



Council has also directed staff to add a new swimming dock in the Gorge Inlet by summer 2024. To accommodate this deadline, staff recommend building a new swim platform and installing it in the south-west area of Gorge Marine Park. This marine park has the regulatory, environmental, and safety conditions to allow this work to be completed next summer.

Staff propose a design-build approach for this project and recommend funding of \$300,000 to procure the necessary team to complete this work.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **Centennial Square Action Plan**

The Downtown Public Realm Plan adopted in 2017 identified Centennial Square as a priority for improvement. The City initiated a planning process in early 2018 for Centennial Square to address immediate priorities, such as accessibility, programming and other 'quick win' opportunities to activate the plaza. In addition, a vision and strategic framework were developed to guide improvements over the medium and long term. The associated public engagement process resulted in over 1,400 individual responses from the community, which informed the concept design for the Centennial Square Action Plan approved by Council in 2019.

### **Swimming Infrastructure in the Gorge Waterway**

In 2019, the City approved a grant to the Gorge Swim Fest Society to explore options to improve recreational access to the Gorge Waterway. The study evaluated twenty-one public access points along the Gorge and recommended sites to improve public access; Banfield Park Dock and the adjacent beach ranked at the top of that list.

Gorge Marine Park (GMP) is the City's only marine park. It is located adjacent to Banfield Park, at the north end of Victoria Harbour. The Province granted the City an occupation license for this portion of the Inlet in 2015, providing the City with the authority to regulate its use and enforce City bylaws. In August 2021, the City updated the zoning for this property to permit docks.

In 2021, a floating recreational swim platform was installed within the GMP in the open water east of the Banfield Park dock. In 2022, the City expanded the existing Banfield Park Dock. As part of this project, the City was granted a permit from Transport Canada to create an active recreational zone in GMP, which would prohibit motorized vessels from entering a protected area, as shown in Attachment B.

In January 2023, Council directed staff to work with the Township of Esquimalt and community members to assess the feasibility of adding a new swim dock at Arm Street Park.

## **ISSUES AND ANALYSIS**

### **Centennial Square Action Plan**

The renewal of Centennial Square poses complex challenges both above and below ground due to the presence of utilities and other underground infrastructure installed over several decades. These factors, along with the Square's urban location and adjacency to multiple office buildings and busy streets, necessitate careful planning of the design and construction.

The revitalization project will occur in stages, with the initial phase focusing on the central elements of the Square. This work will result in a new splash pad, play elements, a commercial kiosk,

improved accessibility, new seating and other furniture, supporting infrastructure for events, and additional trees. Overall, these investments will help to enhance the Square's overall appeal as a welcoming destination. Future phases will convert the undercroft at the west end of City Hall to an indoor multi-use space and deliver transit-oriented improvements on the east side of the Square.

### **Swimming Infrastructure in the Gorge Waterway**

Following Council's recent direction, staff from the City of Victoria and the Township of Esquimalt discussed the possibility of developing a public swim dock at Arm Street Park. After a preliminary site assessment, staff from both jurisdictions identified several concerns relating to accessibility, environmental conditions, and safety that present obstacles to the development of swim infrastructure at this site. At this time, staff from both municipalities do not recommend further investigation of a swim dock at Arm Street Park.

Meanwhile, Gorge Marine Park presents a viable option for additional swimming infrastructure to be delivered within the City's desired timeline. The south-west area of this marine park is a popular destination for aquatic recreation and includes the foreshore conditions and amenities necessary to support an expansion of recreational swimming. The width of the Gorge Waterway in this area allows for safe separation of swimmers, paddlers, and boats. Moreover, there are sufficient depths of water for recreational use during periods of low tide, unlike the shallow mudflats on the north side of the Gorge, adjacent to Arbutus Park.

With its site-specific zoning and favourable conditions, the marine park is likely the best opportunity within the Gorge Inlet to accommodate new swimming infrastructure next year. If Council supports the staff recommendation, the City will install buoys delineating a protected swim zone in the GMP along with the new swim platform.

All development within the aquatic environment and the intertidal zone is subject to federal, provincial, and municipal regulations. Permits are required to ensure aquatic development meets the Water Sustainability Act and the Fisheries Act. Transport Canada regulates and issues work permits within the Gorge Waterway through the Navigation Protection Act, and the City regulates land use through the Zoning Regulation Bylaw. While the typical review period for the provincial and federal permits required for aquatic development is 90-120 days, these timelines can be extended by factors outside the City's control. Staff will make every effort to avoid any such delays that may impact the ability to deliver new swimming infrastructure next summer.

### **OPTIONS & IMPACTS**

#### **Option 1 - That Council approve funding for the Centennial Square Action Plan and new swimming infrastructure in the south-west area of Gorge Marine Park (Recommended)**

Should Council approve this option, the proposed resources will be added to this year's budget, and staff will initiate the work required to complete the phase one design work for Centennial Square and install a new swim platform in Gorge Marine Park. Staff will also report back to Council in 2024 with confirmation of the funding required to construct the first phase of the revitalization plan for Centennial Square.

This option allows the City to advance the immediate priorities outlined in the *Park Sequencing Plan* within the desired timeline.

## **Option 2 - That Council refer the project plans to staff for further refinement.**

Should Council not support the recommended approach for one or both projects, the matter may be referred to staff with further instructions. This option is not recommended, given the impacts it would have on the delivery timelines for projects identified as immediate priorities in the *Park Sequencing Plan*.

### *Accessibility Impact Statement*

As with all park planning, accessibility is a primary consideration in the design of renewed public spaces. Improvements to Centennial Square will include upgraded lighting, furniture, and an accessible ramp connecting the upper and lower plaza areas.

While the new amenities for Gorge Marine Park will be designed with a high degree of accessibility, there are limitations due to existing foreshore conditions along the Gorge Inlet. Improving the accessibility throughout the upland infrastructure will require careful planning and substantial financial investment. It is recommended that this work be considered as part of a future project.

### *Impacts to Financial Plan*

Should Council approve the recommendations, staff will bring forward an amendment to the 2023 Financial Plan Bylaw to increase the Capital Plan by \$1,050,000, with funding from the Buildings and Infrastructure Reserve. This reserve currently has an unallocated balance of approximately \$8.4 million.

### *2023 - 2026 Strategic Plan*

The two projects detailed in this report are aligned with the following strategic priorities:

- *Begin major capital projects that support parks, recreation and public experiences.*
- *Increase water access to the Gorge and Victoria Harbour.*

### *Official Community Plan Consistency Statement*

The Official Community Plan contains the following objectives for parks and open spaces, access to services and facilities:

*(9.1.2) Recognize and balance the multiple purposes and uses of parks, such as cultural events, recreation, sports, ecosystem services, commemoration and aesthetic enjoyment;*

*(9.14) Enhance child- and youth-friendly parks and recreational facilities, services, and programs in the City, to promote a healthy community and to help attract and retain households with children.*

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The amendments to the 2023 Financial Plan proposed in this report will enable the City to deliver on immediate priorities, including revitalizing Centennial Square through a phased approach and adding a new swimming dock to Gorge Marine Park.

Respectfully submitted,

Justin Dykstra  
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Report accepted and recommended by the City Manager.

**List of Attachments**

**Attachment A:** Centennial Square Concept Plan

**Attachment B:** Gorge Marine Park Context Map