

DATE OF MEETING MARCH 20, 2024

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**SUBJECT PARKS AND OPEN SPACES FEES AND CHARGES  
AMENDMENTS**

## **OVERVIEW**

### **Purpose of Report**

To amend Parks, Recreation and Culture Fees and Charges Bylaw 7336 to reflect recommended adjustments to fees and charges and provide some recommended house-keeping changes such as adding the newly completed turf fields to the Bylaw.

### **Recommendation**

That the Finance and Audit Committee recommend that Council:

1. Support the changes to the user rates for Parks and Open Spaces, fee implementation dates, and the Field classification changes as outlined; and
2. Direct staff to bring forward an amendment to the Fees and Charges Bylaw No. 7336 to incorporate the new Parks and Open Spaces fees, fee implementation dates, and Field classification changes.

## **BACKGROUND**

Council adopted the Parks, Recreation and Culture Fees and Charges Amendment Bylaw 7336.04 at the regular Council meeting held 2023-JUN-05 which outlined the new rate classification system, pricing structure and percentage increases for the Parks, Recreation and Culture operations.

Prior to the bylaw amendment in June 2023, these rates had remained unchanged since 2015 and demand for space remained constant. The recommended changes took into consideration a number of factors including fees that:

- Provide accessibility for most taxpayers;
- Are easy to administer and understand;
- Mirror the cost of living increases;
- Are comparable to other Vancouver Island municipalities; and
- Provide subsidized rates to children and youth.

Parks and Open Spaces rates were assessed initially through the lens of commercial usage of the parks as these events resulted in the highest impact to the space, the community, and regular users. After implementing the new fees in September 2023 and using those for the last five months staff have determined that the new fee structure creates some unintended barriers to regular, non-commercial Parks and Open Spaces users. Prior to the bylaw update non-commercial Parks and Open Spaces users were paying a nominal fee to use the park and the

shift to hourly rates results in a quicker increase than some of the groups have been able to absorb and implement in their programs and events. The unanticipated consequence of the shift to hourly rates has disproportionately impacted Not-for-Profit groups, especially those offering smaller events.

**DISCUSSION**

The Parks and Open Spaces fees currently have one set of fees based on hourly rates with discounts applied to the Commercial rate based on the rental group classification. The initial intention with all of the Parks Recreation and Culture facility rental fees was for Private groups to receive a 10% discount from the Commercial rate, Not-for-Profit 2 (adult groups) to receive approximately 20% off, and Not-for-Profit 1 (children/youth groups) to receive the highest discount of approximately 50% off the Commercial rate.

The current fees for Parks and Open Spaces are as follows:

<b>CITY PARKS, PLAZAS, PAVILLIONS, AMPITHEATRES, GROUNDS, PARKING LOTS, TRAILS</b>				
	1-Sep-2023	1-Sep-2024	1-Sep-2025	1-Sep-2026
NP1	\$23.81	\$24.65	\$25.51	\$26.40
NP2	\$47.63	\$49.29	\$51.02	\$52.80
Private	\$59.53	\$61.62	\$63.77	\$66.00
Commercial	\$66.15	\$68.46	\$70.86	\$73.34

Communications with Parks and Open Spaces users allowed staff to collect feedback about the fee structure and how the changes impact their individual events. To further understand the barriers introduced by the new fee structure and consider how best to provide accessibility for most tax payers, staff looked more intensely at the types of Parks and Open Spaces events that traditionally occur throughout the year (small, medium, and large) and any new requests that have been received over the last five months. Staff recognized that each Parks and Open Spaces request is unique in the program/service being offered, the size required to meet the request, and the impact the rental has on both the park and the community. After reviewing the current fee structure, Staff determined that Not-for-Profit groups were disproportionately impacted by the changes especially when the program, event, or services was smaller in size.

With a better understanding of the Parks and Open Spaces requests, Staff are recommending that Council endorse a two-tiered system based on whether the Parks and Open Spaces booking is considered a high impact or low impact booking according to the following the criteria:

<b>High Impact Booking</b>	<b>Low Impact Booking</b>
Admission charge to participate	Free of charge.
High washroom use or extra portable toilets required	Low washroom use and only requires on-site washroom facilities.
Med-High impact to other park user. Eg. loud music, gated areas, parking challenges, etc.	No to low impact on other park users. Non-event park users can access the space during the event and enjoy the space without knowing the event is happening.
Equipment needs such as tents and vehicle access required to deliver equipment during event set-up.	No equipment requirements or vehicles access required to set up the event.

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More than 300 participants during the event.	Less than or equal to 300 participants during the event.
Multi-day events or overnight set-up required.	Single day event.
Overnight storage required.	No overnight setups and storage required.
Greater than or equal to 1000 square feet.	Less than 1000 square feet.
Alcohol use planned for event (beer garden, tasting-type event)	No alcohol.
Serving or sales of event related merchandise during booking.	No sales or service of sales merchandise.
Road/sidewalk closures required during booking.	No road/sidewalk closures required.

Also, to encourage the use of Parks and Open Spaces by Not-for-Profit groups that serve the community, staff recommend increasing the discount for Parks and Open Spaces to be 75% off the Commercial rate for Not-for-Profit 1 (children/youth), rather than the 50% initially identified, and 50% off the Commercial rate for Not-for-Profit 1 (adult), rather than the 20% initially identified. This slight discount adjustment will reduce the rates offered to these groups, reduce the initial barrier caused by shifting to hourly rates, and continue to encourage these groups to utilize the Parks and Open Spaces for their programs and services. With the endorsement of Council, Staff are recommending the proposed changes be effective immediately, following the process to amendment to Bylaw 7336. Below are the suggested changes to the fees for Parks and Open Spaces:

CITY PARKS, PLAZAS, PAVILLIONS, AMPITHEATRES, GROUNDS, PARKING LOTS, TRAILS					
<b>LOW IMPACT</b>					
	Current	REVISED 1-May-2024	1-Sep-2024	1-Sep-2025	1-Sep-2026
NP1	\$23.81	\$7.81	\$8.05	\$8.29	\$8.54
NP2	\$47.63	\$15.63	\$16.10	\$16.58	\$17.08
Private	\$59.53	\$28.31	\$28.97	\$29.84	\$30.74
Commercial	\$66.15	\$31.25	\$32.19	\$33.16	\$34.15
<b>HIGH IMPACT</b>					
	Current	REVISED 1-May-2024	1-Sep-2024	1-Sep-2025	1-Sep-2026
NP1	\$23.81	\$15.63	\$16.10	\$16.58	\$17.08
NP2	\$47.63	\$31.25	\$32.19	\$33.16	\$34.15
Private	\$59.53	\$56.25	\$57.94	\$59.68	\$61.47
Commercial	\$66.15	\$62.50	\$64.38	\$66.31	\$68.30

Under the existing bylaw, the implementation date of all PRC fees from one year to the next is unclear. Traditionally, the fees are adjusted on September 1<sup>st</sup> of each year to reflect the change in seasons that align with user groups. Staff are recommending that all of the PRC fee charts be replaced with charts that identify September 1<sup>st</sup>. There are no changes to any of the fees with the exception of the City Parks and Open Spaces fees addressed above.

Additionally, since the adoption of the Bylaw the status of some facilities has changed and Staff are also recommending the following house-keeping changes to the Parks, Recreation and Culture Fees and Charges Bylaw 7336 including:

- Adding Mariner’s Field (Serauxmen Field 4) to Field A category of Sports Fields.

- Adding the new Harewood Artificial Turf Fields East and West (formerly Sherry Field) to Artificial Turf Field category of Sports Fields.
- Remove Sherry Fields from the Field A category.
- Replace Robbins Park with Robins Park in Field B classification.
- Removing the “Current” column, which refers to 2022 fees, from PRC fees for ease of understanding.

### **OPTIONS**

1. That Finance and Audit Committee recommend that Council support the changes to the user rates for Parks and Open Spaces, fee implementation dates and the field classification changes as outlined; and direct staff to bring forward an amendment to the Fees and Charges Bylaw No. 7336 to incorporate the new Parks and Open Spaces fees, fee implementation dates and Field classification changes.
  - The advantages of this option: The new fees will address financial barriers that were identified with the initial amendment to the fees and encourage the use of Parks and Open Spaces by Not-for-Profit groups. This option aligns with the goals of City Plan: Nanaimo Reimagined, with strategic priorities related to A Healthy Nanaimo and an Empowered Nanaimo.
  - The disadvantages of this option: There may be a slight reduction in revenues to account for the adjustment in fees for low impact rentals, when hard costs such as custodial and parks maintenance fees remain the same.
  - Financial Implications: There may be a slight reduction in revenue.
3. That Council retain the existing Parks and Open Spaces fees as indicated in Fees and Charges Bylaw No. 7336.
  - The advantages of this option: No Bylaw amendment is required.
  - The disadvantages of this option: Not-for-Profit groups may not be able to access the Parks and Open Spaces for the programs and services they normally offer to the community. Increased negative communications from user groups and an escalation in requests for fee reductions, fee waiving, and financial grant support. Conflict between parks users when groups choose to run their event without reserving the space.
  - Financial Implications: Reduction in revenues related to facility rentals in Parks and Open Spaces as groups decide not to offer events and programming.
4. That Council direct staff to explore alternative options for Parks and Open Spaces fees.

### **SUMMARY POINTS**

- A bylaw amendment is required to adjust the Parks and Open Spaces rental rates of the Fees and Charges Bylaw, to reduce barriers of parks usage and better serve the community.
- Not-for-Profit groups have indicated that the current fees are a financial barrier for smaller, less impactful parks bookings.
- The status of some facilities has changed and Staff are recommending house-keeping changes to the PRC fees and charges in Bylaw 7336.

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