



Quadra Cedar Hill Community Association

March 10, 2020

Saanich Parks
(by email)

RE: QCHCA response to the Draft Management Plan for Cedar Hill Park

Dear Saanich Parks,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback to the Draft Management Plan for Cedar Hill Park. We'd also like to thank those who led the process; participated on the Stakeholder Working Group; attended focus groups, Open Houses or Ideas Fairs; and who responded to surveys for their contributions. We are appreciative that, for the first time, we have a plan for our Park that will guide decision-making and action for the next 20 years.

We kept our membership apprised of the progress of the planning process since it began, encouraged attendance at the Ideas Fair and Open House, advised of opportunities to respond to surveys, announced the Draft's release and posted a news item about it on our website. Our comments reflect input gained throughout the process and reactions to this latest draft.

Although the Plan says it's out of scope, we want to publicly comment that we very much support the ongoing golf course operations.

Page 9 says "many community members expressed interest in highlighting the indigenous history of the area via interpretive panels or public art". We are delighted to have Saanich's Canada 150 public art competition selection, Carey Newman's 'Earth Drums', installed at what can become a beautiful welcoming entrance to the Park off Finlayson. We understand that interpretive signage is still to be installed as part of the process.

With respect to Goal 1 'Move the Bowker Creek Blueprint forward (Reach 17)', we are very supportive. Under 'Outcomes', increased habitat, biodiversity in the Park, and reduction of peak flows were mentioned but protecting and improving water quality was missed; we recommend adding it. We had been hopeful work could start sooner than years 6 – 20 given the significant public support through both surveys. QCHCA is interested in ways to partner on this project.

Goal 2: 'Restoration of Kings Pond' including completion of an assessment to determine level of restoration needed, development of a restoration plan and seek funding opportunities (grants and community partnerships) to complete and implement the plan. Once again, the QCHCA is very supportive of this goal and are also interested in partnering on the project. We also look forward to the eventual restoration of Blenkinsop Creek which drains from Kings Pond into Swan Lake.

Goal 3, 'Develop a Natural Areas Plan for the Park'. We understand that the volunteers involved in the year-round Pulling Together work parties every Monday from 9 – noon have been asking for such a plan for a long while and look forward to working with Parks to flesh out and act on it. The Draft Management Plan indicates 'ongoing operational budget' for implementation of this goal but we believe the project warrants its own budget to support volunteers in working with Parks to flesh out and act on this important plan. We also believe there are opportunities for restoration and tree-planting elsewhere in the Park.

Several community members have also raised concerns about encroachment, dumping and other infractions against Parks Management and Control Bylaw 7753 and the apparent lack of enforcement of the bylaw. We feel this issue should be addressed somewhere in the Plan.

Goal 4: 'Obtain Audubon Certification for Cedar Hill Golf Course'. Under 'Outcome' for this goal, we thought the two watersheds should be included when talking about contributing to "the ecological health of the entire park, including the Golf Course."

With respect to Goal 5, 'Consider sustainable measures for the park', we were pleased to note on page 11 of the plan the comment that "by adopting some sustainable measures in parks such as Cedar Hill, Saanich could contribute to meaningful changes in our region" but note that many of the sustainability goals relate more to human activity (encouraging alternate transportation, reusable cups, etc.) rather than natural area restoration and increasing of the tree canopy which would seem to be a natural for the Park.

In terms of Goal 7b, while being supportive of Saanich's Active Transportation Plan, we don't believe the recommendation to create a north-south bike path is in the best interests of all involved. We hope that, if this Plan is approved, the stated "public engagement" will be done only after researching other alternatives, all costs (financial and environmental), and implications for current Park users and sharing this information widely beforehand.

We support Goal 9, 'Upgrade the open space with ball diamonds for both baseball and other events and uses' but didn't see anything that talked about how 'improved drainage' would be achieved. Of concern would be any potential negative impact to Bowker Creek's Reach 17. We also hope that the Special Olympics teams won't be negatively affected by this proposed change.

Although we support the intention, we have some concerns about Goal 11: 'Develop youth-specific activities (to be finalized via further public engagement)'. Given the fate of the

previous skateboard park in the same area, the mention on page 20 of the need to “ensure there is flexibility to allow for enhancements to Reach 17” when upgrading the Finlayson parking lot, and potential space and budget constraints, we believe significant research and analysis needs to accompany a robust public engagement process.

Re Goal 13, ‘Provide outdoor exercise equipment opportunities in the park’, we were pleased to note that this would be finalized via further research and public engagement and look forward to participating in the process. We have heard many comments about a sense that too many activities are being contemplated for the few ‘open’ spaces in south and south-east corner of the park. Others have commented that, if such opportunities were to be provided, they should be free of charge.

Goal 16 says ‘Follow a process should there be a need for an expansion to the recreation centre in the future’. Under ‘Outcome’ for this goal, it states ‘*A public engagement and planning process will be conducted should there be a need to expand the footprint of the Recreation Centre*’. However, on page 8, it states:

“... a building addition does not necessarily need to impede or negatively impact the open grass and meadow areas north and west of the facility. This park planning process has indicated that these areas are highly valued by local residents and park visitors.”

Action 16.1 under the goal states “If/when the Recreation Centre is facing the need to expand then a public engagement process will be conducted **allowing the community to comment on plans**”. We believe true public engagement has the community involved from the ideas stage so maximum creative energy and the greatest breadth of possibilities can be generated and considered.

Although we are pleased to see a goal related to communications with the community, we believe Goal 17 doesn’t capture what we believe is needed. As an example, to say that the community would be engaged in a conversation about activities planned for the park “when appropriate” seems not to be in the spirit of open, honest, two-way communication.

The Plan states that 92% of respondents to the first survey either strongly support or support preservation of the natural environment and similar results were reported in Phase 2. We believe that respondents were not differentiating between ‘natural areas’ as defined in Saanich Parks Natural Areas Management Guidelines and all the other treed, open meadow-type or grassed areas including the golf course greens when they responded. The section ‘Strengths identified for Cedar Hill Park’ on page 14 appears to confirm this. Of the seven strengths listed, six include the non-manmade environment – “large, beautiful park with vistas; natural areas with Garry Oak ecosystems; diverse activities in a central location; nice, safe, yet challenging park path for unstructured exercise, walking, running, etc.; public community golf course; and affordable recreation opportunities”. We believe the Plan could put more emphasis on the wants and needs of the *current* users of the natural, green, open public spaces.

Lastly, while we appreciate the thought and hard work that went into this Plan, we regret that it doesn’t encompass the whole Park as we’d hoped.

We asked Council for a planning process for the Park in 2014 out of a desire to not be faced with unanticipated changes to the Rec Centre, golf course or balance of the Park given the divisive debate about the clay court proposal. When we met with Saanich Parks in late 2016 to discuss the process, we argued for a plan that would include the whole park for the same reason. We are therefore disappointed that the Rec Centre and Golf Course were excluded from the scope of the planning exercise despite this and given the vision which celebrates the Park in its entirety; "Cedar Hill Park balances nature, community and recreation in a harmonious way. People, place and the environment share an intimate connection that fosters health and well-being. We are all stewards of the park, committed to its long-term preservation and enhancement."

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

Susan Haddon
President