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REPORT TO REGIONAL PARKS COMMITTEE MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, MARCH 27, 2024

SUBJECT **Regional Parks and Trails Planning Process Update**

ISSUE SUMMARY

To seek approval for an updated planning process to guide the development of future regional park and trail plans.

BACKGROUND

The Capital Regional District (CRD) Board established a management planning process in 2006 called *The Pathway for Regional Parks and Trails Management Planning* (The Pathway) (Appendix A). The Pathway outlines eight steps for the development of regional park and trail management plans, including at what steps engagement and governance decisions are needed. It further establishes Regional Parks Management Zone Guidelines, which are applied to regional parks through a management planning process and used to provide more precise management direction for areas within individual parks, as well as provides a guide and template for writing management plans.

While The Pathway outlines a standardized planning process, it is time and resource intensive, lacks adaptability, offers little guidance on how to functionally integrate multiple priorities in the planning process, and does not allow for meaningful collaboration with First Nations, negatively impacting service delivery.

The Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan 2022-2032 (Strategic Plan) provides direction to update the existing planning process to improve plan development and delivery. The proposed process will guide the development of park and trail management plans, as well as other high-level Regional Parks plans (Appendix B). It has been designed to build on the planning values and principles established within The Pathway, and to be effective, adaptable and evidence based.

Regional park management zones still remain a valuable management tool. CRD staff will continue to use the zoning described within The Pathway until such time that zoning can be updated through the Stewardship Plan.

ALTERNATIVES

Alternative 1

The Regional Parks Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board:
That the updated planning process be adopted and implemented to develop future CRD regional park and trail plans.

Alternative 2

That the updated planning process be referred back to staff with direction for revision.

IMPLICATIONS

Alignment with Existing Plans & Strategies

The Strategic Plan identifies the following Climate Action & Resiliency priority actions:

- 4.4a *Implement a Park Management Planning Process that is efficient, adaptable, evidence-based and addresses service level needs, financial implications and climate mitigation measures.*
- 4.4b *Engage and involve First Nations governments, stakeholders and the public in the preparation and implementation of park management plans to ensure transparency, knowledge sharing and adaptability.*

The following indicator is to be tracked over the 10-year term of the Strategic Plan:

- 4-4 *Increase the percentage of parks with management plans less than 15 years old.*

The updated planning process addresses Strategic Plan directions and will be monitored, evaluated and revised, as necessary, to meet the annual reporting indicator.

Environmental & Climate Action

A goal of revising the planning process is to be able to complete more plans for the CRD's regional parks and trails. Updating existing, or creating new plans, provides opportunities to advance Strategic Plan priority actions for Conservation and Climate Action and Resiliency.

First Nations Reconciliation

Providing meaningful opportunities for First Nations to participate early and often throughout plan development is a key deliverable of this new planning process. This will ensure that interested Nations can remain informed about planning initiatives at all stages, share their values, concerns, and priorities at the onset of these initiatives, and collaborate with CRD staff to incorporate them into plan development.

The process envisions First Nations collaboration in plan development through participation in working groups. If supported, working groups will be comprised of representatives from First Nations governments with traditional territory within the region, CRD staff, and third-party facilitators, as needed. The working group format provides an opportunity for the CRD and First Nations to build trust, reciprocally share information, and collaborate so that First Nations worldviews and knowledge can inform plan direction. Some Nations may wish to participate in other ways, and these requests will continue to be accommodated to support First Nations rights on the path towards reconciliation.

Social Implications

The proposed process centres evidence-based decision making through public engagement and plan development and yields an improved and refined final product. Using an iterative planning

process, public engagement is better timed to gather information and build knowledge to inform plan development. This ensures the resulting plan utilizes reliable information, is consistent with other evidence-based plans, and remains unbiased.

The more focused, iterative approach to planning creates process effectiveness and reduces the number of touchpoints with the public from three to two. The updated process also reduces governance approvals from the current four, described in the Pathways process, to two, decreasing impacts on staff and Committee/Board time on approvals for a single plan, and increasing the overall efficacy.

A staff report outlining opportunities for engagement will continue to be presented to the Board as part of planning process initiation, providing transparency and ensuring the public is aware of when and how they can participate. Additionally, the public will be able to stay informed at all subsequent project steps through regular updates posted online by staff.

Equity, Diversity & Inclusion

Public engagement methods, such as open houses, focus groups and online surveys will continue to be a part of the process. These methods help reach a broad range of park users and community groups, employ culturally sensitive communication, and create accessible platforms to ensure that diverse perspectives are not only heard but also valued.

Financial Implications

Providing additional opportunities for meaningful collaboration with First Nations is anticipated to increase the cost of plan development. The increased costs will be accounted for through the CRD's regular annual budgeting process.

Service Delivery Implications

Having a more effective planning process should increase the number of parks with approved management plans and reduce the number of parks with management plans more than 15 years old. With a more integrated approach to collect and evaluate relevant archaeological, cultural heritage, ecological, visitor use, visitor feedback and park infrastructure information, plans will be evidence based and better positioned to implement the five strategic priority areas set out in the Strategic Plan.

CONCLUSION

CRD staff are seeking approval to implement an updated planning process to guide plan development across the CRD's regional parks and trails system. The updated planning process fulfills a key implementation action from the Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan 2022-2032. The proposed process provides new and meaningful ways to collaborate with First Nations, aims to increase the rate at which plans are developed, is adaptable and meets Strategic Plan direction. It is expected that this revised process will result in a greater number of plans being developed and implemented.

RECOMMENDATION

The Regional Parks Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board:
That the updated planning process be adopted and implemented to develop future CRD regional park and trail plans.

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ATTACHMENTS

Appendix A: The Pathway for Regional Parks and Trails Management Planning, 2006
Appendix B: Regional Parks & Trails Planning Process, March 2024