

DATE OF MEETING | MAY 23, 2018 |

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**SUBJECT                      PILOT PARK SITE FOR NANAIMO MODEL AIRS RADIO CONTROL  
FLYING CLUB**

## **OVERVIEW**

### **Purpose of Report**

To introduce the concept of a pilot airspace for the safe flying of model aircraft in a City of Nanaimo park(s).

### **Recommendation**

That the Parks Recreation and Wellness Committee recommend that Council endorse:

- (a) Staff to work with the Nanaimo Model Airs Club to explore suitable locations for use of Model Aircraft; and,
- (b) Undertaking a park planning process for East Wellington Park to determine appropriate land use strategies for the site including the exploration of a pilot site for the Model Airs.

## **BACKGROUND**

The flying of model aircraft and drones is a popular activity. Currently there are all kinds of model aircraft flying within the city limits and many within parks. Some fly in accordance with federal legislation and respect of public safety and some do not. Although the planes of the past had loud engines, today with advancing technologies, members fly electric powered models. These are very quiet and produce zero emissions.

The Nanaimo Model-Airs Radio Control Flying Club (Nanaimo Model Airs) represent several of the local model aircraft flyers. The group approached the City of Nanaimo in the fall of 2017 to create a safe model aircraft flying site at a City of Nanaimo Park. Their goal is to have one or two designated park sites for flying with a use agreement between the City and the Model Airs. Members who join the group could then fly in accordance to the agreement and be covered under the Model Airs liability insurance.

### ***Legislation for Flying Aircraft***

Radio controlled model airplanes flying in Canada is regulated by Transport Canada. The Nanaimo Model-Airs operate in full compliance of all Transport Canada Regulations and Interim Orders respecting the use of model airplanes. Operating a model airplane flying in a field is also in compliance with secondary land use regulations for Agricultural Land Reserve use in British Columbia.

### ***Municipalities in British Columbia with Flying Agreements***

Several municipalities in British Columbia have agreements with aircraft clubs on public property. The details vary with each location, but the sport is growing in popularity across the province. The table below summarizes some precedent agreements.

<b>Municipality</b>	<b>Agreement with</b>	<b>Agreement location</b>	<b>Details of the agreement on public property</b>
City of Burnaby	Burnaby Lake "Hoods Up Flyers"	Burnaby Lake Park East Sports Plex Fields 3,4,5,6	Booked times for the clubs and casual time when the field is not booked. Schedules are posted online.
City of Coquitlam	West Coast Radio Controlled Aircraft Flyers	Upper Coquitlam River Park on Pipeline Road	7 days a week
City of North Vancouver	North Vancouver Radio Controlled Flying Club	Inter River Park	Booked times are visible online
City of Richmond	Richmond RC Flyers	Manoah Steves Elementary School	Specific times and rules on one field

### ***Desirable Sites for Flying***

Ideal sites for aircraft flying have an open character and satisfy all Transport Canada requirements in respect to distance from an Aerodrome and populated areas. Long term, the Model Airs would like to have a mowed runway for use (500 feet by 50 feet). This site would have to be situated well away from cars, roads, water bodies and heavy pedestrian traffic areas.

Staff have identified a few sites which may be appropriate for flying. Some sport fields, as well as East Wellington Park, meet the Model Airs needs and could be tested on a trial basis in the future.

### ***East Wellington Park***

East Wellington Park is a 12.7 hectare property located at 2191 East Wellington Road. The property is zoned PRC-1 Nature Park and lies within the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR). The property became park in 2014 when the City of Nanaimo entered into a land exchange in order to expand the Millstone Greenway. Under the land exchange agreement, the City transferred 4.5 acres of land from a City-owned parcel at 155 Westwood Road in exchange for this property. **Schedule A** outlines the park location.

The property has an irregular shape and is confined between the Millstone River on the south and a vegetated rocky escarpment to the northeast. The property falls within the floodplain of the Millstone River and seasonally floods. The property is classified as an Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA)—seasonally flooded Agricultural Field on the City of Nanaimo’s Habitat Atlas. The property was historically used as an agricultural field to grow hay and has annually been hayed since becoming a park. .

In 2011, a biophysical analysis of the property was performed by Chatwin Engineering. The inventory identifies the likely presence of several red and blue-listed species of birds on the site. The report also identifies key features for avian and aquatic habitat including a ditch with seasonally inundated ponded areas, forested areas, comprised of mixed stands of mature trees with several Douglas fir and thick shrub understories and the Millstone River. The report makes recommendations for a number of environmental improvements to the site and boardwalk and trail systems.

Sewer upgrades on Maxey Road were completed by the City of Nanaimo in 2017. This sewer upgrade project also improved a small parking area on East Wellington Road for the park. **Schedule B** depicts the park in its current condition and the new parking area. More sewer upgrades are planned within the park in 2020. After the work is completed, construction of a 1 km soft surface trail along the length of the property will help to connect this park into a larger Millstone Greenway trail network. (**Schedule C**)

### ***Model Airs Club Pilot Concept at East Wellington Park***

East Wellington Park has a large flat open character. It is zoned PRC-1 Nature Park, which allows for recreation and educational uses that are compatible with the natural features of the park, such as use of the air space above the field by aircraft. The property is currently open for public use but has remained undeveloped. A sign is posted at the park introduces the park as a Nature Park with no formal developed trails. It also explains that there will be future planning to define a long-term vision of the site. The park is currently used on an ad hoc basis by pedestrians, dog walkers, birders, flyers of model airplanes, and astronomy enthusiasts.

Undertaking a public engagement and land use planning process at East Wellington Park could further explore the concept of a use agreement between the Model Airs and City of Nanaimo at the site. The proposed land use planning process is as follows:

#### ***Stage 1—Review Existing Conditions (May 2018)***

- Develop base maps and surveys of the site
- Review Biophysical assessments

#### ***Stage 2: Assess Priorities for Park Use and Improvements (June/July 2018)***

- Meet with stakeholder groups to discuss park issues and land use strategy ideas (astronomy club, neighbours, dog walkers, Nanaimo Model Airs and others);
- Hire a Qualified Environmental Professional to review the 2011 biophysical inventory and potential impacts to the site by various park users;
- Hold Public public input session #1 on site;
- Administer public survey regarding park uses and desired visions and strategies;

- Construct a portion of the City website as a communications forum for planning documents and surveys as well as using radio, face book, twitter, and newspaper and site signs for communication about the process.

### ***Stage 3—Plan Preparation (July/August 2018)***

- Assess survey results, stakeholder input, and expert reports;
- Draft park vision and improvement plan prepared based on input and site opportunities and constraints;
- Consider a pilot project for the Nanaimo Model Airs at the East Wellington site as part of the assessing and plan development;
- Present draft plan to Parks Recreation and Wellness Committee and Council for review and approval to have the draft plan reviewed by the public.

### ***Stage 4—Plan Review and Adoption (August/September 2018)***

- Present draft park vision and land use strategy to the public and stakeholders for review and input at Open House #2 (plus social media website, facebook, twitter, draft plan displayed at the Park and Recreation Centres.)
- From public review, update and present the final land use strategy to the Parks Recreation and Wellness Committee for approval and forwarding on to City Council for consideration.

## **OPTIONS**

1. That the Parks Recreation and Wellness Committee recommend that Council endorse:
  - (a) Staff to work with the Nanaimo Model Airs to explore suitable locations for use of Model Aircraft;
  - (b) Undertaking a park planning process for East Wellington Park to determine appropriate land use strategies for the site including the exploration of a pilot site for the Nanaimo Model Airs.
    - **Budget Implication:** The planning process for the park is not in the budget plan for 2018, but was part of the five-year budget plan. Costs to move the process up can be covered from operating accounts in 2018.
    - **Legal Implication:** Federal guidelines for the flying of aircraft will be followed in consideration of all sites.
    - **Policy Implication:** Local bylaws will require updating long term if a pilot and/or permanent site for aircraft is established.
    - **Engagement Implication:** Public engagement about potential sites has not begun. Engagement will occur as part of the planning process. Staff have met with the Model Airs to discuss their needs.

2. That the Parks Recreation and Wellness Committee not recommend that Council endorse:

- **Budget Implication:** No cost to the City of Nanaimo in 2018.
- **Engagement Implication:** The Nanaimo Model Airs Club will still want to work with Staff to determine a suitable location for their club in Nanaimo. Long term planning for East Wellington Park will still have to be carried out at a future date.

### **SUMMARY POINTS**

- The Nanaimo Model Airs are seeking a site to fly aircraft within the City limits
- East Wellington Park is an undeveloped, low-use, seasonally flooded, nature park in central Nanaimo that might be an appropriate site for the Nanaimo Model Airs. Public engagement and a land use planning process could be undertaken to explore use of East Wellington Park as a pilot flying site.
- Other City parks and fields could also be explored as appropriate locations for flying.

### **ATTACHMENTS**

Schedule A-East Wellington Park location and Context

Schedule B-Images of East Wellington Park

Schedule C-East Wellington Park site features

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#### **Concurrence by:**

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