



***RPT 20-470***

**TITLE:** Little Red River Park Report

**DATE:** December 4, 2020

**TO:** Budget Committee

**PUBLIC:** X

**INCAMERA:**

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**RECOMMENDATION:**

That RPT 20-470 be forwarded for consideration during the 2021 budget deliberations.

**TOPIC & PURPOSE:**

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with an update regarding Operating and Capital Budget improvements in conjunction with the Little Red River Master Plan.

**BACKGROUND:**

One of the recommendations and priorities outlined within the Community Services Master Plan upon approval in 2018 was the development of a Little Red River Park Master Plan.

In the spring of 2019, the City of Prince Albert engaged HTFC and Oxbow Architect to create a Master Plan for Little Red River Park with a goal to address programming and infrastructure needs in the park.

As part of the Master plan process a considerable component of the project was to engage the community in a transparent consultation process. This included input from the Community Services Advisory Committee.

This report provides an update regarding what has been accomplished year-to-date, along with updates on partnerships, development opportunities and operational improvements related to the priorities outlined in the Little Red River Park Master Plan.

**PROPOSED APPROACH AND RATIONALE:**

Little Red River Park is a natural urban park covering approximately 1,200 acres within the city limits of the City of Prince Albert. It is situated immediately north of the North Saskatchewan River. Prince Albert is fortunate to have such a large park in proximity to its urban core. A place of great natural beauty, Little Red River Park is of comparable size to Winnipeg's Assiniboine Park (1,100 acres) and Vancouver's Stanley Park (1,000 acres). At the confluence of the Spruce (Little Red) and North Saskatchewan Rivers, the park is ecologically contiguous to the Nisbet Provincial Forest. It is one of the series of parks along the North Saskatchewan River known collectively as the Pêhonân Parkway.

Although Little Red River Park does not serve as large an urban population as Winnipeg or Vancouver, Saskatchewan's park tourism has traditionally drawn visitors from the whole province, and not just the nearest urban centres. Because of its large size and natural setting, Little Red River Park has the opportunity to serve as an urban park while functioning similarly to a municipal or regional park, offering a broad range of potential visitor experiences. The site has offered appeal to people from across the province of Saskatchewan and Canada through thousands of years, for a variety of human activities.

In 2019, HTFC Planning, Design, and Oxbow Architecture undertook the tasks of collecting data, engaging the local community, and analyzing findings on the park in order to offer recommendations for moving forward through a 10-year Master Plan. The purpose of the Master Plan is to guide future operations, development, partnerships, governance and funding of the park to ensure that it remains a valued place in Prince Albert region.

### **2020 Priorities:**

The first year (2020) of the Masterplan, we have made significant headway within the park by focusing in on core competencies such as:

1. Contractor in place to supply services to the Cosmo Lodge (Knotty Pine Bistro)
2. Parks Department has taken responsibility for the day-to-day maintenance within the park, including but not limited to: Mowing, string trimming, garbage, pruning, daily checks thru out the park, snow removal, etc.
3. Improvements to the trail systems, ski hill, working in partnership with the Prince Albert Nordic Ski Club on signing the trails.
4. Council's approval on a Bike Skills Park within Little Red River Park in partnership with the Rock 'N' Road Cycling Club.

5. In House GIS support and partnership with Saskatchewan Polytechnic on development of an interactive trail map that is available on the City website.
6. Marketing initiatives to bring more awareness to the park through the New City Website and social media sites.
7. The Park also experienced a noticeable increase to the overall attendance in 2020.

The Rotary Club of Prince Albert presented a vision to the Executive Committee on November 30, 2020 outlining their intentions to create a legacy as part of their Centennial Project. A landscape architect was engaged to create the concept plan for the Club and the estimated cost for all phases of that concept plan is \$1.4 million and \$1.7 million. The Club estimates the cost of the first phase in 2020 to be \$800,000.

The objective of the Club's project is to replace and refurbish existing infrastructure and to add additional infrastructure. During 2019, the small playground installed in the 1990's on the south bank of the river beside highway 55 was removed for safety reasons. The Rotary Adventure Park project would look to replace and expand the playground facilities with features focused on youth aged 8 to 14, offering a higher level of 'intensity' and challenge than currently available in the city for that age group. The Rotary Club used their own consultant Crosby Hanna & Associates and recommendations for this new park may include a climbing center (rope and/or wall structures), Parkour style circuit area, elevated slides, and a zip line or gravity rail. The Rotary Adventure Park would use natural elevation to support these features as well as limit risk related to river flooding. To ensure a whole-family experience, other features would be provided to ensure everyone from toddlers to elders would have a space to enjoy including swings and paved walking trails.

The concept plan is contingent on the City completing the planned installation of the bridge at the north-west end of the sliding hill parking lot which was previously washed-out in 2013. With the bridge installed, a first phase may include the earthwork and landscaping for the adventure park components, walking trails, bathrooms, and picnic areas near to the adventure park site on the west side of the river, as well as the adventure park components. A possible second and third phase would include the parking lot and road improvements on the east side of the river, reforming the sliding hill and the remaining picnic sites.

The City would work with the Club on each phase of implementation and consult on the different components recommended for installation. With this commitment from the Rotary Club there will be a need to compliment this development with additional needed amenities, operational support and improvements to support continual growth expected within the park.

The recommendations on the additional amenities and improvements align with recommendations from the Little Red River Masterplan funded by the City and listed in order of priority as follows:

**2021 Priorities:**

1. Pedestrian Bridge – The Rotary Club concept plan is contingent on the City completing the planned installation of the bridge at the north-west end of the sliding hill parking lot.
2. Phase one of the Rotary Club Concept - \$800,000 with a commitment of 65% of these funds raised by the Rotary Club (\$520,000) and 35% commitment from the City (\$280,000).

**2022 Priorities:**

1. Parking improvements:
  - Toboggan Hill – 66 stalls at a cost of \$21,000
  - Existing large parking lot south of Cosmo Lodge – 47 stalls at a cost of \$29,000
  - Cosmo Lodge parking – 38 stalls at a cost of \$13,750
2. Parking Lot lighting improvements - \$60,000
3. New compostable toilets/washrooms through out the remainder of the park – an additional four handicapped accessible double jumbo toilet building units at approximately \$40,000 per unit for a total of approximately \$160,000.
4. A 16 X 24 warm-up shelter used in the park for four season programming and winter warm-up. This would be a green initiative with solar panels for lighting and electrical power, and a wood stove for heating purposes. Total projected cost for buildout would be \$50,000.

**2023 Priorities:**

1. A new Ski Lift for the Kinsmen Ski and Snowboard Center. The current lift has approximately two maybe three years left and is nearing the end of life. Ski Lift options continue to be researched and what the costs around those options might be. Total cost for budget consideration in 2023 is unknown at this time. The Department will continue to develop the plans for 2023 based on City Council and User Group Consultation.

These amenities and improvements are the first recommendations through the Little Red River Master Plan. We believe these are part of the core essentials of the park and add to the sustainability of services and programming while assisting with the function and flow of the park. Community services will continue to provide Council with future updates that outline possible partnerships and future funding noting that the plan has been put together as a living document to be reviewed year-to-year.

**Operational Requirements:**

Over the past 9 months since the beginning of COVID-19, pandemic parks and green spaces have seen increased usage and Little Red River Park is no stranger to that.

This pandemic has brought us to a shifting dynamic in Parks and Green Spaces highlighting how they have been viewed and now focuses on how they are being used and viewed in this pandemic. In a 'Park People – Canada's City Park Network' article published July 16, 2020 a public survey was provided to select Canadian Cities to hear from Canadians on their use and perspectives on these areas and how they have been impacted by COVID-19.

The Survey results highlight that both municipal leaders and the public have developed a greater appreciation for parks and green spaces during the pandemic.

- Almost three-quarters (70%) of Canadians said their appreciation for parks and green spaces has increased during COVID-19.
- 94% of cities indicated they have seen increased awareness among municipal leadership of the value of parks to public health and crises resiliency during COVID-19.
- 82% of Canadians said that these spaces have become more important to their mental health during COVID-19.
- Parks are having a significant impact on Canadians social well-being especially for those who live alone. While 38% of people who live with others said parks have become more important to their sense of social connection, this jumps to 47% for those who live alone.
- Over half (55%) of cities said park use has increased during COVID-19.

- Almost two-thirds of Canadians report they have been visiting parks at least several times a week.
- 87% of Canadians support increased spending on parks, park budgets are facing insecurity.
- Canadians are using green spaces closer to home during COVID-19.
- Canadians would like more access to public space, nature, and outdoor programming as part of COVID-19 recovery.
- Canadians are using parks to connect with nature during COVID-19.

Parks and greenspaces continue to see an increase in its user base highlighting the importance of maintaining those spaces and providing services to ensure that we meet standards and service delivery levels. Little Red River Park is no exception to this as we have seen a tremendous increase in activities as families and individual users look for those opportunities to recreate outdoors especially during the pandemic.

In order to meet these needs some focus on those essential services has required Parks to look at what resources would be required within our parks system. With the City now providing maintenance servicing to Little Red River Park starting in May of 2020, there was work to undertake to get the park in shape for the 2020 season noting a significant flooding event resulting in a temporary shutdown of the park for approximately a month.

Prior to the 2020 operating season, the agreement for maintenance services throughout Little Red River Park and operation of the Cosmo Lodge was contracted out at an average yearly rate of \$75,817. At the direction of Council a Request for Proposals was put together to seek out options and vision for both the operation of the Cosmo Lodge and for the maintenance of Little Red River Park. The process resulted in a new operator within the Cosmo Lodge and the City committing to take on the maintenance of the park. Community Services provided Council with Report 20-112 highlighting an analysis of the cost for Parks to provide maintenance services for Little Red River Park showing that cost beginning at \$32,720 in staff wages and benefits.

Parks has embraced the challenges and the turn-around needed to provide quality services at Little Red River Park. The service delivery achieved in 2020 far exceeded expectations with positive reinforcement coming from the users who immediately noticed the changes with dedicated staff on site 7 days a week. Those same expectations will require a consistent response with staffing levels to compliment the continued growth in the weeks, months and years to come. 2020 saw its challenges and there were a number of items such as tree removal, pruning, clean-up of the riverbanks, painting, grass cutting, string trimming, and other improvements that were focused on to bring the park to a standard where maintenance concerns have now been brought under control.

To help offset some of those additional costs with staffing we need to review our current funding obligations with the operator of the Knotty Pine Bistro.

The Knotty Pine Bistro is under a 5-year agreement with remuneration paid in the following manner:

*Year 1 (May 1, 2020 – April 31, 2021)*

Total Sum of \$120,000, plus PST, and GST or \$11,100 per month (taxes included)

*Year 2 (May 1, 2021 – April 30, 2022)*

Total Sum of \$80,000, plus PST, and GST or \$7399.99 per month (taxes included)

*Year 3 (May 1, 2022 – April 30, 2023)*

Total sum of \$40,000, plus PST, and GST or \$3700 per month (taxes included)

*Year 4 (May 1, 2023 – April 30, 2024)*

Total sum of \$20,000, plus PST, and GST or \$1850.54 per month (taxes included)

*Year 5 (May 1, 2024 – April 30, 2025)*

Negotiated percentage of sales paid to city – negotiated in year three of the Agreement.

The City has structured the agreement in such a manner as to reduce the reliance of the contractor on the City to run a successful business. Those savings also help to offset the overall operational costs of Little Red River Park and in return help in providing a balanced approach in our operating model. You will also note that the agreement operating dates do not align with City year-end dates thus spreading the costs from one year to the next. The cost savings provided in this report are based on the City Operational year not the agreement year.

The significant savings to be realized starting in the second year of the contract with a reduction of **\$16,400/year** over **year one**. We then again see a further reduction in year three with an additional reduction of **\$44,400/year** over **year two**. Finally, in **year four** we see a further reduction of **\$29,604/year** reducing the City's financial commitment by **year five** to **\$7,402** and in a position to profit share with the business starting in the April of 2025 with those monies reinvested within the Park.

When we look at staffing costs for Little Red River Park we would follow the same path as noted above by assessing those annual maintenance costs as follows:

*January 1, 2021 – December 31, 2021*

Total Wages of \$32,720 (includes payroll benefits) for 2 staff

*January 1, 2022 – December 31, 2022 with projected wage increase of 1.5%*

Total Wages of \$33,220 (includes payroll benefits) for 2 staff

*January 1, 2023 – December 31, 2023 with projected wage increase of 1.5%*

Total Wages of \$33,720 (includes payroll benefits) for 2 staff

*Year 5 (January 1, 2024 – December 31, 2024) modest wage increase of 1.5%*

Total Wages of \$34,225 (includes payroll benefits) for 2 staff

Over a 5-year period, the City will see the benefit of a total cost savings within the operation of Little Red River Park of \$260,000 plus the added benefit of a negotiated percentage of sales coming from the Cosmo Lodge. The park will also see consistent service levels by having dedicated staffing through out the year to attend to the park.

#### **FINANCIAL:**

The financial implications are outlined in the 2021 Budget document.

#### **CONSULTATIONS:**

Extensive consultation was completed through the development of the Little Red River Park Master Plan.

The Department will also work in conjunction with the Rotary Club through the development of the Rotary Adventure Park.

The Friends of the Park User Group meetings will be re-commencing in 2021 once it is safe to do so under the COVID-19 Guidelines set by the Province.

#### **OTHER CONSIDERATIONS /IMPLICATIONS:**

There is no policy or privacy implications.

**STRATEGIC PLAN:**

There are three (3) Strategic Goals related to the Community Services Master Plan supported here:

**Active & Caring Community:** The planning process has taken into account all feedback received by the public, user groups and stakeholder organizations.

**Sustainable Growth:** The planning process will identify recommendations that focus on priorities for the future with the understanding of available resources to implement any initiatives.

**Infrastructure:** The City will create infrastructure that supports growth while planning for continuous improvement.

**OFFICIAL COMMUNITY PLAN:**

This report supports the Community Services Master Plan initiatives and addresses the goal of contributing to infrastructure and sustainability efforts through proper planning which can help preserve and maintain natural and built environments. Our connection to the natural world is important and must be considered in the delivery of community services.

**PUBLIC NOTICE:**

Public Notice pursuant to Public Notice Bylaw No. 24 of 2015 is not required.

**PRESENTATION:**

Timothy Yeaman, Parks Manager

**ATTACHMENTS:**

1. Little Red River Caretaker Agreement Report
2. Rotary Adventure Park Proposal

Written by: Timothy Yeaman, Parks Manager

Approved by: Director of Community Services and City Manager