

MINUTES
NATURAL AREAS, PARKS & TRAILS ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Committee Rm. 2 and via Microsoft Teams
Saanich Municipal Hall, 770 Vernon Avenue
October 12, 2023, at 4:04 pm

Present: Councillor Judy Brownoff, Pamela Carroll, Catherine Du Bois (via Teams), Christine Harbord, David Little (via Teams), Dave Marecek 4:07 (via Teams), Evan Papps, Don Sutton, Darrell Wick (via Teams).

Staff: Eva Riccius, Senior Manager of Parks; Paul de Greef, Parks Planning and Development Manager; Alix Link, Manager of Urban Forestry, Natural Areas, and Community Stewardship; Dale Samsonoff, People and Programs Manager; Allison Newcombe, Human Resources Associate Advisor; Angela Hawkshaw, Committee Clerk.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOVED by P. Carroll and Seconded by D. Little: “That the minutes of the Natural Areas, Parks & Trails Advisory Committee meeting dated June 8, 2023, be adopted.”

CARRIED

CHAIR’S REMARKS

The Chair welcomed the committee, and the following was noted:

- A response from the Province concerning the Protection and Restoration of Biological Diversity motion that was put forward in May 2023, (report on file) will be communicated to the committee in the future.
- Natural Areas, Parks and Trails Advisory Committee will have new awards for members in the future.
- Two awards will be presented at the Committee Recognition Event on October 19, 2023. All members are encouraged to attend.
- A report for the BC Hydro Act concerning Prospect Lake Road could be available in November.

OVERVIEW OF THE DRAFT ACCESSIBILITY PLAN PRESENTATION

The consultant gave a presentation (PowerPoint on file), and the following was noted:

- This process began when the *Accessible British Columbia Act (2021)* was introduced.
- Saanich has met the following deadlines:
 - To have a draft plan posted publicly by September 1, 2023

- To assemble an accessibility committee
- To create a feedback mechanism
- Input from staff and the public has been collected.
- This multi-year plan will be in place until 2026. Reviews and feedback will be ongoing.
- Statistics Canada has found that Canadian residents living with disabilities face many barriers.
- The employment rate for persons with disabilities has recently risen from 59% to 65% for women and to 69% for men.
- In Saanich it is estimated that 22% of students over the age of 15 are living with one or more disabilities.
- The purpose of this plan is to increase awareness, improve accessibility within Saanich and provide ways to give feedback.
- Three themes that have emerged from the consultation are:
 - Recommendations for change should be made by people that are directly affected.
 - Creation of accessible spaces should be proactive and thoughtful, not reactionary.
 - Access to facilities, programs and services should be accessible for all.
- Saanich has many accessibility achievements including:
 - A new website design with colour, and optional print size and language options.
 - Inclusion training for recreation staff.
 - Improvements to washrooms, elevator lifts, and accessible pathways.
 - Accessibility upgrades in parks and playgrounds.
 - Continuing to provide various methods for people to pay for services.
 - Working collaboratively with BC Transit on accessibility initiatives.
- Saanich employees feel that they are cared about and the District adapts to support them.
- Saanich has created a feedback mechanism to give the public the opportunity to offer input by phone, email or in person.
- A grant was awarded to provide accessibility awareness training for staff.
- Some of the next steps are to:
 - Create an accessibility policy.
 - Outline priority actions for built environment and transportation improvements.
 - Update the Saanich website to include an Accessibility Hub.

The committee made the following comments:

- The presentation was excellent and future support from this committee could be a possibility.
- A presentation from the Parks Department about accessibility and future construction plans could be considered.
- Focus groups are scheduled to happen this fall.

The Manager of Peoples and Programs and the HR Associate Advisor exited the meeting at 4:35 p.m.

The Chair made the following comments:

- Focusing on website design and hiring practices is essential.

- The Capital Regional District (CRD) is developing an accessibility plan as well.

CONSTRUCTION TEAM UPDATE

The Parks Planning and Development Manager gave a presentation (PowerPoint on file), and the following was noted:

- The Parks Construction Team is one of several sections of managers, plans, and operations within the Parks Department.
- Concrete work, furniture replacement, and landscaping are some of the current construction projects.
- Trail work has been completed at King's Pond and Sayward Hill Park.
- One painter is designated to the removal of graffiti in Saanich, and this is a full-time job. There has been a surge in graffiti damage. Providing blank walls could allow people to paint somewhere that will not deface public property.
- New signage has been installed in most parks within the District. The initial cost for these signs is higher but the durability is longer.
- The *Park Furniture Donation Program* is a funded program that continues to operate. Picnic tables, park benches and bike racks are popular choices.
- 25 wooden benches and 10 wooden picnic tables have been refinished. This program will be phased out because it is labour intensive and expensive. Decommissioned benches and tables are used for fencing and application.
- The new recycled plastic benches and tables can last 10-15 years.
- *The Wayfinding Program* continues to replace signposts with a more durable recycled plastic as opposed to wood. These posts are harder to tag, and information can be updated easily.
- Tyndall, McMinn and Playfair Park have new publicly accessible washrooms. The washroom at Copley Park that was destroyed by arson, is complete.
- Upcoming projects include:
 - Fowler Park pickleball courts
 - Bike park refresh at McMinn Park
 - Tolmie Park traffic calming
- The new Gordon Head Recreation Centre bike shelter is complete. \$60,000 was saved by Saanich staff carrying out the installation.

The committee made the following comments:

- A vandalism budget could be increased.
- Plants and trees on traffic islands escalate staff's workload. Traffic laws have changed which create challenges for staff to manage them. Lower maintenance plants could help with cost and longevity.
- A watering control system for the traffic islands is a future plan.
- Funding has been received to replace the sedums but a long-term approach to maintenance could see better results.
- An update about the pit toilets on PKOLS and washroom strategies in general would be appreciated. The manpower to install the pit toilets are costly and staff are seeking solutions.

PICKLEBALL – MCMINN/FOWLER PARK

The Chair made the following comments:

- McMinn Park is a well used park.
- Many thanks have been given from the public for the washrooms.
- The tarp system has been successful in removing most of the sound.
- The Cordova Bay 55 Plus Association has approximately 120 members that play pickleball. There is a desire to teach young people to play.
- A booking program could be useful.
- Fowler Park could be a great location for new courts.

The Parks Planning and Development Manager gave a presentation (PowerPoint on file), and the following was noted:

- The hope is that this presentation will show the work that is being done behind the scenes by Saanich staff.
- In the past 6 years, pickleball has grown immensely in popularity.
- Current studies and strategies have shown that:
 - A booking system is not a priority at this time.
 - More indoor and outdoor facilities are needed.
 - Formal, long-term improvements are essential.
- The BC Recreation and Parks Association (BCRPA) conducted a public noise assessment with an acoustic engineer in February 2023. A report with these results could be available in the future.
- Tolmie Park has 2 dedicated pickleball courts. Efforts to resolve noise issues have been unsuccessful. These courts will be phased out and repurposed when alternate courts are available at Fowler Park.
- Guidelines have been adopted by Council for future sites.
- Fowler Park is largely undeveloped. The concept plans were presented at an open house in May 2023. Option 3 – Active Hub was the preferred design.
- Recommendations made from the acoustical assessment (2022) will be incorporated into the design.
- The park will have benches, bike racks, and 1 tennis court. A kiosk in the middle will offer shade. An existing pit toilet will be available.
- The grading is an important part of the design. Berms will reduce sound.
- The plan is for the facility to be well used and to discourage angst in the community.
- The results from the Greater Victoria Pickleball Strategy (GVPS) could be used to engage the racquet-sports community and develop a consistent strategy and booking system.
- A one-time resource request could be made to Council for Fowler Park.

The Chair made the following comments:

- Within the Parks Strategic Plan, the CRD Board has included recreation and pickleball could be part of this.
- Pickleball has been introduced to the public school system.
- The McMinn Park changes and funding for Fowler Park is important and time sensitive.

The committee made the following comments:

- 15 indoor pickleball courts are available at Saanich Commonwealth Place, Pearkes Recreation Centre, and Cedar Hill Recreation Centre.
- The funding for these projects will come through the budgeting process.
- The geotechnical report has indicated that pre-loading is done at Fowler Park and the pre-existing swamp is not an issue.
- The cost to install one tennis court is the same as 4 pickleball courts.
- Multi-use facilities bring more value to the community.
- The current capitol funding is a replacement budget that is used to replace facilities.
- New trees will be planted.
- Fowler park is scheduled to be completed in 2025.
- McMinn will have a light engagement in the fall.

MOVED by D. Sutton and Seconded by D. Wick: “That it be recommended that Council support Option 3 - Active Hub redevelopment design for Fowler Park as presented at the public open house.”

CARRIED

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 5:48 p.m.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, November 9, 2023, at 4:00 p.m.

Councillor Brownoff, Chair

I hereby certify these minutes are accurate.

Angela Hawkshaw, Committee Clerk