

Cloverdale Beach

(B. Henderson)

Recommendation

That the November 29, 2017, Citizen Services report CR_5154, be received for information.

Previous Council/Committee Action

At the August 29, 2017, City Council meeting, Councillor B. Henderson made the following inquiry:

Could Administration provide a report on the following:

1. What would the process be to explore the possibility of keeping the Cloverdale beach in place long-term after the bridge construction is completed?
2. In the short term, what could the City do to ensure that the negative effects of the current beach use are mitigated?

Executive Summary

In August 2017, a temporary beach formed next to the Tawatinâ Bridge on the south side of the North Saskatchewan River. The beach was a result of the combination of berms required for construction of the bridge and low water levels.

The temporary beach was a popular destination. Public enthusiasm for the beach resulted in challenges and concerns for residents in the adjacent area.

The process for exploring the possibility of keeping the beach in place long-term includes environmental, jurisdictional, safety considerations, impact to the surrounding communities and additional supporting amenities. Listening to the perspectives of residents in the adjacent communities, citizens who enjoyed visiting the beach and citizens of Edmonton as a whole is also an important component of the process.

In the short term, a number of mitigation measures to minimize impacts to the surrounding community were undertaken, such as parking and traffic control measures, increased Park Ranger and Peace Officer presence in the neighbourhood and surrounding parkland, and additional garbage receptacles on adjacent trails.

These mitigation measures will be in place again should the temporary beach re-emerge in subsequent years.

In 2012, City Council directed Administration to explore the possibility of establishing a beach play area along the North Saskatchewan River. Due to seasonal and yearly fluctuations that can change dramatically in a short time frame, and the unpredictability of the river, construction of a beach directly touching the river was not recommended at that time. As a result, Committee passed a motion directing Administration to further explore possible options for a sand experience/beach play area near the North Saskatchewan River.

In response, Administration reviewed a number of locations suitable for a sand experience/beach play area and in April, 2013, Committee passed a motion that Administration provide a report that further explores the costing and development of a Sand Experience/Urban Beach Play Area, to be located at the Louise McKinney Riverfront Park. In June 2014, City Council passed a motion directing Administration to include an urban beach, without direct access to water, in the Louise McKinney Riverfront Park master plan. The Master Plan is scheduled to come to City Council in the first quarter of 2018.

If City Council wishes to pursue a permanent beach in Cloverdale, environmental reviews and approvals would be required, including approvals by other orders of government. Fluctuating river conditions, impact to surrounding communities and supporting amenities would need to be considered.

Report

Background

In 2017, berms were placed in the North Saskatchewan River for construction of the Tawatinâ Bridge. As a result, sediment and sand formed next to the bridge, which created an exposed sandbar (temporary beach) when water levels were low. Depending on future water levels, the temporary beach may or may not reappear over the next two to three years.

Regulatory agencies require removal of temporary facilities and restoration of vegetation and natural habitat at the completion of construction. Therefore, the berms are scheduled to be removed in late 2019 or 2020. It is expected that the river will return to the pre-construction condition and the sand deposits will disperse and resettle along the river.

From 2012 to 2014, at the request of City Council, a series of reports were presented about the opportunity to create a beach along the North Saskatchewan River (Attachment 2). Following an evaluation of potential locations within the river valley, a beach along the water's edge was not recommended at that time due to the fluctuating conditions of the North Saskatchewan River (water levels, currents, water quality, etc).

An urban beach development was proposed at Louise McKinney Riverfront Park to provide a centrally located beach amenity similar to Sugar Beach in Toronto and Paris Beach in Paris. A report regarding Louise McKinney Riverfront Park capital improvements, including the previously proposed beach, is scheduled to come to City Council in the first quarter of 2018.

Process for Exploring the Possibility of a Long-Term Beach

The process for exploring the possibility of keeping the beach in place long-term includes environmental, jurisdictional, safety considerations, impact to the surrounding communities and additional supporting amenities. If the Cloverdale location was to be pursued as a permanent beach, a comprehensive planning and environmental review process would be required including reviews and approvals from both provincial and federal governments.

Environmental Considerations

City of Edmonton plans and policies provide direction for the planning, environmental review and development of the North Saskatchewan River Valley and Ravine System.

BREATHE: Edmonton's Green Network Strategy (2017) identifies the parkland adjacent to the temporary beach as an ecological park specifically intended to protect an area of land and/or water. Ecological parks are managed for the primary purpose of preserving natural processes, species and habitat elements.

There are a number of open space capital projects, underway or proposed, in the vicinity of the temporary beach, including the Gallagher Park Master Plan, Mill Creek daylighting, and Valley Line LRT construction. Given the growing desire for people to access, connect to and enjoy the river valley and river-based activities while protecting the ecological network, there is a need for a coordinated strategic planning approach for the central core of the river valley, which could occur through an update to Ribbon of Green. This updated strategic plan would help provide broader direction around the planned use and accommodations within the river valley. Administration is exploring the initiation of this project within the next year.

Jurisdictional Considerations

The location of the 2017 temporary beach, and access to it, is considered provincial bed and shore and falls under the Government of Alberta's jurisdiction and all activity in or near the river falls under the jurisdiction of Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada and Transport Canada. If the Cloverdale location was to be pursued as a permanent beach, a comprehensive planning and environmental review process would be required including reviews and approvals from both provincial and federal governments.

The time required to complete all planning and design work and seek provincial and federal regulatory approvals for a beach at Cloverdale is estimated to be up to four

years. This includes concept development, upfront technical reporting, feasibility studies, public and Indigenous engagement, and design work. Administration would then initiate approval and notification processes required by provincial and federal regulatory agencies. Further information regarding required environmental assessments and regulatory requirements is provided in Attachment 1.

Safety Considerations

A beach along the water's edge would require careful consideration of the fluctuating conditions of the North Saskatchewan River including water levels, currents, and water quality. High water warnings occur in spring and also at other times of the year, most recently in the summer of 2016.

Impact to the Surrounding Communities

The popularity of the temporary beach affected the surrounding communities in a number of ways. Prevention of damage to parkland, parking and traffic, open fire pit use, noise, public urination and defecation and litter were some of the concerns expressed by residents in 2017. Resident feedback, additional supporting amenities and the possible need for ongoing monitoring and enforcement would be important considerations.

Additional Supporting Amenities and Infrastructure Improvements

The need for additional supporting amenities and infrastructure improvements such as washroom facilities, garbage receptacles, bike racks, beach access, parking and traffic control, emergency vehicle access would need to be considered. Rezoning may be required depending on the supporting amenities.

Public Engagement

Listening to the perspectives of residents in the adjacent communities, citizens who enjoyed visiting the beach and citizens of Edmonton as a whole would be an important component of the process.

Short-term Mitigation Measures

To mitigate concerns in the surrounding community and parkland, the following actions were undertaken in 2017. Similar short-term mitigation measures will be put in place if the temporary beach appears during low water periods in upcoming years. Adjustments will be made as required.

Temporary Infrastructure Improvements (removed October 2017)

- Portable toilets, a bike rack and additional garbage cans were added to the maintained trail near the temporary beach.

Monitoring and Enforcement

- Park Ranger and Animal Control Peace Officers monitored the temporary beach, surrounding parkland and neighbourhoods. Efforts focused on damage to parkland, responsible pet ownership, environmental stewardship and reducing impacts such as littering on the area. Open fire concerns were forwarded to Fire Rescue Services and public disorder or criminal issues were reported to Edmonton Police Service.
- Increased presence of Park Rangers and Peace Officers on-site during high use times and intermittently throughout the day. Enforcement efforts were coordinated with Edmonton Police Service to ensure a consistent approach.

Parking and Traffic Control

- On September 1, 2017, 98A Avenue was restricted to one-way traffic only (parking on both sides) to streamline traffic flow, reduce traffic congestion, mitigate parking concerns and improve pedestrian safety. A detailed review of the roadway geometry and operations is currently underway, in collaboration with Parks and Roads Services and Fire Rescue Services, to ensure safe operations of vehicles, parking, pedestrians and access for emergency services. This review will also take into consideration future impacts from LRT operations and community concerns.
- Parking Enforcement Officers, in coordination with Edmonton Police Service, actively patrolled the residential areas in Cloverdale to ensure all drivers were parked safely.
- Parking Services has been proactively working with the Cloverdale Community League to facilitate implementation of a Restricted Residential Parking Program which would time restrict non-resident parked vehicles in anticipation of the new Valley Line LRT station. The community has informally expressed interest to implement during the second quarter of 2018, in order to mitigate potential parking issues related to the temporary beach if it reoccurs. Administration will continue to support the community's request while following the City Council approved guidelines for Residential Parking Program implementation.
- A final decision on the one-way operation of 98A Avenue will be made in 2018, in consultation with local residents.

Communications

- Ongoing communications took place with the president of the Cloverdale Community League and individual residents in Cloverdale to advise them about actions the City was undertaking to mitigate concerns in the surrounding community, trail and parkland.
- Through social media, the City of Edmonton website and 311, the public was reminded to:
 - Use caution when using the trails to access the area since the entry point is not a maintained trail.

- Be water wise: be aware of fluctuating water levels and currents, anyone under the age of eight should be within arms' reach of a parent around water.
- Be good neighbours - Pack out garbage - Respect the parkland - Keep dogs under control.
- Initial discussions with Alberta Health Services has begun around development of further public messages as it relates to the use of the North Saskatchewan River.

Budget/Financial Implications

If City Council wishes to pursue a permanent beach location, funding would be required to initiate project development and advance the planning and design process which would inform the capital and operating budget requirements.

Short-term mitigation measures will be covered through the respective department and branch operating budgets.

Corporate Outcomes and Performance Management

Corporate Outcome: Edmontonians are connected to the city in which they live, work and play.			
Outcome(s)	Measure(s)	Result(s)	Target(s)
Edmontonians are connected and take pride in their city through enjoyment of recreational opportunities.	% of Edmontonians who feel they have access to amenities and services that improve their quality of life	67% (2016)	70% of respondents who feel they have access to amenities and services that improve their quality of life
Corporate Outcome: Edmonton is a safe city			
Edmontonians feel safe and are effectively protected from risk through sustainable practises.	% of Edmontonians who feel safe and effectively protected from risk when visiting river valley parks.	62% (2016)	65% of Citizen survey respondents feel safe and effectively protected from risk when visiting river valley parks.
Corporate Outcome: The City of Edmonton's operations are environmentally sustainable.			
The City of Edmonton strives to minimize adverse environmental impacts and maintain ecological connectivity.	Provincial status of Edmonton's at risk amphibian, reptile and fish species.	7 amphibian, reptile and fish species in Edmonton are considered at risk. (2015)	Edmonton's at risk amphibians, reptiles and fish maintain or improve their provincial status.

Attachments

1. Overview of Municipal, Provincial, and Federal Environmental Planning and Approval Processes
2. Louise McKinney Urban Beach - Council Report History

Others Reviewing this Report

- T. Burge, Chief Financial Officer and Deputy City Manager, Financial and Corporate Services
- C. Campbell, Deputy City Manager, Communications and Engagement
- D. Jones, Deputy City Manager, City Operations
- A. Laughlin, Deputy City Manager, Integrated Infrastructure Services
- L. McCarthy, Deputy City Manager, Urban Form and Corporate Strategic Development