

DISTRICT OF NORTH VANCOUVER COUNCIL WORKSHOP

Minutes of the Council Workshop for the District of North Vancouver held at 5:00 p.m. on Tuesday, December 12, 2023 in the Committee Room of the District Hall, 355 West Queens Road, North Vancouver, British Columbia.

Present: Mayor Mike Little
Councillor Jordan Back
Councillor Betty Forbes (via Zoom)
Councillor Jim Hanson
Councillor Herman Mah
Councillor Lisa Muri
Councillor Catherine Pope

Staff: David Stuart, Chief Administrative Officer
Rick Danyluk, Acting General Manager – Finance and Technology
Gavin Joyce, General Manager – Engineering, Parks and Facilities
Saira Walker, General Manager – Corporate Services
Caroline Jackson, Director – Climate Action, Natural Systems and Biodiversity
Steffanie Warriner, Director – Parks
Peter Cohen, Deputy General Manager – Engineering Services
James Gordon, Manager – Administrative Services
Monica Woods-Marshall, Section Manager – Urban Forestry and Natural Areas
Nicole Foth, Parks Planner
Guy Elexey, Community Forester, Environmental Sustainability Operations
Kaitlin Hebron, Confidential Council Clerk
Amanda Day, Administration Clerk
Adriana Reiher, Council Liaison/Support Officer

1. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

1.1. December 12, 2023 Council Workshop Agenda

MOVED by Councillor MURI

SECONDED by Mayor LITTLE

THAT the agenda for the December 12, 2023 Council Workshop is adopted as circulated.

CARRIED

2. ADOPTION OF MINUTES

Nil

3. REPORTS FROM COUNCIL OR STAFF

3.1. Draft Natural Areas Trail Strategy

File No. 12.5810.01/000.000

Gavin Joyce, General Manager, Engineering, Parks and Facilities, provided an introduction to the Council Workshop, noting that the purpose of the workshop is to discuss two significant projects related to the District's natural parklands system.

Steffanie Warriner, Director, Parks, advised that staff will be presenting the results of an 18-month process involving consultation, research and analysis, which formed the basis of the Draft Natural Areas Trail Strategy. Ms. Warriner noted the District's natural parkland areas are highly valued by the community and provide a wide range of benefits and services that support health and well-being, outdoor recreation and environmental sustainability. She stated that with Council's support, the Draft Natural Areas Trail Strategy will provide the strategic direction for ways staff can improve the overall management of the natural parklands system including providing increased support for outdoor recreational needs and trends as well as fostering the communities strong desire for shared stewardship.

Nicole Foth, Parks Planner, presented the Draft Natural Areas Trail Strategy and stated it aligns with the Official Community Plan (OCP), which provides direction to protect environmentally sensitive areas and provide trails. Ms. Foth commented that the OCP underscores that nature is key to the District's identity, and staff continue to hear how much residents value and love the trails and being in nature. Ms. Foth referred other District plans that support the proposed trails strategy. The Corporate Plan proposes to improve the trails system, ensure it is well-maintained, and to reduce environmental impacts. The Parks and Open Space Strategic Plan seeks to balance environmental protection and recreation.

Ms. Foth noted the focus of the strategy is on natural areas, classified as large, forested, less developed parkland areas of Fromme, Lynn Canyon, and Seymour. There are also natural areas within the neighbourhoods where the principles of this strategy can also apply. Ms. Foth stated the Fromme and Lynn Canyon areas already have existing plans, these plans will continue to guide the planning and management of these areas. The Draft Trail Strategy identifies the need to develop an area trails plan for the Seymour area. In Phase 1 of the process, staff heard from the community about key community values, ideas and opportunities for natural trail areas in the District. In Phase 2, staff developed the Draft Trail Strategy, sought community feedback and refined the strategy based on input received. The next phase is presenting the Draft Trail Strategy to Council.

In Phase 1, there were more than 1,900 participants, one of the most participated engagements in the District. Staff executed an online survey, an intercept survey, stakeholder workshops and meetings with local community, recreation and environment groups, adjacent land managers, and District agencies and partners such as North Shore Rescue, North Vancouver Recreation and Culture Commission, North Shore Emergency Management and the RCMP. Staff also met with Squamish Nation and Tsleil-Waututh Nation early in the process. Results showed over 83% of online survey respondents are from North Vancouver. It was found that over 80% of trail users participate in between two and four activities on the trails, with the most common trail activities being walking, hiking, nature viewing, mountain biking and dog walking. Over 80% of survey participants said trail variety, natural feel and character, ecosystem health and trail quality are important. Survey results show a strong desire for increased parking, waste bins, washrooms and informational signage. Staff also heard input on dog leash optional trails, some in support and others with concerns.

Phase 2 began in Fall 2023 with over 1000 participants. Staff engaged with residents through an online survey, pop-up events, stakeholder workshops and meetings, and meetings with Squamish Nation and Tsleil-Waututh Nation. Results of the second engagement process showed overwhelming support for the vision statement, guiding principles and goals of the Draft Trail Strategy. District staff also worked closely with the Parks and Natural Environment Advisory Committee throughout the development process. At their most recent meeting in November 2023, the committee unanimously passed a motion to support the Draft Trail Strategy.

Ms. Foth noted the vision statement as 'Our trails in natural areas are a model of sustainable recreation management, balancing environmental protection and recreation access. Our well-defined natural trail network offers access to nature for physical social, cultural, and spiritual well-being, while we respect and care for our ecosystems.

Ms. Foth noted the following list of Guiding Principles:

- Environmental sustainability;
- Collaboration;
- Risk management;
- Shared use;
- Adaptive management; and,
- Reliable resourcing.

Ms. Foth discussed how the Guiding Principles help frame decision-making and how actions are implemented in the journey towards achieving the Vision Statement. Through public consultation, approximately 80% of users visit for two to four types of activities on the trails, and that trail variety was an important quality, which shows a desire that most users are looking for a trail network that accommodates various types of uses. As a Guiding Principle, it is described as encouraging courteous interactions in shared spaces and promoting responsible trail use by all trail users.

Ms. Foth discussed how the goals are organized around three themes: experiences, ecosystems and stewardship. For experiences, this goal is about fostering enjoyable and informed experiences through planning, development and maintenance. The goal for ecosystems is about conserving and enhancing our ecosystems and habitat through optimizing and strategically locating trails, maintaining them, and restoring the surrounding areas. By providing well located and defined trails, it can reduce off-trail impacts by directing park visitors where to go. The District is fortunate to have a culture of shared stewardship, thousands of volunteer hours have been spent on trails and natural areas by the community, including Streamkeepers, North Shore Mountain Bike Association, school groups and community groups.

Ms. Foth highlighted the following action items for the short-term plan:

- Develop Seymour Area Trails Plan including ecological analysis;
- Review dog access on trails;
- Develop trail sign guidelines;
- Review trail difficulty level rating guidelines, trail classifications, evaluation criteria;
- Identify opportunities for trailhead amenities;
- Develop a communications plan to educate trail users; and;

- Review emergent recreation trends and develop guiding policy or regulations.

Ms. Foth stated that overall, the Draft Trail Strategy will help guide daily maintenance on trails as well as improve the experience, conservation of ecosystems, and expand stewardship of the trails for sustainable recreation access to our natural area trails.

Council discussion ensued and the following comments and concerns were noted:

- Highlighted the District's relationship with its parks and natural environment;
- Expressed support for the strategy;
- Expressed concerns regarding the Seymour Area Trail Plan;
- Recognized the need for a trail plan for Seymour;
- Expressed support for the expansion of current trails and trail networks;
- Expressed concerns regarding the protection of parklands;
- Commented on the need to find balance between protecting parks and trails along with recreational use;
- Referred to the high usage of District parks and trails;
- Expressed concerns regarding the impact of severe weather conditions on parks and trails;
- Noted resident desire for new trails and new trail networks;
- Expressed concerns regarding parks and trails that cross multiple jurisdictions;
- Expressed concerns regarding shared stewardship;
- Commented on decommissioned areas due to overuse;
- Highlighted the need to expand existing trail networks to cater to all types of trail users;
- Queried how on and off leash areas are being monitored and enforced;
- Opined dogs and dog walkers are an issue in the Seymour parks and trails;
- Commented on issues surrounding trailheads including congestion and lack of amenities such as washroom facilities;
- Discussed the possibility of temporary washrooms;
- Commented on the need for easier trail options for aging community members;
- Opined that trails that lead out onto private streets should be treated differently;
- Commented on mountain bikers using private roads as trail systems, and the negative impact on the residents;
- Commented on illegal parking by trail users on private roads;
- Noted a distinction needs to be made between the east and west sides of Seymour;
- Commented on volunteer participation;
- Opined the existing trail system is neglected;
- Queried similarities between the District's and Metro Vancouver's Parks plans;
- Commented on the desire for trailhead amenities;
- Commented on the need for improvements to signage and wayfinding; and;
- Suggested improvements be made to the DNV website relating to parks and trail networks.

In response to a question from Council, staff advised that there are multiple land managers along Seymour, with the District being one and staff would work with the other land managers to develop a maintenance plan.

In response to a question from Council, staff advised that there is a strong focus on the conservation and protection of certain parklands.

In response to a question from Council, staff advised that the Metro Vancouver Regional Parks Plan is to protect and connect parklands.

In response to a question from Council, staff advised that the Province has made increasing progress on trail characterization and signage.

In response to a question from Council, staff advised that they collaborated with Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Nation when developing the strategy.

In response to a question from Council, staff advised that they are working on signage clarifying on and off leash areas.

In response to a question from Council, staff advised that park rangers take an educational approach in on and off leash areas, however, they are able to enforce if necessary.

In response to a question from Council, staff advised that there is a strong desire from the community for volunteer opportunities.

In response to a question from Council, staff advised that multi-use paths and trails are designed on a case-by-case basis.

Mayor LITTLE left the meeting at 5:57 p.m. and returned at 5:59 p.m.

Councillor POPE left the meeting at 6:13 p.m. and returned at 6:15 p.m.

3.2. Forest Resilience Plan Implementation

File No.

Monica Woods-Marshall, Section Manager, Urban Forestry and Natural Areas, presented the District's Forest Resilience Implementation Plan and noted the program's three objectives, which includes forest restoration projects, advancing and aligning plans and strategies, and fostering a culture of shared stewardship and partnerships.

Ms. Woods-Marshall highlighted forests as the core of the community's identity in the District as they offer ecosystem services and support health and well-being. Ms. Woods-Marshall noted many benefits as well as risks associated with our forests, such as trees providing slope stability and the absorption of storm water, protecting us from erosion, landslides and flooding. Forests provide important habitats and promote biodiversity; they clean air and support both mental and physical well-being. Ms. Woods-Marshall commented on the current state of District forests and referred to climate change, development and recreation use impacts and forest composition as factors for the declining state of the forests.

Ms. Woods-Marshall commented on existing plans and strategies. The Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) was developed in 2007 with the forestry consultant company Blackwell and Associates, which assessed wildfire risk in the District and identified priority areas for fuel mitigation. These locations have all been completed and the program was updated in 2019 with new treatment sites. In 2011 the Official Community Plan (OCP), 2012 the Parks and Open Space Strategic Plan and 2017 the Climate Change Adaptation Strategy were developed which contain objectives and actions to proactively manage the District's forested areas. Ms. Woods-Marshall clarified that the CWPP work focused on the Wildland Urban Interface areas only, the buffer area between the District's big areas of forests that intersect with development and infrastructure and does not include other important forested areas that require management and restoration. The CWPP scope is also specific to fuel mitigation and has not typically included restoration techniques such as replanting and invasives management. In order to address this gap, staff worked with Blackwell and Associates to create a Forest Resilience Plan, which was presented to Council in May 2022 and finalized in November 2022. Through a collaborative process with the District's Fire and Rescue Services, Environment and Climate and Biodiversity department, staff took the consultant's Forest Resilience Plan and developed a practical and operational program to implement.

Ms. Woods-Marshall discussed the first objective of the program, to advance forest health restoration projects in priority areas through an ongoing operational program. Ms. Woods-Marshall noted projects will be prioritized based on a risk and benefits analysis that includes the consideration of:

- Public safety;
- Risk of property damage;
- Known environmental or biological stressors (including looper moth damage, disease, root and stem rot, dwarf mistletoe, invasive species, susceptibility to windstorms, and wildfire risk);
- Ecosystem sensitivity;
- Community health and recreation values; and,
- Budgetary and other constraints.

Ms. Woods-Marshall noted 17 priority forest health restoration project locations were selected and stated these projects will utilize existing resources, volunteer support and additional capital and operating capacity estimated at \$6.5 million over the next five years. Staff will report back on the program through the Financial Plan update in Fall 2024, which will help inform budget allocation for the following years. This work will also be integrated into the annual Asset Management Planning process over the next few years. Ms. Woods-Marshall then provided an example of a project, describing in early 2023, the District had an opportunity to pilot this more comprehensive scope of forest resilience work in Mountain View Park. This area was significantly impacted by looper moths and several trees were dead and posed a risk to infrastructure and public safety. Staff removed approximately 55 hazardous trees and completed fuel treatment maintenance prioritized in the CWPP. The project also included 22 volunteers planting 500 trees to promote the regeneration of a more resilient forest. This work was implemented in conjunction with Metro Vancouver Parks, who completed a similar project in Lynn Headwaters Regional Park.

Ms. Woods-Marshall discussed the second objective of the program, to continue to develop and advance related plans, strategies and policies to align forest health initiatives. Ms. Woods-Marshall stated staff will continue reviewing and updating existing documents, and a future overarching Urban Forest Management Plan will be developed.

Ms. Woods-Marshall discussed the third objective of the program, to enhance shared stewardship of District forests through partnerships, outreach and education. Ms. Woods-Marshall noted this objective focuses on creating a culture of shared stewardship and increasing public knowledge on the importance of healthy forests. This also includes continuing to build relationships and collaborate with other municipalities, regional and provincial governments, and First Nations governments. Ms. Woods-Marshall then provided an example of the Princess Park health restoration project. Ms. Woods-Marshall noted with climate change and increasing recreational demands, the forested areas of Princess Park have become heavily degraded and there is increasing erosion. The area was prioritized for a forest health restoration project, part of the project included a community event where 60 volunteers planted approximately 1,000 native plants in just two hours. The volunteers contributed approximately 150 volunteer hours total. Ms. Woods-Marshall referred to overwhelming positive feedback from the public and a strong call for more opportunities to volunteer. Ms. Woods-Marshall stated through the Forest Resilience Implementation Program, staff will have more capacity to offer events to the public, along with enhanced capacity through the Ecology Centre to deliver these types of initiatives. Staff will explore an "Adopt-a-park" type program to harness the enthusiasm of volunteers. Staff also have shared stewardship groups asking for increased opportunities to restore sensitive ecosystems. Council's endorsement of this program will allow staff to increase operational capacity.

Mayor Little varied the agenda as follows:

4. PUBLIC INPUT:

4.1. Layne North:

- Highlighted the importance of parks and trails in the District;
- Expressed concerns regarding logging; and,
- Highlighted the need for conservation efforts.

4.2. Walter Hajen:

- Noted he has worked in environmental protection for 25 years;
- Noted it was difficult to follow the survey as there was a lack of distinction between types of trails;
- Stated the majority of damage on trails is from mountain bike usage; and,
- Opined there was a lack of public consultation for trail usage in Princess Park.

4.3. James Nadel:

- Spoke as the President of the North Shore Mountain Bike Association (NSMBA);
- Expressed support for the trail strategy;
- Commented on the NSMBA's relationships with land managers;
- Commented on the inaction of previously identified objectives regarding the creation of new trails;
- Opined the work of the NSMBA be included in the budget for future projects; and,
- Noted the NSMBA helps to maintain multi-use trails.

Council discussion ensued and the following comments and concerns were noted:

- Highlighted the importance of the CWPP;
- Commented on negative environmental impacts such as looper moths;
- Noted support from the Province is necessary to help manage lands and forests;
- Discussed the budget for the Forest Resilience Plan;
- Queried if provincial funding is possible; and,
- Expressed concern regarding the state of our forests.

5. ADJOURNMENT

MOVED by Councillor MURI

SECONDED by Mayor LITTLE

THAT the December 12, 2023 Council Workshop is adjourned.

CARRIED
(6:59 p.m.)

Mayor

Municipal Clerk