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Item No. 01
Halifax Regional Council
December 13, 2016

TO: Mayor Savage and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY: Original Signed by Director

Brad Anguish, Director, Parks and Recreation

DATE: December 1, 2016

SUBJECT: Response – Fort Needham Park Tennis Courts Petition

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

This report originates from the August 2, 2016 Regional Council meeting where Councillor Watts presented a petition containing 91 signatures requesting Regional Council to reconsider the Fort Needham Park Master Plan so that the existing tennis courts are either maintained or improved to include a modern multi-court sports area. A subsequent motion was introduced:

MOVED by Councillor Watts, seconded by Councillor Mason that Halifax Regional Council direct staff to prepare reports responding to the petitions presented to Regional Council on August 2, 2016.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, Section 79 (1), The Council may expend money required by the Municipality for; (k) recreational programs; (x) lands and buildings required for a municipal purpose; (ah) playgrounds, trails, including trails developed, operated or maintained pursuant to an agreement made under clause 82(c), bicycle paths, swimming pools, ice arenas and other recreational facilities;(ai) public grounds, squares, halls, museums, parks, tourist information centres and community centres.

BACKGROUND

Throughout 2014 and 2015, HRM developed a Master Plan for the Fort Needham Memorial Park in the North End of Halifax. A staff report, dated October 5, 2015, outlined the project and established a program for the implementation for the Master Plan. That report was approved by Regional Council on October 27, 2015. The Master Plan outlines changes to the park, one of which is the removal of two tennis courts. That change is one element of the overall design of the park and is necessary to accommodate grading and the development of new play areas and paths (Attachment A).

On August 2, 2016 Regional Council requested a response to a petition that requests that there be a reconsideration of the Fort Needham Park Master Plan, “so that the existing tennis courts are either maintained or improved to include a modern multi-court sports area.”

DISCUSSION

Fort Needham Memorial Park is a Regional Park that serves a dual purpose of being the primary site for HRM to commemorate the Halifax Explosion and a park to serve local recreational needs. The October 5, 2015 staff report identified that:

“The main objectives of the plan are to:

- Emphasize the regional and national significance of the park by clarifying its commemorative nature as a memorial park to the Halifax Explosion;
- Continue to provide a range of healthy, vibrant, and active recreation opportunities for the local community; and
- Overcome the functional impediments in the park such as steep grades, lack of presence on the streets, lack of internal circulation, and the loss of important views of the Bell Tower monument and the hilltop views of the harbour and surrounding city.”

The key elements of the Master Plan are outlined in Attachment A, which are to be implemented in three phases. The location of the existing tennis courts have also been added for this report. As part of the Master Plan’s implementation, Regional Council approved \$2.2 million for 2016/17 for parts of phases 1 and 2 along with a further \$3.0 million to be allocated in the 2017/18 budget, subject to the receipt of cost-shared funding from other sources. An early part of the phasing includes the removal the existing tennis courts to accommodate a new expanded playground and paths that will be constructed in 2017.

The overall master plan will improve the accessibility of the park including improvements to the plaza surrounding the monument and pathways. Currently, the tennis courts and existing playground are on elevated grades and are not fully accessible. Re-grading will address accessibility issues in that area and allow for additional future accessible paths. While recognizing that the removal of the tennis courts is a loss of one form of recreational amenity, the following is noted:

- the current location of the tennis courts compromises the intent and overall implementation of the Master Plan;
- tennis courts exist in other locations, including nearby Highland Park, Merv Sullivan Park, and the Halifax Common;
- The removal will enable construction of the playground that includes sensory elements to reflect the injuries caused by the explosion, including loss of sight and hearing; and
- the Master Plan outlines that new sports courts are to be considered within the area of the Needham Centre, when HRM rationalizes that facility and Devonshire Arena.

While the timing of a review of the Needham Centre and Devonshire Arena is not definitive, it is related to the construction of the Dartmouth 4-Pad arena, which is underway, and decisions about the reinvestment of the Halifax Forum that are expected to occur in 2017.

Funding and Commemoration Update

HRM is actively seeking funding for the implementation of the Master Plan and is in discussions with private organizations and other levels of government. HRM has already received a commitment of \$500,000 from the Canadian Heritage Fund, and additional information about other potential funding will be provided through separate reports and budget documents. Work for the 100th anniversary of the Halifax Explosion (December 6, 2017) is well underway with the Halifax Explosion 100th Anniversary Advisory Committee.

Master Plan Update

On November 17, 2016, HRM staff hosted an open house to provide updates on the general implementation of the Master Plan. Members of the public were also provided with specific information about the removal of the tennis courts and were asked for their opinion on this part of the Master Plan. Staff obtained useful information about the community's use of the courts and, in particular, how they are used for alternative informal recreation (other than tennis). When asked about their views about moving ahead with the full playground and permanent paths in place of the tennis courts, it was found that community sentiments were divided, although a majority of respondents had stronger sentiments that are supportive of removing the tennis courts to immediately proceed with the full playground and paths (Attachment B). Consequently, staff does not see the need to revisit the Master Plan. As a result, removal of the tennis courts and construction of the playground will be undertaken as outlined in the Fort Needham Master Plan in the first phase of the project in 2017.

However, in light of the spectrum of community views and the alternative ways in which the tennis courts are used for other activities, staff will review the need for new sports courts in the future during future phases of the Master Plan or with a review of the Needham Centre/Devonshire Arena.

In order to meet funding commitments and to have the park ready for the 100th anniversary event, it is critical that staff continue with the current work plan without delay. Should Regional Council wish to debate this Information Report, it is requested that this occur on December 13, 2016 so that necessary design work occur over the holiday period.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications associated with this report as it is for information only.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

There was significant involvement of the public in the development of the Master Plan. Two public meetings to solicit feedback on general park issues and short and long-term goals were held in advance of the Master Plan project. The actual master plan process included:

- a public design workshop;
- an online survey;
- an Interpretive Design Workshop was held with the Halifax Explosion 100th Year Advisory Committee; and
- a public presentation was held at the United Memorial Church hall to present the park Master Plan's design concept and implementation strategy to the community, which was attended by over 50 residents and was well accepted.

As well, on November 17, 2016, HRM staff hosted an open house to provide updates on the general implementation of the Master Plan. Members of the public were also provided with specific information about the removal of the tennis courts and were asked for their opinion on this part of the Master Plan (Attachment B). Of the 34 people who provided input, 53% were supportive of the implementation of the

new playground and pathways, 26% were supportive of retaining the tennis courts, and 21% indicated less definitive support for one option over the other.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: Fort Needham Master Plan (with the location of the existing tennis courts added)

Attachment B: Results from the November 17, 2016 Open House

A copy of this report can be obtained online at <http://www.halifax.ca/council/agendasc/cagenda.php> then choose the appropriate meeting date, or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210, or Fax 902.490.4208.

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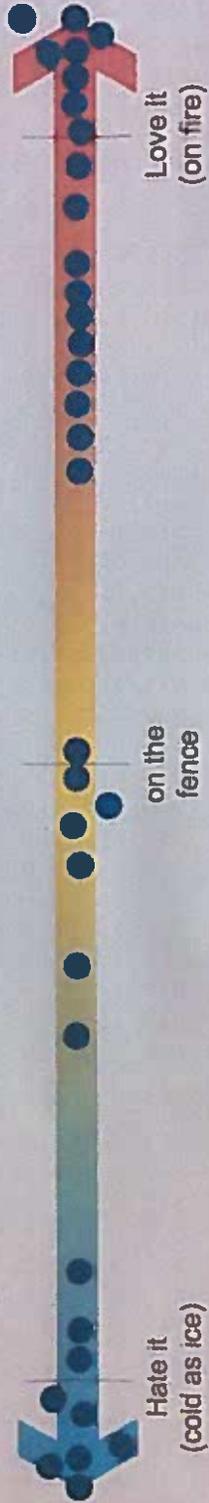
Attachment A – Fort Needham Memorial Master Plan



Attachment B – Results from the November 17, 2016 Public Open House

How do you feel about moving ahead now with building the full playground and permanent paths in place of the tennis courts?

Please place your mark along the line below:



Fort Needham Memorial Park - Master Plan Implementation

Fort Needham Memorial Park
Public Open House November 17, 2016

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