



Governance and Priorities Committee Report For the Meeting of July 10, 2014

To: Governance and Priorities Committee
From: Julie MacDougall, Assistant Director - Parks
Subject: Michigan Street Community Garden Relocation

Date: July 10, 2014

Executive Summary

In 1999, the community worked with LifeCycles Project Society to develop a community allotment garden on Michigan Street in the James Bay neighbourhood on provincially owned lands, known as the South Block.

In 2013, the Province initiated the sale of a portion of the South Block for development purposes. Redevelopment of the site includes offices as well as low-rise residential with street level commercial along Menzies Street. A location for the existing community garden is not envisioned in the redevelopment plans.

Following sale of the lands for development, Michigan Street Gardens approached the City to discuss options for relocation within the James Bay neighbourhood. In order for the proposed garden relocation to move forward, the preliminary step is to establish a recommended site to proceed with more detailed discussions with the community.

City of Victoria Parks staff met with the garden group and other interested parties to look at various park and boulevard areas within the neighbourhood for the potential relocation. South Park was identified as the recommended site due to its size, aspect and proximity to South Park School.

Recommendation:

That Council direct staff to proceed with South Park as the proposed site for relocation of the Michigan Street Community Garden, subject to more detailed consultation with the neighbourhood.

Respectfully submitted

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Leigh Sifton'.

Leigh Sifton
Manager, Parks Planning & Design

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Julie MacDougall'.

Julie MacDougall
Assistant Director, Parks

A large, stylized handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Jocelyn Jenkins'.

Jocelyn Jenkins
Acting Director, Parks, Recreation
and Culture

Report accepted and recommended by the City Manager:

Date:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be the City Manager's signature.
July 4, 2014

Purpose

This report is to update Council on the status of discussions regarding the existing Michigan Street community garden and to seek Council direction to proceed with discussions on a recommended relocation site.

Background

In 1999, the community worked with LifeCycles Project Society to develop a community allotment garden on Michigan Street in the James Bay neighbourhood on provincially owned lands, known as the South Block. A site map is provided as Attachment 1. The existing garden covers an area of approximately 500 square meters and contains communal gardening space, a cob structure shed and 23 allotment beds of various sizes.

The City's Official Community Plan identifies the importance of urban food security and includes policies and objectives related to encouraging food production in visible and suitable public places; and, supporting the development of at least one allotment garden per neighbourhood with more in areas with higher densities.

Based on the City's current Community Gardens Policy (Attachment 2), Victoria supports the creation of community gardens and will assist the organization in locating new garden sites where available land exists, where neighbours have been consulted and are supportive, and where a gardening group demonstrates an interest and commitment.

As per the Community Garden Policy, the City will approve the use of park land for community gardens on a case-by-case basis following consultation with the affected community and subject to Council approval.

Issues & Analysis

In 2013, the Province initiated the sale of a portion of the South Block for development purposes. Redevelopment of the site includes offices as well as low-rise residential with street level commercial along Menzies Street. A location for the existing community garden is not envisioned in the redevelopment plans.

Following sale of the lands, the garden group approached the City to discuss options for relocation within the James Bay neighbourhood. In order for the proposed garden relocation to move forward, the preliminary step is to establish a recommended site to proceed with more detailed discussions with the community.

In order to identify potential sites, City of Victoria Parks staff looked at various park and boulevard areas with the garden group and other interested parties in early 2014. An initial "long list" of 11 possible sites was developed. Following review, seven of those sites were considered to be too difficult to proceed forward with. These sites and their reason for exclusion are:

- Beacon Hill Park – Challenges in relation to the Park Trust
- Waterfront lands along Dallas Road – too much wind & salt spray
- Irving Park – available space is shady and subject to acidic needle fall
- Adjacent to Montreal Street tennis courts – too constricted
- Centennial Park – too constrained & would require tree removal
- Converting parking spots in either of two multi-story parking lots attached to private condominium complexes – would require third party legal agreements and may entail structural upgrades

Of the total 11 sites, four sites were identified as potential locations. An overview map of James Bay identifying the sites as well as aerial photos of each site specifically can be found in Attachment 3.

- Todd Playlot
 - Located on Montreal Street. Adjacent to Macdonald Park and in close proximity to existing Montreal Street Community Garden and to James Bay Community School. Use as a community garden would likely require relocation of the existing play equipment in order to obtain a similar size area for the community garden.
- Macdonald Park - Niagara Street Frontage
 - Boulevard space between the roadway and the active portions of Macdonald Park. Close to James Bay Community School. With an area of over 1,500 sq. m available, the site size is more than adequate however large, mature trees would shade out the garden.
- Rithet Street Right-of-Way
 - Extra wide road right of way could be reconfigured to allow garden space. Location is not proximate to other community spaces. More detailed roadway design would be required in order to determine space available for garden use. This would require costly road re-design and construction.
- South Park
 - Un-programmed area of park adjacent to Toronto Street, south of the playing fields. Proximate to South Park School, who in preliminary conversations have indicated an interest in the opportunity to use the garden for educational purposes. Area available outside of play and naturalized areas is approximately 850 sq. m, which is larger than the the area of the existing garden. As School District 61 currently maintains the park, agreement with them would be required.

Based on this review, South Park is the recommended site for garden relocation, subject to further discussions with the James Bay Neighbourhood Association and the garden proponents including:

- Ensuring the site is acceptable to the James Bay Neighbourhood Association, the public and any other relevant stakeholders. As per the Community Garden's Policy, consultation is to be led by the proponents.
- Confirming that James Bay Neighbourhood Association would enter into a License of Occupation (terms to be determined) with the City for the community garden. Once finalized, this would require Council approval.
- Identifying the budget and responsibilities towards relocation with a target date of completion of November 2014, the date Michigan Street gardens is required to vacate their current site.

Options & Impacts

Recommendation: That Council direct staff to proceed with South Park as the proposed site for relocation of the Michigan Street Community Garden, subject to more detailed consultation with the neighbourhood. Staff will report back to Council by September 2014.

Alternate Recommendation: That Council request staff to explore alternate options in the James Bay neighbourhood.

Regardless of the option chosen, as per other community gardens developed in the City and the City's Community Garden Policy, with the exception of the provision of water and some minor split

rail fencing if requested, the costs for garden construction are borne by the proponent. Subject to availability, the City also provides compost or leaf mulch to assist.

Recommendations

That Council direct staff to proceed with South Park as the proposed site for relocation of the Michigan Street Community Garden, subject to more detailed consultation with the neighbourhood.

Attachments

- Existing Garden Overview Map
- Community Gardens Policy
- Proposed Sites Overview

06/27/2014

Michigan Street Garden

