

MINUTES
PARKS, TRAILS AND RECREATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Held at Saanich Municipal Hall, Council Chambers
June 23, 2021 at 4:00 pm

Present: Councillor Judy Brownoff (Chair), Kathleen Burton, Leigh Campbell, Pamela Carroll, Pat Danforth, Lyndsay Edgar, Amy-Jade Louie, Dexter Owen

Staff: Eva Riccius, Senior Manager Parks; Tiana Solares, Senior Manager, Recreation; Mike Goldsworthy, Park Planner Designer; Tania Douglas, Senior Committee Clerk

Regrets: Ted Austin, Annie Djioisa, Kyle Danielewicz

Minutes

MOVED by P. Carroll and Seconded by D. Owen: "That the Minutes of the Parks, Trails and Recreation Advisory Committee meeting held May 26, 2021, be adopted as circulated."

CARRIED

CHAIR'S REMARKS

The Chair reported that the motion from PTR to ask staff to report on a district-wide dog strategy has been approved by Council. Parks staff will create a report to go to Council in July with an outline of steps needed to be done for a district wide dog strategy.

RECREATION SERVICE EXPANSION

The Senior Manager of Recreation presented information regarding the plans to reopen recreation services. She noted that:

- The province announced a restart plan and we are at step 2 of restart plan (July 1 is step 3.) Saanich has had a more specific approach than usual.
- Steps 3 and 4 are dependent upon the directives given, however a framework is in place.
- High intensity indoor classes will be added again after July 1st. It is anticipated that the mask order will be lifted and masks will be recommended and not mandatory. People have reported that they do not like to do exercise with masks on.
- We have brought back low intensity indoor group classes and families can now watch sports outside.
- At the pool there is increased lane density and lockers are open again although distanced. An increasing number of people are swimming but pre-registering is still necessary.
- Adult sports are now permitted again.
- The Cedar Hill Golf course is re-opening the putting greens and with limited food services.
- When Step 3 has occurred there will be an increase in capacity in classes. More direction is expected from the Public Health Officer.
- At SCP there will be increases in lane density for all swimming (public and clubs).
- Public will remain as reserved drop-ins and items such as slide and spray areas will be layered on in July and August. Staff want to enhance and increase services as we go and will need to hire more staff (eg. lifeguards).

- The capacity at SCP is almost 700 and things will increase slowly and safely. The public needs to get used to the increase in participants again.
- Tournaments and events will return at the Cedar Hill Golf Club.
- It is expected that in September it will be more business as usual but we keep some things learned during COVID-19 (eg. reserved spaces for fitness classes) and maybe not do things at 100% capacity.

In reply to a question, the Senior Manager of Recreation Services stated that scheduling swims and programs around the allowable capacity is a big challenge. Along with increasing the capacity, the schedules will change in weight rooms and pools. When looking at something like family swims, it also has to do with entry and egress requirements.

NATURAL INTELLIGENCE

The Senior Manager of Parks presented information on Natural Intelligence and mentioned the assistance provided by Ron Proscow, Marketing Coordinator at Saanich Parks and Recreation on this presentation. This presentation was previously given at a National Parks meeting and looks at last summer's marketing campaign and what was learned. The following was noted:

- We live in an important Coastal Douglas fir zone. Is a small area and most of it is privately owned. As a government agency we have an obligation to know what is happening on our lands.
- The importance of nature is becoming more mainstream; the goal is to get every resident involved in enhancing the natural world by 2025.
- In 2019 with the soft launch, Saanich website had informal survey about what people do when outside and how long they are spending outside. We are way higher than most of the Canadian average. The most active are mainly women 35-60 years old. Staff will investigate building ongoing outreach to include other demographic groups.
- Last summer staff created an Awareness and Education Campaign. It has a lot of components (eg. TV ad, hike the island series on CTV, radio ads, social media ad popups, branded content stories).
- The results in social media engagement was almost 23,000 public engagement posts and 779 hours public spent reading natural intelligence website content on the web. This is a big increase from 2019.
- A conceptual model was shown on building natural intelligence. There are many existing programs and ideas and concepts were also shown. There are any components to this and staff want to grow everyone's knowledge and involvement.
- Information was provided about newly created Great horned owl nesting platforms which has successfully housed owls in Saanich.
- The theme for this summer is more focused on parks keeping us healthy and how can we keep parks healthy. It is about respect and the gift of nature.

Committee comments/questions and staff responses:

- Effort by some members has been made to get out into nature more last year.
- Will there be more YouTube and Instagram ads? Member recommends YouTube and Instagram Geofencing can help target people in certain areas.
 - Instagram will be put more in focus this year and we will invest in YouTube this year. As we build a video library we may make our own section or channel.

- In terms of return on investment/effort, what do we see people doing?
 - We want people to volunteer more and become more engaged to the next level. One thing we are doing is looking at baseline research and see what we can ask of our community now and then in 5 years we can hopefully see there has been an increase in stewardship.
- One committee member is doing their Thesis on natural intelligence. This summer they will talk to residents to find baselines to put together a thesis. Part of this will ask people where were you at with natural intelligence and what does it mean to you now, before and after the pandemic.
- We need to make sure everyone is included in this process and not just able-bodied, caucasian, middle-class people.
- Is there any reaching out to with VIHA with health perspective?
 - Staff recently received an email from the CEO of the BC Parks and Recreation Association who is working with the Ministry of Health. They are looking for specific parks examples to provide the Ministry of Health as to where municipalities provide healthy spaces.

The Senior Manager of Parks noted that this is not the kind of program to do quickly. It needs to be a slow build so sustainability can be built in. Staff want everyone to feel engaged and see where they fit into the process.

PARK ACQUISITIONS IN GROWING NEIGHBOURHOODS

The Senior Manager of Parks introduced the Park Planner and they both presented information on park acquisitions. Saanich has 170 parks over about 826 hectares and the total park land in the municipality is over 1,700 hectares including CRD. Staff noted:

- Saanich has an opportunistic approach to new park acquisitions. When a homeowner asks if we want to buy or receive land, we look at and see if it meets certain criteria. If it does, it goes to Council who decides whether or not to acquire the land. A recent example of this is a property at the corner of Dysart and Walter. This was a house lot that was donated and it makes a great neighbourhood park.
- The role of urban parks is strong and this has been seen in the last year across the world (the importance of parks in urban settings). Parks are no longer just nice to have, they are an essential service.
- Lots of research has been done on this report by Park People in Toronto; they did a national survey about the importance of parks and it and reinforces what we are saying today.
- Google analytics show park use and the general trend over the last year shows how much park use has increased.
- We have plans to increase density in two parts of Saanich (Shelbourne and Uptown Douglas) and we need to figure out where those people can walk a dog, play with children, etc.
- Shelbourne Valley has Cedar Hill, Mt. Tolmie, Lambrick and Browning Parks. There is not a lot of green space in the actual corridor. We will not be able to fulfill the goal of an extra 26 hectares of parkland, knowing that areas will be densified.
- Uptown Douglas, population increase estimation is about 4000 people, we are missing about 20 hectares of greenspace (about the size of Cuthbert Holmes). Staff have the challenge of how can we meet the needs of those people and provide high quality greenspaces.
- We need to plan greenspace early on in the process and have intentional connections from trails to greenspace.

- Sometimes hard spaces can be turned into small high quality greenspaces. Rights of way can be turned into parks, private land owners agreeing to create a park space beside their development can also help.
- The goal is building-in nature (pollinatory planting, water features or something that creates nature and respite for eye and senses).
- Pocket parks: the most recent is at the corner of Cedar Hill and Shelbourne Street (Gore Peace Memorial Park). It is being used quite a bit. More trees will be planted.
- The main message is we want to think about being intentional now about park potential in densified areas, and when opportunities arise we can be ready to work with developers or the school board to create public spaces.

Committee comments/questions and staff responses to questions:

- The Strategic plan has a variety of targets for the amount of greenspace per 1000 people. We have informally mapped the 10 minute mark (1/2 km). This has not been adopted by Council yet.
- It will be important to create greenspace and dog spaces. These are things Council can look at.
- There is no doubt a little greenspace is calming in an urban area.
- This is part of the natural intelligence piece and how parks help with emotional intelligence as well.
- Covid has shown that parks are part of a healthy community.
- Sometimes streets can be so green just with trees lining them. This is part of the new approach to community planning. Shelbourne Valley has language around the memorial trees. The Cordova Bay draft plan also has specific language about streetscapes.
- The Engineering department plans complete streets that include cars, bikes, walkers and trees. Trees used to be left out of this planning. Even commercially, things are changing, more people will go in a commercial area with trees.
- A greenway is planned in the Shelbourne Valley following Bowker Creek along the Browning Park.
- Question raised about the process to identify corner or easement gardens; are there community gardens.
- Corner gardens (eg. horticultural displays at McKenzie/Cedar Hill Cross Rd, Richmond/Cedar Hill Cross, Glanford, etc.) purpose is to add colour and interest into the landscape. There are no plans for more unless the opportunity presents itself.
- There is a policy on community gardens to have at least one community garden in every neighbourhood in Saanich. This has proven to be a challenge. There hasn't been demand for these except in Gorge Tillicum park. We do need a commitment from a neighbourhood group to help in the stewardship and take on the management of them.
- Suggestion that SCAN be made aware that this is an option. Also some seniors work with community gardens. There is a community garden brochure on how to create a community garden. It's a great way for social connection but difficult to get up and established.

UPDATE – PAWS IN PARKS TEMPORARY DOG PARKS

The Senior Manager of Parks provided information regarding the temporary pop up dog park pilot project and noted.

- The short-term dog parks will be set up for two weeks at each location and this will be flexible in case something has to change.
- Parks will not be placed in natural areas, rather fields will be used.

- Sites and schedules were given. Fowler, Hyacinth, Gorge Rudd and Cadboro-Gyro parks will be among the parks hosting the temporary dog parks.
- A student has been hired to be an ambassador to the program; he is working on a survey to obtain feedback from these dog park users.
- Saanich Communications team will put out a news release and this will also be promoted in various ways.

Committee comments and staff responses to comments:

- Not all members would use a dog park. Some prefer to play frisbee freely in a field or go hiking with their dogs.
- People did see that on social media there are some people that are excited about this pilot project. This could be good for pups learning obedience and socialization.
- A goal is to find out what dog owners are looking for. It may be that areas could have larger rocks, stumps or something that makes it more engaging for dogs.
- Some have heard concerns about dogs having their shots.
- The parks having the pilot are various sizes. It is unknown how people will use the space to play. It may be that this is for dogs playing socially as opposed to throwing balls/frisbees. People who like to have their dogs off leash in unfenced area may benefit.
- Some people have had people ask questions around the potential of dogs spreading germs. We may want to add this to the survey (as a safety question).
- There could be concerns with water bowl sharing. Staff noted water won't be provided.
- Gyro park was put on the list last because of some technical issues and in discussion about migratory birds. No dogs are allowed in Gyro park until August 31.
- There could be problem with people thinking these temporary areas are the only place dogs can go. We will need to clarify that dogs are still allowed in main parks.
- Could there be a separate bin for dog poop collection? Is it compostable?
- This is a pilot and we will gather information.

UPDATE – FOOD TRUCKS IN PARKS

The Senior Manager of Parks provided an update and the following was noted:

- Three parks will host food trucks this summer.
- There has been lots of interest from food truck vendors, 18 people applied and a random draw was done for 10 vendors.
- The eight vendors that were not chosen have been drawn as reserved vendors in case something goes wrong with anyone. A list of participating vendors are noted on the Saanich website.
- Sometimes the primary vendor is not able to commit to the total week so the reserve vendors are being contacted to fill any empty spaces.
- Survey to be done with the vendors after the pilot is done.
- Vendors Must have own garbage and recycling containers for customers.
- Vendors are able to be set up between 9am – 9pm. Vendors must be out of the park by 10 p.m. They will set their own schedule and are not required to be there the whole 12 hours.

Staff confirmed that the food vendors are all local. In reply to a comment wondering if we'll get calls about music or garbage lying around, staff are hoping that vendors will take a look around the area for garbage. The student that will be overseeing the dog park and food truck project and will remind vendors to look around for garbage and can call out the maintenance group to pick up over-full garbage bins.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 5:38 p.m. The next meeting is Wednesday, September 22, 2021.

Councillor Brownoff, Chair

I hereby certify these Minutes are accurate.

Committee Secretary