

DATE OF MEETING 2023-APR-03
AUTHORED BY DEBORAH BECK, PARKS AND OPEN SPACE PLANNER
SUBJECT EAST WELLINGTON PARK PLAN

OVERVIEW

Purpose of Report

To present the East Wellington Park Plan to Council for consideration of adoption. |

Recommendation

That Council adopt the East Wellington Park Plan as presented in the Staff Report dated 2023-APR-03.

BACKGROUND

The property is located at 2191 East Wellington Road and is 12.7 hectares (29.7 acres) in size. The property was acquired by City of Nanaimo for expansion of Millstone Greenway in 2014. The property is within the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) and is designated as Parks & Open Spaces in City Plan. The property has long been enjoyed as an informal place for nature appreciation, night sky viewing, dog walking, and other outdoor recreation.

The East Wellington Park Plan process began in the summer of 2018. The planning process included community engagement and environmental analysis of the site as detailed on Page 5 of the Park Plan (Section 1.4). The Park Plan was drafted based on input from the public, interested parties, and professional reports identifying site opportunities and constraints. The first draft of the Park Plan was presented to the Committee of the Whole on 2019-OCT-28. Council subsequently passed the following motion at their meeting on 2019-NOV-04:

“That Council direct Staff to:

- 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;*
- submit a non-farm use application to the Agricultural Land Reserve for park development; and,*
- report back to Council with the final draft plan.” |*

DISCUSSION

Since 2019-NOV-04, Staff have presented the draft park plan to the public and stakeholder groups for review and input, completed both an Environmental and a Agricultural Assessment.

A draft plan was provided to the Agricultural Land Commission (ALC) and then revised following their comments. A link to community engagement findings can be found in Attachment A.

Engagement Activities included:

- An open house held at the Cavallotti Lodge on 2020-JAN-18
- Posting information on the City website
- Advertising the open house and other engagement opportunities on the City website, on Social Media, and in the Newspaper
- Meetings with key interested parties and potential future park partners to provide input

The Millstone River East Wellington Park Side Channel Conceptual Design (NHC) report was completed 2021-APR-13, to determine the feasibility of creating aquatic habitat restoration areas adjacent to the Millstone River and recommended designs. It also provided insight into the hydrology of the park and the role it plays in flood management of the Millstone River system. *An Agricultural Assessment Report (Haddow)* was completed 2021-MAY-10 to guide future agriculture and horticulture uses at the park.

The East Wellington Park Plan (Attachment B) was updated to include relevant information from these reports and input from the public and interested parties. Revisions to the Concept Plan include a simplified field and trail concept design removing features that would be impacted by flooding and by concentrating site amenities (such as benches and view areas) to the multi-use trail area. The fenced off-leash dog feature was removed and the *environmentally sensitive field* and *agriculture zones* were replaced with a blanket *regenerative agriculture & environmental conservation zone*.

The draft Park Plan was first sent to the Agriculture Land Commission (ALC) in Sept 2019 for review and comments. The ALC responded with recommendations, and the Park Plan was updated based on these recommendations. The Park Plan was further updated based on the environmental and agricultural studies completed in 2021. This updated draft was sent to the ALC in December 2022 for review. In February 2023 the ALC provided a letter advising that they support the East Wellington Park Plan, and provided a last round of suggested edits which have been incorporated into the plan. Also, the ALC has advised that there are proposed features in the Park Plan that may need an ALC non-farm use application prior to construction, such as the viewing platform, signage, and parking improvements.

If Council moves forward with adoption of the East Wellington Park Plan, implementation in 2023 may include bringing the park into agricultural production; working with community partners to co-manage agricultural activities on the property; and, partnering with Nanaimo Astronomy Society to pursue an 'Urban Star Park' (USP) designation by the Royal Astronomical Society for this location. |

OPTIONS

1. That Council adopt the East Wellington Park Plan as presented in the Staff Report dated 2023-APR-03.
 - a) The advantages of this option:
 - It allows for the opportunity to bring East Wellington Park into agricultural production for summer 2023 with community partners.
 - It allows the park to potentially become an 'Urban Star Park' in 2023

- b) The disadvantages of this option:
 - There are financial costs associated with implementing the plan.
- 2. That Council provides alternative direction regarding the East Wellington Park Plan.
 - a) The advantages of this option:
 - City Funds that would be allocated to park improvements and amenities could be re-allocated to other projects
 - User groups will continue to unofficially use property as is
 - b) The disadvantages of this option:
 - Without a proper park plan, there is a greater potential for user group conflict,
 - Potential user groups and community partners will look elsewhere for locations to provide community education and research in their specific fields or expertise

SUMMARY POINTS

- Staff carried out community engagement on a draft plan for East Wellington Park in 2018 and in 2020.
- Staff completed a number of environmental and agricultural assessment reports to inform the Park Plan.
- A draft of the Park Plan was sent to the Agriculture Land Commission (ALC) in 2019 and 2022 and the plan has been revised based on ALC comments. The ALC supports the Park Plan.
- Based on these reports and the community feedback received, Staff made relevant revisions and additions to the East Wellington Park Plan

ATTACHMENTS:

ATTACHMENT A: Links to East Wellington Project Page and Supporting Documents
ATTACHMENT B: East Wellington Park Plan

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