the community.

- The existing wetland on site should be protected and enhanced to preserve habitat and hydrological functions
- Arable land is an important site feature that should be protected to allow for continued agricultural activities
- Heritage fruit and nut trees are significant to the agricultural and cultural heritage of the site

2

Passive Recreation - Participation in physical, social, intellectual, creative, and spiritual pursuits that enhance individual and community wellbeing. The following are desirable features to support passive recreational opportunities for the site:

- Trails • Boardwalks • Viewing Platforms • Educational Tours • Educational Signage
- Public Washroom • Public Gathering Space • Public Seating • Nature Play

3

Food Security - Agriculture will continue to be a key pillar of this site. Agriculture plays a central role in the site's identity and benefits of agriculture are highly valued by the surrounding community.

Continue to cultivate agricultural activities on site by providing education and supporting infrastructure for the following:

- Small-scale mixed farming
- Community Plots
- Edible landscapes and food forests
- Innovative farm initiatives
- Permaculture
- Demonstration growing plots
- Indigenous food systems
- Small-scale food processing
- Growing heritage breeds (fruits, nuts, vegetables, livestock)
- Workshops and programs
- Market

4

Affordable Housing - The property at 933 Park Avenue is designated 'Suburban Neighbourhood' in the City Plan: Nanaimo ReImagined. In 'Suburban Neighbourhood', ground-oriented multi-unit dwellings are supported including triplex, fourplex, and townhouses to a maximum of three stories. Residential units are proposed, on a reduced footprint to preserve arable land and to preserve the site's natural assets. The design of the residential development should offer opportunities for interaction with activities in the park, and provide linkages to the park and surrounding community. The building design should complement the neighbourhood, and amenities such as a common kitchen and common work areas should be considered.

5

Education - The site is intended to provide opportunities for community engagement education, and to expand existing initiatives that seek to improve access to local food knowledge. Infrastructure to support workshops, programs, tours, and community gatherings should be considered as key aspects of the site design.

Common educational themes or ideas this site has the potential to explore

- Soil Science
- Ecological Restoration
- History of Harewood
- Heirloom Plants
- Indigenous Histories
- Biodiversity
- Indigenous Food Systems
- Gardening
- Heritage Breeds
- Pollinators
- Photography and Art
- Farming Best Practices (water & soil conservation, crop rotation, cultivars, water management)
- Integrated and Sustainable Housing
- Salmon Habitat Protection
- Animal Husbandry
- Wetland Ecology and Hydrology
- Community Network and Partnerships
- Seed Saving and Libraries
- Nutrition
- Programming (food shares, food stays, classes, workshops, tours, daycamps, field trips)
- Food Processing and Preparation (cooking, canning, pickling, curing)

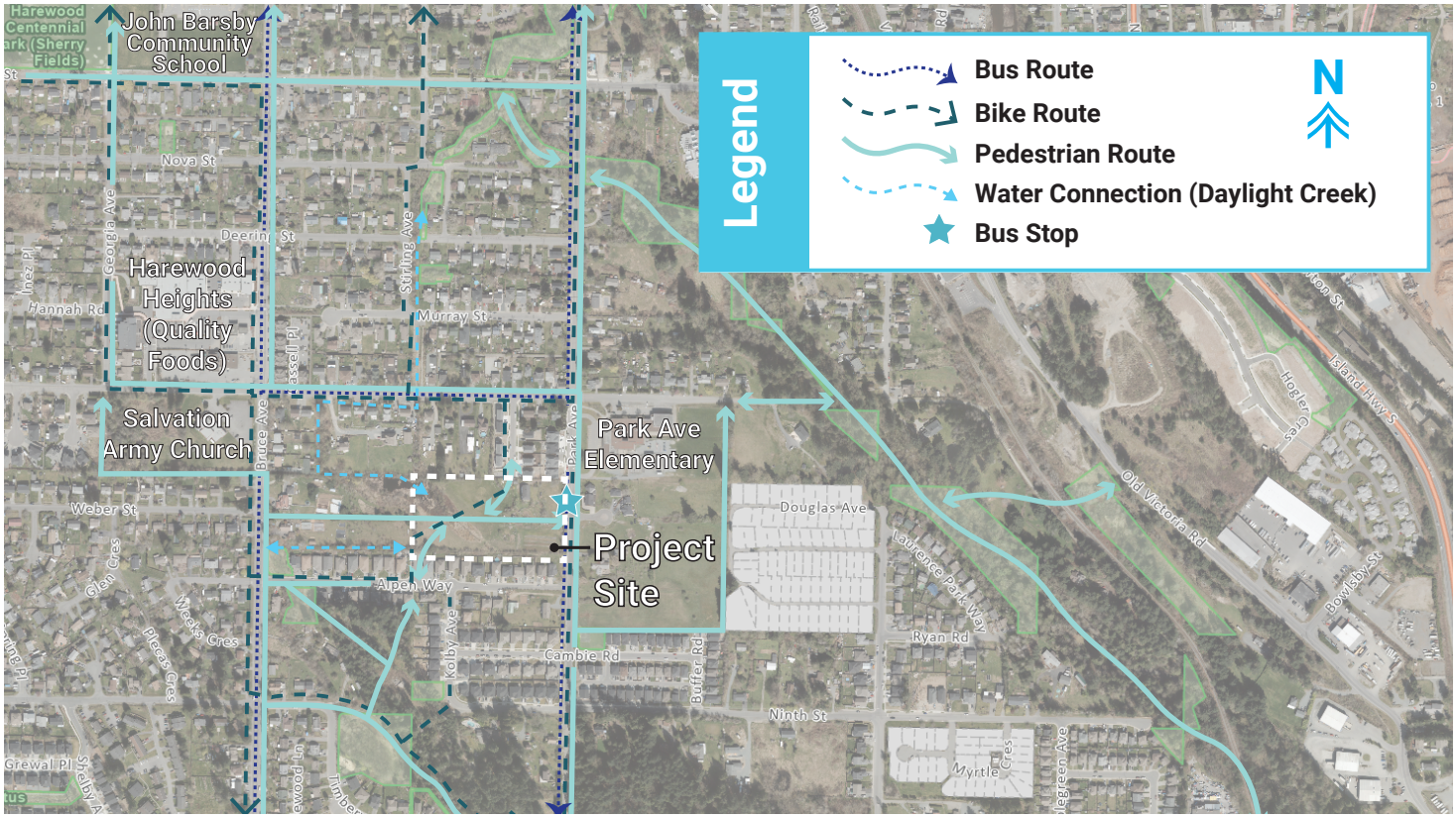
6

Connectivity - The site provides an opportunity to improve neighbourhood connectivity for ecological and active transportation systems.

Improve ecological and active transportation-based forms of connectivity and accommodate varying transportation modes (i.e. car, bike, pedestrian travel), including:

- Provide site connections to existing bike lanes and existing trails
- Ensure perimeter sidewalks connect to existing walking routes
- Provide public access to the site at Boardwalk Ave and Allies Place
- Examine opportunities to acquire land adjacent to the Chase River and Cat Stream to form a more robust ecological network that connects to the existing wetland on site
- Provide connectivity to shopping, schools and nearby parks

Figure 2: Site Connectivity



PARK AVENUE CONCEPT PLAN

A concept plan with four options was designed to capture the Park Goals and site recommendations identified by Nanaimo Foodshare Society and city staff when the property was initially purchased and by the neighbourhood residents and interest groups during Phase One of the engagement process.

- Grand pedestrian entrance to park
- Potential agriculture area
- Boardwalk with view deck, signage & benches
- Trail with signage & benches
- Agricultural area
- Park Ave sidewalk & parallel parking
- Conceptual Pavilion & Washroom Building
- Nature playground (all ages)
- Existing heritage fruit & nut trees to be protected & preserved where possible
- Affordable housing site

Option One

- Grand pedestrian entrance to park
- Potential agriculture area
- Boardwalk with view deck, signage & benches
- Trail with signage & benches
- Agricultural area
- Park Ave sidewalk & parallel parking
- Conceptual Pavilion & Washroom Building
- Nature playground (all ages)
- Existing heritage fruit & nut trees to be protected & preserved where possible
- Affordable housing site

Option Two

- Grand pedestrian entrance to park
- Potential agriculture area
- Boardwalk with view deck, signage & benches
- Trail with signage & benches
- Agricultural area
- Park Ave sidewalk & parallel parking
- Conceptual Pavilion & Washroom Building
- Nature playground (all ages)
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Option Three

- Grand pedestrian entrance to park
- Potential agriculture area
- Boardwalk with view deck, signage & benches
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- Nature playground (all ages)
- Existing heritage fruit & nut trees to be protected & preserved where possible
- Affordable housing site

Option Four

ATTACHMENT C

Review of Land Use Options in the Draft Park Avenue Concept Plan (June 2023)

Option One: 1.75 - 2 acre (0.7 - 0.8 ha) rectangular parcel fronting onto Park Avenue	
Pros	***Cons***
Can accommodate more townhouse units to house more people, achieve the "Suburban Neighbourhood" land use objectives, and may allow for a more economically viable development.	Less area available overall for public park use.
Allows for circulation and driveway access options from both Park Avenue and Boardwalk Avenue.	Less agriculture area along Park Avenue frontage.
Allows for the housing units to front onto Park Avenue in compliance with DP guidelines, and consistent with the existing streetscape and siting of houses along Park Avenue.	
Allows for space to ensure the development does not impact the wetland, and can avoid the existing sanitary sewer main.	

Option Two: 1 acre (0.4 ha) square parcel fronting onto Park Avenue	
Pros	***Cons***
Allows for more space for public park use.	May not allow for an economically viable development given potential servicing, site and building construction costs.
Allows for circulation and driveway access options from both Park Avenue and Boardwalk Avenue.	Less agriculture area along Park Avenue frontage.
Allows for the housing units to front onto Park Avenue in compliance with DP guidelines, and consistent with the existing streetscape and siting of houses along Park Avenue.	
Developable area does not impact the wetland, may allow for protection of more heritage trees, and avoids the existing sanitary sewer line.	

Option Three: 1 acre (0.4ha) square parcel setback from Park Avenue	
Pros	***Cons***
Driveway access would likely be from Boardwalk Avenue only consistent with the MOESS.	May not allow for an economically viable development given potential servicing, site and building construction costs.
Developable area may allow for protection of more heritage trees.	Public park area is somewhat divided into three sections.
	Does not allow for street presence for the housing units as recommended by DP guidelines.
	Due to the limited road frontage more area onsite may be needed for driveway and emergency vehicle circulation.

Option Four: 1 acre (0.4ha) rectangular parcel setback from Park Avenue	
Pros	***Cons***
Driveway access would likely be from Boardwalk Avenue only consistent with the MOESS.	May not allow for an economically viable development given potential servicing, site and building construction costs.
Developable area may allow for protection of more heritage trees.	Road construction would be required to build 'future road' along the north property line (however this road will be needed anyway in future).
	Does not allow for street presence for the housing units as recommended by DP guidelines.
	Developable area may be impacted by proximity to the wetland and existing sanitary sewer line.