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REPORT TO REGIONAL PARKS COMMITTEE MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, JULY 24, 2024

SUBJECT **Royal Oak Golf Course Lands – Interim Management Guidelines**

ISSUE SUMMARY

Capital Regional District (CRD) staff are seeking approval to implement the Royal Oak Golf Course Lands Interim Management Guidelines (IMG). The purpose of the IMG is to guide the operation of the former Royal Oak Golf Course property (the property) until First Nations interests are addressed and land from the property is included within an approved park management plan.

BACKGROUND

The CRD purchased the property, a 10.92-hectare (27-acre) lot located in the District of Saanich and adjacent to Elk/Beaver Lake Regional Park and Saanich Commonwealth Place, on October 31, 2023. The property has remained vacant since the golf course closed in 2017, with the exception of some informal recreational use of the grounds by the public and a private golf business operating from the former clubhouse building whose lease was transferred to the CRD during the acquisition.

CRD staff are currently engaging with First Nations to determine their interests in the property. Once these interests are understood, staff will determine whether any land from the property should be added to Elk/Beaver Lake Regional Park or if it should be established into a separate, new regional park. Given the age of the existing 2010 *Elk/Beaver Lake and Bear Hill Regional Parks Management Plan*, which last went through a full management planning process in 1992, staff recommend that this plan be repealed and replaced if land from the property is added to it. The development of a new management plan for Elk/Beaver Lake and Bear Hill regional parks would provide the opportunity to incorporate all past acquisitions made to both parks since the original plan was approved, in addition to providing updated management direction that aligns with *the Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan 2022-2032* (Strategic Plan). If land from the property is used to establish a new regional park, a separate management plan will be developed for this park. Creating a separate park management plan provides the opportunity to consider a unique park classification and management direction for the land that is distinct from Elk/Beaver Regional Park.

While discussions with First Nations are ongoing and prior to a new management plan being in place, direction is needed to guide the interim management of the property. Staff developed the IMG (Appendix A), which prioritizes building relationships and gathering information needed to better understand the property's park values and inform the development of a new park management plan. The IMG further guides the securement of the property and establishes how it is to be utilized on an interim basis, prior to a park management plan being in place. Once First Nations interests have been addressed and land from the property has been included within an approved park management plan, the IMG will no longer be used to manage the property.

ALTERNATIVES

Alternative 1

The Regional Parks Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board:
That the Royal Oak Golf Course Lands Interim Management Guidelines be adopted.

Alternative 2

That the Royal Oak Golf Course Lands Interim Management Guidelines be referred back to staff with direction for revision.

IMPLICATIONS

Alignment with Existing Plans & Strategies

The IMG broadly supports the five priority areas within the Strategic Plan. It provides guidance to establish collaborative working relationships with First Nations to continue the CRD's reconciliatory action. It further guides gathering information needed to inform conservation, visitor experience, climate action and resiliency, and access and equity-related park management actions that could be implemented through a future park management plan.

Environmental & Climate Action

The property provides habitat for several native plant and animal species and has an important role within natural systems in the region. The IMG includes multiple interim management actions that support ecological restoration and conservation initiatives and seeks to better understand the property's natural values. It further includes interim management actions that support the development of climate change mitigation and adaptation measures that could be implemented through a future park management plan.

Initial observations have confirmed the presence of the threatened Pacific Coast population of western painted turtle (*Chrysemys picta bellii*). Steps will be taken to monitor and mitigate threats to protect and enhance habitat for this species on the property.

First Nations Implications

Six First Nations governments were identified as having asserted Territory over the property. Discussions between the CRD and these Nations began during the land acquisition process to advise them of the purchase and to begin to understand their interests in the property. An additional Nation communicated interest in the property after acquisition and has since been included in the discussions.

The CRD recently forwarded a draft copy of the IMG to these Nations for information and committed to continuing discussions to identify and pursue opportunities that respect and support First Nations self-determination. This includes identifying approaches that support First Nations environmental, social, cultural, and economic interests in the property.

Equity, Diversity & Inclusion

The IMG includes an interim management action that supports the identification of barriers to access and equity within the property that could be addressed through a future park management plan.

Financial Implications

No major capital projects are proposed to be implemented while the IMG is in place and implementation costs can be covered through the CRD's regular annual budgeting process.

Staff do not intend to pursue any major repairs to the existing clubhouse building and adjacent parking lot until First Nations interests are understood. This area will remain restricted to public use while these investigations are ongoing and the existing business lease renewed on a month-to-month basis once it expires in April of 2025.

Service Delivery Implications

Since the golf course ceased operations in 2017, the former golf cart pathways have been used by the public for walking, running, dog walking and cycling. The former fairways are also frequented by disc golf players who have set up an informal disc golf course with metal tone poles (tonals) as targets. Based on observational data, CRD staff estimate that of all recreational activities currently taking place on the property, 75-80% are pedestrian pathway users and 20-25% are disc golfers.

Staff's recommendation is that the CRD continue to make the property available for public use while the IMG is in place and that the existing pathways be maintained as hiking trails for walking, running, leash-optional dog walking and similar pedestrian uses. CRD staff are currently exploring options to partner with an established recreation group to continue to allow disc golf on the property on a temporary basis while staff assess its compatibility within the regional parks system through the development of the Stewardship Plan. The consideration of formally sanctioning disc golf on the property on a long-term basis, as well as other more active outdoor recreation opportunities, such as cycling and equestrian use, would need to occur through the development of a park management plan. This will provide an opportunity for all voices to be heard and interests expressed as part of the public and First Nations engagement processes that inform management plan development.

Social Implications

Implementing the IMG clearly communicates how the CRD intends to manage the property and what recreation opportunities are available while it's in place. The IMG includes flexibility to adapt management activities based on public feedback and new information, while the CRD continues to learn more about the property and engages with First Nations.

CONCLUSION

CRD staff are seeking approval to implement the IMG to guide the operation of the Royal Oak Golf Course Lands property while conversations with First Nations are ongoing and in the absence of a park management plan. The IMG supports Strategic Plan direction and prioritizes building relationships and gathering information needed to inform the development of a new park

management plan. It further guides the securement of the property and establishes how it is to be utilized on an interim basis. Once First Nations interests have been addressed and land from the property is included in an approved park management plan, the IMG will no longer be used to manage the property.

RECOMMENDATION

The Regional Parks Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board:
That the Royal Oak Golf Course Lands Interim Management Guidelines be adopted.

Submitted by:	Mike MacIntyre, Senior Manager, Regional Parks
Concurrence:	Luisa Jones, MBA, General Manager, Parks, Recreation & Environmental Services
Concurrence:	Ted Robbins, B. Sc., C. Tech., Chief Administrative Officer

ATTACHMENT

Appendix A: Royal Oak Golf Course Lands – Interim Management Guidelines (July 2024)