

DATE OF MEETING JUNE 11, 2018

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SUBJECT GEORGIA GREENWAY PHASE 1 UPDATE

OVERVIEW

Purpose of Report

To obtain direction from Council on how to proceed with the Georgia Greenway Project.

Recommendation

That Council direct Staff to proceed with the construction of the Georgia Greenway Phase 1 Project, in 2018, as currently designed.

BACKGROUND

Council identified the Georgia Avenue Pedestrian / Cycling Bridge over the Chase River project as one of the Top 5 Key Capital Projects and Initiatives in the 2016-2019 Strategic Plan Update.

This initiative is supported by several planning documents such as Harewood Neighbourhood Plan, Official Community Plan, Harewood Centennial Park Master Plan, and Nanaimo Transportation Master Plan.

Phase 1 of the Georgia Greenway includes:

- a 4.0 meter wide multi use trail through Harewood Centennial Park connecting Sixth Street and Seventh Street,
- a 4.0 meter wide multi modal bridge over the Chase River,
- LED lighting along the trail, and
- crossing improvements at the intersections of Sixth Street and Seventh Street

Engineering designs were completed in 2017, and the project was tendered in March of 2018 with construction planned for summer 2018. Construction of the bridge requires the removal of several trees including one significant Bigleaf Maple and two landmark Cottonwood trees.

At the March 26, 2018 Special Council Meeting, Council passed a motion to “refer the siting of the bridge in the Georgia Greenway Project to Staff for further discussions regarding tree retention”.

Since the March 26, 2018 Council direction, the following work has been completed:

- The project tender was cancelled.
- A professional forester completed testing and a risk assessment of the two landmark Cottonwood trees.

- Staff attended the Active for Life Expo on May 12, 2018 to discuss the project with the public and gather feedback.
- A public survey was conducted to gather project feedback.

DISCUSSION

Public Engagement

Two public engagement events were held for the project. The first was on May 13, 2017 during preliminary design, and the second was on May 12, 2018. Both events were at the Active for Life Expo, which is an annual event held in the Harewood community that promotes health, wellness and active participation opportunities for all ages and abilities. Public surveys were available at each event, and online, to collect feedback. The 2017 survey received 162 responses and the 2018 survey received 215 responses. The results of both surveys showed that the majority of respondents would use the Georgia Greenway once created.

The top three design criteria identified in the 2017 public engagement were:

- Incorporating Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles in the design of the facility.
- Ensuring the facility was easy to use for pedestrians and cyclists.
- Separating pedestrians and cyclists from vehicle traffic.

The results of the 2018 public engagement indicated that:

- the majority of input supports the project and views it as an overall community benefit that would create a safer space for pedestrians and cyclists, encourage active transportation, and improve accessibility and connectivity for the neighborhood.
- there are some opposed to the project due to concerns over the proposed bridge width, tree removal required for the bridge, project cost, and safety concerns.

Bridge Width and Alignment

In 2008, the City of Nanaimo developed Bicycle Facility Design Guidelines for the planning, design and maintenance of bicycle facilities, and are based on design guidelines established by the Transportation Association of Canada (TAC). Our guidelines recommend that multi-use pathways should be a minimum of 4.0 meters wide. This width will provide appropriate space for the two-way travel of pedestrians, cyclists, in-line skaters, persons in wheelchairs, and all other non-motorized users. The current design includes a 4 meter wide bridge, which meets the City of Nanaimo's Bicycle Facility Design Guidelines.

The current design also meets specific objectives identified in the 2013 Harewood Neighbourhood Plan which states, *"Create a neighbourhood street bikeway on Georgia Avenue, including a multi-use path across Harewood Centennial Park, and a multi modal bridge across Chase River."* The neighbourhood plan also specifically mentions the width of the multi-use trail, *"As part of the Georgia Avenue bikeway, create a new 4.0 meter wide multi use pathway across Harewood Centennial Park, with a new multi modal bridge over the Chase River."*

The current design also includes a straight bridge alignment that offers the best sightlines and will provide a more comfortable and safe experience for users of all ages and abilities. It also allows for easier monitoring by the RCMP, which supports the CPTED principles requested through the

2017 public engagement. Alternate alignment options explored had negative impacts to safety and private property, and exceeded available budget.

Tree Retention

18 trees need to be removed for the project in the current design, including one significant Bigleaf Maple and two landmark Cottonwood trees.

The Bigleaf Maple tree needs to be removed for the project regardless of the bridge alignment or width because of space requirements for large construction equipment that is needed to build the bridge, such as a crane that would lift the concrete bridge deck components into place.

The two landmark Cottonwood trees underwent a risk assessment by a Registered Professional Forester. Both trees were visually assessed and had specialized testing completed to provide data about their inner condition and current health. The risk assessment concluded that both of these trees have decay within their trunks, and both would pose high risk to people using the bridge, and the bridge structure itself, if the trees remained after a bridge is built. They also commented that the likelihood of failure of these two trees after construction of a bridge could be as little as two years. The detailed report can be found in Attachment D.

The 2018 public survey results indicate that 75% of respondents support the removal of the trees for the project.

A Tree Compensation plan will be prepared by an environmental professional and will include a minimum of 28 new trees. It will also include the removal of invasive species and restoration with appropriate plantings to improve the overall habitat quality along the Chase River within the project area.

OPTIONS

1. Council direct Staff to proceed with the construction of the Georgia Greenway Phase 1 Project, in 2018, as currently designed.
 - **Budget Implication:** There is funding in the 2018 budget allocated to the project.
 - **Political Implication:** There are some residents in the community who oppose the project due the required tree removal. Proceeding with the project would be a disappointment to those who would like to see the trees remain.
 - **Strategic Plan Implication:** Council identified the Georgia Avenue Pedestrian / Cycling Bridge over the Chase River project as one of the Top 5 Key Capital Projects and Initiatives in the 2016-2019 Strategic Plan Update. Completing the project would be in conformance with the Strategic Plan Update.
2. Council direct Staff to cancel the project.
 - **Political Implication:** The majority of the respondents who filled out the survey supported the project. School District 68 and the Harewood Neighborhood Association also have expressed their support for the project. Cancelling the project would be a disappointment to those who support the project.

- **Strategic Plan Implication:** Council identified the Georgia Avenue Pedestrian / Cycling Bridge over the Chase River project as one of the Top 5 Key Capital Projects and Initiatives in the 2016-2019 Strategic Plan Update. Cancelling the project would not be in conformance with the 2016-2019 Strategic Plan Update.

SUMMARY POINTS

- At the March 26, 2018 Special Council Meeting, Council passed a motion to “refer the siting of the bridge in the Georgia Greenway Project to Staff for further discussions regarding tree retention”.
- The risk assessment of the landmark Cottonwood trees concluded that both trees have decay within their trunks, and both pose a risk to people and a bridge, if they remain, regardless of bridge width.
- Staff conducted additional public engagement and a new public survey, which indicated a majority of residents support the project and the required tree removal.

ATTACHMENTS

ATTACHMENT A – Georgia Greenway Project Map

ATTACHMENT B – Georgia Greenway Letters of Support

ATTACHMENT C – Georgia Greenway May 2018 Public Engagement Summary

ATTACHMENT D – Georgia Greenway Cottonwood Tree Assessment

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