



Committee of the Whole Report

For the Meeting of January 30, 2020

To: Committee of the Whole **Date:** January 23, 2020
From: Thomas Soulliere, Director, Parks and Recreation and Facilities
Subject: 2019 Annual Progress Report: Parks and Open Spaces Master Plan

RECOMMENDATION

That Council approve an exemption for high-profile garden locations from the city-wide garden bed naturalization program, including the north west corner of Topaz Park, the planters along Government Street and Belleville Street, as well as at the cenotaph in Pioneer Square.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of progress made on implementation of the Parks and Open Spaces Master Plan.

Victoria's parks inventory includes dynamic, inclusive, and diverse public spaces, which support health and wellness, protects natural areas, and allows residents and visitors to connect with the unique ecosystems and character of the city.

This document provides direction to staff for the purposes of planning and managing the City's parks. The short-term and long-term actions are rooted in public engagement, ensuring that activities and investments align with community values and priorities.

The Parks and Open Spaces 2019 Annual Report (Appendix A) provides a comprehensive accounting of the progress made over the past year towards the goals approved by Council in the strategic document.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the actions completed and initiated in 2019 associated with the Parks and Open Spaces Master Plan.

BACKGROUND

Council approved the Parks and Open Spaces Master Plan (POSMP) in 2017 as a strategic roadmap to guide the planning, management and investment for the City's parks inventory over the next 25 years. Council has also directed staff to report on the "progress of implementation of priority

actions identified in the Parks and Open Spaces Master Plan, Urban Forest Master Plan and the Growing in the City initiative”, on an annual basis.

In June 2019, staff provided Council with a progress update on the Growing in the City programs and recommended further actions to advance urban gardening priorities outlined in the 2019-2022 Strategic Plan. Council approved five recommendations focused on removing barriers to food production on private and public land. In addition, targets were set for the program that reflect input received from the Urban Food Table and align with the City’s strategic priorities.

In December 2019, staff provided Council with a progress update on the implementation of the Urban forest Master Plan and received approval of funding for priority actions as well as amendments to the Urban Forest Master Plan to reflect updated tree canopy cover data.

ISSUES & ANALYSIS

The Parks and Open Spaces Master Plan guides not only the work of the Parks division, but also informs the consultation for projects led by other City departments, such as the neighbourhood planning process, transportation planning, and the review of private development proposals that impact trees and green spaces.

Staff have advanced work on approximately half of the 55 actions outlined in the POSMP. Some of the 2019 actions of note include:

- Relationship building with local Indigenous people and coordination on park projects
- Acquisition of waterfront park land in James Bay
- New amenities in the expansion to Cecelia Ravine Park
- Renewal of the playground and pathways at Summit Park
- Improvements in the Dallas Road and Clover Point park spaces
- A comprehensive condition assessment of all amenities in parks
- Renewal of five sport courts
- Improved accessibility for pedestrians and cyclists in Beacon Hill Park
- Recognition events acknowledging the contributions of former mayors Gretchen Brewin and Peter Pollen
- Collaboration with stakeholders on sport and cultural events in City parks

Responding to the Climate Emergency

In 2019, the City joined leaders from the region and around the world in declaring a Climate Emergency. Parks and open spaces are being impacted by climate change, but natural assets can also help communities adapt to and mitigate these impacts. The City is taking action to identify risks and develop strategies to increase the community’s resilience.

The City has adjusted its management of the planted environment. For example, staff have processed the Council direction to transition garden beds to native and adaptive plants that are drought tolerant, pest resistant, pollinator friendly and lower maintenance. Staff also modified operational practices including a shift to organic fertilizers, utilizing electric equipment, reducing single-use plastics and increasing the propagation and cultivation of native plants.

These actions are aligned with the City’s Climate Leadership Plan and contribute to the advancement of Goal 2: Victoria’s natural environment flourishes in a changing climate.

The 2019 Annual Report attached provides additional details on the progress made over the last year towards realizing the City's strategic goals.

OPTIONS & IMPACTS

That Council approve an exemption for high-profile garden locations from the city-wide garden bed naturalization program, including the north west corner of Topaz Park, the planters along Government Street and Belleville Street, as well as at the cenotaph in Pioneer Square.

In 2019, Council directed staff to “naturalize” all garden beds in the city, except for those in Beacon Hill Park and displays associated with the seasonal hanging basket program. Staff have identified an option, for Council consideration, which would provide for an exemption of three more high-profile garden locations. These sites include the prominent bed at the northwest corner of Topaz Park facing Blanshard Street, as well as the raised planters along Government and Belleville Streets, south of Humboldt Street, and the garden at the cenotaph in Pioneer Square. All of these locations are considered high-profile opportunities to showcase unique seasonal horticultural displays, and staff recommend that Council permit this longstanding practice to continue.

Accessibility Impact Statement

The Parks and Open Spaces Master Plan includes a guiding principle to increase the accessibility of the parks and open spaces system by considering a broad range of accessibility issues at the outset of all park planning and design projects.

The City has also taken actions to balance accessibility considerations with the management of the City's natural habitats including:

- Planting lower allergen plants in proximity to high traffic or gathering areas.
- Inquiring with neighbouring homes if any residents suffer from pollen allergies prior to tree selection when planting boulevard trees.
- Published the Lower Allergen Landscape Planting Resource List and the Pollinator and Allergy-Friendly Gardening in the City of Victoria guide. Both documents are used by staff and shared with the public including new and existing community gardens.

2019 – 2022 Strategic Plan

Progress on the Parks and Open Spaces Master Plan, the Urban Forest Master Plan and Growing in the City initiative, helps the City advance towards strategic objectives:

- #5 Health, Well Being and a Welcoming City; and
- #6 Climate Leadership and Environmental Stewardship.

Impacts to Financial Plan

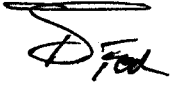
There are no impacts to the 2020 Financial Plan with this report.

CONCLUSION

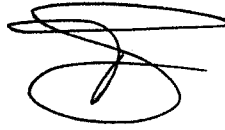
The Parks and Open Spaces 2019 Annual Report provides a summary of the progress made towards the City's strategic goals and objectives. Staff will continue to provide information on the

implementation of the Master Plan through the Quarterly Reports and the Annual Financial Report, in addition to the POSMP annual report.

Respectfully submitted,

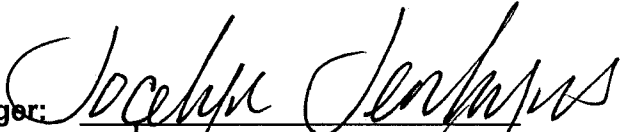


Nav Sidhu
Assistant Director,
Parks and Recreation



Thomas Soulliere
Director,
Parks, Recreation and Facilities

Report accepted and recommended by the City Manager:


Date: Jan 23, 2020

List of Attachments

Attachment A: Parks and Open Spaces 2019 Annual Report