

DATE OF MEETING JULY 20, 2020

AUTHORED BY RICHARD HARDING, GENERAL MANAGER, PARKS RECREATION
AND CULTURE

**SUBJECT EXTENSION OF PILOT SITES FOR REMOTELY PILOTED
AIRCRAFT SYSTEMS IN PARKS**

OVERVIEW

Purpose of Report

To provide background information regarding flying remotely piloted aircraft systems in the City of Nanaimo and feedback on the two pilot sites for remotely piloted aircraft systems flying in parks.

Recommendation

That Council extend the one-year pilot project that allows members of the Nanaimo Model Airs Club, or individuals who qualify for a permit from the General Manager of Parks, Recreation and Culture, to fly remotely piloted aircraft systems in designated locations at designated times, for one additional year.

BACKGROUND

The Nanaimo Model Airs Club (Model Airs) approached Parks and Recreation staff in the fall of 2017 to create a safe model aircraft flying site in a Nanaimo park. The Model Airs have been safely operating model aircraft under their club umbrella for decades. Their current flying site is outside of City limits and so the Club requested of staff to work together on finding suitable locations within a city-owned park. The Model Airs proposal includes the creation of a legal and safe environment for people interested in remotely piloted aircraft systems of all types to enjoy their hobby to the fullest at specific parks.

Requirements for flying sites have changed over the last few years with advancing technologies. The planes of the past had gas engines but members today fly mainly electric-powered models. The electric engines have low decibels and produce zero emissions.

On 2019-MAY-27, Council approved a one-year pilot project that allows members of the Nanaimo Model Airs Club, or individuals who qualify for a permit from the General Manager of Parks, Recreation and Culture, to fly Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems in designated locations at designated times. The motion carried unanimously.

REGULATIONS

The flying of remotely piloted aircraft systems in Canada is regulated by Transport Canada. As of June 2019, all remotely piloted aircraft systems flyers were required to have a licence for flying issued by Transport Canada unless they belong to a Model Aeronautics Association of Canada (MAAC) regulated club, like the Model Airs. The Model Airs operate in compliance with Transport Canada regulations and the MAAC orders respecting the use of remotely piloted aircraft systems. As a club, they have insurance for their members who are operating within club guidelines.

Designating trial locations for the flying of remotely piloted aircraft systems under the Model Airs Club offers safe flying opportunities within Nanaimo's parks.

At this time, the "Parks, Recreation and Culture Regulation Bylaw 2008 No. 7073" does not address the flying of remotely piloted aircraft systems on City-owned parkland. Currently there are various types of remotely piloted aircraft systems flying within the City limits. Some fly remotely piloted aircraft systems in accordance with federal legislation and respect of public safety, and some do not. There are instances where the public flies aircraft over sports fields with user groups on the field or in areas that are not considered safe, putting the public at risk.

PILOT SITES

Two natural turf sport fields were developed into pilot sites for the flying of remotely piloted aircraft systems.

1. **Serauxmen Sports Fields** (850 Third Street) is an ideal pilot site for the flying of fixed wing aircraft. These remotely piloted aircraft systems can be up to 5 kgs and can have a wingspan of up to 2m. This site is the largest and has the most amenities including washrooms, easy access, fencing and parking. Using this site for flying also assists staff with geese management issues. All flying takes place within the sports fields boundaries, and not over the environmentally sensitive areas contained within Third Street Park.
2. **Elaine Hamilton Park** (1631 Naylor Crescent) is the choice for flying of drones. This site has good access, washrooms, amenities, and fencing. All drone flying takes place within the boundaries of the sports fields, and not over neighbouring houses.

MEMBERSHIP

Model Air members who fly at these locations within these designated times and dates under the pilot project are in compliance with Transport Canada regulations and covered by the Club's insurance. New members are mentored by experienced members on safe operating practices. An agreement with the Model Airs for use of the pilot sites is in place and could easily be extended. This agreement outlines respectful use of the park to balance park use for all users, safety, and environmental values.

Other recreational flyers who are not part of the club are required to have a Transport Canada licence and be a paid member of MAAC for insurance purposes. These individuals may apply to the Director of Parks and Recreation for a permit to use the designated pilot sites at designated times in a similar manner to the Model Airs (at no cost during the pilot project).

MONITORING AND FEEDBACK DURING THE PILOT PERIOD

The pilot airspaces ran from 2019-JUL-01 to 2020-JUN-30. As with most pilots, changes to site infrastructure were limited. During the pilot period, the City displayed signage at the pilot sites notifying the public about the one-year trial and the rules about public field use while UAVs are flying. Signage requested that the public send feedback to Parks and Recreation staff through a phone number or email address. Information was also posted in the City's website.

Feedback from the public was very limited. Only two individuals provided feedback and it is included in Attachment 1.

The Model Airs enjoyed using both sites and gave overall positive feedback about the pilot period. Most flying at Elaine Hamilton Park occurred on weekends and most flying at Serauxman Fields occurred on Tuesdays. Three additional members joined the club because of the pilot project. The Club requested additional signage at both sites (but especially at Serauxman fields) to orient flyers to the site and explain about the pilot project. In addition, the club requested a key to access existing bathrooms and storage facilities as they did not have access to them this past year. Lastly, they asked to coordinate with operations staff on field maintenance and flying times at Serauxman fields as field maintenance often occurred on Tuesdays when groups were flying and it caused them to stop.

Six members of the public requested a permit from the General Manager of Parks, Recreation and Culture to use the designated pilot sites at designated times in a similar manner to the Model Airs but without joining their club.

In addition, due to the current pandemic, spring sports teams (mostly soccer and baseball) who would have most been in conflict with remotely piloted aircraft systems were not playing on the fields and the Model Air members themselves did not congregate and use the field.

If the pilot is extended, staff will work on additional signage and coordination with park operations staff and the flying club. Staff will also work on proactive communications to make sure the public know about the rules associated with flying remotely piloted aircraft systems, the parks bylaws, and the pilot sites for safe flying.

OPTIONS

1. That Council extend the one-year pilot project that allows members of the Nanaimo Model Airs Club, or individuals who qualify for a permit from the General Manager of Parks, Recreation and Culture, to fly remotely piloted aircraft systems in designated locations at designated times, for one additional year.
 - **Budget Implication:** Costs associated with additional signage at the two locations would come out of parks operating budgets. Proactive communications would be in collaboration with corporate communication. Fees and charges for the field allocations will continue to be tested during the pilot project and worked into bylaw amendments following the trial period.
 - **Legal Implication:** The Model Airs will continue to operate in accordance with Transport Canada regulations and will be covered under MAAC insurance. Anyone not in the club must show their park permit, and compliance with Transport Canada and MAAC rules and insurance, as well as agree to fly during designated times only. Cautionary signage will continue to be placed at the sites while flying occurs.
 - **Policy Implication:** "Parks, Recreation and Culture Regulation Bylaw 2008 No. 7073" (for park use and fees and charges) will require updating long term if the pilot is deemed a success.
 - **Engagement Implication:** The public provided very limited feedback during the initial trial period. Communication via new signage, social media, and promotional materials can raise public awareness during the pilot extension.
 - **Strategic Priorities Implication:** Supporting partnerships with community groups to provide amenities to the community.

2. That Council deny the approval of extending the pilot sites for the flying of remotely piloted aircraft systems for another year.
 - **Budget Implication:** No additional costs.
 - **Engagement Implication:** The Model Airs Club and other recreational flyers will still require a legal flying location for remotely piloted aircraft systems within the City of Nanaimo.
3. Other direction by Council.

SUMMARY POINTS

- Two pilot sites for safe and legal flying of remotely piloted aircraft systems have been underway for one year in a collaboration between the Nanaimo Model Airs Club and City of Nanaimo (Serauxman Sportsfields and Elaine Hamilton Park).
- Feedback has been limited during the initial pilot year.
- The extended pilot project would run for one additional year from 2019-JUL-01 to 2021-JUN-30 and following that year, would return to Council for a final decision.
- All flyers would continue to be required to follow Transport Canada regulations and carry MAAC authorized insurance.

Submitted by:

Richard Harding
General Manager, Parks Recreation and
Culture

ATTACHMENT 1

Public Feedback Received

Date	Name	Comments
2019- JUL- 23	Person 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has built drones for 25 years. They only fly at about max 20 km/h The racing drones tend to be much noisier than his. He compared his drone flying style to kite flying. It doesn't make any noise and he only flies when there is no one else at the park. • The racing drones can fly over 100mph. The pilots use VR headsets and video cameras to fly the drones through obstacles courses. These tend to cause noise nuisances • Does not want to join the racing club in order to fly at Elaine Hamilton (I provided information on how he can get an individual permit) • Does not want to be lumped into the same category as the others
2019- JUL- 23	Person 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Sunday drone races have been causing noise disruptions to him and other neighbours • Dogs and cats become anxious from the noise • Expects city receive more calls from other concerned neighbours. • Says they operate from 9am to 7pm some weekends