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REPORT TO REGIONAL PARKS COMMITTEE MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 22, 2020

SUBJECT Options for CRD Contribution toward the Acquisition of Kings Road Park

ISSUE SUMMARY

The District of Saanich is seeking up to \$2 million from the Capital Regional District (CRD) in order to offset incurred debt from the purchase of a 2.2 hectare parcel on Kings Road.

BACKGROUND

In July 2019, the District of Saanich (Saanich) purchased a 2.2 hectare parcel of mostly undeveloped land at 2661 Richmond Road, 1843 Kings Road and 1845 Kings Road (Kings Road) from BC Hydro for \$5.5 million (Appendix A). It is partially wooded with a large, cleared grassy area and includes part of a 220 meter segment of Bowker Creek that runs along the southwest boundary of the site. The parcel includes a single-family dwelling. The property represents a relatively large greenspace in the core urban area of the CRD, and local community members currently use the property as a place to walk and recreate.

Most of the property is zoned P-2 Utility; however, there are areas along the northern and southern property boundaries along Kings Road and Haultain Street that are outside of the Bowker Creek corridor zoned RS-6 Single Family Dwelling, and may have potential for development.

CRD staff indicated that this property does not meet the criteria of a CRD regional park. Environmental values attributed to this property reflect the low level of regional significance of the parcel and its associated values. The property is a relatively disturbed landscape and has very limited regional connectivity to other natural areas. Furthermore, the property does not support rare or unique environmental features, sensitive ecosystems or species at risk that would give more weight to such a small, fragmented parcel.

This area is not identified in the Regional Parks 2018-2019 Land Acquisition Strategy. This Land Acquisition Strategy is no longer current and requires updating for 2020-2021. The land acquisition criteria is a key component of the strategy that guides staff in making recommendations to the Regional Parks Committee and CRD Board about selecting specific land parcels for acquisition. As a first step in developing the 2020-2021 Land Acquisition Strategy, staff will bring a renewed land acquisition strategy and land acquisition criteria to the Regional Parks Committee in March 2020 for review and recommendation to the Board.

ALTERNATIVES

Alternative 1

The Regional Parks Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board:
That staff bring a renewed land acquisition strategy and land acquisition criteria to the Regional Parks Committee in March 2020 for review and recommendation to the Board.

Alternative 2

The Regional Parks Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board:
That the CRD use \$2 million from the Land Acquisition Fund to purchase a portion of the Kings Road property from the District of Saanich for the purposes of regional park.

Alternative 3

The Regional Parks Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board:
That staff explore innovative approaches or alternate opportunities with the District of Saanich for the CRD to purchase other property and report back to the Regional Parks Committee.

IMPLICATIONS

Environmental & Climate Implications

The overriding principle within the Land Acquisition Strategy is that “bigger natural areas are better and connected natural areas are the best.” This principle is further supported by significant empirical evidence that suggests large connected patches of natural, undisturbed and structurally complex landscape is most important for ensuring long-term viability, ecological function and sustainability under a changing climate. The Kings Road parcel is not connected to other protected areas, is small, highly disturbed, and lacks significant natural and environmental values.

This property contains portions of a 220-metre reach of Bowker Creek. The CRD-supported Bowker Creek Initiative is guided by the Bowker Creek Watershed Management Plan (2003) and the Bowker Creek Blueprint (2011). The two plans highlight the importance of the stream and potential for creek restoration in this area, such as improvement to riparian values, enhancement of stormwater management and a greenway path.

Saanich’s *Streamside Development Permit Area (SDPA) Bylaw* protects a 30 m buffer along any stream from new development. Under this municipal bylaw, one cannot alter, subdivide or start construction in the SDPA. This bylaw complies with the provincial *Riparian Areas Regulation* under the *Fish Protection Act*. A mechanism to provide added protection for the streamside and surrounding lands could be a conservation covenant with local government/and or a land-trust.

Intergovernmental Implications

The parcel is in the District of Saanich, but within close proximity to the City of Victoria and District of Oak Bay. Most of the property is zoned P-2 Utility; however, portions of the property outside of the Bowker Creek corridor along Kings Road and Haultain Street are zoned RS-6 Single Family Dwelling, which may have potential for development.

Regional Growth Strategy Implications

As undeveloped greenspace, the Kings Road property contributes toward a more liveable, healthy and resilient community in an area of the CRD that is being increasingly urbanized.

Social Implications

The local community identifies this property as a valuable public amenity and green asset. Many residents use the property as a park and are active stewards of the site. Partnership opportunities and local community support to preserve this location is prevalent. The land is in close proximity to the Royal Jubilee Hospital and the Victoria Hospice. Access to a green space is important for

health and wellness. The Royal Jubilee is a major employer in the region and one of Greater Victoria's main hospitals serving people across the region.

Financial Implications

The balance in the Land Acquisition Fund is \$6.7 million. Approximately \$3.7 million is earned annually through the Land Acquisition Fund levy. In November 2019, the CRD Board renewed the fund for an additional 10-year period.

Service Delivery Implications

A detailed analysis of service delivery implications has not been completed. Due to specific limitations in the *Local Government Act*, the requirement to declare land and trails as "regional park" or "regional trail", and the need for ownership of the real property in order to do that, the CRD may only use the Land Acquisition Fund to purchase property and interests it owns. The fund cannot be used to contribute toward an acquisition made by another party. As the CRD is limited to purchasing parkland it owns in fee simple, the property would have to be subdivided.

Alignment with Existing Plans & Strategies

The CRD Board-approved Regional Parks Land Acquisition Strategy 2018-2019 (LAS) includes priority land acquisition lists to guide acquisition priorities. The Kings Road parcel is not listed.

The LAS also allows for evaluation and potential purchases of properties on an opportunistic basis. These opportunities are assessed using established LAS criteria and are compared against existing priorities and properties under active consideration to determine if the land merits potential addition to the regional parks system. The Kings Road parcel has been assessed and is considered of low acquisition value due to its small size, the degree of disturbance and lack of significant environmental values.

An assessment of regional park significance also plays a fundamental role in acquiring land. Regionally significant areas are typically natural areas that represent the diverse geography and environments in the context of the entire region and will attract people from throughout the region, which cannot be said about this property. Staff think that this property would be most appropriately protected as a municipal park. The CRD could be directed to explore alternate opportunities to purchase other properties from the District of Saanich.

CONCLUSION

In July 2019, the District of Saanich (Saanich) purchased a 2.2 hectare parcel on Kings Road from BC Hydro for \$5.5 million. In order to offset incurred debt, Saanich is seeking \$2 million from the Capital Regional District (CRD). This property was evaluated against the Regional Parks Land Acquisition Strategy (LAS) criteria in 2018 and again in 2019 by CRD staff, who indicated that this property does not meet the current LAS criteria and should not be pursued as a CRD regional park.

RECOMMENDATION

The Regional Parks Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board:

That staff bring a renewed land acquisition strategy and land acquisition criteria to the Regional Parks Committee in March 2020 for review and recommendation to the Board.

Submitted by:	Jeff Leahy, RPF, Senior Manager, Regional Parks
Concurrence:	Larisa Hutcheson, P.Eng., General Manager, Parks & Environmental Services
Concurrence:	Robert Lapham, MCIP, RPP, Chief Administrative Officer

ATTACHMENT

Appendix A: Map of Kings Road Property (District of Saanich)