

Council Member Motion

Meeting Date Tuesday, December 12, 2023
From Councillor Justice
Subject **Update of Parks and Trails Master Plan**

Background

An update of the Parks and Trails Master Plan (PTMP) is a project identified in the new Official Community Plan, and subsequently flagged in the Official Community Plan Projects & Implementation report for possible consideration during business planning.

Though the PTMP is less than a decade old, a great deal of the ground upon which the PTMP was built has shifted and updating the plan seems both necessary and prudent. Some of the changes that relate to the PTMP include the following:

- The pandemic has led to enduring changes in recreational demand, usage patterns, and resources.
- We have adopted a new regional funding model for recreation in the CVRD
- New provincial legislation will change the Municipality's ability to negotiate parkland contributions through rezoning applications
- Rowing Canada has established their National Training Centre in North Cowichan, presenting potential unexplored recreational opportunities
- Biking has grown in popularity and we have an enhanced understanding of the economic development opportunities related to both organized and unorganized mountain, gravel and road biking racing and tourism.
- We have received a formal request from the Cowichan Trail Stewardship Society for a plan reconsideration concerning Richards Mountain.
- We have engaged the community on the future of our forests and have a better understanding of the ways in which the forest is valued for the recreational and ecological resources it provides.
- We are developing new knowledge and goals related to a Biodiversity Protection Policy, and anticipate new guidelines regarding avoiding ecological trail impacts.
- There may be future opportunities for collaboration with Quw'utsun Nation to conserve/protect additional land with potential recreational use through the Tripartite Nature Agreement
- We have a new generation of senior leadership in parks and recreation, presenting an opportunity for fresh perspectives

Beyond those changes, we have completed a new OCP which explicitly identifies the need to update the PTMP to better align with community goals and objectives.

And perhaps most important in many ways, we now have an enhanced understanding of our path toward reconciliation and have committed to working with Quw'utsun Nation on decision making related to our forest lands; we know of Quw'utsun Nation's concerns related to recreational trails in forest lands and the opportunities we have to further build relationships through work to resolve those concerns.

Recommendation

THAT Council provide direction to staff to add the Updating of the Parks and Trails Master Plan, aligning with OCP policy direction (4.4.2c), into Council's Strategic Plan and to schedule the project in either the 2024 or 2025 (as soon as capacity permits). Specifically, the update should address:

1. Aligning the PTMP with the goals and objectives of the new OCP.
2. Exploring and addressing Quw'utsun Nation's concerns related to recreational trails in forest lands.
3. Responding to changes in recreational demand, usage patterns, and resources enduring from, or linked to, the pandemic.
4. Incorporating evolving/new insights into economic development opportunities related to organized/unorganized mountain/gravel/road biking tourism.
5. Addressing the formal request from the Cowichan Trail Stewardship Society for a plan revision concerning Richards Mountain.
6. Exploring the potential establishment of a parkland acquisition strategy and associated fund, in line with OCP policy 4.4.2c.
7. Integrating new understandings and goals emerging from the nascent Biodiversity Protection Policy, especially recommendations regarding ecological trail impacts.
8. Tackling community concerns over trail access and parking that became pronounced during the pandemic.
9. Responding to changes in provincial legislation with respect to Municipalities ability to negotiate parkland contributions through rezoning applications
10. Reconsidering parkland acquisition plans in the Bell McKinnon Local Area Plan given unanticipated complexities in the implementation of that plan
11. Exploring emerging or potential opportunities for collaboration with Quw'utsun Nation to identify areas for conservation/protection that can contribute to the Tripartite Framework Agreement on Nature Conservation between Canada, BC, and the BC First Nations Leadership Council and which also have potential for recreational use
12. Exploring recreational opportunities related to the presence of the national training centre of Rowing Canada
13. Addressing changes related to the new Regional Recreation funding model

Attachment: