



Committee of the Whole Report

For the Meeting of November 26, 2020

To: Committee of the Whole **Date:** November 13, 2020
From: Thomas Soulliere, Director, Parks, Recreation and Facilities
Subject: Report Back: Vehicle Access Changes in Beacon Hill Park

RECOMMENDATION

That Council receive the following report for information.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In response to the introduction of the provincial state of emergency due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in April 2020, the City implemented a suite of targeted interventions within parks, trails and public roadways. These changes were intended to support public health measures designed to limit the risk of spreading the virus through physical distancing and encouraging citizens to “stay local”.

In May 2020, Council directed staff to limit vehicle access in Beacon Hill Park to the parking lots at Heywood Road, Circle Drive, and Nursery Road, and the roads that serve as their closest access point, as shown in Attachment A. Staff were also directed to collect and report back on input from the Accessibility Working Group and other accessibility organizations, as well as any feedback received by City staff regarding the changes over the summer, to inform future considerations about vehicle access in the park.

Over the past several months, staff have compiled the feedback received. It is important to note that apart from the specific accessibility groups identified, the City did not actively seek input from any other groups or individuals.

The feedback received is summarized below.

Input from the Accessibility Working Group

Staff met with and received feedback from the AWG in July 2020. Staff heard that people with disabilities may use public facilities differently than others, and that passive recreation, such as driving to enjoy the scenery, is an important use of the park.

The AWG recommended that the Beacon Hill Loop be opened or partly opened to provide access to people with disabilities and that the vehicle access changes not be made permanent. The AWG also recommended that staff consult with other accessibility organizations previously engaged in City initiatives. The AWG consultation report can be found in Appendix B. Recommendations on

accessible parking design standards, and supply rates will be addressed through the City's Accessible Parking Requirements and Design Guidelines project currently underway.

Input from accessibility organizations

The City reached out to local accessibility groups with a short survey on the changes to the vehicle access in Beacon Hill Park. More than 50 accessibility organizations were invited to participate. The response rate was 20 per cent (10 completions), which is a "moderate" rate for an online survey.

Precisely 50 per cent of respondents indicated the vehicle access changes in the park had a "negative impact" on their organization's use of the park, while 30 per cent noted the changes had "no real impact", and 20 per cent expressed no opinion. No respondents indicated that the changes had a "positive impact" on their organization's use of the park.

Survey participants were also asked whether their organization preferred that the current vehicle access restrictions remained or not. In response, 40 per cent indicated they would prefer that the current adjustments "end immediately", while 10 per cent suggested the change "should end when physical distancing is no longer required", and 50 per cent of respondents had no opinion on this. No respondents indicated a preference in to have the current access restrictions "remain in place".

Feedback received through the survey suggests that the changes presented challenges for the members that these organizations serve. The complete results of the survey can be found in Appendix C.

Unsolicited correspondence received

Since the access changes were introduced, the City has received hundreds of emails on the matter. All public correspondence has been tracked and compiled. The majority of correspondence noted opposition to the changes. The table below provides a summary of correspondence received by the City from May 14 to Sept. 30, 2020.

Received by	Opposed	Support	Total
Mayor and Council Office	500	15	515
Parks Division	22	1	23
Engagement	3	2	10
Total	525	18	548

The majority of people who opposed the vehicle access changes, in both the survey and correspondence, highlighted that the changes limited access for seniors and people with disabilities.

The City's Active Transportation Advisory Committee provided feedback on the improved level of comfort for people walking, riding and rolling within the park but recognized the value of some vehicle access to support people with disabilities and families with young children.

OPTIONS

Should Council wish to maintain a level of vehicle restriction while the pandemic continues, and address at least some of the concerns expressed by citizens, Council may consider directing staff to re-open the Beacon Hill Loop from Circle Drive while keeping Chestnut Row, Bridge Way and Arbutus Way closed, to facilitate physical distancing within the park.

CONCLUSION

The original intent of the interventions implemented at Beacon Hill Park was to support the public health advice to provide adequate space for physical distancing for park users and limit the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Based on the feedback from several residents, it appears these interventions have also negatively impacted access to the park for seniors and individuals with disabilities, who rely on the use of vehicles.

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: November 19, 2020

List of Attachments

Appendix A: Beacon Hill Park Road Closure Map
Appendix B: Accessibility Working Group Consultation Report
Appendix C: Accessibility Organizations Engagement Summary