



Bear Creek Improvement Project ***(Sub-Committee to ECCC)*** ***Minutes***

City Centre Room 402
City Library
10350 – University Drive
Surrey, B.C.
TUESDAY, JULY 25, 2023
Time: 3:30 p.m.

Present:

M. Lamont, Chairperson
K. Purton, Vice-Chair
D. Jack
J. Mah
A. Kaps
E. Zaklan
A. Ivens
K. Kwan

Absent:

Staff Present:

S. Neuman, General Manager, Engineering
N. Aven, Director, Parks
V. Jhingan, Director, Design and Construction
A. Sodha, Administrative Assistant

A. REPORTS

1. Bear Creek Park Improvement Project File: 1721-011/00

The General Manager, Engineering provided an overview of the Bear Creek Park Improvement Project and responded to questions from the sub-committee.

B. OTHER BUSINESS

1. Discussion

Project Overview:

The Bear Creek Park Improvement Project involves collaboration between Engineering and Parks staff as well as input from both the Environment and Climate Change Committee, whom referred the matter to a sub-committee including representatives of the Friends of Bear Creek Park, and the Parks, Recreation & Sport Tourism Committee. Engineering and Parks staff proposed a series of potential park enhancements, ranging from: trails, pathways, landscaping, wildlife exclusion fencing, boardwalks, benches, litter baskets, etc. in lieu of the originally envisioned wetlands and BMX pump track.

Budget Allocation and Committee Engagement:

Council instructed staff to work with the Environment & Climate Change Committee and the Parks, Recreation & Sport Tourism Committee for preferred options on how the remaining allocated budget could be prioritized.

Wetlands:

Staff clarified information related to the original enhanced wetlands proposal. Maps presented, including one in a Corporate Report, indicated that the wetlands might be artificially constructed. Concerns were raised by the subcommittee about the sustainability of these wetlands during the dry summer months. The sub-committee strongly emphasizes the importance of safeguarding the natural wetlands.

Funding Considerations:

Funding allocation was discussed and confirmed that the available funding / budget for the works is slightly in excess of \$800,000 including any consulting, design, supplies, materials and construction fees and taxes. All works would need to be procured and delivered by the City and in accordance with the City's Purchasing Policy.

A list of potential improvements was provided for consideration, totalling in excess of \$3 Million, and an initial review/discussion ensued. The high level conceptual cost estimate of each individual item was provided as a reference for discussion, and representatives acknowledged the variance between budget and cost estimate.

Indigenous Historical Significance:

Members of the Friends of Bear Creek Park acknowledged that projects with indigenous recognition should be considered. While not directly linked to park restoration, discussing Indigenous heritage may allow for an opportunity to integrate cultural elements into restoration efforts. It was suggested to include Indigenous values and culture in park signage and educational materials.

Ecological Concerns and Preservation:

Insights were shared regarding bird assessments conducted through eBird, revealing the identification of approximately 20 migratory bird species, some of which are classified as at-risk. Concerns were voiced regarding the wetland areas, as signs indicate a loss of their typical wetness, accompanied by visible indentations that could be attributed to external forces. The presence of salmon within the area was also noted, adding an additional layer of ecological importance to the natural attributes of the area.

Potential solutions were proposed to address ecological concerns, including the enhancement of wildlife passages, utilization of directional fencing, and the implementation of informative signage. Discussion ensued regarding the preservation of ecosystems, safeguarding wildlife, and the enrichment of habitats.

The sub-committee emphasized the importance of fully safeguarding the wetlands from human interaction as there is concern for litter and disturbance of the area. Prioritizing maximum ecological benefits over social benefits was expressed as a priority in the restoration process.

Green Wall Concept:

The concept of a "green wall" was proposed along 84 Avenue to provide shade and reduce noise. It was suggested that vegetation be used for this purpose, although budget limitations were acknowledged. The choice of fencing material was discussed, with reservations expressed about the durability of a metal fence over time. The central objective is to cultivate a dense planting arrangement that aligns with the prescribed 10-foot height limitation, aiming to create both a functional barrier and an aesthetically pleasing natural boundary.

Community Garden:

Discussion ensued regarding the potential benefits and drawbacks, encompassing educational opportunities, community engagement, and the fostering of pollinator habitats. Concerns were raised regarding the proximity of power lines, the potential for vandalism, and the essential level of community involvement required for effective garden management.

While the sub-committee acknowledged the numerous benefits associated with a community garden, they also recognized practical challenges and associated expenses. Ultimately, a decision was reached to not explore the concept of a community garden at this time.-

Fencing:

Inquiries arose about the method used to evaluate the value of the proposed wildlife fencing improvements, and whether the fencing coverage extended to both sides of the designated zone. The discussion included considerations regarding the positioning of the fencing and the exploration of various design scenarios. A consensus was reached regarding the importance of connecting wildlife fencing with creek crossings to facilitate wildlife passage.

The sub-committee expressed their intention to develop comprehensive plans and concepts for these aspects prior to the next meeting. Discussion ensued regarding budget-friendly approaches, with suggestions such as utilizing split rail fencing and integrating mesh for smaller animal containment. There was a strong emphasis on identifying suitable choices for wildlife fencing and creek crossings that align seamlessly with the overarching objectives of the park restoration efforts.

Hydro Seed Mixture and Water Quality:

Concerns were expressed regarding plastic debris in hydroseed mixture and its impact on wildlife. Water quality and oxygen levels were discussed in relation to aquatic life. There are environmental concerns related to the inclusion of plastic debris in the hydroseed mix, potential bird fatalities, and impacts on water quality. There was an exchange of information regarding the source of the soil, the possibility of contaminants, and the potential effects on local wildlife.

The sub-committee acknowledged the significant importance of the issue for the overall well-being of the park and emphasized the need for further investigation.

Riparian Enhancement and Restoration:

Discussion was focused on riparian enhancement and restoration efforts in the Bear Creek vicinity. Various proposals were put forth, including in-stream improvements, the identification and uncovering of culverted trails, and the management of invasive species. It is recommended that the scope and location of significant areas are identified in order to establish enhancement and restoration plans.

Discussion ensued regarding specific areas for riparian enhancements and potential restoration zones. The Friends of Bear Creek may be a resource for this as members have local knowledge of the area.

Trail Connection and Public Involvement:

Introducing an east-west trail connection along 84 Avenue is a key component in the Bear Creek Park restoration. Discussion ensued regarding extending the north-side trail while minimizing tree removal and addressing hazardous trees. Public involvement was emphasized for project success. The purpose of the trail was identified as a point-to-point travel route, rather than purely recreational. Ideas included extending the trail along the road's north side while preserving aesthetics by integrating the trail with nature. Design considerations explored options to accommodate trees similar to existing urban pathways.

The potential southward extension to connect with existing pathways was also explored, accounting for ecological impacts and future road expansions. The sub-committee was less supportive of the southerly trail connections and preferred the lands be retained in natural grasslands. The importance of aligning trail design with future developments and implementing wildlife fencing was encouraged to achieve a comprehensive approach.

Next Steps and On-Site Assessment:

Summary of core values identified by the sub-committee as the most important:

1. Protecting natural areas and wetlands
2. Avoiding fragmentation of wetlands and trees
3. Minimizing human intrusion
4. Increasing shade opportunities through the concept of a green wall
5. Prioritizing maximum ecological benefits over social benefits

The next steps involve arranging an on-site meeting to evaluate the impact and potential tree loss. A proposed activity involves exploring Bear Creek Park and its neighboring creeks to gain holistic insight into the region. There is concern for potential effects on local wildlife and plants resulting from the addition of new trails, underscoring the need for a thorough impact assessment. The sub-committee proposed that hazardous trees be evaluated and that aerial footage from a drone be used for improved project assessment and prioritization.