

CLEARWATER PARK DEVELOPMENT PLAN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On 2016 January 15, the Standing Policy Committee on Community and Protective Services referred Report CPS2016-0040 (Clearwater Park Development Plan) back to Administration to report back with a status update no later than 2016 June. An in camera discussion around Report LAS2015-52 at the 2016 January 11 Council meeting also led to a request for Administration to further clarify the proposed development phasing of Clearwater Park and how the Southwest Calgary Ring Road (SWRR) will impact the park. This report addresses these two requests for information and also provides further detail on the plans for a constructed wetland within Phase 1 of the Clearwater Park development.

The City acquired the Clearwater Park site in 1979 through a donation of lands from the Devonian Group of Charitable Foundations. The Clearwater Park Development Plan (Attachment 1) was created through a public engagement process and is intended to serve as a guide for the development of the future park. The main objectives of the preliminary design were to optimize and retain the existing uses in the park, protect and enhance the natural environment along the Elbow River, and provide an environmental education component in the park. The Clearwater Park Preferred Concept Plan (Attachment 2) outlines the proposed development.

Administration is seeking approval of the concept plan that will trigger additional funding for the park development through both the land sale tied to the Southwest Calgary Ring Road (LAS2015-51) and the negotiated wetland relocation. As the land sale is closing on 2016 April 15 this report needs to be forwarded to Council on 2016 April 11 as an item of urgent business.

ADMINISTRATION RECOMMENDATION(S)

That the SPC on Community Services and Protective Services recommend that Council:

1. Receive for information the Clearwater Park Development Plan (Attachment 1);
2. Approve the Clearwater Park Preferred Concept Plan (Attachment 2); and
3. Receive this report as an item of urgent business at the 2016 April 11 Council meeting.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL DIRECTION / POLICY

On 2016 March 7 Council adopted the Legacy Parks Fund Committee Recommendations contained in Report LPC2016-0166 (ENMAX Legacy Parks Program – Southwest Ring Road Impacts to Weaselhead and Clearwater Parks); and directed that the Report and Attachments remain confidential pursuant to Sections 23(1)(b), 24(1)(a)(b), 24(1)(g) and 25(1)(c) of the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* until the Southwest Calgary Ring Road land sale has closed.

On 2016 January 11, Council Adopted Recommendation 1 contained in Report LAS2015-52; and directed that the Recommendation, Report, Attachments and in camera discussion remain confidential pursuant to Sections 23(1)(b), 24(1)(a), 24(1)(c), 24(1)(g) and 25(1)(b) of the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* until the sale has closed, except for Attachments 4 and 5 which shall remain confidential.

On 2016 January 11, a MOTION ARISING, Moved by Councillor Demong, Seconded by Councillor Chabot, that with respect to Report LAS2015-052, saw Council direct Administration

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“to investigate the disposition of sale proceeds and of land depicted in Attachments 1(f) and 1(g), as discussed during today’s in camera session, and return with a report to the Legacy Parks Fund Steering Committee.

At the 2003 June 21 meeting Council approved LPC2004-03, identifying Clearwater Park for funding through the ENMAX Legacy Parks Program.

BACKGROUND

Clearwater Park is located just outside the city’s western limits, one kilometre west of the community of Discovery Ridge on Highway 8 (Glenmore Trail) along the Elbow River. The park land owned by The City is a quarter section or about 65 hectares (160 acres).

The City acquired the Clearwater Park site in 1979 through a donation of lands from the Devonian Group of Charitable Foundations to The City of Calgary with the condition that it be retained and developed as a future public park. Clearwater Park contributes to the conservation and protection of key watershed areas along the Elbow River providing recreational programming and environmental education opportunities. The park is currently used by Calgary Parks for summer camps as a day trip destination and Clearwater Park’s tipi site is booked by community groups such as the Calgary Girl Guides and Scouts for day use and overnight programs. The development of Clearwater Park will create future opportunities for partnerships that will promote early outdoor learning through natural inquiry for Calgary students. This project was included and approved by Council as part of the ENMAX Legacy Park Program Phase 1.

The Clearwater Park Development Plan was created through an extensive engagement process and is intended to serve as a guide for the development of the future park. The main objectives of the preliminary design were to optimize and retain the existing uses within the park, and to protect and enhance the natural environment along the Elbow River. The park will continue to offer unique environmental education and outdoor recreational opportunities to youth and families, including wetland education initiatives and youth group camping.

Throughout the Clearwater Park development and stakeholder engagement process, a wetland feature had always been envisioned as an important landscape component for the site. With the subsequent announcement from Alberta Transportation (2007) of two highway projects: Southwest Calgary Ring Road and Highway 8 twinning; negotiations between The City and the Province were initiated to find a suitable replacement location for the existing Elbow Valley constructed wetlands which would be displaced by the highway expansion. As a result of these discussions, Clearwater Park was deemed a suitable location for facilitating stormwater runoff from the highway within the planned wetland development proposed for Clearwater Park Phase 1. This created an opportunity to leverage the park project with funds from the Province contributing to the wetland construction. The twinning of Highway 8 is expected to occur with the Southwest Calgary Ring Road (SWRR) project, which is anticipated to begin in the fall of 2016 and be complete by the end of 2021. The City and the Province continue to work together to integrate stormwater management elements and other components of the SWRR project that will impact the park.

INVESTIGATION: ALTERNATIVES AND ANALYSIS

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In 2011, Administration retained a design consulting firm and scope for this initial phase of work was to establish a park development plan and design concept to guide future development for Clearwater Park. Community engagement was undertaken with input from the public, City staff (internal stakeholders) and external stakeholders.

This engagement process along with a biophysical inventory and assessment, and analysis of current conditions and future needs of the region drove the creation of the Clearwater Park Development Plan (Attachment 1). The Development Plan reflects the vision for the park:

“Clearwater Park is a unique legacy park, representing the nature and culture of the lands surrounding Calgary. It is an oasis, focusing on nature conservation and environmental education. The site is a jewel that protects what is precious; land, air, water, and natural areas. The park is connected to the regional trail system.”

The Clearwater Preferred Concept Plan (Attachment 2) outlines key features of the future park including:

- A signed entry road leading to pockets of parking and a drop-off area.
- Major new features such as a washroom building, large and small picnic shelters, enhanced campsite area with yurts in place of tipis, and a constructed wetland feature.
- Enhanced links to the regional pathway system and improved trail network including boardwalks and viewing platforms adjacent to the wetland.

The Clearwater Park development is to be undertaken in two phases:

- Phase 1 of park development will include construction of the wetland, day use facilities including trails, parking, picnicking, interpretation, and vegetation restoration.
- Phase 2 of park development is currently unfunded and will include improvements to group camping areas, washrooms and furnishings, as well as further vegetation restoration and additional trails and interpretive features.

Stakeholder Engagement, Research and Communication

The process to develop the Clearwater Park Development Plan (Attachment 1) included consultation with numerous external stakeholders groups, the general public, as well as City business units. Three visioning workshops were held where input, suggestions and comments were gathered along with ideas for improvements in the park. The feedback supported the development of a project vision and objectives along with the Clearwater Park Preferred Concept Plan (Attachment 2). A letter of support from “Common Digs”, a group that models programs after a Forest School approach established in Europe since the 1950’s, is included as Attachment 3.

External stakeholders included: Signal Hill and Discovery Ridge Community Associations, Elbow River Watershed Partnership, Calgary Pathway Advisory Committee, Calgary Arts and Development Council, Calgary River Valley Forum, Calgary Field Naturalists, Calgary Sports Council, Calgary Archery Club, Off-Leash Calgary, Rocky View County, TransAlta, Province of Alberta and Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada. Further information on the engagement process is found in Attachment 1.

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Calgary Parks has been a stakeholder on the corporate team reviewing the Southwest Calgary Ring Road Integration Project.

Strategic Alignment

The Clearwater Park Development Plan aligns with:

- Current Council Priorities of a city of inspiring neighbourhoods and a healthy and green city by proposing a design that protects the sensitive ecosystem and fosters environmental stewardship.
- Supports the Municipal Development Plan (2009) by proposing development at Clearwater Park that protects the biodiversity and unique environmental features of the area.
- The Open Space Plan (2003) policies for regional recreation parks by creating a design for Clearwater Park that responds to the current and future needs of the regional market and proposes amenities that are appropriate at the regional scale.

Social, Environmental, Economic (External)

Social

This regional park along the Elbow River will attract residents in the region and across the city. The park will provide significant recreational and educational opportunities that are not offered within Calgary's city limits including enhancements to the camping site. This amenity provides the only City park overnight camping opportunity for schools, community groups and private groups.

Environmental

The Preferred Concept Plan (Attachment 2) includes designs that will sustain the park's sensitive riparian ecosystems and promote responsible use of these spaces. Part of Clearwater Park could contain a new constructed wetland for the treatment and management of stormwater runoff (from the Highway 8 expansion) that would be mutually beneficial to The City and the Province. The Clearwater Park wetland will act as an upstream source of protection to the Glenmore Reservoir. The constructed wetland will also help to compensate for the loss of the Elbow Valley Constructed Wetland, which has been the location for a popular environmental education program.

Economic (External)

High quality park space favourably impacts the image and economy of Calgary and is associated with indirect benefits including but not limited to increased land values and community desirability.

Financial Capacity

Current and Future Operating Budget:

The proposed development will impact operational costs as new park assets are added and park usage increases. Administration has completed a preliminary analysis of anticipated operational costs. Initial estimates indicate up to \$100,000 in new operational costs which will be offset through minor revenue. These costs will be refined as detailed design and construction occurs. Administration will bring forward a funding request through the budget process at the appropriate time.

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Current and Future Capital Budget:

Capital improvements noted in the redevelopment plan have been estimated at \$7.8 million. Clearwater Park currently has \$700,000 of capital funding from the ENMAX Legacy Park Program. Negotiations with the Province on compensation for the Elbow Valley wetland and site improvements have been concluded and may provide up to \$4 million in funding for the wetland and adjacent site development at Clearwater Park (Phase1), subject to the approval of the Preferred Concept Plan (Attachment 2). Administration will continue to coordinate with the Province's road construction timelines and phase accordingly.

The balance of current funding for the development of Clearwater Park will be realized through the land sale at Clearwater tied to the Southwest Calgary Ring Road (LAS2015-51).

Risk Assessment

Negotiations with the Province have been ongoing and Southwest Calgary Ring Road construction is anticipated to begin in the fall of 2016. The progress of construction of the Highway 8 expansion will have an impact on the overall design, timing and development of the park. If the Preferred Concept Plan (Attachment 2) is not approved, funding from the Province will not be realized for the wetland and adjacent site development at Clearwater Park (Phase 1).

REASON(S) FOR RECOMMENDATION(S):

Clearwater Park was selected as one of the ENMAX Legacy Park Program candidate parks for preservation and protection of key watershed areas along the Elbow River. This project involved the preparation of a Preferred Concept Plan for the park fulfilling the vision to preserve unique riparian habitats along the Elbow River and to offer new recreation opportunities. Phase 1 of park development contains a constructed wetland that will offer environmental education benefits to citizens and enhance biodiversity. Approval of the preferred concept plan will guide future development and funding for the park.

ATTACHMENT(S)

1. Clearwater Park Development Plan
2. Clearwater Park Preferred Concept Plan
3. Letter of support – common digs