CITY OF NANAIMO
THE HARBOUR CITY

Staff Report for Decision

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SUBJECT PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY AND PHASED CONCEPT PLAN FOR WESTWOOD LAKE PARK AMENITY IMPROVEMENTS

OVERVIEW

Purpose of Report

To update Council on recent public engagement about the draft Westwood Lake Park amenity and parking improvements at First Beach and to discuss next steps.

Recommendation

That Council:

1. Approve the Westwood Lake Park Final Concept Plan as presented for Phase One improvements in 2022; and
2. Include Phase Two and future improvements in the 2023-2027 Draft Financial Plan for Council's consideration.

BACKGROUND

Westwood Lake Park

At the Finance and Audit Committee Meeting held on 2021-MAY-19, Council approved the following motions:

That the Finance and Audit Committee recommend that Council receive the draft ideas and improvement options at Westwood Lake Park for public review and direct Staff to return with feedback and refined improvement concepts for Council's consideration; and

That the Finance and Audit Committee recommend that Council direct Staff to include the Westwood Park amenities project in the draft 2022-2026 Financial Plan for Council's consideration.

Following that meeting, $970,600 was added into the 2022-2026 Financial Plan for Phase 1 of the project.

Growing Demand and REIMAGINE Nanaimo Context

In recent years, Westwood Lake Park has seen increased use by diverse user groups and special events. More recently, during the COVID-19 Pandemic, demand for outdoor recreational activities has also increased. The park currently has three City-owned access points with parking.

Providing public access to waterfront areas has been a priority for many years for the City of

Nanaimo, and has continued to be a top priority by residents surveyed throughout the REIMAGINE Nanaimo process. Nanaimo's easy access to parks, open spaces, and waterfront sites are a key reason that people choose to move to and visit Nanaimo.

Enhancing recreational outdoor destinations like Westwood Lake Park is also identified in emerging sport tourism strategies, and influences place making and attraction policies as identified in the Economic Development Strategy (2020).

DISCUSSION

Through the late summer and early fall of 2021, public feedback was sought on the draft Westwood Lake Park Amenity improvement options. These options focused on updates to the main entrance off Westwood Road, the First Beach and parking area, and the location formerly occupied by the Caretaker House. Elements in the site plans provided were shown as interchangeable and intended to test which directions the public would like to see.

Public Engagement

Various methods of public engagement were initiated to assess public support of the draft amenity ideas for the First Beach and Westwood Road entrance including:

- A virtual meeting with neighbourhood residents in the area was held on 2021-JUN-29
- A neighbourhood meeting (held onsite with about 20 local residents on 2021-OCT-24).
- Stakeholder interviews with park user groups and some Staff teams.
- An online survey that had 636 respondents.
- Presentation to the Advisory Committee on Accessibility and Inclusiveness (ACAI) meeting held on 2021-SEP-22, which highlighted a focus on universal accessibility improvement ideas.

The various ways to respond were advertised through a variety of methods including:

- Significant onsite signage with project info and QR codes linking to online surveys. See Attachment A for the detailed project information posters and site plans originally posted at the site for review (Summer-Fall 2021).
- Social media posts (Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter).
- Press releases and subsequent newspaper articles.
- Online information on getinvovlednanaimo.ca
- City newsletter promotion.
- Direct flyer drop-offs to over 200 park neighbours with QR codes and online survey links.
- Cross promotion through the neighbourhood association networks and stakeholder groups.

Public Engagement Results

Online Survey

A survey was launched on the get involved platform in late August and closed on 2021-OCT-31. A total of 947 people visited the survey, and 636 responses were received. Of the respondents,

about 25% lived in the Westwood neighbourhood, and almost half of the respondents were aged 35-50 years old.

A full response summary is available in Attachment B.

Overarching themes include:

- Strong support for the idea of improvements and new amenities at Westwood Lake Park including beach expansion, improved washrooms, outdoor shower, volleyball, updated playground, better fishing facilities, increased seating, and improved picnic facilities;
- Desire to maintain the natural park aesthetics;
- Support for updates to washroom facilities;
- Strong support of additional parking at First Beach (including consideration of boat trailer parking and busses with stronger transit links) with improved traffic flow as well as multiple exit and entrance points;
- Support also mentioned for additional parking improvements and amenities at other park access locations (Second Beach, Arbot Road, College Drive and the backside of the lake trail);
- Continued desire to reduce conflicts with bikes on main trails;
- Mixed opinions regarding bikes and bike amenities;
- Comments regarding park maintenance, geese, and garbage collection;
- Desire to consider integrating “green approaches” including rainwater capture, shade tree planting, and EV charging; and
- Desire to keep and maintain existing boat launch where it is.

Stakeholder interviews

A summary of issues and desires from the various stakeholder groups is available in Attachment C.

Overarching themes include:

- Maintaining the park as natural area as much as possible;
- Addressing overuse concerns including issues with trail maintenance, trail widths, parking areas, and parking overflow;
- Continuing to acquire additional land parcels to increase the park size;
- Improving traffic flow, conflicts between multiple park users, and emergency access;
- Considering structures for events and group park use such as a picnic shelter;
- Adding park amenities including a new playground, picnic facilities, activities like sand volleyball, and areas with shade etc.;
- Adding site furnishings including seating, picnic tables, ping pong tables, etc.;
- Addressing universal accessibility concerns – washrooms, parking, and access to water;
- Adaptive single track trails, boat launch, fishing pier, signage and trail condition information;
- Expanding single track trail networks for mountain biking and wilderness recreation; and
- Improving amenities and access to the lake for recreational fishing.

Neighbourhood Meeting

At the meeting held on 2021-OCT-24, over thirty nearby residents attended a site meeting and were generally supportive of park improvements as long as the aesthetic retains a natural character. Parking lot expansion was supported if it is focussed in disturbed locations (such as the former caretaker house area) with as little tree impact as possible. Park amenity upgrades were desired to meet local and community need. A summary of the meeting is included in Attachment D.

Final Concept Plan

Guided by engagement results and information gathered on the needs for improvements at Westwood Lake Park, as well as updated geotechnical and tree surveys, a final concept plan has been developed for the Westwood Lake Park and Amenity Improvements (First Beach and Entrance). This concept can be found in Attachment E.

This concept plan outlines expectations for what can be accomplished within the existing Phase 1 budget and during the 2022 calendar year. It also outlines amenities proposed for Phase 2 of the plan.

Amenities and Improvements for Phase 1

- Overall natural aesthetic
- Parking located in disturbed areas with least disturbance to trees and site
- 36 additional standard parking stalls for a total of 95 standard parking stalls
- 4 additional accessible parking stalls for a total of 8 universally accessible stalls. All accessible parking stalls will have both rear and side loading options. This is 6 stalls over code requirement
- Parking circulation allows for an in and out loop and moves the traffic away from the busy First Beach area, improving pedestrian safety
- Parking lot design promotes slower traffic with raised pedestrian crossing tables and various surface types
- Allows bus and trailer access into parking lot and potential transit connections
- Emergency vehicle access integrated
- Motorcycle parking included
- Layout respects existing significant trees. The current layout impacts 35 existing insignificant trees and only 1 significant tree. Previous layouts impacted 46 and 50 trees respectively including up to 4 significant trees. Replanting will be done in accordance to existing bylaws and new trees will be planted in excess of trees removed.
- Integration of stormwater management areas and raingardens to capture and filter rainwater
- Integration of permeable and impermeable surfacing for parking lot (consideration of wrap/permeable asphalt for travel lane and permeable pavers of gravel-crete for parking stalls)
- Landscaped buffer for park neighbours (initiation)
- No parking lot lighting included but conduit installed for future potential electrical needs.

- Non motorized boat launch to remain with “good neighbour” signage to let users know how to access/park
- Existing vendor space and power kiosk to remain
- Active Mobility improvements along Westwood Road (2.0m wide sidewalk and street bike lane)

Amenities and Improvements planned for Phase 2:

- Expansion of beach area in phase 2 of approx. 800m2
- Overall natural aesthetic
- Central green open space for events and future park amenities
- More shade at First Beach—Trees and inclusion of amenities such as removable umbrellas, awnings etc.
- Improved and expanded fishing pier with universal access and fishing line recycle station
- Universal access across sand and to the water
- New picnic areas and additional seating
- Improved multi-use trail and connections to parking and park entrance
- Integration into existing single track and multi-use trail systems
- Landscaped buffer for park neighbours (completion) Underground Servicing for a future amenity building and conduit for future park needs
- Bike wash and bike tools moved to another location to help reduce conflicts.
- Bike parking

Amenities for future design consideration:

- Consideration of covered picnic and special event facilities
- New amenity building with universal washrooms and integrated information, outdoor shower, storage and first-aid/lifeguard locations
- Reduction of conflicts between multiple users and mountain bikes at the First beach park entrance.
- Consideration of other park amenities such as sand volleyball
- Overall parking planning consideration for the entire park site including biophysical assessments, park carrying capacity and environmental restoration opportunities.
- New playground for children 2-12 years old

Future Design and Implementation Process

Guided by the engagement results and information gathered on the needs for improvements at Westwood Lake Park, the following outlines the proposed next steps and deliverable dates:

NEXT STEPS	
	Date
Presentation of engagement summary and Final Concept Plan including design details of Phase 1 and future phases for Council consideration	March 2022
Final Concept Plan provided to community for information (online information and onsite signage)	Spring – Summer 2022
Final Concept Plan provided to the ACAI (focus on universal accessibility and inclusion features) and Environment Committee (focus on integrated storm water and infiltration features as well as planting details)	Spring-Summer 2022
Detailed design and tendering for Phase 1 improvements and where possible, interim parking improvements for the 2022 summer season.	Spring/Summer 2022
Phase 1 construction begins	Summer/Fall 2022
Detailed design for Phase 2 and future implementation costing to be included in the 2023-2027 Financial plan for consideration	Summer and Fall 2022

OPTIONS

1. That Council:

    1. Approve the Westwood Lake Park Final Concept Plan as presented for Phase One improvements in 2022 and;
    2. Include Phase Two improvements in the 2023-2027 Draft Financial Plan for Council's consideration.
        - The advantages of this option: Keeps the project design process moving forward with Phase One implementation in 2022 using the $970,600 available in the current financial plan. Updates on cost estimates and tendering will be communicated with Council as they become available. Other park improvements at First Beach and throughout the site can still be considered and budgeted for at a future time.
        - The disadvantages of this option: Overall costing is currently not available at this time for Phase Two.
        - Financial implications of this option:
            - A $970,600 budget is included in the 2022-2026 Financial Plan for the Westwood Lake Improvement project. The funding for the project comes from the Special Initiatives Reserve. Increases to cost estimates may require changes to scope of work or additional funding.
            - Inclusion of Phase 2 and future improvements in the 2023-2027 Draft Financial Plan may result in other planned projects being cancelled or deferred to stay within available funding.

2. That Council:

    1. Not approve the Westwood Lake Park Final Concept Plan as presented for Phase One improvements in 2022. and;
    2. Not include Phase Two improvements in the 2023-2027 budget process for Council's consideration.

        - The advantages of this option: The Park will stay unchanged for the time being.
        - The disadvantages of this option: Public expectation for park updates may have been raised through public engagement. Increased use and community needs would not be addressed.
        - Financial Implications of this option: The remainder of the $970,600 currently in the financial plan could be allocated to other projects.

3. That Council recommend another option for park improvements at Westwood Lake Park.

SUMMARY POINTS

- Westwood Lake Park is a very popular park in Nanaimo and the amenities require updating to meet community needs and use.
- Community engagement regarding improvements was aligned with the REIMAGINE Nanaimo process and overall the results were supportive of moving forward with improvements.
- Phase 1 of the Westwood Lake Park amenity improvements can be implemented in 2022 with Phase 2 and future phases added in future capital plans for consideration.
- This project is a good opportunity to showcase the achievement of integrated community values and goals that form the basis of the REIMAGINE Nanaimo project.

ATTACHMENTS:

ATTACHMENT A: Concept Plans used for public review and input (Summer-Fall, 2021)
ATTACHMENT B: Westwood Lake Improvement Survey Comments
ATTACHMENT C: Westwood Lake Stakeholder Input
ATTACHMENT D: Westwood Lake Park—Neighbourhood Meeting Notes (2021-OCT-24)
ATTACHMENT E: Final Concept Plan with engagement feedback incorporated (March 2022)

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