

DATE OF MEETING | OCTOBER 28, 2019 |

AUTHORED BY | MADELEINE KOCH, PARKS AND OPEN SPACE PLANNER, AND
ROB LAWRANCE, ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNER

**SUBJECT | EAST WELLINGTON PARK MANAGEMENT AND ACTION PLAN
UPDATE**

OVERVIEW

Purpose of Report

To provide Council with an update on the East Wellington Park Management and Action Plan and to obtain direction regarding next steps. |

Recommendation

That Council direct Staff to:

1. hold an open house at the park and post the draft East Wellington Park Management and Action Plan to the City of Nanaimo's website to gather public input;
2. submit a non-farm use application to the Agricultural Land Reserve for park development; and,
3. report back to Council with the final draft plan.

BACKGROUND

Plan Instigation

Planning for East Wellington Park began in the summer of 2018 when the former Parks, Recreation and Wellness Committee recommended that Staff undertake a park planning process for East Wellington Park, including assessment of the site's suitability for remotely piloted aircraft system (RPAS) flying.

Since that time, Staff have developed a draft East Wellington Park Management and Action Plan ("the Draft Plan"), which is included as Attachment A. The planning process included public consultation and environmental analyses of the site, as detailed in Section 2 of the Draft Plan.

In May 2019, it was determined that East Wellington Park is not a suitable location for RPAS flying. A one-year pilot project has been launched to allow qualified groups and individuals to fly RPAS under certain conditions at Serauxmen Sports Field and Elaine Hamilton Park.

The Site

Location	2191 East Wellington Road
Size	12.7 hectares (29.7 acres)
Zoning	PRC-1 (Nature Park)
Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR)	In the Agricultural Land Reserve
Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESAs)	Seasonally Flooded Agricultural Field; Millstone River Riparian

East Wellington Park is located between the Millstone River to the southwest and a rocky escarpment to the southeast. The park is primarily a seasonally flooded field with riparian area along the river. It is also bordered by an escarpment to the north.

While the property has long been used for outdoor recreation purposes, it formally became a park in 2014 when the City of Nanaimo entered into a land exchange agreement to expand the Millstone Greenway (a planned network of green space and trails along the Millstone River that includes Buttertubs Marsh Conservation Area, and Bowen, Barsby, and Maffeo Sutton Parks).

DISCUSSION

Plan Content

The Draft Plan (Attachment A) has been developed based on community and stakeholder input to date, and the results of environmental studies of the site. The plan identifies six overarching park goals, including objectives for each and an implementation schedule to achieve the plan goals over approximately four years. A concept site plan to guide park development has also been drafted (see page 20 of the Draft Plan).

Park goal summary:

Goal 1: Environmental Conservation and Restoration

Environmental studies of the site (Appendix B of the Draft Plan) reveal that East Wellington Park has substantial environmental value, and there are opportunities to improve environmental functions within the park. The Draft Plan includes objectives to:

- Enhance the Millstone River and its riparian area by increasing the riparian buffer and improving river flows as appropriate
- Create new habitat areas, including a potential new backchannel to support fish rearing and provide other environmental functions

Goal 2: Agricultural Production

The park is located within the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR), which presents a special opportunity to support local agricultural production on City parkland. It also means the property is subject to the regulations of the Agricultural Land Commission (ALC). A successful non-farm use application to the ALC will be required to authorize some of the proposed park improvements.

Nanaimo Food Share and Vancouver Island University's (VIU) Faculty of Trades and Applied Technology have both expressed an interest in partnering to use the park for agriculture, horticulture, experiential learning, and/or research.

The Draft Plan includes objectives to:

- Support ecologically sensitive agriculture and horticulture in the park
- Enter into user agreements with other agencies and community groups

Goal 3: Support Astronomy Activities

The park is a popular astronomy destination due to its open views to the south and minimal light pollution. The Nanaimo Astronomy Society (NAS) has indicated their interest in partnering with the City to facilitate astronomical activities at East Wellington Park (see Attachment C).

The Draft Plan includes objectives to:

- Collaborate with NAS on the development of a night sky viewing area
- Pursue an "Urban Star Park" designation for East Wellington Park through the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada in collaboration with NAS

Goal 4: Support Education and Research

Given the nearby location of the VIU Horticulture Program's G.R. Paine Centre, interest from Nanaimo Food Share and NAS's interests in the site, there are opportunities for this park to support a variety of formal and informal education and research opportunities.

The Draft Plan includes objectives to:

- Enter into user/partnership agreements with community groups focused on agriculture/horticulture education and research
- Install interpretive signage related to park uses
- Support small group educational events

Goal 5: Accommodate Dog Walking

The site has long been used as a site for dog walking, including off-leash dog walking, despite the park currently being designated for on-leash only. Community consultation revealed an almost perfect split between those in favour of off-leash dogs at this location and those opposed. Both the environmental report and the ALC note concerns with any dog off-leash use not secured by appropriate fencing, due to potential conflicts with sensitive wildlife and adjacent agricultural livestock.

The Draft Plan includes objectives to:

- Support dog walking that does not interfere with agriculture or the environment (by only allowing dogs off leash within a fully fenced area)
- Mitigate potential conflicts between dogs, other park users, and the environment (through education and enforcement)

Goal 6: Improve Park Access and Amenities

To date, the City has made no formal improvements to East Wellington Park. Park access is limited by seasonal flooding and the informal nature of park trails.

The Draft Plan includes objectives to:

- Facilitate year-round park access (by developing raised trails)
- Improve accessibility and provide amenities (by using appropriate trail surfacing in target areas, improving access from the parking area, and installing rest/nature viewing areas)

Next Steps

Staff recommend the following next steps:

- Submit a Non-Farm Use Application to the ALC
- Gather public input on the Draft Plan by hosting an open house at the park and posting the Draft Plan to the City of Nanaimo's website
- Report back to Council with the final draft plan

OPTIONS

1. That Council direct Staff to:

1. hold an open house at the park and post the draft East Wellington Park Management and Action Plan to the City of Nanaimo's website to gather public input;
2. submit a non-farm use application to the Agricultural Land Reserve for park development; and,
3. report back to Council with the final draft plan.

- The advantages of this option: Gathering input on the Draft Plan would clarify the degree to which the plan addresses stakeholder and community interests. Securing ALC approval will ensure the park plan is consistent with applicable regulations, and that it supports the agricultural capability of the land. The plan supports Council's strategic directions related to environmental responsibility, stakeholder relationship enhancement, and livability. It is also consistent with other overarching policy documents and community needs.
- The disadvantages of this option: Additional engagement and application to the ALC would delay endorsement of the plan. Once endorsed, implementation of the Draft Plan would require moderate park maintenance resources, adding to operations demands.
- Financial Implications: This option would involve the cost of hosting an open house event and application fees for the non-farm use application. Once endorsed, plan implementation would involve both capital costs over approximately four years and ongoing maintenance costs.

2. That Council endorse the draft East Wellington Park Management and Action Plan.

- The advantages of this option: Forgoing additional community and stakeholder input would save the cost of hosting an open house and would bring the plan into effect immediately. The plan supports Council's strategic directions related to environmental responsibility, stakeholder relationship enhancement and livability. It is also consistent with other overarching policy documents.

- The disadvantages of this option: The community and stakeholders would not have the opportunity to comment on the Draft Plan. Implementation of the Draft Plan would require moderate park maintenance resources, adding to operations demands.
 - Financial Implications: Once endorsed, implementation of the plan would involve both capital costs over approximately four years, and ongoing costs.
3. That Council reject the draft East Wellington Park Management and Action Plan.
- The advantages of this option: No additional financial resources would be required.
 - The disadvantages of this option: East Wellington Park would remain unmanaged, community input would not be addressed, and guidance for future partnership opportunities would be lacking.

SUMMARY POINTS

- A draft management and action plan for East Wellington Park has been drafted, based on community and stakeholder input and the results of environmental studies of the site.
- The Draft Plan includes six overarching goals for the site: Environmental Conservation and Restoration; Agricultural Production; Support Astronomy Activities; Support Education and Research; Accommodate Dog Walking; and Improve Park Access and Amenities.
- Staff recommend collection of community and stakeholder input on the Draft Plan and completion of a non-farm use application to the Agricultural Land Commission prior to Council endorsing the plan.

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment A: Draft East Wellington Park Management and Action Plan
Attachment B: Letter of Support from the Nanaimo Astronomy Society
Attachment C: Letter of Support from Vancouver Island University Horticulture
Attachment D: Email Letter of Support from Nanaimo Food Share

Submitted by:

Madeleine Koch
Parks and Open Space Planner

Rob Lawrance
Environmental Planner

Concurrence by:

Richard Harding
General Manager, Parks, Recreation, and
Culture