



City of Richmond

Report to Committee

To: Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services
Committee

Date: July 8, 2013

From: Mike Redpath
Senior Manager, Parks

File: 06-2345-20-GCIT1/Vol
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Re: **Garden City Lands – Phase One Vision and Guiding Principles**

Recommendation:

That the Vision and Guiding Principles as detailed in the report “Garden City Lands –Phase One Vision and Guiding Principles” from the Senior Manager, Parks dated July 8, 2013, be endorsed as the basis for the Garden City Lands future planning, Phase Two – Concept Development.

Mike Redpath
Senior Manager, Parks
(604-247-4942)

Att. 2

REPORT CONCURRENCE			
ROUTED TO:	CONCURRENCE	CONCURRENCE OF GENERAL MANAGER	
Communications	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Engineering	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Law	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Policy Planning	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Transportation	<input type="checkbox"/>		
REVIEWED BY DIRECTORS	INITIALS:	REVIEWED BY CAO	INITIALS:

Staff Report

Origin

On October 22, 2012 the following resolution was adopted by Council:

“That the Garden City Lands planning process as described in the staff report titled Garden City Lands – Planning Process 2013-2014 dated October 4, 2012 from the Senior Manager, Parks be endorsed.”

In addition, this report directly relates to the achievement of the following Council 2011-2014 term goal:

“7.4. Commence planning for the eventual use of the Garden City Lands.”

The purpose of this report is to respond to the October 22, 2012 Council direction to commence a planning process, by presenting the findings of the Garden City Lands Phase One- Planning Process including a Vision and Guiding Principles which will then be used as the basis for commencing with the Garden City Lands Phase Two- Concept Development.

Findings of Fact

The City owned Garden City Lands (the Lands) are approximately 136.5 acres (55.2 hectares) located on the eastern edge of Richmond City Centre, between Westminster Highway, Garden City Road, Alderbridge Way and No. 4 Road. The Lands are located within the provincially designated Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) and are currently vacant. The Metro Vancouver 2040 Regional Growth Strategy has designated the Lands ‘Conservation and Recreation’.

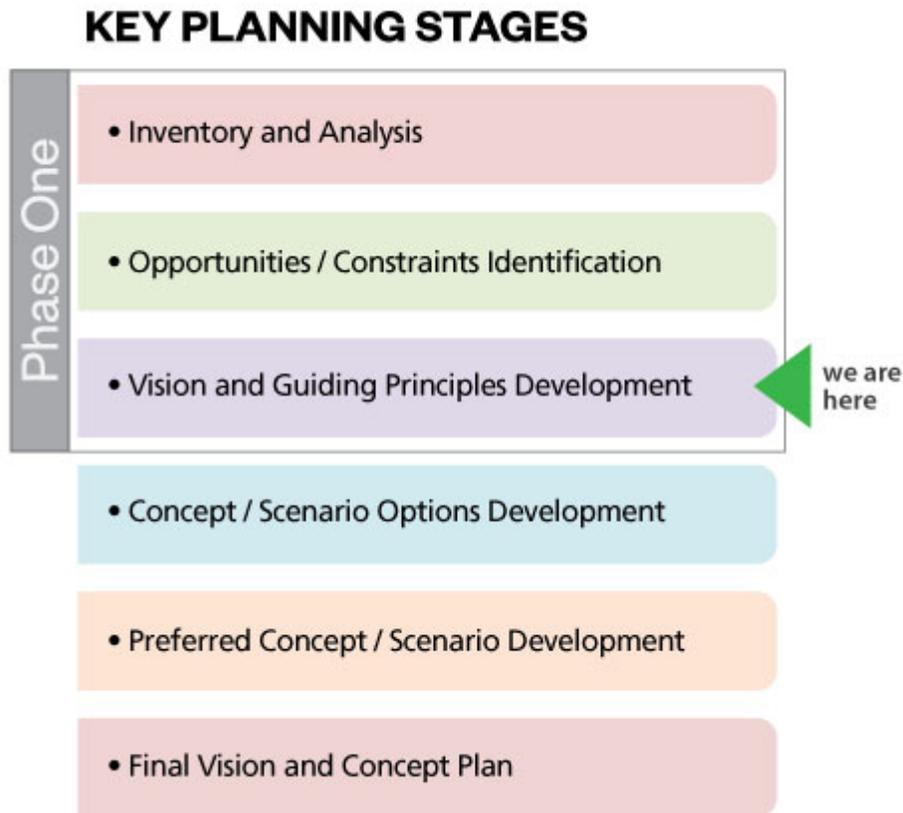
In the current 2041 Official Community Plan (OCP) Land Use Map, the Garden City Lands are designated as ‘Conservation’. This is defined as being natural and semi-natural areas with important environmental values that may also be used for recreation, park, agricultural and food production purposes. The Lands are also zoned Agriculture.

Analysis

BACKGROUND

One of Council’s 2011-2014 term goals is to commence planning for the eventual use of the Garden City Lands. Staff were directed at the July 24, 2012 Parks Recreation and Cultural Services Committee to report back on a public consultation process for the Lands. In response to that referral a report entitled “Garden City Lands – Phase One Planning” was presented at the September 25, 2012 Parks Recreation Committee that outlined both a planning process and a range of public engagement opportunities.

At this meeting, staff were directed to bring forward a revised work program and a compressed timeline for the planning process. On October 22, 2012 Council adopted the following revised planning process with a completion date of June 2014:



The first three steps outlined above have been completed as Phase One. This phase has focused on two main goals: ‘getting to know the land’ through conducting a technical review of the land and site context, and ‘getting to know the community vision’ through a creative public engagement process.

Key objectives of Phase One:

1. To have a thorough and comprehensive understanding of the existing site, the physical and community context, and identify key factors influencing future decision-making. This foundational information is vital to moving forward with developing options and a final concept plan.
2. To provide well defined, transparent, and easily understood documentation and presentation of the information gathering process and inventory results that can be used for communication and ongoing dialogue.
3. To undertake an innovative public engagement process that is transparent, well-documented, inclusive, and reaches the broadest community audience.

Since Council approval of the planning process in September 2012, the key steps as detailed above have been completed and are presented in this report.

PHASE ONE – INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS/OPPORTUNITIES & CONSTRAINTS

The first two steps in Phase One included a biophysical and historical inventory of Garden City Lands and a review of relevant City strategies. This information was used to develop presentation material for the public engagement process (**Attachment 1**).

A brief sampling of the key findings from the review process is presented below:

- The majority of the City Centre residents will live within a 2 km walking distance of Garden City Lands.
- The Lands are a 10 minute walk to a Canada Line Station.
- Over 25,000 cars pass by the Lands during peak hours on weekends.
- From 1903 until 2010 the Federal Government owned the Lands.
- The Vancouver Rifle Range was established on the Lands in 1904 and operated until 1928. It was a recreational and a military training location.
- In 1974 the lands were included in the Agricultural Land Reserve.
- Permissible uses have evolved over the years. In addition to farming uses, other uses are permitted such as: ecological reserves, passive recreation, open parkland, horticulture and nurseries, education and research, and agri-tourism.
- There are no historic records indicating the land has ever been actively farmed.
- Any potential crop farming will require amending the soils and infrastructure upgrades.
- Garden City Lands are located at the west edge of the Greater Lulu Island Bog.
- The lands have been mown and cleared for the last one hundred years.
- The plants on the site are predominately native with some invasive plants.
- It takes up to 500 years to create 30 cm of a peat bog. Peat depths are between 50 cm and 100 cms on the Lands.
- The Lands contain the remnant bog landscape and seasonal wetland areas.
- Annual mowing has kept the trees from emerging and shading out the low growing bog plants.
- These Lands together with Nature Park and the federal DND Lands create a significant 472 acre ecological hub.
- Managing the hydrology on the site is critical to the health of the bog environment.
- The Garden City Lands are 2 km from the Oval and Middle Arm waterfront linked by Lansdowne Road.
- Walking has been identified as the most popular recreational activity in Richmond.
- Community cohesiveness is stronger when there are opportunities for informal social interaction, and where people of diverse ages and backgrounds can engage in shared experiences.
- Access to healthy, affordable, and culturally appropriate food is a human right.
- Expressing creativity through art pieces, engaging events, festivals, and performances are key to evolution of a ‘great place’ destination.

CONSULTATION AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

As part of the public engagement process the City committed to an extensive communication program to inform the public about the Garden City Lands project. A dedicated website, **creategardencitylands.ca**, was developed, along with a supporting Facebook page and Twitter account. A unique project logo and visual identity was also created.

The project web site was launched in early May with background information about the Lands. From May 15 to June 1, 2013 daily *Fast Facts* were provided on the website, posted on Facebook page and distributed via Twitter in the lead up to the Ideas Fair held on June 1, 2013. All the materials including the questionnaire from the Ideas Fair have been uploaded to the site and posted on the City's Let's Talk Richmond online engagement platform.

A community-wide media information campaign was also initiated that included numerous newspaper advertisements, special briefings conducted by staff and the Mayor, and extensive media coverage from local and regional news outlets.

An Ideas Fair was held on Saturday, June 1, 2013 which provided the public with an opportunity to be on the Lands for the first time, view and respond to the information display boards, and participate in a series of idea generating activities. A Stakeholder workshop was held on June 6, 2013 with a number of community groups to discuss values and potential visions from their individual and representative group perspectives.

Attachment 2 details the community engagement process, the various engagement tools, and presents a summary of the key input from the public. An overview of the different public engagement opportunities is provided below:

- 650 people attended the June 1st Ideas Fair
- 220 questionnaires were filled in
- 99% said that they enjoyed the Ideas Fair
- 28 video conversations were taped
- 60 people took part in the eco-tours
- 1121 document downloads from the City website
- 112 questionnaires filled in on-line
- 12 people attended the June 6th Stakeholder Workshop
- Numerous proposals, letters, and e-mails were sent into Council and staff
- In all, there were 15 different ways that the public has provided input.

Other Consultation:

Detailed submissions were received from the Garden City Lands Conservation Society outlining their vision for the lands, along with visions and plans/sketches from other residents.

The Richmond Sports Council forwarded a copy of the 1986 City vision for the Lands detailing a sports complex scheme over the entire site as envisioned in support of the unsuccessful 1994 Commonwealth Games bid. A sports complex would require removal of the site from the Agriculture Land Reserve. City staff are working with the Sports Council to identify community sports needs for the future and where these needs would best be served in the City.

A meeting was also held with a representative from the Kwantlen Polytechnic University to discuss the request for a Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Laboratory Farm at Garden City Lands as part of the newly formed Applied Science in Sustainable Agriculture program. A preliminary proposal has been received that outlines initial financial commitment, site requirements and the rationale for this particular site. Further discussions with the University will occur over the summer and the results will be the subject of a separate report to Council in Fall 2013.

Information gathered from the many engagement opportunities indicated that activities and uses supporting Community Wellness and Active Living were the number one priority closely followed by Environmental Sustainability and then Urban Agriculture. The following graphic is one example of the results from the questionnaire at the June 1st Ideas Fair and Let’s Talk online engagement platform (**Attachment 2**).

How would you create a legacy gift for all City residents? Tell us which of the following farm and non-farm activities permitted within the ALR you would support?



7 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The synthesis of the community aspirations, values and ideas gathered through the public engagement process provided clear and consistent messages. That together with the key findings from the background inventory and analysis provides a solid basis for the development of guiding principles and an overall vision. These following principles and vision will be used as the foundation for Phase Two - Concept development.

Encourage Community Partnerships and Collaboration

Working together with others to achieve a common vision is critical to creating a productive and sustainable legacy for the Lands. Success will be a result of the coordinated efforts and commitment to a vision by many stakeholders.

Respect Agricultural Land Reserve

Respect the agricultural designation and encourage viable and sustainable agricultural uses that benefit the community. Find creative and innovative ways to allow for a full range of other permitted uses on the Lands while ensuring agricultural viability. Applying *agro-ecology* sustainability principles will ensure the careful and thoughtful integration of ecology, wildlife, culture, economics, and society with agricultural production.

Strive for Environmental Sustainability

The conservation and restoration of the higher ecological value bog areas and the unique bog plants and wildlife represents a green legacy for future generations to enjoy and learn from. Managing the existing biodiversity of the site and enhancing the wetland ecology will increase the ecosystem or natural services that the Garden City Lands provide and position the City well for climate change resiliency. Green infrastructure such as stormwater detention ponds can also add biodiversity to the site and provide recreational and aesthetic benefits. In addition to looking at the environmental values of the site itself, there is an opportunity to develop strong ecological connections with the surrounding areas.

Promote Community Wellness and Active Living

Well designed and placed amenities and infrastructure will foster access to year round activities such as walking and cycling, picnicking, nature appreciation and gardening. Trails, boardwalk, and viewing platforms carefully sited to protect the ecological values of the site will provide access for people to enjoy the fresh air, open skies, views and the changing seasons. Innovative programs and creative interpretation features will encourage ongoing discovery and learning. The amenities and infrastructure will have a distinct design and character that respects and reflects the unique landscape and history of the lands. This will be a place of social interaction and community cohesiveness where new memories and traditions will be created.

Maximize Connectivity and Integration

There will be seamless connection and integration with the surrounding urban, natural and rural landscapes through physical, visual and ecological links and networks. Recreation, ecological areas, and agriculture functions on the site will be integrated in a way that is respectful and beneficial. A culture of walking and cycling will be promoted. Access from the surrounding

neighborhoods will be safe, comfortable, and clearly delineated with crosswalks, a trail network and a series of clear and distinct entryways.

Allow for Dynamic and Flexible Spaces

Spaces will be dynamic and able to adapt- expand or contract- depending upon seasons, community interests and needs over the years, new innovative programs and cultural opportunities. The Lands will allow for a range of experiences - quiet spots for serenity and contemplation to areas that encourage vibrancy and excitement through community celebrations, performances, inspiring and engaging programs, and social interactions. Carefully and strategically placed permanent and/or temporary art/landscape installations will add another layer of interest to the Lands and help create a distinct character.

Develop Science-based Resource Management Plans

Natural processes are complex and evolve over time. The bog environment is very sensitive to changes in soil conditions and relies on a strictly maintained hydrology regime. The potential enhancement of the current seasonal wetland areas to permanent water features will need to be carefully considered. An integrated eco-systems approach will be applied to short term and long term enhancement projects. Changes to the land will require ongoing monitoring and research. The lifecycle of physical infrastructure will also be considered in planning, design and construction of amenities.

Building on the public input and Guiding Principles, the following Vision for the future planning of the Lands has emerged:

The Garden City Lands, located in the City Centre, is envisioned as an exceptional legacy open space for residents and visitors. Visible and accessible from many directions, the Lands are an impressive gateway into Richmond's downtown, and a place of transition and transformation from the rural to the urban. Its rich, diverse and integrated natural and agricultural landscape provides a dynamic setting for learning and exploration. It is inclusive with a range of spaces, amenities and experiences that encourage healthy lifestyles, social interaction and a strong sense of community pride.

NEXT STEPS

Phase Two, as illustrated below, will involve developing concepts for the Garden City Lands based on the Guiding Principles and Vision, and the many valuable ideas from the public engagement process. Opportunities for the public to provide input will continue throughout Phase Two.

KEY PLANNING STAGES



Financial Considerations:

Funding for the Phase One and Two Garden City Lands Planning Process was approved by Council in October 2012.

Financial Impact

None.

Conclusion

The Garden City Lands is a legacy green space in the heart of the City. Council approved a planning process in October 2012 for the development of a Concept Plan for the Lands. Phase One which focused on two main goals: 'getting to know the land' through conducting a technical review of the land and site context, and 'getting to know the community vision' through a creative public engagement process has been completed. A very successful Ideas Fair was conducted on June 1, 2013 at Garden City Lands with 650 people attending and on June 6, 2013 a focus group workshop was held with representatives from community organizations. A website was also created that provided the public with another venue to receive information and

provide input.

The public input together with the findings from the background inventory and analysis provided the basis for the development of guiding principles and an overall vision. These principles and the vision will be used as the basis for the Garden City Lands future planning in Phase Two—Concept Development.

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