

DATE OF MEETING December 18, 2023

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**SUBJECT PARK AVENUE CONCEPT PLAN – 933 PARK AVE– PHASE 2
ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY**

OVERVIEW

Purpose of Report

To provide a summary of the 933 Park Ave - Phase 2 engagement process, and seek Council's direction for a preferred land use option before updating the Park Avenue Concept Plan.

Recommendation

That Council:

- 1) advise Staff which land use option should be incorporated into the draft Park Avenue Concept Plan; and,
- 2) direct Staff to return to Council with an updated Park Avenue Concept Plan for consideration of endorsement.

BACKGROUND

The property at 933 Park Avenue was purchased by the City of Nanaimo in 2019 to meet several complementary community benefits identified by Nanaimo Foodshare Society (NFS) and City Staff. *“NFS and City Staff have identified a number of potential uses. These may include food production, a farmers’ market, wetland restoration, public nature park, and affordable housing. All of these uses would be further investigated through a public planning process should Council decide to acquire the Property.”* The property purchase was funded from the City Property Acquisition General Fund to support affordable housing on two acres, and from the City's Parks Development Cost Charge Fund, to facilitate community recreation, environmental protection, and food security on the remaining three acres.

A consultation process to guide the development of a Concept Plan for the property at 933 Park Avenue began in the summer of 2022. The Phase One community engagement included a guided site tour and charrette workshop to gather input from community members and representatives from other interested parties (the Phase One Engagement Summary can be found in Attachment A). Based on the input received in 2022, a draft concept plan was created.

The draft concept plan was presented at the regular Council meeting held 2023-JUN-19, where the following motion was passed:

“That Council receive the Draft Park Avenue Concept Plan - 933 Park Avenue (Draft - June 2023) and direct Staff to add a fifth option to keep the property intact without any affordable housing on it and proceed with a Phase Two public review and input process.”

The NFS has a license to use a portion of the property as an education centre, community garden, and urban farm (including operating a farm stand for food and produce sales and farm tours) until 2023-DEC-31 with an option to extend another year. The existing house is currently rented by lease until March 2024. The intention is to ultimately demolish the house, as necessary maintenance and renovation costs are expected to exceed rent revenue.

City Plan Context:

City Plan policies reflect wide public input on community issues including housing, food security, recreation and wellness. For example:

- C3.2.5. Prioritize the use of City-owned land for socially beneficial uses such as affordable and supportive housing, and seek opportunities to partner with agencies and organizations that support community wellbeing.
- C3.4.5. Continue to collaborate and partner with community organizations to support food system activities on City-owned land.
- C3.6.1. Continue to provide recreation facilities and infrastructure to meet the demands of the community as it grows and that support overall recreation and wellness needs.
- C3.6.8. Provide opportunities, amenities, and educational programs that encourage people to be active and participate in wellness, recreation, cultural and environmental stewardship activities in parks, open spaces, and natural environments.
- D4.8.1. Plan Green Spaces to support the protection of environmentally sensitive areas and areas of high agricultural and forestry values.

The Integrated Action Plan also includes a number of relevant priority actions including:

- Priority 75 - Identify sites for acquisition and potential partnerships for affordable and supportive housing.
- Priority 77 - Finalize the Park Avenue Concept Plan (933 Park Avenue) including consideration of affordable housing.
- Priority 90 – Through community partnerships, implement food production and agroforestry supporting infrastructure at 933 Park Avenue.

Through community partnerships, the City is currently growing food at ten municipally owned sites (seven community gardens, four food forests, and 933 Park Ave) and is also hoping to partner for future food production at the 12-hectare East Wellington Park site which is in the Agricultural Land Reserve. Increased food production at the 933 Park Ave site would depend on successful partnerships with community organizations. |

DISCUSSION

The five land use options presented in the Phase Two engagement process included:

Option 1 (Swiss Chard) – includes 3 acres for park use (recreation, farm practices and wetland) and 2 acres for affordable housing development adjacent to Park Avenue.

Option 2 (Beet) – includes 4 acres for park use (recreation, farm practices and wetland) and 1 acre for affordable housing development adjacent to Park Avenue.

Option 3 (Apple) – includes 4 acres for park use (recreation, farm practices and wetland) and 1 acre for affordable housing development adjacent to Boardwalk Avenue. This option uses more farm area but less recreational space.

Option 4 (Raspberry) – includes 4 acres for park use (recreation, farm practices and wetland) and 1 acre for affordable housing development adjacent to Boardwalk Avenue. This option uses less farm area than Option 3 (Apple) by changing the location of the recreational space.

Option 5 (Carrot) – includes 5 acres for park use (recreation, farm practices and wetland), and no affordable housing.

The five land use options can be found in Attachment B.

Phase Two Engagement Process:

The following public engagement actions took place in the fall of 2023:

1. A Collaborators Meeting was held on 2023-OCT-18 to discuss the perspectives of various organizations interested in the draft Park Avenue Concept Plan. Attendees included representatives from the Harewood Neighbourhood Association (3), Nanaimo Association for Community Living (1), Growing Opportunities (4), Nanaimo Foodshare (1), and Nanaimo Area Land Trust (1). A copy of the meeting notes can be found in the Phase Two Engagement Summary in Attachment C.
2. An Online Survey presented five land use options for the Draft Park Avenue Concept Plan and requested a preferred option, along with why the option was preferred. The survey was posted on the City's Get Involved website for approximately four weeks and closed on 2023-NOV-03. A summary of the survey results can be found in the Engagement Summary in Attachment C.
3. An Open House was held on 2023-OCT-25, from 6-8 p.m. at Park Avenue Elementary School. Display boards providing details on the Park Avenue Concept Plan and related land use options were set up at the open house, and participants were asked to vote on a preferred option through a "dotmocracy" process, and leave a comment. Approximately 161 persons attended the open house. A summary of the open house results can be found in the Phase Two Engagement Summary in Attachment C.
4. Creation of a Get Involved Project website with an outline of the project, project timeline, survey, and links to relevant background documents such as the Phase One Engagement Summary and City Plan.
5. A write up for the E-Newsletter was included in the *My Nanaimo This Week*, guiding residents to the Get Involved Page to review the design options and provide feedback by filling out the online survey.
6. Print notifications for the open house and online survey were sent to approximately one thousand local residences. Signage about the survey and open house were also posted around the school site.

What We Heard:

Collaborators Meeting:

Groups represented at the collaborators meeting, shared a wide range of comments and thoughts about the five proposed land use concepts and balancing site uses and community need. Discussion generally focused on the need to acknowledge the history of the site, and whether or not housing on the site made sense given the need to protect diminishing farmland in the area. The location of the site is ideal for teaching farming and promoting urban agriculture. While housing is considered important, most of the groups in attendance noted preference for the site to be used solely for park/agricultural use, with no onsite housing.

Online Survey Results:

Based on the input received through the surveys, the preferred land use option was Option 5 (Carrot) which features no land allocated for housing. The online survey results are outlined below:

OPTION	DESCRIPTION	RESULTS
Option 1 (Swiss Chard)	3 acres park use/2 acres housing	64 voted for this option
Option 2 (Beet)	4 acres park use/1 acre housing	55 voted for this option
Option 3 (Apple)	4 acres park use/1 acre housing	30 voted for this option
Option 4 (Raspberry)	4 acres park use/1 acre housing	43 voted for this option
Option 5 (Carrot)	5 acres park use/no housing	604 voted for this option

These results are not a statistical sample. It should be noted that one participant in the Online Survey process chose to cast more than one vote (voting 52+ times for various options). Staff were able to identify most of the redundant votes and have removed these from the vote tally, and feel confident that the vote tally is representative of those who participated.

Open House Results:

Open house attendees provided conversational feedback to staff as well as written feedback on the open house boards and through a dotmocracy exercise on the display boards (each attendee was given a sticky dot when they signed in to place of the display board of the land option they preferred). In order to be accessible, hard copies of the online survey were also available at the open house for attendees to submit. Attachment C includes a summary of the feedback left physically on the presentation boards at the open house. The open house dotmocracy voting results are as follows:

OPTION	DESCRIPTION	RESULTS
Option 1 (Swiss Chard)	3 acres park use/2 acres housing	6 voted for this option
Option 2 (Beet)	4 acres park use/1 acre housing	2 voted for this option
Option 3 (Apple)	4 acres park use/1 acre housing	2 voted for this option
Option 4 (Raspberry)	4 acres park use/1 acre housing	4 voted for this option
Option 5 (Carrot)	5 acres park use/no housing	147 voted for this option

It is likely that this sample includes redundant feedback from those who completed the online survey. The dotmocracy exercise showed a similar result to the Online Survey with Option 5 (Carrot) being the preferred option by a large margin.

Based on the input provided in both the Phase 1 and Phase 2 public engagement processes, it is clear that the subject property at 933 Park Avenue holds great significance for the surrounding community, and that the vision that Council adopts for future use of the site is of keen interest to this community. In both engagement processes, there was consistent support with respect to recreation, farmland, and protection of wetland elements of the draft Park Avenue Concept Plan. However, many participants did not support incorporating housing into the future land use plan.

Staff believe that both the City's food security and housing objectives can be accommodated on the property at 933 Park Avenue and are not mutually exclusive, and that housing development can creatively be integrated with food production, recreation and open space uses on the site. Based on public input, Council objectives for purchasing the site, and supporting policy documents, Staff are seeking Council direction to determine which of the five land use options should be incorporated into an updated Park Avenue Concept Plan. |

OPTIONS

1. That Council:

- 1) advise Staff which land use option should be incorporated into the draft Park Avenue Concept Plan; and,
- 2) direct Staff to return to Council with an updated Park Avenue Concept Plan for consideration of endorsement.
 - The advantages of this option: Would provide clear direction to Staff on which land use option is preferred by Council, and then allow staff to revise the draft Park Avenue Concept Plan accordingly for Council's consideration of endorsement.
 - The disadvantages of this option: Staff are not able to update the draft Park Avenue Concept Plan until a land use option is selected.
 - Financial Implications: Future capital costs will be incurred in order to implement the Concept Plan once endorsed.

2. That Council provide alternate direction.]

SUMMARY POINTS

- The property at 933 Park Avenue was purchased by the City of Nanaimo in 2019 to meet several complementary community benefits.
- During the summer of 2022, a public engagement process (involving community members and other interested parties) was completed to inform a draft concept plan for City-owned land at 933 Park Avenue.
- In June 2023, Council directed Staff to proceed with Phase Two public engagement with five land use options for consideration.
- A Phase Two public engagement process to obtain input on five land use options for the draft Park Avenue Concept Plan was completed in October 2023.
- Staff are seeking Council direction on a preferred land use option for 933 Park Avenue.

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment A: Link to Phase One Engagement Summary – September 2022

Attachment B: Five Land Use Options for 933 Park Avenue

Attachment C: Phase Two Engagement Summary – December 2023 |

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