



P.O. Box 1749  
Halifax, Nova Scotia  
B3J 3A5 Canada

**Item No. 15.2.1**  
**Halifax Regional Council**  
**May 9, 2023**

**TO:** Mayor Savage Members of Halifax Regional Council

**SUBMITTED BY:** Original Signed

\_\_\_\_\_  
Councillor Patty Cuttell, Chair, CPED Standing Committee

**DATE:** April 20, 2023

**SUBJECT:** **Rehab Lands Park Plan**

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**ORIGIN**

April 20, 2023 meeting of Community Planning and Economic Development Standing Committee, Item 12.1.1.

**LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY**

Legislative Authority is outlined in the attached staff report dated April 12, 2023.

Community Planning and Economic Development Standing Committee – Terms of Reference  
Purpose

- (1) The purpose of the Community Planning and Economic Development Standing Committee is to recommend to the Council directions to support Community and Economic life “making HRM the most livable community in which to live, work and play”.
- (2) The specific areas of oversight include:
  - a. the Municipality’s Regional Plan and community planning programs;
  - b. the Municipality’s Economic Strategy and Economic Prosperity Outcomes including the implantation of “Capital Ideas” and the Immigration Action Plan;
  - c. Community building initiatives in the areas of arts, culture, recreation and heritage and related facility strategies; and

**RECOMMENDATION ON PAGE 2**

## **RECOMMENDATION**

The Community Planning and Economic Development Standing Committee recommends that Halifax Regional Council

1. Adopt the Rehab Lands Park Plan as a guiding document for future improvements to 255 Bissett Road;
2. Approve a dedicated off-leash dog area, as identified on Map 6 of the Rehab Lands Park Plan, to be incorporated and subsequently designated as part of the development of park facilities upon the Rehab Lands; and
3. Not refer the potentially surplus lands, which have been identified as surplus in Attachment A Site Plan, to the disposal process set forth in Administrative Order Number 50 Respecting the Disposal of Surplus Real Property as identified in the staff report dated April 12, 2023

## **BACKGROUND**

Community Planning and Economic Development Standing Committee received a staff recommendation report dated April 12, 2023 to consider the Rehab Lands Park Plan.

For further information refer to the attached staff report dated April 12, 2023.

## **DISCUSSION**

Community Planning and Economic Development Standing Committee considered the staff report dated April 20, 2023 and approved the recommendation as amended to Halifax Regional Council.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Financial implications are outlined in the attached staff report dated April 12, 2023.

## **RISK CONSIDERATION**

Risk consideration is outlined in the attached staff report dated April 12, 2023.

## **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

Meetings of the Community Planning and Economic Development Standing Committee are open to public attendance and members of the public are invited to address the Standing Committee for up to five (5) minutes during the Public Participation portion of the meeting. Meetings are live webcast on Halifax.ca. The agenda, reports, video, and minutes of the Standing Committee are posted on Halifax.ca.

For further information on Community Engagement refer to the attached staff report dated April 12, 2023.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

Environmental implications are outlined in the staff report dated April 12, 2023.

**ALTERNATIVES**

Alternatives are outlined in the attached staff report dated April 12, 2023.

**ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment 1 – Staff recommendation report dated April 12, 2023.

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A copy of this report can be obtained online at [halifax.ca](http://halifax.ca) or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210.

Report Prepared by: Dorothy Maponga, Legislative Assistant, Municipal Clerk's Office 902.478.2408

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P.O. Box 1749  
Halifax, Nova Scotia  
B3J 3A5 Canada

**Item No. 12.1.1**  
**Community Planning and Economic Development Standing Committee**  
**April 20, 2023**

**TO:** Chair and Members of Community Planning and Economic Development  
Standing Committee

**SUBMITTED BY:**   
Denise Schofield, Acting Chief Administrative Officer

**DATE:** April 12, 2023

**SUBJECT:** **Rehab Lands Park Plan**

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**ORIGIN**

Regional Council Motion on May 24, 2016 (Item Number 14.1.8), MOVED by Councillor Nicoll, seconded by Councillor Hendsbee:

THAT Halifax Regional Council

1. Designate approximately 16 hectares of the lands associated with the Former Halifax County Rehabilitation Centre PID, #00402982, as parkland as outlined in Attachment 2 of the staff report dated May 5, 2016;
2. Direct staff to work with the Cole Harbour Parks and Trails Association to create the necessary connections from Bissett Park to Cole Harbour Lawrencetown Heritage Park through the Rehabilitation Centre Lands; and
3. Direct staff to review the remainder of the property under the Administrative Order 50 process for potential disposal.

**MOTION PUT AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Regional Council Motion on June 5, 2018 (Item Number 14.7.1) MOVED by Councillor Nicoll, seconded by Councillor Mancini:

THAT Halifax Regional Council request staff prepare a comprehensive park plan for the Rehab Lands on Bissett Road, to be completed as a 2019/20 Business Plan deliverable, which shall incorporate community engagement, the Cole Harbour Open Space Plan, and consideration of an Off-Leash Dog Park.

**MOTION PUT AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

**LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY**

*Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, S.N.S. 2008, c. 39.*

61(3) The property vested in the Municipality, absolutely or in trust, is under the exclusive management and control of the Council, unless an Act of the Legislature provides otherwise.

HRM Administrative Order 2017-013-OP *Respecting Off-leash Dog Areas Within Parks*

HRM Administrative Order Number 50 *Respecting the Disposal of Surplus Real Property*

## **RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that the Community Planning and Economic Development Standing Committee recommend that Halifax Regional Council:

1. Adopt the Rehab Lands Park Plan as a guiding document for future improvements to 255 Bissett Road;
2. Approve a dedicated off-leash dog area, as identified on Map 6 of the Rehab Lands Park Plan, to be incorporated and subsequently designated as part of the development of park facilities upon the Rehab Lands; and
3. Refer the potentially surplus lands, which have been identified as surplus in Attachment A Site Plan, to the disposal process set forth in Administrative Order Number 50 *Respecting the Disposal of Surplus Real Property*, with the size, configuration, and timing of such disposals to be subject to further review as identified in this staff report.

## **BACKGROUND**

The Rehab Lands occupy 20.4 hectares (50.4 acres) on Bissett Road in Cole Harbour and are directly across the road from the Cole Harbour–Lawrencetown Coastal Heritage Park. The site has lake frontage on Bissett Lake and connects to Bissett Lake Park by way of a multi-use trail (Attachment A). The Rehab Lands are the site of the former Halifax County Rehabilitation Centre, which operated from the 1940's providing short and long-term patient mental health care. When the institution closed in 2002, the land reverted to the Halifax Regional Municipality. Subsequently, all the buildings have been demolished and the site remediated, leaving the lands as a largely informal open space. The site remediation work includes the containment of contaminated materials found on site with a clay cap constructed over top. While the capped area can be used as parkland, no buildings, underground utilities, or intrusive works are to be constructed within the containment cell, and no building slabs or foundation walls can be built within 30 meters of the capped area. This 'no build' zone occupies a significant area of the open space on the plateau and limits the site for other land use considerations.

The Rehab Lands were first identified as an important open space acquisition in the 2013 Cole Harbour Basin Open Space Plan (Open Space Plan). In 2016, Regional Council passed the motion to designate 16 hectares of the Rehab Lands property as parkland and to review the remaining 4.4 hectares under the Administrative Order 50 process for potential disposal. With the adoption of the 2019/2020 Parks & Recreation Business Plan, Regional Council directed that a park plan be prepared for the Rehab Lands. This plan was also to include consideration of a dog off-leash area for Cole Harbour, which has been identified as a site that may be able to address a service gap for this area of the Municipality.

Key features of the Rehab Lands site include lake frontage on Bissett Lake, commanding hilltop views of the surrounding area, and natural wooded sections. The terrain is characterized by a relatively flat and open plateau that steeply drops off toward the lake, demonstrating a significant elevation change.

Additional information about the Rehab Lands is contained in the Rehab Lands Park Planning Report (Attachment B).

## **DISCUSSION**

Park plans, prepared by municipal staff with community engagement, have been developed in situations where parkland has been acquired and a plan is needed to establish the open space function and recreation needs within the existing park system and open space network.

In proceeding with the development of the Rehab Lands Park Plan, a recreation needs assessment was conducted to determine the best use of the parkland with a full evaluation of:

- physical site conditions;
- park service delivery;
- community demographics;
- nearby recreation facilities; and
- directions identified in municipal plans and guiding documents.

Staff consulted with the community to confirm assumptions about the park, and to gather the community values, wants, and needs. An online public engagement was conducted on the Shape Your City Halifax website. There were two separate opportunities for the community to engage in the park planning process.

#### Values Gathering Online Engagement – Winter 2020/21

An online survey was conducted to better understand the community's recreational needs and values. The survey ran from December 3, 2020 to January 18, 2021, and received 775 submissions. The survey asked questions regarding demographics, current use of parks, future recreation uses for the new park, and dog off-leash considerations. Findings from the survey indicate that a majority of people feel some level of park development was appropriate, particularly for low-impact recreation. The top five recreation interests are: trail use, relaxation activities, winter activities, nature exploration, and water-based activities. More than half the respondents were in favour of designating a section of the park for off-leash dog use. Disc golf and mountain biking facilities were popular suggestions provided by the community. More information can be found in the What We Heard Report 1 (Attachment C).

#### Evaluation of Park Options – Fall 2021

The second round of the engagement included three concept scenarios for the park being presented for community feedback. The engagement ran from September 29, 2021, to November 1, 2021. There were 321 participants in the online survey. The intention of the engagement was to explore how different program elements could fit on the site, and to evaluate different options for the off-leash dog facilities, parking lot location, trail development, and access to the lake. The concept that generated the most interest focused on developing the park as a fun destination that complements other parks in the area and includes day use activities such as picnicking, disc golf and access to the lake. More information can be found in the What We Heard Report 2 (Attachment D).

### **Findings**

From the assessments, several key findings emerged, including:

- the property is a key asset within the existing parks system for enhancing the open space connectivity and conserving the natural and agricultural landscape character of the area;
- the existing network of recreational trail activities should be supported and expanded on the site;
- park development should take advantage of the natural assets of the site including the views of Cole Harbour Basin, lakeshore access to Bissett Lake, and the natural wooded areas;
- the history of the former Rehabilitation Centre and the County Home is of cultural interest within the region and there are many stories that can be told with signage and interpretation within the park;
- there is a lack of designated dog off-leash areas within Cole Harbour and a portion of the park can be designated for this use;
- the park, as underdeveloped parkland of a significant size, can be considered for emerging recreation trends that may otherwise be challenging to fit into established parks;
- the surrounding area is well served with a variety of recreation facilities, such as playgrounds and sport fields, and there is a low need for additional similar type facilities; and
- A large area at the top of the hill has clay soil cap to contain contaminated materials associated with the former institution buildings. This area must be left as open space with no tree planting, buildings or other structures that would penetrate the clay cap.

## Rehab Lands Park Plan Highlights

The Rehab Lands Park Plan suggests developing the park with separate activity zones for passive and active recreational uses. Most of the site is to be left natural, particularly sensitive areas with steep slopes and the riparian buffer along the lake. The open fields and wooded areas visible from Bissett Road are to be retained to preserve the agricultural landscape character of the area. Passive and unstructured recreation uses are suggested for the flat hilltop area. Active recreation facilities suggested are those which generally have a low development footprint and are compatible with the natural character of the site. The plan proposes trail development for a range of abilities and activities to provide access to the natural areas throughout the site including the lakeshore. The inclusion of interpretive elements is suggested to relay the history and former use for mental healthcare. Quiet seating areas and meditation spaces are also proposed.

From the findings, the Rehab Lands Park Plan suggests several park amenities and recreation facilities that include:

Scenic Lookoffs – There are several vantage points on the hill that provide views of the Cole Harbour Basin and the surrounding area. Several areas are identified to develop lookoffs that provide different experiences. This includes a lookoff plaza, belvedere picnic structure, and sculpted elevated earth mound.

Picnic Areas – The hilltop and lakeshore areas are suggested locations for picnic facilities such as picnic tables and open lawns.

Dog Off-Leash Area – Public engagement identified that a dedicated fenced area for off-leash dogs was the preferred option. An area of approximately 1.4 hectares with an open play lawn and wooded trails has been identified. This was evaluated under the criteria for dog off-leash facilities under the municipality's *Off-leash Dog Areas Administrative Order* (Attachment E). From a compatibility perspective, the area is found to be favourable relative to factors including its proximity to other land uses.

Naturalized Meadow Area – The naturalized open fields on the plateau are to be retained and enhanced to increase the biodiversity with plants that provide food and habitat for pollinators such as hummingbirds, bees, and butterflies.

Lake Pier – The development of a pier is proposed, to improve access to the lake, with a shade structure and seating on the concrete foundation of the former pumphouse. Docking for canoes and kayaks are also suggested.

Sledding Hill – A winter sledding area can be developed, with some earthwork alterations to the hill, that would give optimal slopes and run out space. Sledding is an impromptu winter activity that can happen when there is snow cover and does not require additional infrastructure.

Mountain Biking Area – Short trail loops, which take advantage of the steeper slopes, are suggested for the eastern side of the hill in the wooded area. These trails would be for building mountain biking skills rather than long distance treks.

Disc Golf – This is an active recreation activity that can be integrated into the wooded areas without a large development footprint. The plan proposes to start with a nine-hole beginner friendly course with potential to expand to 18-holes.

Meditation Labyrinth – This idea came from public engagement and proposes a contemplative space that allows for reflection and introspection. A labyrinth pattern is formed by a singular path that travels from a starting point at the edge to an endpoint at the centre. It would consist of a simple path within the natural meadow area. There is opportunity to include an interpretive component around mental health awareness.

## Surplus Lands Considerations

Preliminary work done in 2016, under the Municipality's internal Real Property review process, identified that approximately 16 hectares should be retained for parkland purposes, with the remaining 4.4 hectares to be reviewed for consideration as surplus for potential disposal. Two flanking areas with frontage along Bissett Road were identified as not essential to retain for parkland at that time, with the intent that the sale of these lands could provide potential revenues.

Through the recent park planning process, further study of the potential surplus land was undertaken with a more detailed site analysis and defined park development program. The boundaries of both areas were reevaluated and adjusted to accommodate physical aspects of the site and spatial needs of the proposed park program resulting in both areas being smaller in size than originally identified. The site at the north end of the property was approximately 1.7 hectares (4.2 acres) in size. The boundary was revised to provide an offset and sufficient buffer from the Bissett Trail built in 2018, reducing the size of the potential surplus area to approximately 0.97 hectares (2.4 acres). The site at the south end of the property was approximately 2.7 hectares (6.7 acres) in size. The boundary was revised to provide an offset from an existing stream and pond reducing the size of the area to approximately 0.94 hectares (2.3 acres).

### North Site

The potential surplus area at the north end of the Rehab Lands property borders two sides of the Halifax Water depot property which the Municipality owns. Halifax Water have indicated that they will be relocating their operations and may no longer require the property after 2025. Halifax Water also occupies an area on the Rehab Lands property that is used as a temporary storage yard. The Park Plan has identified that this 'pad ready' site could be considered for an additional parking lot should the demand for more parking occur once the park is established. This area is adjacent to the proposed location for any future park washroom facility and Trans Canada Trail rest stop. It is recommended that the north site be retained and assessed for surplus when a decision can be made regarding the future of the Halifax Water depot property and the need for additional parking can be determined.

### South Site

The potential surplus area at the south end of the Rehab Lands property originally extended further back from Bissett Road. The Park Plan has identified this back area as desirable for recreational use, namely for mountain biking trails or the expansion of the disc golf course. The existing drainage stream and pond create a natural boundary between park activities and the potential private lots. Under the current planning regulations, flag lots and new road intersections on Bissett Road are not permitted; therefore the extended surplus area would not yield more potential lots as each lot will require frontage on Bissett Road. The recommendation is to review the south site, as redefined in the Park Plan (Map 5), for potential disposal.

## Conclusion and Next Steps

A number of recreation services can be fulfilled within this parkland area, including a dog off-leash area for the Cole Harbour community. The approval of the Rehab Lands Park Plan will set a guiding document for future park development. A phased approach to implementation would be considered in future Business Plans for development of the park according to the plan. If approved, the production of detailed designs, either as a whole or in phases, would be the next step to fine-tune program areas.

The establishment of a dedicated (fully-fenced) off-leash dog area within the park would fulfill the requirement for an off-leash dog area for Cole Harbour as identified in the Off-Leash Dog Park program. The project would include a parking lot, walking trails to access the off-leash area, a fenced off-leash area, tree planting, and sun/weather shelter.

The prospective disposal of lands, identified in this report, will be reviewed through the process identified in Administrative Order Number 50 *Respecting the Disposal of Surplus Real Property*.

**FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no immediate financial implications as this report is seeking an approval of the Park Facilities Plan as a guiding document for future park improvements and provides direction over a future disposal of lands.. Future capital expenditures for park development would be considered in subsequent years during the business planning process and disposal of lands would occur through Administrative Order Number 50 *Respecting the Disposal of Surplus Real Property*.

**RISK CONSIDERATION**

There are no significant risks associated with the recommendation in this report. The risks considered rate low. To determine this, consideration was given to operational, financial, and reputational risk.

**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

Community engagement was conducted online and ran from December 3, 2020, to January 18, 2021, and from September 29, 2021 to November 1, 2021.

**ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no specific environmental implications that have been identified with the content of this report.

**ALTERNATIVES**

1. Regional Council could choose to approve or request changes to the park plans as presented. This may require additional review, possible community consultation and a separate staff report.
2. Regional Council could choose not to approve the proposed park plan. This is not recommended based upon the need for a park plan to guide future capital decisions for the park.

**ATTACHMENTS**

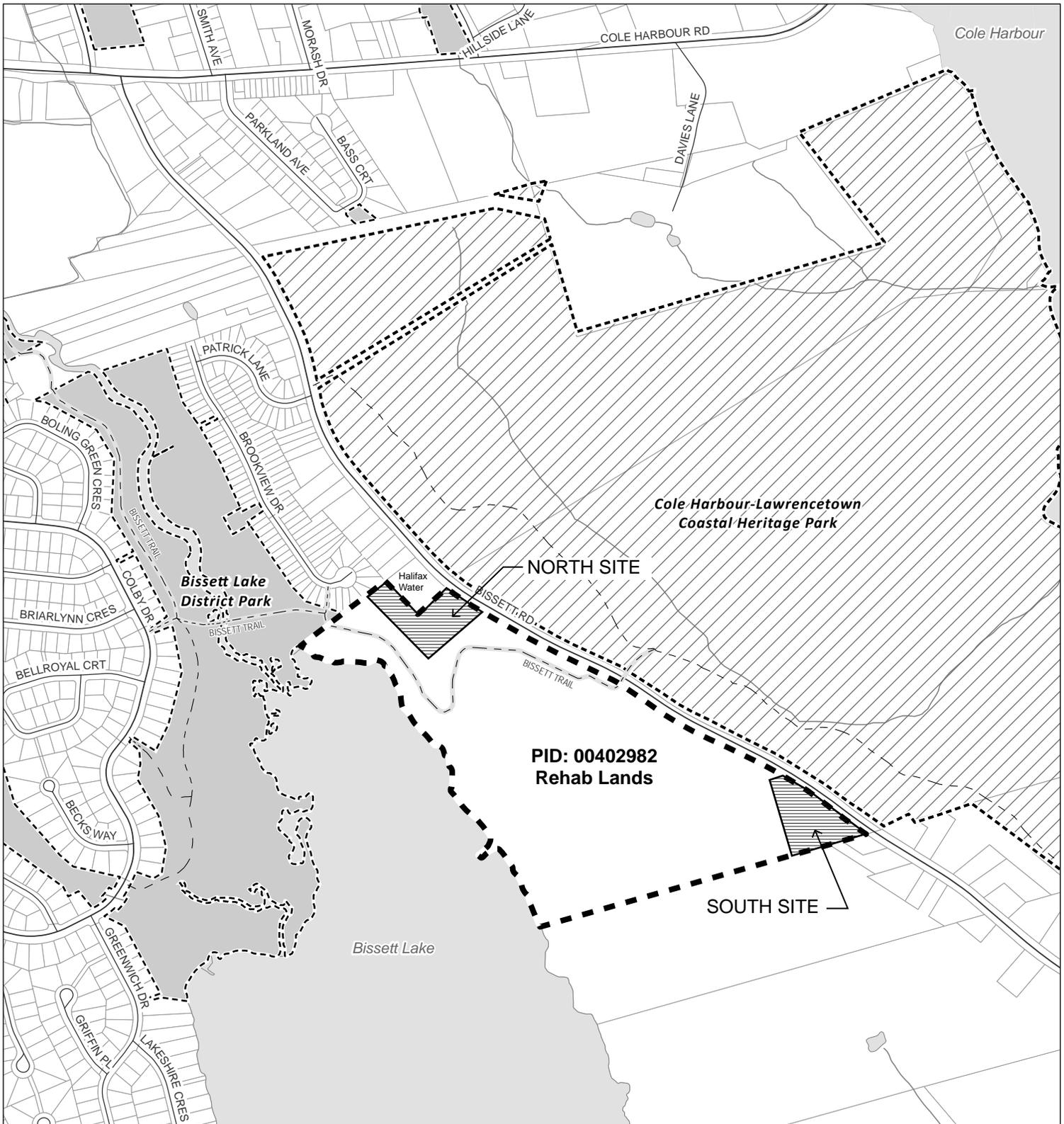
Attachment A – Site Plan  
Attachment B – Rehab Lands Park Plan  
Attachment C – What We Heard Report 1  
Attachment D – What We Heard Report 2  
Attachment E – OLA Criteria Rehab Lands

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A copy of this report can be obtained online at [halifax.ca](http://halifax.ca) or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210.

Report Prepared by: Carolle Koziak Roberts, Landscape Architect, Parks & Recreation 902.499.7360

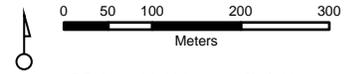
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**SITE PLAN - REHAB LANDS**

-  Rehab Lands Boundary
-  Lands Identified for Surplus Considerations
-  Provincial Park
-  Municipal Park
-  Active Transportation Trail

**HALIFAX**  
**Parks & Recreation**  
**Policy & Planning**



# HALIFAX

# REHAB LANDS

PARK PLAN REPORT

FEBRUARY 2023



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## BACKGROUND

The Rehab Lands are located on Bissett Road in Cole Harbour, NS. They are the site of the former Halifax County Rehabilitation Centre which closed in 2002. When the land reverted to the municipality, Regional Council directed that 16 hectares of the property be designated for parkland and to review the remaining lands for potential disposal. With the adoption of the 2019/2020 Parks and Recreation Business Plan, Regional Council directed that the park plan be prepared and include the consideration of a dog off-leash area.

The Rehab Lands were first identified as a key open space in the Cole Harbour Basin Open Space Plan (Open Space Plan) which was adopted by Regional Council in 2013. Building on the work that was done on the Open Space Plan, the following factors were analyzed:

- the history of the site
- site characteristics
- park and recreation needs
- proximity to existing parks and recreation features
- community demographics
- municipal plans and guiding documents.

The former Halifax County Rehabilitation Centre was a residential mental healthcare treatment centre for short and long-term patients. It operated on the site from the 1940s until 2002, and was subsequently demolished, leaving the site largely as an informal open space.

## FINDINGS

From the background analysis and public engagement, several findings emerged:

- The site fits into the larger network of parks and trails and provides continuity of greenspace between the provincial and municipal parkland. Current recreational trail activities should be supported and expanded.
- There are commanding views from the site of Cole Harbour Basin, lakeshore frontage on Bissett Lake, and natural wooded areas. The development of the park should take advantage of these natural assets.
- The history of the former Rehabilitation Centre and County Home is of cultural interest within the region and there are many stories that can be interpreted within the park.
- There is a lack of designated dog-off leash areas within Cole Harbour and a portion of the park can be designated for this use.
- The park is a recent parkland dedication of significant size that can provide for emerging recreation trends that may otherwise be challenging to fit into established parks.
- The area is well served with a variety of recreation facilities, such as playgrounds and sport fields, and there is a low need for additional similar type facilities.
- Park development should focus on low impact recreation that integrates with the natural areas.

## PARK PLAN

Based on the findings, a park plan has been developed that includes a concept plan with a focus on a series of program spaces, functional diagrams, and an implementation plan with phasing.

At the heart of the plan is an approach that includes the development of the site with a series of “rooms” for various activities that were highlighted through public consultation and other reviews. These have been incorporated through designs and programming ideas that account for the open space attributes of the site and surrounding system of parkland spaces.

The park plan serves as an overall guiding document for future park development. The implementation plan outlines a sequence of improvements that can be realized incrementally through subsequent budget cycles, depending on the availability of capital funding.

Of the previously identified surplus lands, the park plan recommends retaining the lands at the north end of the property until the park has been established and a determination can be made on park usage and parking demand. The land at the southern end of the property is not essential to retain as parkland and can be considered for disposal at any time.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 PROJECT BACKGROUND

The Rehab Lands are located at 255 Bissett Road in Cole Harbour, Nova Scotia. They are the site of the former Halifax County Rehabilitation Centre which operated from the 1940s until 2002. When the institution closed, the land reverted to the Municipality. The buildings were subsequently demolished and some residual soil contamination was remedied. With the adoption of the 2019/2020 Parks and Recreation Business Plan, Regional Council directed that this park plan be prepared and include the consideration of a dog off-leash area.

## 1.2 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The Rehab Lands property presents an opportunity to establish parkland in the Cole Harbour community. Much of the value of the site for recreation is its natural assets and adjacency to existing parkland. It was identified in the Open Space Plan as a strategic open space connection between Bissett Park and Cole Harbour-Lawrencetown Coastal Heritage Provincial Park. The Open Space Plan highlighted opportunities for the site to provide passive, low impact recreation activities that bring people into contact with natural environments and encourage healthy lifestyles. There may also be the ability to incorporate some active forms of recreation given the large size of the property.

The purpose of the park plan is to identify municipal park and open space programming for the site. This plan is to be used as a guiding document, so as resources become available, features can be implemented in a coordinated way.

## 1.3 CONTEXT

The Rehab Lands occupy 20.4 hectares (50.4 acres). The property has lakeshore frontage on Bissett Lake and commanding views of the Cole Harbour Basin estuary. Much of the site retains natural wooded sections. The area on the hilltop where the former buildings existed has been remediated and left to naturalize with grasses and meadow flowers.

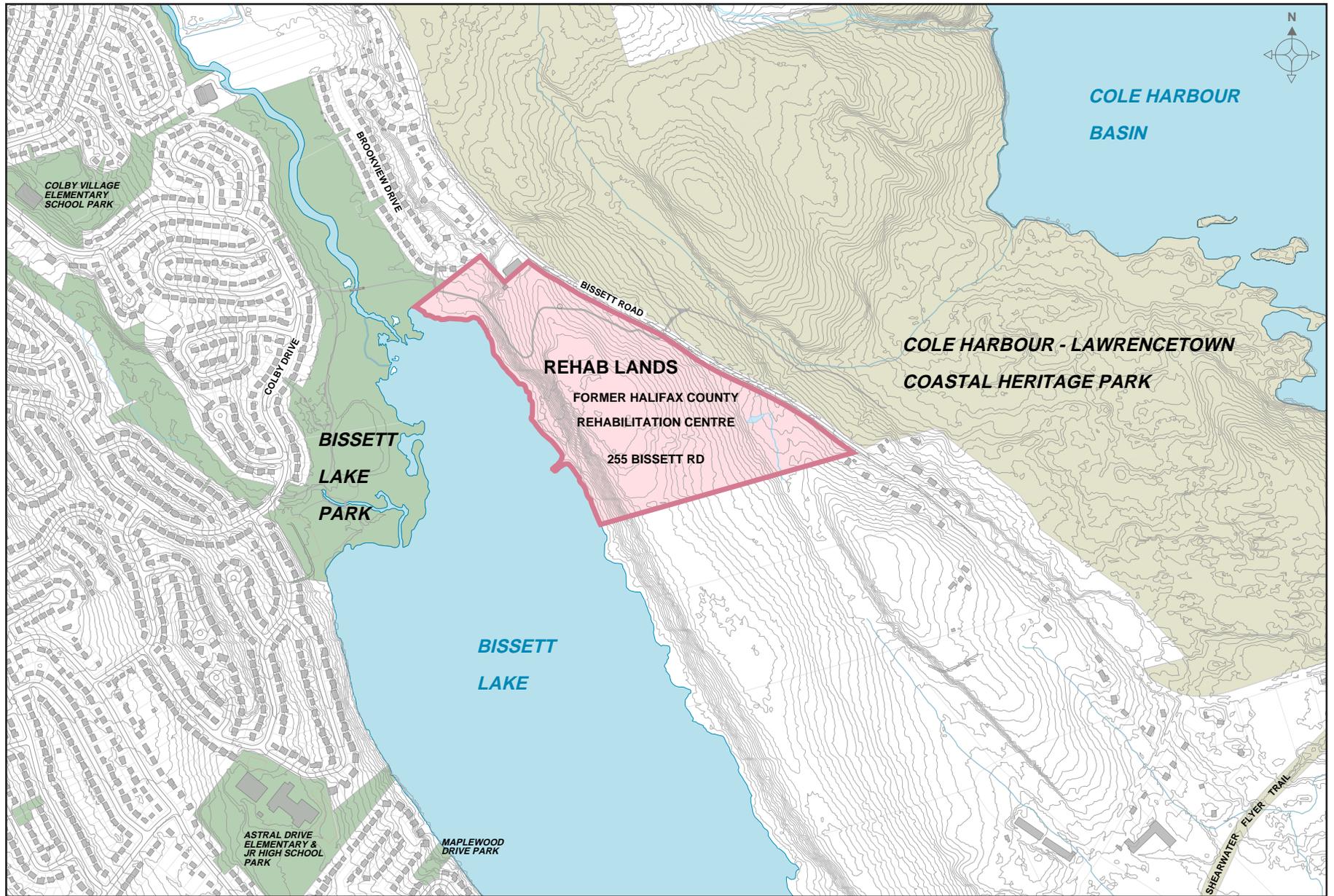
The property is zoned under the Halifax Regional Municipality Land Use By-Law for Cole Harbour/Westphal as P-2, Community Facility Zone. Permitted land uses include institutional and open space usage. The surrounding land uses are a mix of parkland, agricultural, residential, and commercial areas. The site is on the edge of the Urban Residential Settlement District with a portion of the property within the Municipal Service Boundary for sewer and water. It is bordered to the north by a Halifax Water maintenance and storage facility (P-2) and a cluster of residences along Brookview Drive (R-2). Bissett Road runs along the northeast border of the site, and to the east of the road lies Cole Harbour-Lawrencetown Coastal Heritage



FIGURE 1: PHOTO OF THE BISSETT TRAIL, JUNE 2021

Park (Regional Park Zone, RPK). Adjacent to the southern border of the property is an undeveloped woodland zoned as Rural Estate (R-7) and Single Unit Dwelling (R-1), both for residential and open space land use. Bissett Lake is directly west of the property.

Access to the Rehab Lands by car is by Bissett Road. There are no sidewalks on this portion of the road. People walking and cycling can access the site by the Bissett Trail, a multi-use, active transportation trail that opened in 2019. Construction of the trail was the first step in the park's development and an essential link for the municipality's active transportation network connecting the residential neighbourhoods of Colby Village and Forest Hills to the Cole Harbour-Lawrencetown Coastal Heritage Provincial Park through a network of trails and park systems.



MAP 1: SITE LOCATION AND CONTEXT

## 1.4 HISTORY & LANDSCAPE CHANGE

### NATURAL HERITAGE

The natural landscape of the area is characterized with a rolling hill topography of a drumlin field. The natural surroundings are exceptional, with several lakes, rivers, and native Acadian forests. The historical forests of this terrain would have constituted a matrix pattern of different forest ecosystems. Soils are mostly fine, rich loams that support vigorous forest growth. On hill tops, one could expect pure hardwood stands dominated by Yellow Birch, Sugar Maple, and American Beech. On the lower slopes and valleys would have been mixed wood stands dominated by Red Spruce, with Eastern Hemlock and some scattered hardwoods. There is also some coastal influence with a higher frequency of White Spruce and White Pine in open stand conditions.

### INDIGENOUS HERITAGE

Cole Harbour, Halifax/Dartmouth, and the Eastern Shore are all within the Eskikewa'kik territory, one of the seven territories within the Mi'kmaq confederation. Prior to European arrival, the Mi'kmaq had settlements in the Wampawk area (Cole Harbour). Wampawk means "still water" in the Mi'kmaw language. Largely a coastal people, evidence points to encampments along the estuary shores with strong evidence at the Little Salmon River where it meets the marsh. In the Cole Harbour Basin area, the harbours and salt marshes provided fowl, fish and shellfish as well as naturally occurring crops. Away from the coast, lands and

waterways provided seasonal fish and game as well as additional crops and plants.

### EURO-CANADIAN HERITAGE

Early European settlement in the area consisted of seasonal fishing camps along the coast when a few Acadian families established themselves in the nearby Chezzetcook area from the 1500's through to the 1740's. In the 18th century land was opened up for farming. Beginning in the 1750's the first British land grants were made in the area. The Rehab Lands property was originally part of the larger 5,600-acre land grant to Foreign Protestants obtained from the colonial government in 1786. The first owner was Jean George Bissett who arrived in Nova Scotia with his family from Montbéliard, France. The land was farmed and handed down through the generations of the Bissett Family until the property was purchased by Halifax County.



FIGURE 2: PHOTO FROM THE EARLY 1900's OF THE POORS FARM (COUNTY HOME)

The rural settlements around Cole Harbour became one of several agricultural communities which supplied Halifax and Dartmouth with local food. The 1970's saw a change from an agricultural to a suburban residential community with the development of suburban subdivisions initiated by rapidly growing demand for new housing. In 1984, responding to community pressure to preserve the remaining natural open space and cultural assets of the area, the Province established the Cole Harbour-Lawrencetown Coastal Heritage Provincial Park system.

### MENTAL HEALTH AND SOCIAL WELFARE

In Nova Scotia, the public mental hospital system had a two-tier structure which separated the newly diagnosed sick from the chronically ill. The first tier were hospitals that were owned and operated by the Province of Nova Scotia, whereas the second tier, comprising of the custodial chronic care hospitals, were funded



FIGURE 3: AERIAL PHOTO OF REHABILITATION CENTRE WITH BISSETT LAKE IN THE FOREGROUND

and run by municipalities. Most of these facilities were established in the late 1800s with an aim to establish cottage hospitals for the mentally ill in their own communities. With insufficient funding, most of them had become poor houses, the institutions and asylums derived from the British poor law copied in Nova Scotia. One such facility was the County Home also known as the Poores Farm which was located approximately one kilometer southeast from the current site, that is now part of the Cole Harbour Heritage Park.

### HALIFAX COUNTY REHABILITATION CENTRE

In the 1930's the Halifax County purchased the Rehab Lands property for the construction of the Halifax County Home and Mental Hospital to replace the County Home when it was destroyed by fire in 1929. The hospital opened its doors to patients in 1941, to provide social welfare services. Eventually its board concentrated solely on mental health. Later the facility was taken over by the Province of Nova Scotia serving patients from the entire province. Beginning in 1996, the Department of Community Services initiated a closure program for the facility, and patients began to be transferred out of the Centre to a variety of alternative care facilities. The facility, named at this point the Halifax County Rehabilitation Centre, finally closed in 2002.

The property for the hospital was selected for its isolated, tranquil, and visually inspiring setting. The mental hospital was built as a secure institution intended to protect those inside and out. The first building was constructed in 1938-41, and the second was built a decade later. By 2002 there were several buildings on



FIGURE 4: AERIAL PHOTO OF REHAB LANDS 2008 SHOWING THE REHABILITATION CENTRE BUILDINGS AND TRAILER PARK BOYS SET.

the property. The two main buildings contained nearly 120,000 square feet of enclosed space. Other buildings included a laundry and central heating plant, workshop/greenhouse, large workshop, and auditorium. In addition to the service driveways and parking, the site development included a basketball court and a small sports field. Water for the facility was drawn from a pumphouse on Lake Bissett. The pumphouse concrete foundation and causeway remain but the water main was abandoned. The institution had its own septic system and dispersal pond on site.

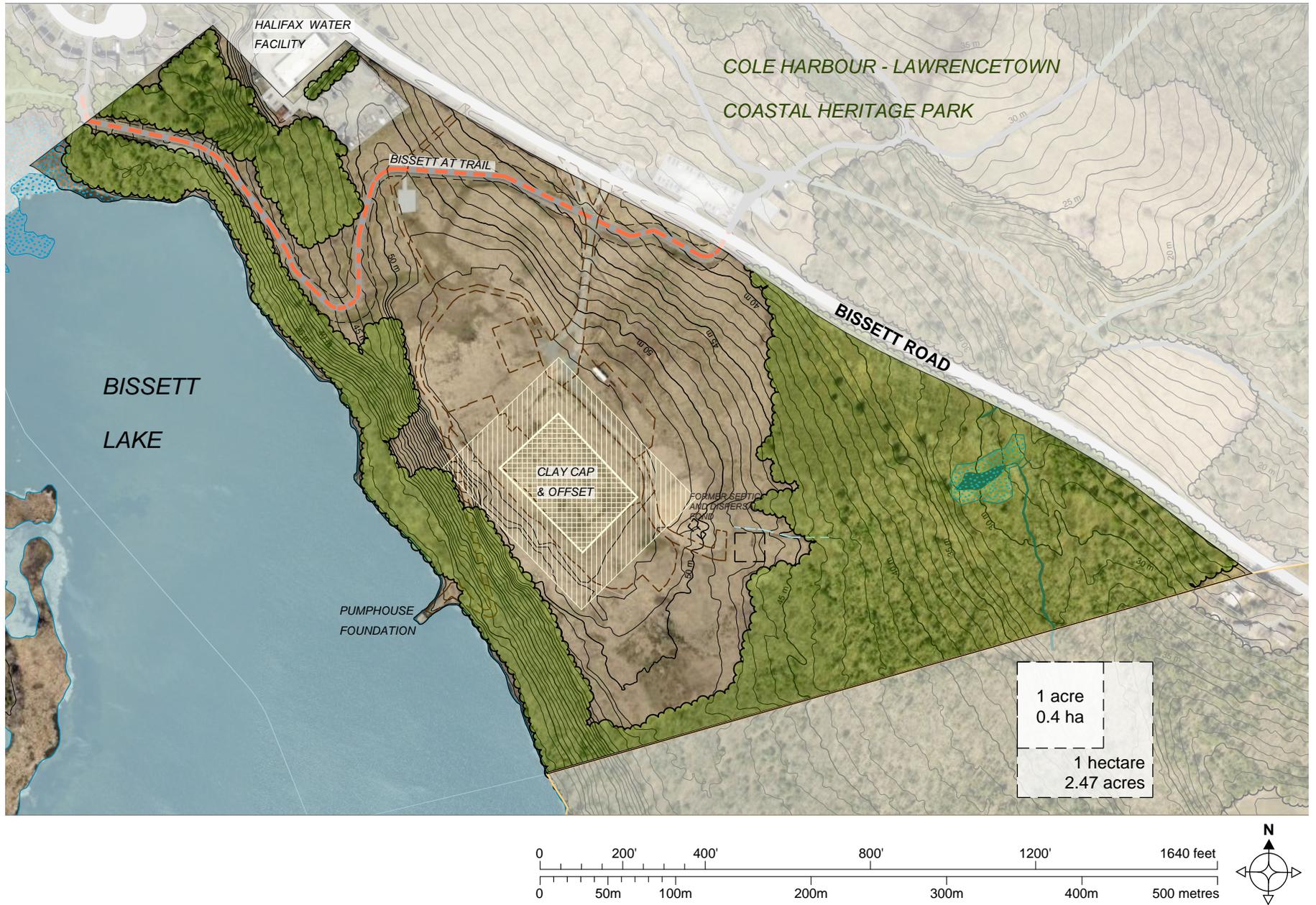
### RECENT PAST AND CURRENT USES

After the former Rehabilitation Centre closed, the site was used as a film and television set,



FIGURE 5: AERIAL PHOTO OF REHAB LANDS 2020 SHOWING THE BISSETT TRAIL AND SITE REMEDIATION

the most well-known being the production of the Trailer Park Boys television series and full-length movie. The set included the replica of the fictional mobile trailer park. After several years as a rented film set, the vacant buildings were demolished and the site remediated beginning in 2010. During the demolition activities, contaminated ash material was uncovered under the building slabs of the south building footprint. The contaminated soils and floor slab were left in place and covered with a thick clay cap. Since then, the site has largely remained as an informal open space. The Bissett Trail opened in 2019 and connects through the site from Bissett Road to the trail system in Colby Village and Bissett Park. Since its opening, the paved multi-use trail is well used for walking and cycling.



MAP 2: EXISTING SITE CONDITIONS

# 2 INVESTIGATIONS & ANALYSIS

## 2.1 EVALUATION OF PARKS AND RECREATION NEED

In this section, a summary of existing municipal park asset data, supporting research and best practices, and site visit data are presented, with a focus on:

- physical site conditions
- park service delivery
- community demographics
- Municipal guiding documents
- land suitability.

## 2.2 SITE CHARACTERISTICS

### SITE AREA

20.4 ha (51.45 acres)

### GEOLOGY & SOILS

The surficial geology of the area generally consists of silty till plains and drumlins. The bedrock geology is underlain by the Meguma Group Goldenville Formation, which consists of greywacke, quartzite, slate, schist, and gneiss. Past drilling explorations did not encounter bedrock.

The soil conditions (Wolfville Series) are derived from meguma slate and greywacke, and consist of clay, loam and till material that are particularly erodible on steep slopes. Areas with rich loam soils can support vigorous forest growth.

### TOPOGRAPHY

The topography of the site is characterized by a drumlin, a clay and till mound rising to an elevation of 53 meters above sea level and 22 meters above Bissett Lake. A relatively flat plateau exists at the top of the hill within the centre of the property. The west facing slope has a vertical change of approximately 18 meters to the lakeshore with gradients greater than 1:2 (vertical:horizontal) along some segments of the bank. To the east the land is sloped at a constant gradient of 1:8 (vertical:horizontal) towards Bissett Road.

### DRAINAGE

A ridge running north to south through the centre of the site appears to be the watershed divide for Bissett Lake to the west and Cole Harbour Basin to the east. Bissett Lake drains to the southeast to Cow Bay and the Atlantic Ocean located less than two kilometers from the site. Surface drainage for the east side is directed to the municipal stormwater collection system (ditches and culverts) along Bissett Road. There is an intermittent watercourse that flows south from the former institution's septic system (septic tanks, settling pond) into the wooded area, collecting in a small pond in the low area of the site. The west side drains naturally to the lake.

### VEGETATION

The areas on the plateau, occupied by the former institution, and the east facing slope, are open and the vegetation left to naturalize with grasses and meadow flowers. There are a few trees lining the former entrance driveway.

Close to half the site is forested having trees of varying species and maturity. Species include Red Oak, Red Maple, American Beech, White Birch, White Ash, Red and White Spruce, and Balsam Fir. Understory species include Striped Maple, Witch Hazel, and Witherod. Along the shoreline, the forest consists of primarily hardwood, varying in age, with intermittent softwoods. In the southwest corner of the site, there are some mature Red Oaks worth protecting for the size of their canopy. At the north end of the lake and mouth of Bissett Brook, there are riparian zones and cattail marshes.

### WILDLIFE

The most common wildlife sightings in the area are resident and migratory birds and waterfowl which nest in the wetlands and along the shoreline. The wooded areas provide habitat for a wide variety of mammals (raccoons, rabbits, and porcupine). The open grass areas of the site have grazing mammals (deer), birds, reptiles, and insects. Bissett Lake has associated fish, birds, amphibians, and insects.

## ACCESS & PARKING

Many park visitors will drive and access the park by Bissett Road. There are two existing driveway entrances off Bissett Road, the main driveway to the former institution and the driveway to the former superintendent's residence. There is a gravel parking lot for about 35 vehicles across the road in the Provincial Heritage Park. This lot is frequently full during peak hours. There is no on-street parking or sidewalks along Bissett Road.

People walking or cycling from adjacent residential areas can access the park by way of the Bissett Trail active transportation route. The Trail connects through the site from the northwest entrance of the park and generally stays along the north and east perimeter to a signaled crosswalk on Bissett Road to connect to the Heritage Park.

The northern areas of the park fall within 1000 meters of a transit stop with the nearest stop on Colby Drive (59 Colby, 159 Colby Express). The stop is approximately 425 meters from the northwest park entrance by way of the multi-use trails. There is currently no transit route along Bissett Road.

The existing circulation network includes the Bissett Trail and an informal footpath along the shoreline. The former main driveway ends at the top of the hill. All other driveways and parking areas have been removed.

## EXISTING USES

The primary recreational use of the site is walking and cycling by way of Bissett Trail. With the site no longer fenced off, people are beginning to walk and explore the natural areas. There is also some fishing along the shoreline.

The use of the site as a film set has continued as an occasional existing use. In 2020, the site was used for the filming production of Chapelwaite, a period horror drama series set in the 1850's based on Stephen King's short story, 'Jerusalem's Lot'. The Rehab Lands were used as filming set with replica buildings for the main street of the fictional town of Preacher's Corners, the church, and cemetery.

At times, such as during events at the Cole Harbour/ Salt Marsh Trail, the site is used for overflow parking.

## MUNICIPAL SERVICES & UTILITIES

A small section at the north end of the property adjacent to the R1 zone is within the Municipal Service Boundary and can be serviced with both sewer and water. The remainder of the property is outside the Service Boundary and is not serviced with municipal sewer. Bissett Road is serviced with municipal water and a water lateral which served the former Rehab Centre does extend onto the property but has been capped.

Overhead power and telecom lines run along the east boundary of the site along Bissett Road. There are light fixtures on poles lining the main driveway which end at the top of the hill.

## SITE REMEDIATION

Starting in 2010, the vacant buildings were demolished due to their degraded state and potential for vandalism. The demolition process required treatment of hazardous and contaminated material from the buildings (lead paint, concrete, asbestos) and hydrocarbons from decades of heating fuel and vehicle maintenance. During the demolition process, soil samples taken from under the south building revealed the use of contaminated ash material used for the sub-base for the foundation when it was constructed in the 1940's. The remediation plan put in place left the contaminated materials and the buildings floor slab in place and covered by a further 400 millimeters of clay soil to cap off the site. No building, underground utilities or intrusive works are to be constructed within the containment cell. No building slabs or foundation walls can be built within 30 meters of the capped area.

The remediation work was done in accordance to permits and inspections from Nova Scotia Department of the Environment with the site being monitored with monitoring wells in place and visual inspections as outlined in the Risk Management Plan approved by the Nova Scotia Department of the Environment.



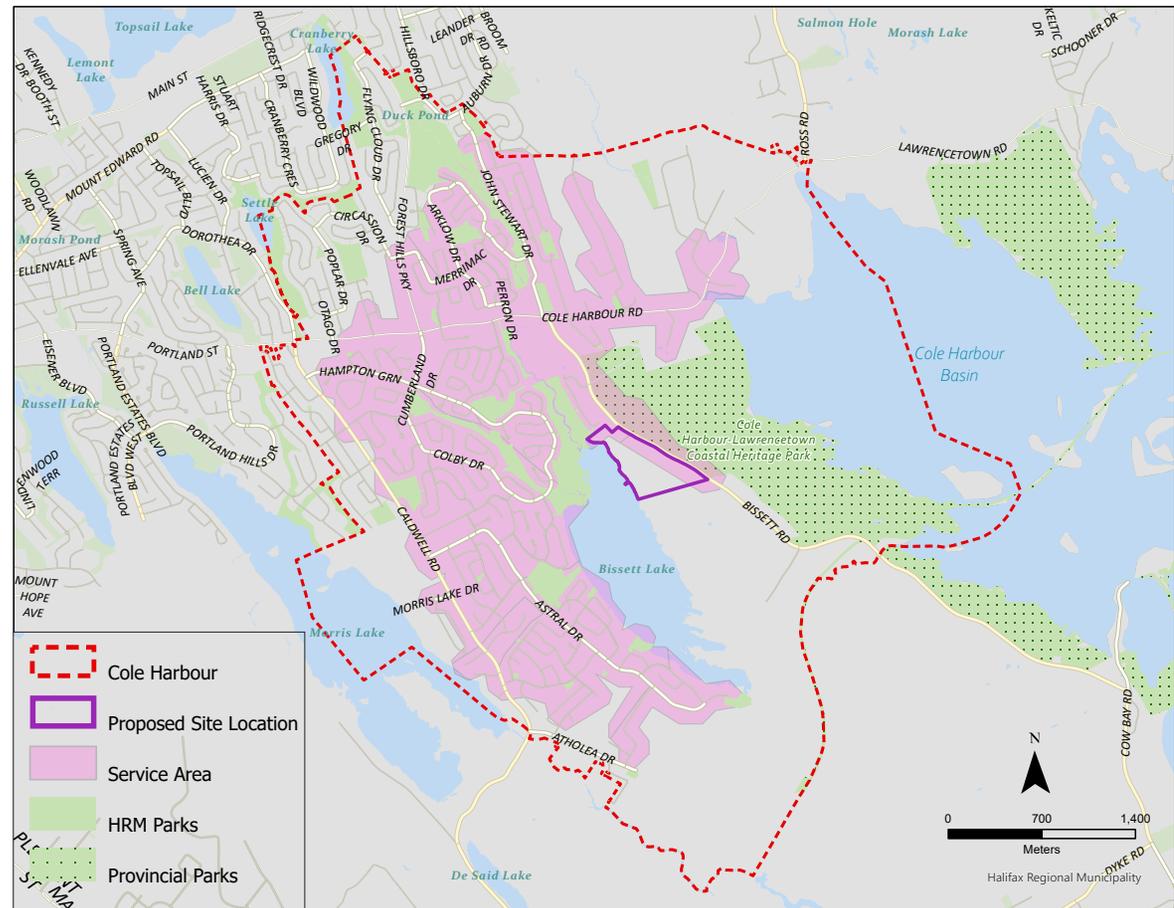
FIGURE 6: MONITORING WELL

## 2.3 PARK SERVICE DELIVERY

The Halifax Green Network Plan rationalizes an 800m (10 minute walk/ 3 minute cycle) service level for the Urban Settlement area outside the Regional Centre. For Rural and Rural Commuter areas a walking distance is not specified, in favour of a direction to concentrate parks in Local Centres and Growth Centres. The Rehab Lands site borders on the Rural and Urban Settlement areas. Since both the rural and suburban models can apply, a 1.2 km (15 minute walk/ 5 minute cycle) driving range of was used to determine the parks service area.

Within this service area there are 11 other municipal parks for a total area of existing parks of 68.3 ha (168.8 acres). The area per 1000 people is 4.6 ha. With the addition of the Rehab Lands (20.4 ha), the area per 1000 people will increase to 5.9 ha for municipal parks. With the inclusion of the Provincial Park parcels (136.3 ha) which fall within the service area, the park area increases to 225 ha (556 acres) and the area per 1000 people increases to 15 ha for municipal and provincial parks.

The area is well served with a variety of recreation facilities from local parks with play structures to district parks with ball diamonds, playing fields, and sport courts. For aquatic recreation and water access, there is a boat launch in Bissett Lake District Park and an outdoor swimming pool and splash pad in the Colby Village Recreation Centre Park. Rainbow Haven Beach is a 6 km drive from the park. This supports the view that such formal recreation facilities are not needed on the site.



MAP 3: COMMUNITY AND PARK SERVICE AREA

## 2.4 COMMUNITY DEMOGRAPHICS

Within a 1200 meter distance from the Rehab Lands site there are 15,023 people in approximately 5,500 dwellings. Compared to the mean for the entire municipality, there are some notable differences (Table 1):

- higher proportion of 10-19 year olds;
- lower proportion of 20-29 year olds;
- higher proportion of 60-69 year olds;
- higher proportion of 70-79 year olds; and
- lower proportion of people 80 years plus.

These demographics indicate that a higher number of seniors and families with older children are living within the service area. However, there is a lower number of young adults and the elderly living in the area. This can partially be attributed to the lack of housing types in the community that serve people at these two life stages. The suburban pattern is mostly small lot residential development, much of it single family with home ownership.

Given the varied demographics, the Rehab Lands park should be designed to accommodate a wide range of potential users, with special attention to older and retired residents and youth.

TABLE 1: POPULATION ESTIMATES +/- 10% WITHIN THE 1200m SERVICE DELIVERY AREA FOR REHAB LANDS PARK.

Age Range (years)	Approx. Percentage	HRM Mean Percentage	Approx. Number in Catchment
0-4	4.8	4.9	725
5-9	5.4	5.4	816
10-19	*12.1	10.5	1826
20-29	*11.2	15.0	1685
30-39	13.6	13.2	2045
40-49	13.1	13.5	1966
50-59	15.4	15.7	2306
60-69	*14.1	12.0	2113
70-79	*8.0	6.4	1200
80 Plus	*2.3	3.6	340

Stats Can 2016

\*Notably different than HRM mean

## 2.5 MUNICIPAL OPEN SPACE PLANS & GUIDING DOCUMENTS

There are a variety of functional plans and policy documents that are considerations in the development of the park plan. Table 2 contains actions from the Urban Forest Master Plan, the Open Space Plan, the Community Facilities

Master Plan (2), the Administrative Order respecting Off-Leash Dog Areas within Parks, the Green Network Plan, and the HRM Washroom and Drinking Fountain Strategy.

TABLE 2: MUNICIPAL DIRECTIONAL DOCUMENTS TO INFORM PARK ACTIONS

Document	Date	Direction
Urban Forest Master Plan	2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Retain appropriate amounts of native canopy and buffer strips in riparian zones</li> <li>Tree canopy in Cole Harbour is 27% with a target of 70%. The tree canopy on the Rehab Lands is 48% which exceeds the general target tree canopy cover for parks of ~40%</li> </ul>
Cole Harbour Basin Open Space Plan	2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Retain essential lands needed for public open space</li> <li>Provide multi-use recreational space for both passive and active recreation</li> <li>Environmental protection of Bissett Lake through riparian buffering and storm water management</li> <li>Provide trail and AT connections</li> <li>Protect scenic views toward Bissett Lake and the Cole Harbour Basin estuary</li> <li>Interpret the history of the property as an important public institution with cultural value to the community</li> <li>Consider how the property can contribute to the proposed 'Cultural Core' for the Cole Harbour Basin</li> </ul>
CFMP2	2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Accessibility and universal design should be a consideration in facility design</li> <li>Safe and accessible pedestrian circulation is an important design consideration</li> <li>Walking distance should be considered for the placement of urban park facilities</li> <li>To identify need, opportunity, and costs associated with playing field design and management decisions, HRM should develop and implement a playing field strategy</li> </ul>
AO 2017-013OP Off-Leash Dog Areas within Parks	2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dogs are to be effectively leashed when in parks except within designated off-leash areas</li> <li>Recognize the health and recreational benefits of off-leash dog activity for the public through the provision of off-leash dog areas within designated parks</li> <li>Provide adequate, appropriate and safe areas for dogs to be off-leash in parks</li> <li>Provide a level of service within parks that is economically and environmentally sustainable and in balance with the Municipality's broad objectives and priorities</li> <li>Minimize conflicts between potential park uses and neighbouring land uses through the careful siting, design and development of off-leash dog areas</li> <li>Protect the natural and cultural values of parks while providing opportunities for off-leash dog areas</li> </ul>

TABLE 2: MUNICIPAL DIRECTIONAL DOCUMENTS TO INFORM PARK ACTIONS. (Continued)

Document	Date	Direction
Green Network Plan	2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Action 12 - Work with Halifax Water and Nova Scotia Environment to promote green infrastructure, such as naturalized stormwater retention ponds and bioswales, as the preferred approach to managing stormwater</li> <li>• Action 23 - Balanced with other open space uses, support community gardens and other forms of food production in public parks and other Municipally-owned properties</li> <li>• Action 25 - Consider community gardens, fruit trees, and food supportive amenities, when preparing master plans for public open spaces</li> <li>• Action 44 - Incorporate year-round recreational infrastructure, including winter-oriented activities, when planning parks</li> <li>• Action 45 - Enhance existing standards for the design of parks with a focus on versatile and flexible space, based on the nature of different park types and situations, that encourages participation of all ages and abilities</li> <li>• Action 46 - Include culture and education programs and projects, such as the inclusion of public art within parks and nature interpretation programs when planning for parks</li> <li>• Action 47 - Ensure there is a clear and consistent communication system related to accessibility and wayfinding to and within parks</li> <li>• Action 48 - Enhance social gathering in municipal open spaces by encouraging limited private and not for profit commercial initiatives</li> <li>• Action 76 - Identify, preserve and celebrate cultural landscapes and resources when preparing master plans for publicly-owned open spaces</li> </ul>
HRM Washroom & Drinking Fountain Strategy	2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anticipate washroom use for new parks</li> <li>• Use temporary washrooms to test demand</li> <li>• Washrooms should only be located in fully serviced park locations</li> <li>• Consider partnerships with adjacent facilities or businesses rather than build a permanent stand-alone permanent facility</li> </ul>
HRM Accessibility Strategy	2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider accessibility for the park as identified in the Accessibility Strategy, which may include signage, accessible parking spaces, walkways, trails, recreation facilities, buildings, and park structures</li> </ul>

## OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

> The Off-Leash Service Review adopted by Regional Council in 2015 highlighted a lack of dog off-leash areas within the Cole Harbour community. Additionally, the Province of Nova Scotia has contacted the Municipality for assistance in relieving the use of the adjacent Provincial Park as an off-leash area, an activity that is contrary to the Provincial Parks Act. The Rehab Lands is a good candidate site for this use as it is of sufficient size and there are no conflicts with the surrounding land uses.

> With the provision of the artificial turf sports field at the Cole Harbour Common, it now serves as a campus for active sport usage for the community. Therefore, no sport field or other similar recreation facilities have been identified for the Rehab Lands.

> The history of the site is of cultural interest within the region. It remains an example of the area’s significant farming past, as well as an example of the evolution of public welfare and mental health care in Nova Scotia. Many

of the employees of the Rehabilitation Centre still live in the community and have a strong connection to its history. There are many stories associated with this site and the former County Farm site now within the Provincial Park. Local historians have expressed interest in some type of recognition and interpretation of the former use of the property.

## 2.6 LAND SUITABILITY

The Rehab Lands property is 20.4 ha (50.4 acres) in size with a range of landscape types that vary in suitability for park development. About 16 ha or 79% of the property is suitable for some form of recreation activities. The site is well suited for passive recreation activities. Much of the site is in a natural state, with half of it (48% or 9.9 ha) remaining as woodland. The slopes towards Bissett Road are open fields naturalized with grasses. The site of the former Rehabilitation Centre on the plateau has been remediated and is also open and naturalizing with grasses.

- 6% (1.3 ha) of the site is developed and includes the Bissett Trail, main driveway, and the area used by Halifax Water for a works yard.
- The area of the former grounds of the Rehabilitation Centre on the hilltop is open and generally flat and dry. It represents the most suitable areas for park development. The size of this area is 4.9 hectares (12 acres) and represents almost one-quarter of area of the property.
- The treed lowlands are also generally level but the ground is wetter with drainage channels and a pond. This area represents about 1.6 ha (4 acres) or 8% of the property.
- The open and treed areas with moderate slopes make up 9.7 ha (24 acres) or 47% of the property. These areas can be suitable for trails or other activities that can occur on sloped terrain.

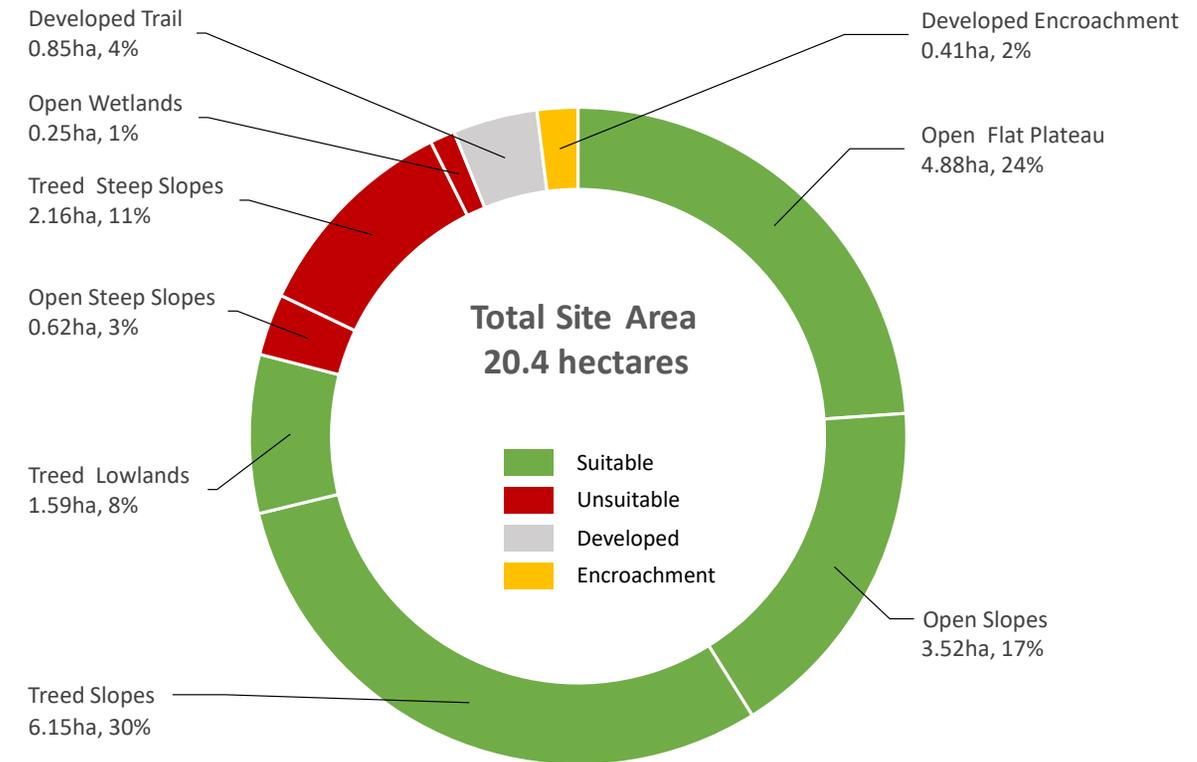


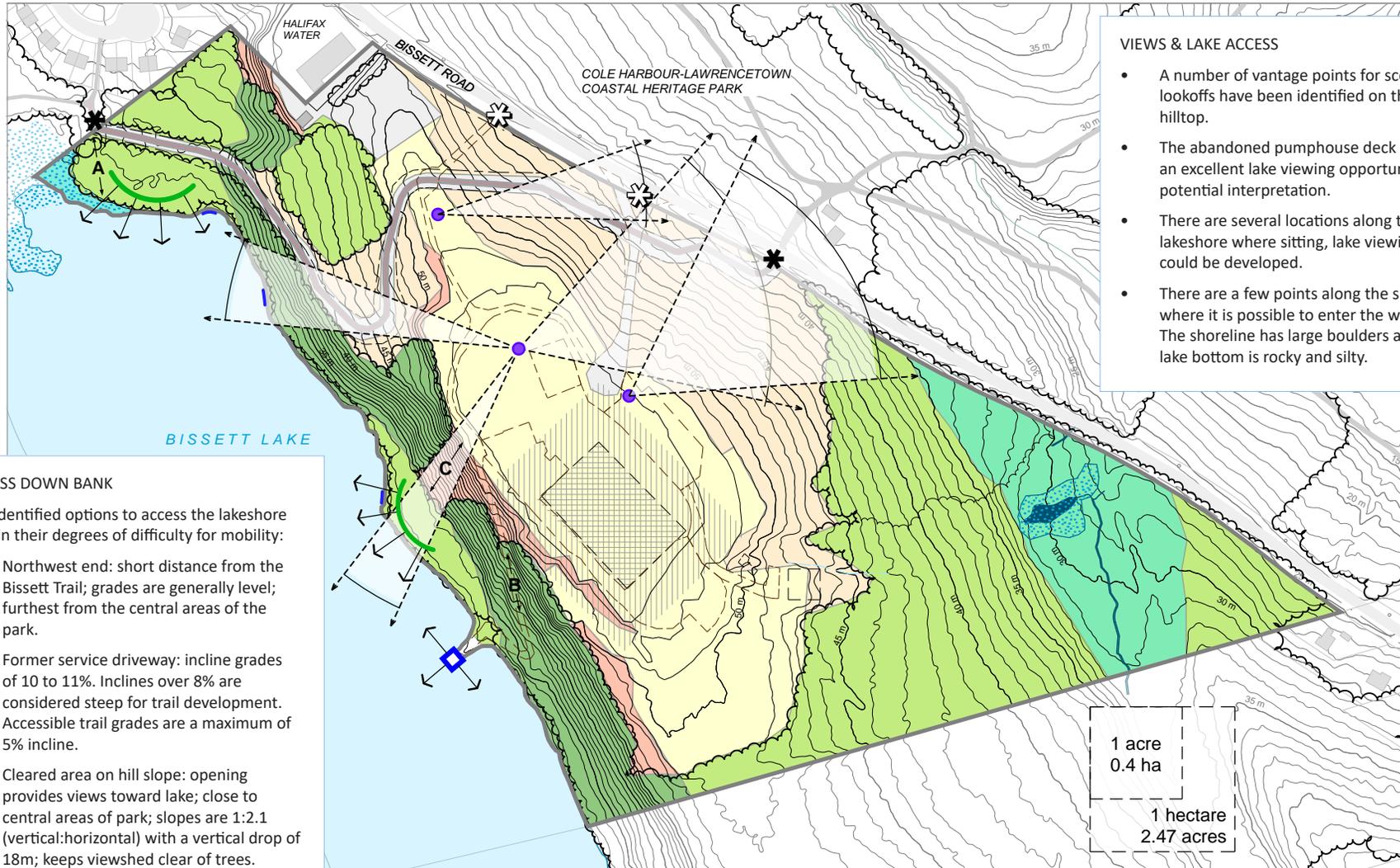
FIGURE 7: ILLUSTRATION OF TOTAL PARK AREA AS DEFINED BY LAND SUITABILITY FOR PARK DEVELOPMENT

- 3 ha (7.4 acres) or 15% of the site is characterized with steep slopes or open wetlands which are unsuitable for recreation development.
- The riparian zone follows the shoreline and ranges from 20m to 70m in width. The area is defined by the shoreline to the top of the bank slope or edge of the Bissett Trail. It is 3 ha (7.4 acres) in size and represents 15% of the property.
- The size of the containment cell is approximately 59m x 85m (0.5ha/ 1.2 acres). The building constraints include no construction or excavation activity within the clay cover. With the inclusion of the 30m perimeter buffer zone, the no-build zone is 1.73 ha (4.3 acres) in size, or about 35 percent of the area of the open, upper plateau.

## 2.7 SITE ANALYSIS

### LEGEND

 OPEN, FLAT HIGHLANDS	 TREED, SLOPES	 OPEN, WETLANDS	 VEHICLE ENTRANCE	 SCENIC VIEWS
 OPEN, SLOPES	 TREED, STEEP SLOPES	 DEVELOPED AREAS	 TRAIL ENTRANCE	 LAKE VIEWS
 OPEN, STEEP SLOPES	 TREED, LOWLANDS	 CONTAINMENT CELL + BUFFER	 LAKE ACCESS	



### VIEWS & LAKE ACCESS

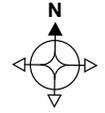
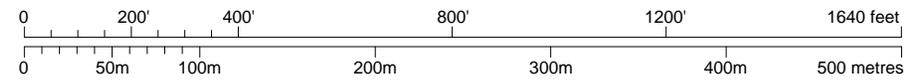
- A number of vantage points for scenic lookoffs have been identified on the hilltop.
- The abandoned pumphouse deck provides an excellent lake viewing opportunity with potential interpretation.
- There are several locations along the lakeshore where sitting, lake viewing areas could be developed.
- There are a few points along the shoreline where it is possible to enter the water. The shoreline has large boulders and the lake bottom is rocky and silty.

### ACCESS DOWN BANK

The identified options to access the lakeshore vary in their degrees of difficulty for mobility:

- Northwest end: short distance from the Bissett Trail; grades are generally level; furthest from the central areas of the park.
- Former service driveway: incline grades of 10 to 11%. Inclines over 8% are considered steep for trail development. Accessible trail grades are a maximum of 5% incline.
- Cleared area on hill slope: opening provides views toward lake; close to central areas of park; slopes are 1:2.1 (vertical:horizontal) with a vertical drop of 18m; keeps viewshed clear of trees.

MAP 4: SITE ANALYSIS DIAGRAM



## 2.8 SURPLUS LANDS CONSIDERATIONS

When Regional Council passed the motion to designate the Rehab Lands as parkland, the direction at that time was to retain 16 hectares for parkland and review the remaining 4.36 hectares of the property under the Administrative Order 50 process for potential disposal. Two flanking areas with frontage along Bissett Road were identified for potential disposal. The area identified at the north end of the property was approximately 1.73 hectares and the area at the south end was approximately 2.36 hectares.

Through this park planning process, the boundaries of the potential surplus areas were reviewed and adjusted to accommodate physical aspects of the site and potential park uses. The following was found:

### North Site

- There is a steep elevation change in the back area which reduces the site's development potential.
- The area used by Halifax Water for a temporary storage yard is a cleared and level 'pad ready' site which would be a cost effective option for a parking lot, and an alternative to developing undisturbed areas in the park for parking.
- The as-built location of the Bissett Trail is further to the north. The boundary of the potential surplus area should be adjusted with a recommended offset of 20 meters from the trail to provide a sufficient vegetation buffer between the park trail and any potential private lot.

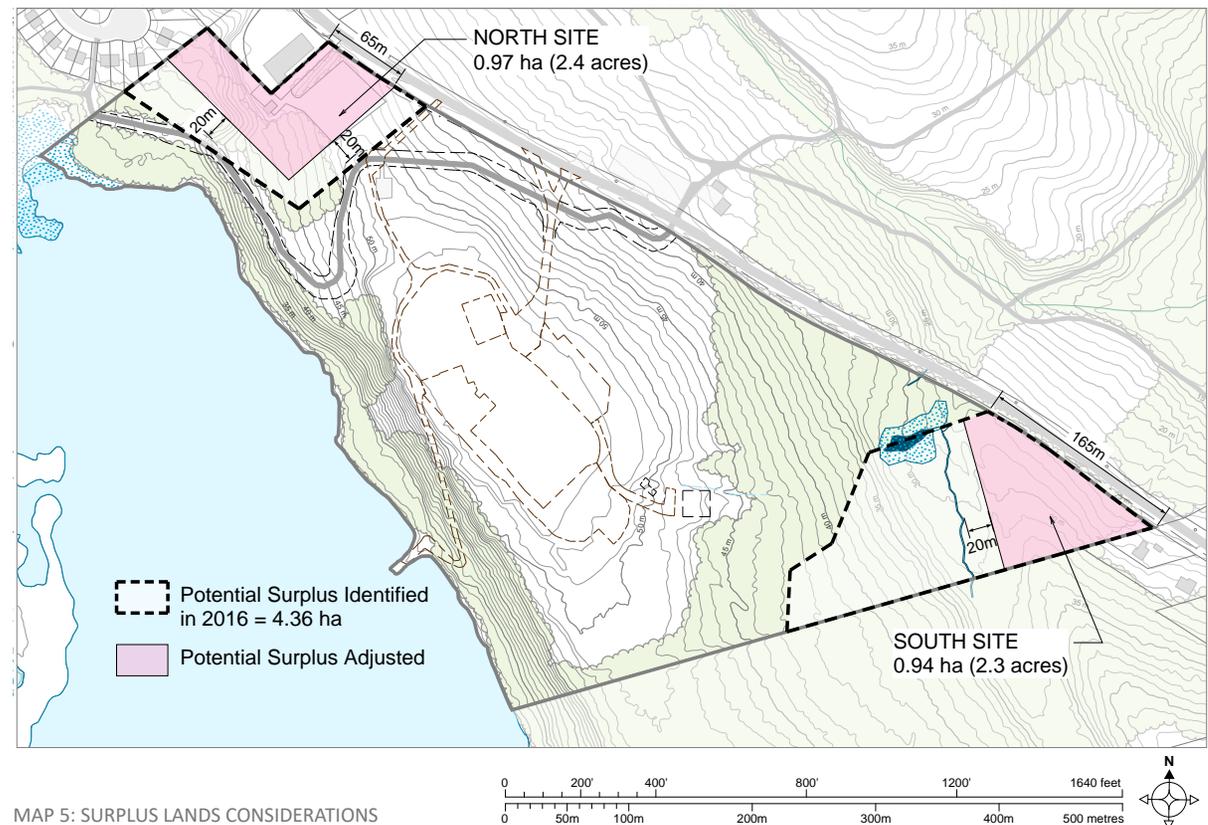
### South Site

- The back end of the identified surplus area has potential for park activities, such as mountain biking trails, that take advantage of the sloped terrain.
- There is stream and pond in the low, wet area which provide ecological diversity and opportunities for nature education and interpretive programming.
- The pond and wet lowlands reduce the site's development potential.

- The stream provides a natural boundary between park activities and any potential private lots. The boundary of the potential surplus area should be adjusted include only the area to the east of the stream.

With the adjusted boundaries, the sizes of the potential surplus areas are:

- North Site area: 0.97 hectares (2.4 acres)  
Frontage on Bissett Road: 65 meters
- South Site area: 0.94 hectares (2.3 acres)  
Frontage on Bissett Road: 165 meters



# 3 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

An online public engagement was conducted on the Shape Your City Halifax website throughout the park planning process. The development of the Park Plan was informed by two rounds of engagement. The first round was conducted to better understand the community’s recreational needs and values, and the second round was to present concept plans back to the public for feedback.

## 3.1 VALUES GATHERING

The first round of the engagement included an online park user survey and digital ideas board. The engagement ran from December 3, 2020 to January 18, 2021. The park user survey asked

questions about demographics, current use of parks, future recreation uses for the new park, and dog off-leash considerations. For the ideas board people were asked to submit ideas for the park and to indicate which ideas they liked.

The following was noted:

- Most people feel that some level of park development is appropriate, with more leaning towards low impact recreation than active recreation use.
- Physical activity, such as walking or cycling is the most popular activity people are already doing or are interested in doing.
- Relaxation and activities for mental well-being are the top activity people are very

interested in doing in the park, followed by winter based activities, nature exploration, and water based activities.

- Activities that have the least interest for the park are active sports, children’s play, or community gardening.
- The two most requested recreation facilities are for a disc golf course and mountain bike facilities.
- More than half the participants are in favour of having a section of the park designated for off-leash dog use. Off-leash trails are the most popular feature, followed by open lawn areas. Having the area fenced is important for both dog owners and non-dog owners.

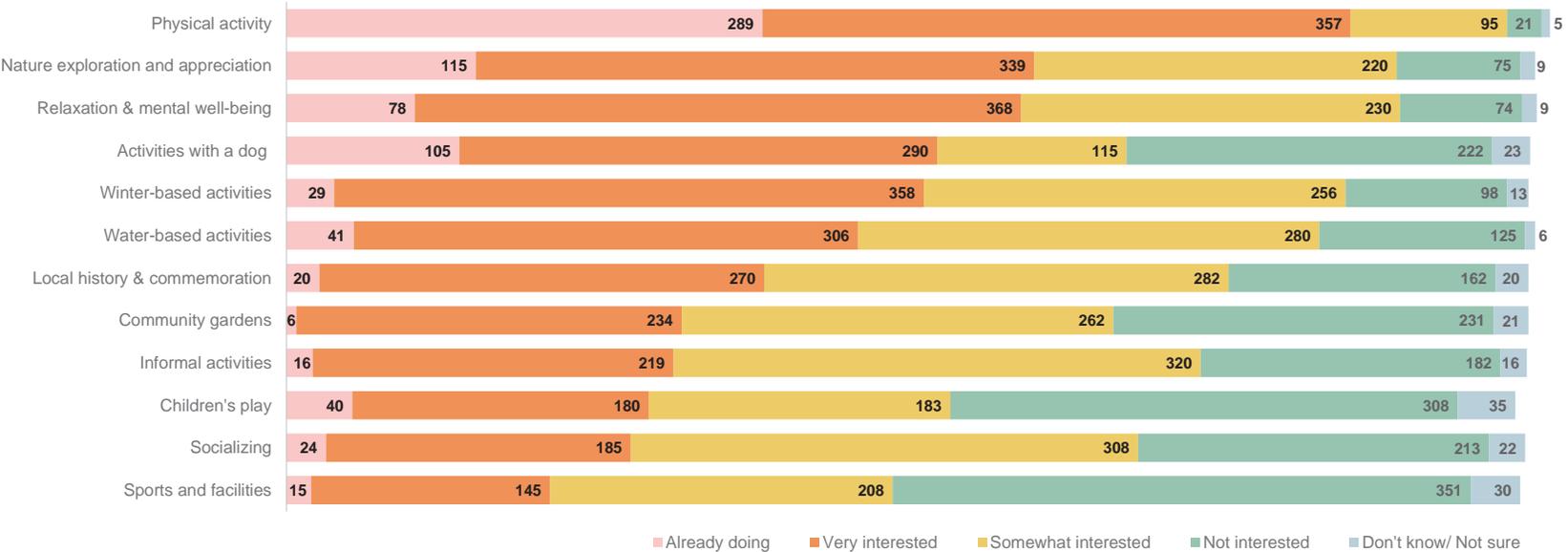


FIGURE 8: SURVEY RESULTS FOR PARK EXPERIENCE AND ACTIVITY INTERESTS

## 3.2 EVALUATION OF OPTIONS

For the second round of the engagement, three concept scenarios were presented to the public themed as “A Place to Play”, “A Place to Learn”, and “A Place to Unplug”. The scenarios were developed around popular themes that emerged during the first round of engagement. Of the three scenarios presented, “A Place to Play” generated the most support. This concept focuses on developing the park as a destination that compliments the other parks in the area. It includes day use activities such as picnicking, disc golf, and access to the lake. There is also interest for incorporating elements from the other two concepts into the Preferred Park Plan.

The online survey responses were received from September 29, 2021, through November 1, 2021. The intention of the engagement was to explore how different program elements could fit on the site, and to evaluate different options for the off-leash dog facilities, parking lot location, trail development, and access to the lake.

The following was noted:

- For the off-leash dog provisions, preference is for a dedicated area that is fenced off from the rest of the park and includes a mix of natural areas and mowed lawn.
- For off-leash trails the preference is that dogs are on-leash on all trails except for dedicated off-leash areas.
- The highest ranked option for the parking lot location is at the north end of the site close to Bissett Road, although a more central location is preferred for people with mobility challenges.

- The majority of the feedback for trail development is to provide a variety of trail types within the park that complement existing trails and provide new experiences.
- The highest ranked option for getting down to the lake shoreline is the connection to Bissett Trail at the far north end of the site where the grades are manageable. The second ranked option is a switchback ramp.
- A pier for small boats and seating are the highest favoured options for access to the lake.
- Maintaining trails for winter use and a sledding hill are the highest favoured options for winter activities.
- Having a washroom in the park is the most popular amenity with over 80% of respondents selecting it for one of their top choices. Picnic areas and lookoffs were chosen by more than half the respondents. Disc golf and quiet seating/meditation spots were chosen by more than a third of the respondents.



FIGURE 9: CONCEPT PLAN “A PLACE TO PLAY”



FIGURE 10: CONCEPT PLAN “A PLACE TO LEARN”



FIGURE 11: CONCEPT PLAN “A PLACE TO UNPLUG”

# 4 FINDINGS

## 4.1 KEY FINDINGS AND ACTIONS

The following table (Table 3) illustrates the translation of park issues and opportunities into solutions, and further into actions. The specific actions have informed the subsequent park plan.

TABLE 3: PARK ACTIONS



Issues & Opportunities	Solutions	Specific Actions
The park connects into a large network of trails and greenspace. The Bissett Trail now travels through the park connecting the communities of Colby Village and Forest Hills with the Coastal Heritage Provincial Park trail system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to support and expand recreational trail activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a system of trails in the park designed for a range of abilities and activities that complement the existing trail network.</li> </ul>
The history of the site is of cultural interest within the region with many stories associated with the former Rehabilitation Centre and former County Home (Poors Farm) site within the Provincial Park.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognize and interpret the former use of the property for social welfare and mental health care.</li> <li>Consider the positive role parks and greenspaces have for mental wellbeing and mental health care.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Partner with local historians to develop interpretive themes and elements.</li> <li>Develop quiet seating areas and opportunities to practice mindfulness such as a meditation labyrinth.</li> </ul>
There is a lack of designated dog-off leash areas within the Cole Harbour Community. There is steady and increasing demand for formal dog off-leash areas (OLAs).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Designate part of the park for off-leash use</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish a dedicated off-leash dog area designed to serve a regional population.</li> </ul>
The park is an acquisition of significant size that is undeveloped with undetermined programming.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider new facilities for emerging recreation trends that may be challenging to accommodate within established parks but would be compatible for this site.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a disc golf course.</li> <li>Develop mountain biking trails</li> </ul>
Much of the park is undeveloped with many natural assets that offer unique recreation experiences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Retain much of the natural areas in the park including the natural vegetation along the shoreline, steep banks, and wooded areas.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop picnic areas and trails.</li> <li>Provide nature interpretation through programming or self-guided elements that highlight the natural areas of the site such as the shoreline, cattail marshes, ponds and woodlands.</li> </ul>

TABLE 5: PARK ACTIONS



Issues & Opportunities	Solutions	Specific Actions
There are commanding views from the site of the Cole Harbour Basin and Bissett Lake.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify the key vantage points and protect the scenic viewshed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop viewing areas and lookoffs at key vantage points.</li> <li>Maintain the vegetation to keep the viewshed open.</li> <li>Any development within the viewshed should be sympathetic to preserving the scenic views.</li> </ul>
The park has lakeshore frontage on Bissett Lake. The concrete foundation of the former pumphouse on the lake remains intact.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide opportunities for people to access and enjoy the lake.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a pier on the former pumphouse foundation for people to sit and enjoy the lake.</li> <li>Provide docking for kayaks and canoes.</li> <li>Develop a trail along the shoreline.</li> </ul>
Most people will drive to the park. Bissett Road is a rural road with open ditches, no sidewalks and lacks transit.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide a parking lot of sufficient size to anticipate the number of users for the proposed park facilities.</li> <li>Promote the active transportation trail system as an alternative mode of travel.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a main parking lot for the park for approximately 60 cars initially, with space available to expand.</li> <li>Provide information on the website about accessing the park by way of the active transportation trail.</li> </ul>
There are safety issues with on-street parking along Bissett Road with a lack of parking facilities for people accessing the Salt Marsh Trail/ Trans Canada Trail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide an access point for the trail system on the Rehab Lands with parking and amenities for trail users.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a second parking lot adjacent to the Bissett Trail off Bissett Road.</li> <li>Provide trailhead signage and rest stop amenities for trail users.</li> <li>Provide information about amenities for Trans Canada Trail users.</li> </ul>
There is a lack of publicly accessible washrooms and drinking water in the area which prevent longer stays.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Anticipate washroom use for the new park.</li> <li>Consider partnering with the Province to provide shared washroom facilities for both the Coastal Heritage Park and the new park.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use temporary washrooms to test demand.</li> <li>Re-establish water service into the site for drinking water fountain/ bottle-filling station.</li> <li>Consider the establishment of a public washroom building once the park is established and park usage data validates the need, through the Washroom and Drinking Fountain Strategy program.</li> </ul>
The slopes toward the shoreline are steep with a vertical drop of 18m which makes it challenging for people with mobility issues.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a choice of access options down to the shoreline to meet a range of abilities.</li> <li>For challenging topography, provide the best access reasonable for these locations with alternate routes elsewhere.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Construct a trail along the shoreline with an access point at the north end where the grades are flatter.</li> <li>Reinstate the former service driveway down to the lake.</li> <li>Construct a staircase and/or switchback ramps centrally located in the existing clearing on the bank.</li> </ul>
Park use is much lower during the winter season	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide for recreation activities that can be enjoyed year-round or can take advantage of winter conditions.</li> <li>Provide winter maintenance for select pathways.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop the dog off-leash area and disc golf course and promote as year-round activities.</li> <li>Provide winter maintenance for the proposed paved pathways.</li> <li>Promote snowshoeing in wooded trails.</li> <li>Construct a sledding area for winter recreation.</li> </ul>

# 5 PARK PLAN

## 5.1 VISION FOR THE PARK

The Rehab Lands has many natural features that offer unique park experiences and opportunities. The vision for the park development is to take advantage of the site's assets, particularly the scenic views and water access, and introduce compatible, low impact recreational activities that bring an element of fun and novelty. Recognition and interpretation of the former use of the property for mental health care and its cultural interest within the region is also proposed.

From the public engagement it was evident that there was lower interest in seeing traditional park development for active recreation facilities such as sport fields and playgrounds. Instead, there was more interest in low impact park development for passive recreation such as trails, picnic areas, and a formal off-leash dog area. Disc golf and mountain biking were also noted as emerging recreation interests. The aim is to retain the natural areas and allow the previously developed areas to naturalize. The size of the property is large enough to accommodate some development for active recreation facilities that are compatible with the low impact development envisioned for the park.

## 5.2 PREFERRED CONCEPT PLAN

The preferred park plan builds on the concept, "A Place to Play" with the inclusion of some of the elements from the other two concepts, particularly the inclusion of nature appreciation and interpretation, and providing tranquil spaces for people to relax. Within this concept there are also opportunities to interpret the former Rehabilitation Centre and to bring awareness to mental health issues.

The plan proposes the following:

- Develop a system of trails, designed for a range of abilities and activities, that bring people in contact with the natural areas of the site. This includes developing a trail along the lakeshore and loop trails through the woodland and open hilltop areas.
- Develop a variety of scenic lookoffs that take advantage of the unique views from the hilltop.
- Establish a dedicated off-leash dog area and parking lot designed to serve a regional population.
- Provide amenities for picnicking, including picnic tables and shelters, open lawn areas, and forest clearings. The provision of outdoor cooking facilities could be considered with future park investments for water, sewer and power servicing.
- Provide recreational access to the lake with the development of a pier on the

existing concrete foundation of the former pumphouse.

- Facilitate winter use of the park through winter maintenance of select trails.
- Construct a sledding area for winter recreation.

The plan also proposes the following considerations based on community interest or initiation with potential partnerships:

- Develop a 9-hole disc golf course with an option to expand to 18-holes.
- Develop an area for mountain biking with a series of single-track trail loops.
- Develop interpretation panels that highlight the former Rehabilitation Centre and local history of the area.
- Raise awareness for mental well-being through the provision of a meditation labyrinth path and other contemplative spaces.
- Enable nature education through programmed activities or developing self-guided interpretive panels.

- |                                   |                                       |                                       |   |  |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|--|
| <b>1</b> SCENIC LOOKOFF           | <b>5</b> MEDITATION LABYRINTH         | <b>9</b> DISC GOLF COURSE - 9 HOLE    | <b>13</b> QUIET SEATING/ MEDITATION SPOTS | <b>P</b> PARKING LOT                         |
| <b>2</b> SPIRAL RAMP LOOKOFF      | <b>6</b> MEADOWS & POLLINATOR GARDENS | <b>10</b> MOUNTAIN BIKE SKILLS TRAILS | <b>14</b> FOREST REGENERATION             | <b>W</b> DRINKING WATER                      |
| <b>3</b> HILLTOP PICNIC AREA      | <b>7</b> DOG OFF-LEASH AREA           | <b>11</b> LAKESHORE PICNIC AREAS      | <b>15</b> TRAIL REST STOP                 | <b>I</b> SITE INTERPRETATION & COMMEMORATION |
| <b>4</b> BELVEDERE PICNIC SHELTER | <b>8</b> SLEDDING HILL                | <b>12</b> PIER WITH GAZEBO & DOCKS    | <b>16</b> OUTDOOR TOILETS                 | <b>●</b> NATURE INTERPRETATION               |



MAP 6: PREFERRED CONCEPT PLAN

## 5.3 PARK FEATURES

### SCENIC LOOKOFFS

There are a number of vantage points on the hill that provide views of the Cole Harbour Basin and Atlantic coastline towards the east, and views of Lake Bissett and Colby Village residential area towards the west. The Concept Plan identifies locations for various types of lookoffs and experiences:

**Plaza Lookoff** - located at the top of the hill adjacent to the main path. This is envisioned as a paved area with benches facing the view towards the Cole Harbour Basin. There are opportunities for interpretation signage at this location.

**Spiral Ramp Lookoff** - located in an area of the site that has views in multi-directions of both the Basin and the Lake. This is an earthen mound sculpted in a spiral form that rises about 4m above the existing grade of the hilltop. A path spirals up to the top with a gentle inclined gravel path affording 360° scenic views of the surrounding area. The lookoff brings visitors higher above the tree line and power lines for better views of the Cole Harbour Basin and Atlantic Ocean. The earthen mound is a more accessible alternative to constructing a viewing

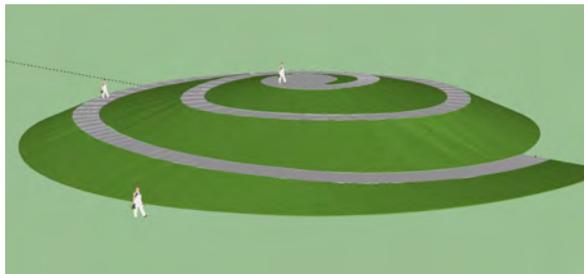


FIGURE 8: MODEL OF SPIRAL RAMP MOUND



FIGURE 12: VIEW OF COLE HARBOUR BASIN FROM THE REHAB LANDS

tower with stairs. The mound can be constructed with the excess fill from the excavation of the parking lot or earthwork shaping for the sledding hill. The side slopes would be planted with a mix of meadow grasses and wildflowers similar to the naturalized meadow areas.

**Belvedere Lookoff** - A belvedere is a summer house or open-sided gallery commanding a fine view. The belvedere is envisioned as an open-sided park structure with seating. It is proposed on the west side of the hill where there are views overlooking Lake Bissett. The belvedere can also support the picnic area.

### PICNIC AREAS

There are a number of sites for developing picnic areas in the park. The hilltop, particularly the northern area, takes advantage of the scenic views. Along the lakeshore there are a couple of spots where the topography of the bank widens

out into flatter areas that would be suitable for developing picnic spots.

The hilltop picnic area would have open lawns planted with shade trees. Amenities would include picnic tables and the belvedere park shelter. Potential washrooms and drinking water located nearby would enhance the picnic experience. Future considerations for outdoor cooking facilities could be a community oven or campfire grill with additional considerations for operation and maintenance.

The picnic areas along the lakeshore would be in small clearings in the wooded areas. Picnic tables would be set on leveled areas surfaced with crusher dust or wood chips. Some of the picnic table spots should be sited and designed for accessibility. The topography at the north end of the shoreline may be more suitable for accessible picnic spots than the areas further down the shoreline where access down the bank becomes more challenging.

## DOG OFF-LEASH AREA

The type of dog off-leash facility proposed for the park is a dedicated off-leash area (OLA) that would be fenced from the other areas of the park.

The dedicated OLA shown in the concept plan is located where the grades are generally flat. A mix of landscapes are proposed which range from an open lawn to wooded trails. The open lawn is sited over top the capped area. It would be surfaced with grass that would be regularly mowed and kept clear of trees to maintain the integrity of the clay cap. The remainder of the area would be planted with native trees and left to naturalize as part of the forest regeneration.

There are three separate entrances into the fenced area. Two gates are off the main pathway loop which connects to the parking lot and upper areas of the park. The third gate connects to the perimeter path that goes through the wooded area.

A shade structure is proposed to provide shade until the tree canopy matures. Dog waste receptacles are located off the main paved path where they can be easily serviced. Pathway bollard lighting may be considered to increase evening use of the OLA, particularly during the winter season.

## NATURALIZED MEADOW AREA

The park plan proposes to retain the grasses and meadow vegetation now growing on the plateau formerly occupied by the institution buildings. The remediated area capped with a layer of clay soil should remain clear of tree

growth to retain its containment function. Native plants that provide food and habitat for pollinators (hummingbirds, bees, and butterflies) can be introduced into the meadows to increase biodiversity. The addition of trails, interpretive signage and structures for hummingbird nests or beehives can enhance the educational component.

## LAKE PIER

Access to the lake can be accomplished by taking advantage of the existing pumphouse structure. A pier can be built on the concrete foundation and short causeway that extend out into the lake. A shade structure and seating are proposed to provide a place to sit and enjoy the lake. The pier can be designed for docking kayaks and canoes. The addition of floating docks may also be considered.



FIGURE 13: MEADOW AREA

## SLEDDING HILL & WINTER ACTIVITIES

Winter activities are difficult to plan for with the inconsistency of snow cover or ice conditions of our warmer winters. One strategy to increase park use during the winter season is to provide for activities that can be done year-round, such as walking or disc golf. Another strategy is to develop facilities that can be adaptable for winter activities when the snow or ice conditions are favourable.

Snow sledding is an impromptu activity that can occur when there is snow cover without a lot of specialized infrastructure or scheduling. Criteria for locating or building a sledding hill include a slope with a 1:4 (vertical:horizontal) ratio that provides a good downward momentum, and a large, flat area at the bottom for runout space. The Concept Plan identifies one area of the site that can be developed for sledding with some alterations to the terrain.

Ice conditions on the lake are not reliable, but there may be some weeks when the temperatures are cold enough for the lake to freeze and the ice is thick enough for skating. The pier could be built to enable people to access the lake for skating. The park is not a suitable location for artificial ice because of its proximity to the ocean and the amount of salt in the air.

## MOUNTAIN BIKING AREA

Mountain biking is an appropriate active recreation activity that can be introduced into the park. The concept plan shows an area where dedicated mountain biking trails can be developed. These are short, closed loops which take advantage of the steeper slopes on the eastern side of the hill in the wooded area. Their purpose is more for skill building than for longer bike treks. Opportunities for partnering with biking trails groups may be considered for construction expertise and maintenance. The western slopes that drain towards the lake should be avoided because of the potential bank erosion and sedimentation that can be caused by this activity.



FIGURE 14: MOUNTAIN BIKE TRAIL EXAMPLE

## DISC GOLF

Disc golf is an active recreation activity that can be integrated into the wooded areas of the site without a large development footprint. It was extensively identified as a recreational use through the public engagement. There is sufficient space available to develop a disc golf course in the wooded area on the southeast facing slope. This location offers more shelter than the hilltop which is exposed to winds. A disc golf course can be rustic, and often times is located in wooded areas where the courses are laid out through the trees. Disc golf does not need the manicured fairways of traditional golf courses.

It is proposed that a nine-hole course be laid out to avoid large trees to preserve the canopy, or carved out of the brush areas. A tree survey should be done alongside the topographic survey to help inform the layout and reduce unnecessary tree cutting. There would be some understory clearing and branch pruning.

Disc golf is a relatively new activity for the municipality and this would be the first dedicated facility offered in a municipal park. As such, it is recommended to start with a nine-hole, beginner friendly course to allow more people to try the activity.

## MEDITATION LABYRINTH

A number of contemplative spaces are proposed throughout the park. They can be simple quiet seating areas with benches or offer more interesting features such as forest hammocks.

A meditation labyrinth is proposed for the hilltop meadow area. Labyrinths are contemplative spaces that allow for reflection and introspection. The pattern is formed by a singular path that travels from a starting point at the edge to an end point at the centre. There are no walls with hidden paths or dead ends like maze puzzles. Labyrinths are best located in serene, natural environments that provide a peaceful and tranquil setting, but should not be too isolated or out of view that feels unsafe to use. Other amenities include benches or seating to allow for reflection or journaling, and signage to explain how to use the labyrinth. Landscaping with wildflower meadows can enhance the experience. The labyrinth provides an opportunity for commemoration and public awareness of mental health issues. Community labyrinths may be funded through partnerships with organizations.



FIGURE 15: MEDITATION LABYRINTH EXAMPLE

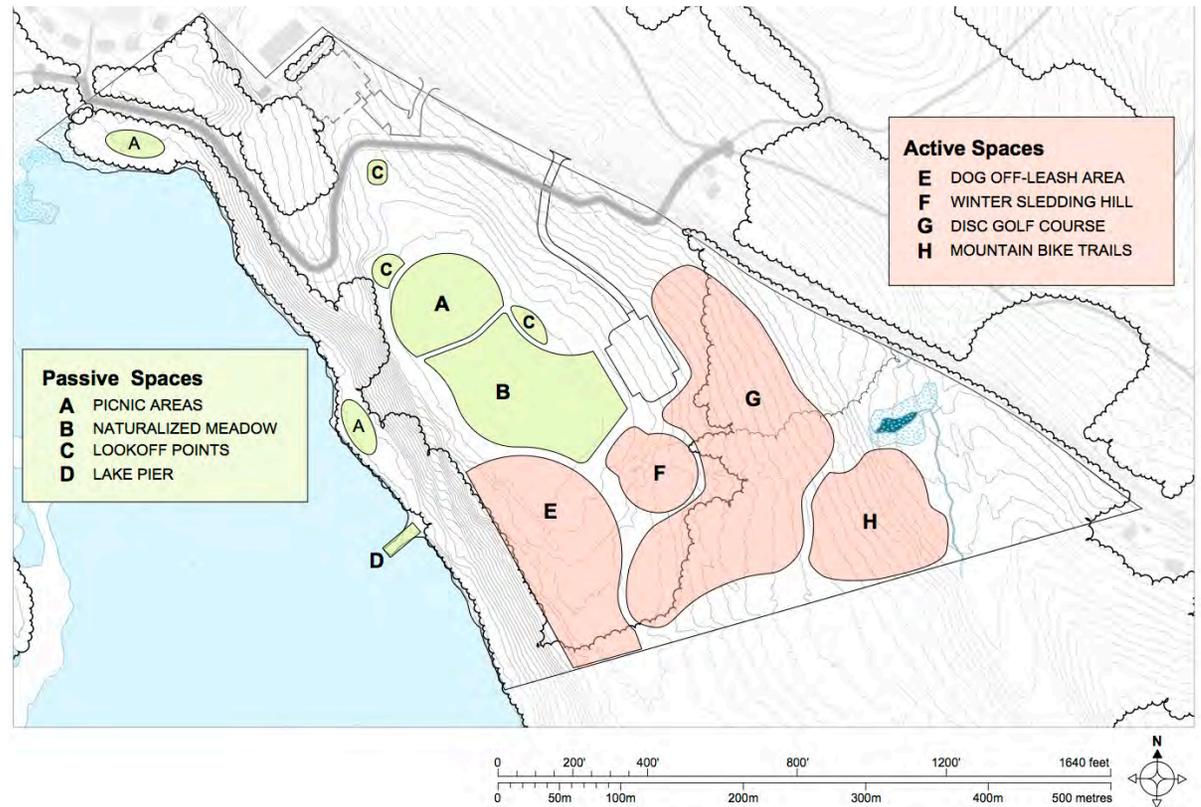
## 5.4 FUNCTIONAL DIAGRAMS

### PARK ACTIVITY ZONES

Careful consideration of zoning the park for different activities will enable differing recreation experiences to co-exist. Passive spaces for the park are grouped on the hilltop and lakeshore. Active spaces for the park are located in the southern portion of the site. (Map 4)

**Passive Spaces** - Most of the site is to be left natural, particularly the steep slopes and riparian buffer along the lakeshore. Passive and unstructured recreation areas are located on the flat, hilltop with the development of picnic areas (A) and naturalized wildflower meadows (B). There are several vantage points on the site that present scenic viewing for developing lookoff points (C). There are two more picnic areas along the lakeshore and a pier that reaches out into the lake (D).

**Active Spaces** - The site program also includes active recreation facilities that are compatible with the natural character of the site. A dedicated off-leash dog area (E); winter sledding hill (F); disc golf course (G) and mountain bike trails (H).



MAP 7: PARK ZONING PLAN

## ACCESS & PARKING

Local residents often walk or cycle to the park by way of the Bissett Active Transportation Trail. It is proposed that the park trails system will connect to the AT trail with pedestrian scale park entrances oriented off this trail.

The park is to have vehicular entrances off Bissett Road for people arriving by car. The existing driveway of the former institution is to be the main vehicular entrance for the park. The secondary driveway access to the former superintendent's residence is an alternate access point.

The park will require its own parking lot to accommodate park visitors. It is anticipated that the dog off-leash activities will attract the most frequent use of the park with people using the facility year-round with several visits a week. A main parking lot with 60 stalls is proposed for the initial phase of the park development. This is comparable in size to the parking lot at the Mainland Common dedicated dog off-leash area.

## PARKING LOT LOCATION OPTIONS

There are two locations identified for parking lots. The first location is to site the parking lot off the former driveway and build it into the hill. It is proposed to set the parking lot at a lower elevation to 'hide' it from view from the lookoff plaza. The lot would be tiered to better fit with the existing topography. This option is centrally located within the park and close to the off-leash dog area, disc golf and hilltop picnic areas.

The second location is to build a parking lot on the north side of the Bissett Trail off the

driveway access of the former superintendent's house. A smaller parking lot of about 26 stalls could be initially constructed with the potential to expand with an additional 60 stalls into the area currently being used by Halifax Water. This option is within the sewer and water services area and near the preferred siting for any permanent washroom building. A trailhead and rest stop could be developed alongside the parking lot to serve users of both the Trans Canada Trail and the park. This location is further away from the off-leash dog area.

Further geotechnical and costing investigations are recommended to assess the feasibility of both sites. Construction of the first option will need to address grade changes and water seepage from the hillside. An alternative would be to build the parking lot on the upper, flatter part of the hill but this would impact on use of this space for other potential park uses that require large, level areas of land.

The full build out of the second option is dependent on Halifax Water's relocation of their temporary works yard which may occur by 2025. The smaller parking lot could proceed sooner.

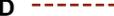
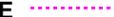
## TRAIL DEVELOPMENT & PARK CIRCULATION

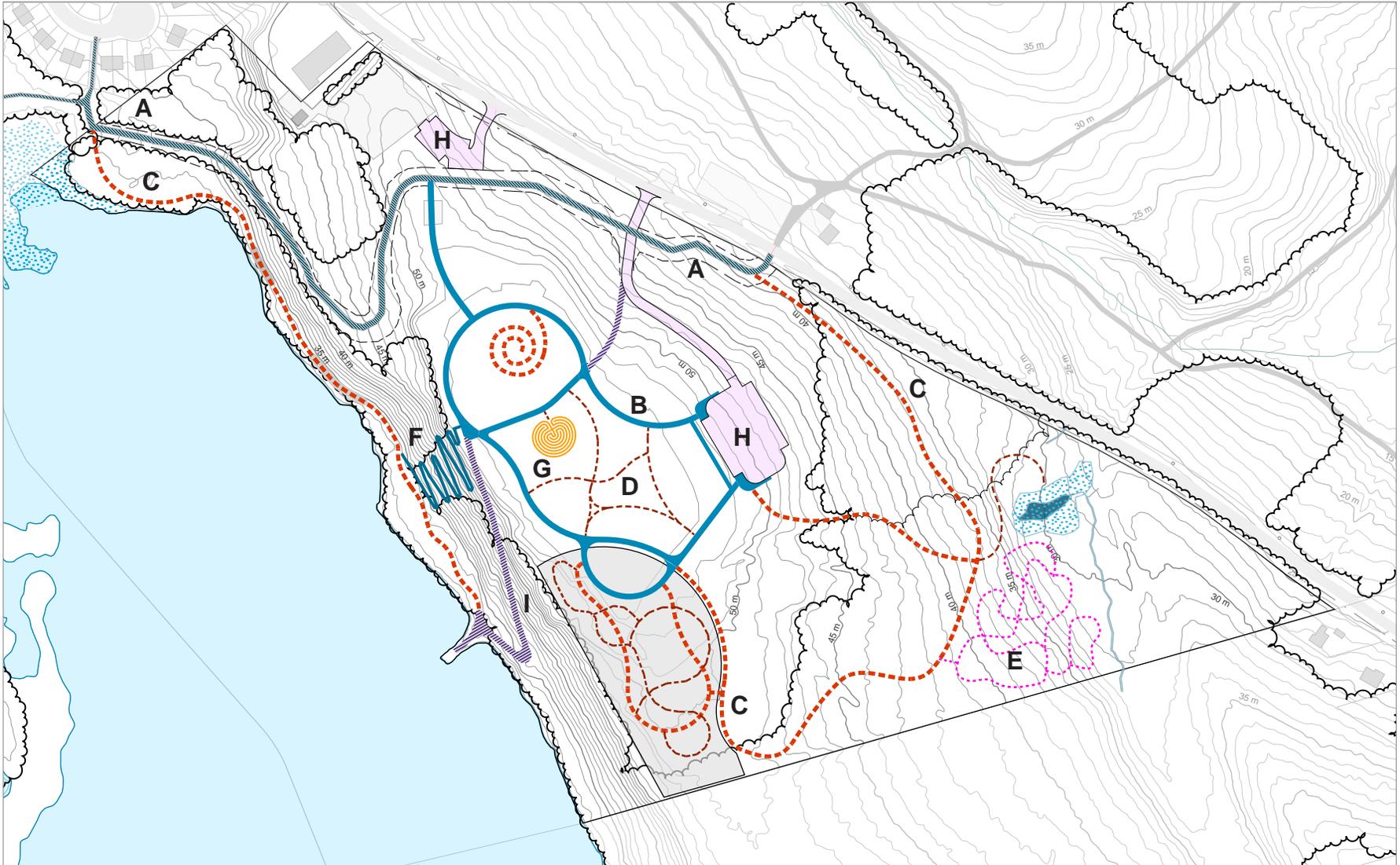
The circulation network for the park is organized around a series of trail loops designed for a range of abilities and activities. A hierarchy of trail types is proposed that ranges from paved multi-use trails to meandering footpaths. The main trails are to be constructed for universal accessibility. Where the topography is challenging, full accessibility may not be feasible without a large-scale intervention and alteration of the natural site. The aim is to provide the best reasonable access at these locations and provide alternate routes or similar experiences elsewhere where site conditions are more favourable.

The trail network is an extensive part of the park development with a potential of 4.4 km of new trails proposed. (Map 5)

**A. Existing Active Transportation Trail** (Bissett Trail) - the multi-use trail was completed in 2019 and provides a route for walking and cycling through the park connecting Bissett Lake Park and the Coastal Heritage Park. It is a 4.0m wide paved path and designed for accessibility with grades not exceeding 5% incline. This trail segment is part of the Trans Canada Trail network.

**B. Paved Multi-Use Trails** - The topography on the upper part of the hill is generally flat and suitable for the development of accessible paths. A paved multi-use trail is proposed to loop around the hilltop connecting to the parking lot, off-leash dog area, and the Bissett Trail. A paved trail also loops through the upper area of the off-leash dog area. These trails should be built to standards for winter maintenance to allow for year-round use and access to the off-leash dog area.

- A**  BISSETT ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION TRAIL - EXISTING
- B**  MULTI-USE TRAILS - PAVED
- C**  MULTI-USE TRAILS - GRAVEL
- D**  WALKING TRAILS
- E**  MOUNTAIN BIKING TRAILS
- F**  SWITCHBACK RAMP
- G**  LABYRINTH PATH
- H**  VEHICULAR DRIVEWAYS AND PARKING
- I**  SERVICE VEHICLE DRIVEWAY



MAP 8: CIRCULATION PLAN

**C. Gravel Recreational Trails** - A network of recreational trails is proposed for the wooded area and along the lakeshore. These trails would be 1.5 to 2.0m wide and surfaced with crushed aggregate screenings (crusher dust). Incline grades should be kept under 5% (1:20). Winter maintenance is not proposed for gravel trails.

- The wooded trail connects to the Bissett Trail near the entrance off Bissett Road and goes through the treed area along the eastern side of the ridge. The trail then connects to the upper multi-use paths. There is a spur that connects to the parking lot, and a loop that travels through the off-leash dog area. These trails can be considered for off-leash designation if required.
- The shoreline trail connects to the Bissett Trail at the northwest entrance and follows the shoreline to the proposed pier and former service driveway. The trail will be within the riparian buffer zone and it is recommended that further investigations into the appropriate trail construction be done. Some of the trail segments along the shoreline may need to be built with decking or low retaining walls depending on site conditions and topography. It is proposed to eventually connect the shoreline trail to the Shearwater Flyer Trail.
- The Spiral Ramp - a gravel path follows a spiral up to the top of a constructed mound. The path is 2.0m wide with an incline of 2% (1:50). There is a flat area at the top for seating and viewing.

**D. Walking Trails** - Narrower walking trails are proposed for the naturalized meadows and dog off-leash area. These can take shape as natural footpaths or surfaced with wood chips or crusher dust.

**E. Mountain Biking Trails** - Single-track trails designed for mountain biking are proposed in addition to the multi-use trails used for both walking and cycling.

**F. Switchback Ramps** - these ramps are to be built with handrails and landings.

**G. Labyrinth Path** - There are a number of examples of labyrinth paths which can be constructed with inlaid stepping stones or defined simply with a mowed pattern in the grass. Another option can be crusher dust path with a stone boulder edging. The path construction should consider maintenance and universal accessibility.

**H. Vehicular Driveways and Parking Lots** - the parking lots can initially be gravel surfacing with the option to upgrade to asphalt pavement depending on level of use and maintenance.

**I. Service Vehicle Driveways** - The upper part of the main entrance driveway is to be retained for service vehicles to access the upper pathways. It is proposed to reinstate the service road down to the lake.

## ACCESS TO SHORELINE

The lake is one of the greatest assets of the park but developing an accessible route down to the shoreline is challenging with the large elevation change and steep bank slopes. Several access routes to the lakeshore are proposed:

- Former Service Driveway - The original bank grading for the former service driveway is still intact but grown in with vegetation. The service driveway is to be reinstated to provide access for park vehicles to service the picnic areas and pier. Although, the grades are 10-12% and not within accessibility standards, it can be navigated by more able-bodied people.
- North Entrance - Efforts to provide an accessible route to the lake should focus on the north end of the lakeshore where the topography is less steep and a shorter distance from the Bissett Trail. Accessible trails with incline grades of less than 5% are achievable and would provide more people the opportunity to access the shoreline area.
- The “Colossal Climber” is a series of switchback ramps and staircases. It is envisioned as a feature in the park that offers a physical workout and a place to sit with benches at landings that face towards the lake. The climb up the steep bank has an elevation change of approximately 18m with a ramp run of approximately 350m with inclines and landing rests that can be navigated in a wheelchair or with a stroller. It is a more physically challenging option that may not be accessible to some. A ramp system with staircase would provide

more choice of access options to people of differing abilities, where taking stairs may be preferred over a longer inclined route. Of the three routes down to the lake, this is the most direct option from the central area of the park. By building in the existing clearing along the bank, views of the lake from the hilltop lookoffs will remain clear of new tree growth.

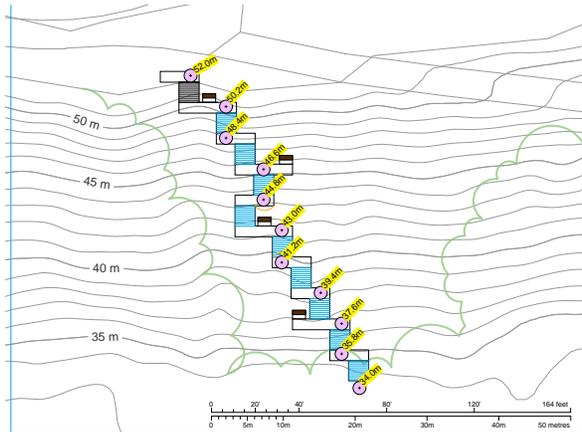
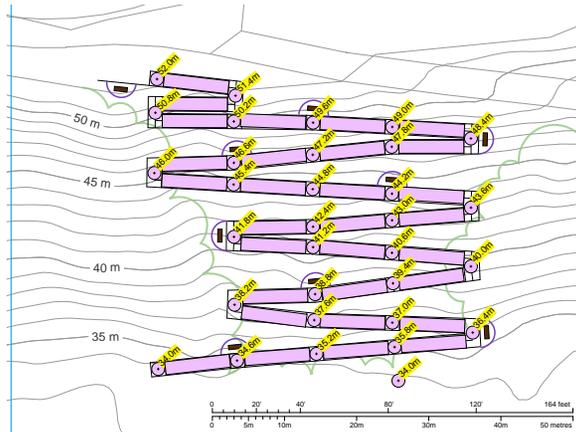
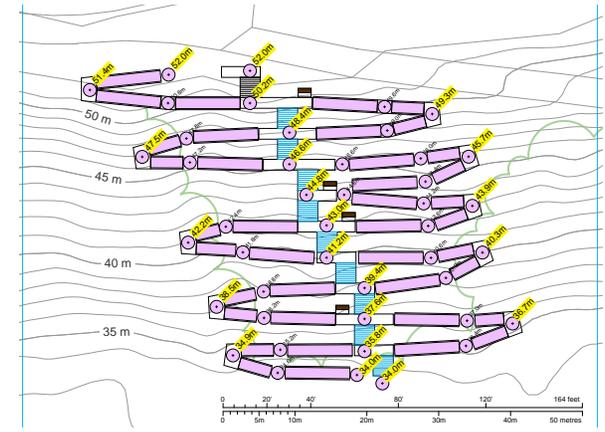


FIGURE 16: SCHEMATICS FOR STAIRS/ RAMP SYSTEM

**Schematic 1** shows a staircase built as a series of stairs and landings that jog diagonally up the hill. There are ten flights of stairs with landings between each set. Benches are located on every second or third landing. Each flight of stairs has 10 risers with an elevation change of 1.8m. This option has smaller infrastructure footprint at the outset than the ramp options, but with stairs there are more maintenance considerations, and depending on materials used, a shorter life cycle replacement. This option would not accommodate wheelchairs or people pushing a bike or stroller.



**Schematic 2** shows a ramp system made of 30 ramp segments with landings, each ramp section is 9m run x 0.6m rise and has handrails. There are 8 rest stops with benches along the route spaced out on every third to fifth landing (approx. 30 to 50m). The intent would be to build the ramp system into the hill matching closely with existing grades.



**Schematic 3** shows the incorporation of staircases with the ramps. There is a rest stop with a bench on every second or third landing. The benches provide places to sit with scenic views out to the lake. While this option has the most infrastructure, it provides the best option for accessibility providing both ramps and stairs.

[Note: schematic design was done as a proof of concept and was developed using GIS topographic information. Final design may vary from schematics and should be developed with more detailed topographic survey information.]

## 5.5 MANAGEMENT & SITE SERVICING

### VEGETATION MANAGEMENT

Vegetation management should vary across the site according to the park functions. The intent is to retain most of the wooded areas allowing some select clearing for trails and other low impact facilities. The open areas and previously developed remediated areas can be naturalized and reforested creating a mix of open meadows and tree stands. Leaving the areas along the Bissett Road as open fields retains the past agricultural character of the area. Grass lawns are proposed for the hilltop picnic area and the lawn in the off-leash dog area. Retaining the natural vegetation on steep banks and along the shoreline will be important to prevent erosion.

The Plan proposes the following Vegetation management Areas (Map 6):

- A. Existing Wooded Areas: Retain existing tree canopy. Selectively clear for trail development. Thin understory and prune low branches for disc golf courses, picnic, and seating areas.
- B. Viewshed: Where scenic lookoff points have been identified, retain the views by keeping the vegetation low and clear of tall trees within the viewshed areas.
- C. Reforestation: Plant a mix of tree species native to the area. Consider migration planting with the introduction of tree species from warmer climate zones.
- D. Naturalized meadows: Allow the area to naturalize over time with native grasses and meadow vegetation. Consider the addition of

pollinator plant species. Monitor and remove invasive species.

E. Lawn Areas: Maintain mowed grass areas for the hilltop picnic area, off-leash dog lawn, and sledding area.

F. Remediated Area: Maintain the clay cap clear of trees by removing saplings periodically.

### WASHROOMS AND SITE SERVICING

Access to basic amenities, particularly public washrooms and drinking water, enhance the park visitor experience and enable people to stay for longer periods of time. Having access to a washroom was the topmost park amenity requested during the public engagement. A washroom building is a significant investment and would be considered through the implementation of projects pursuant to the Washroom and Drinking Fountain Strategy.

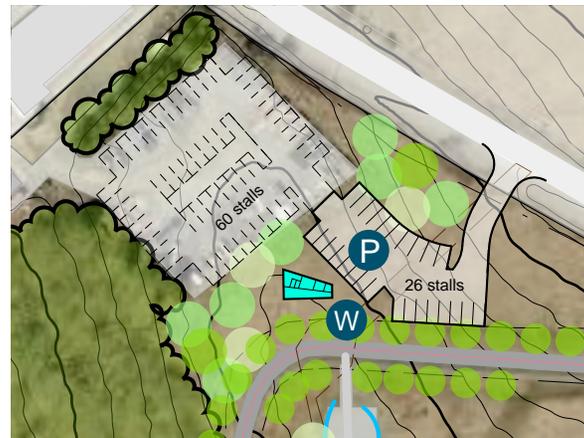


FIGURE 17: WASHROOM LOCATION & SECOND PARKING LOT OPTION

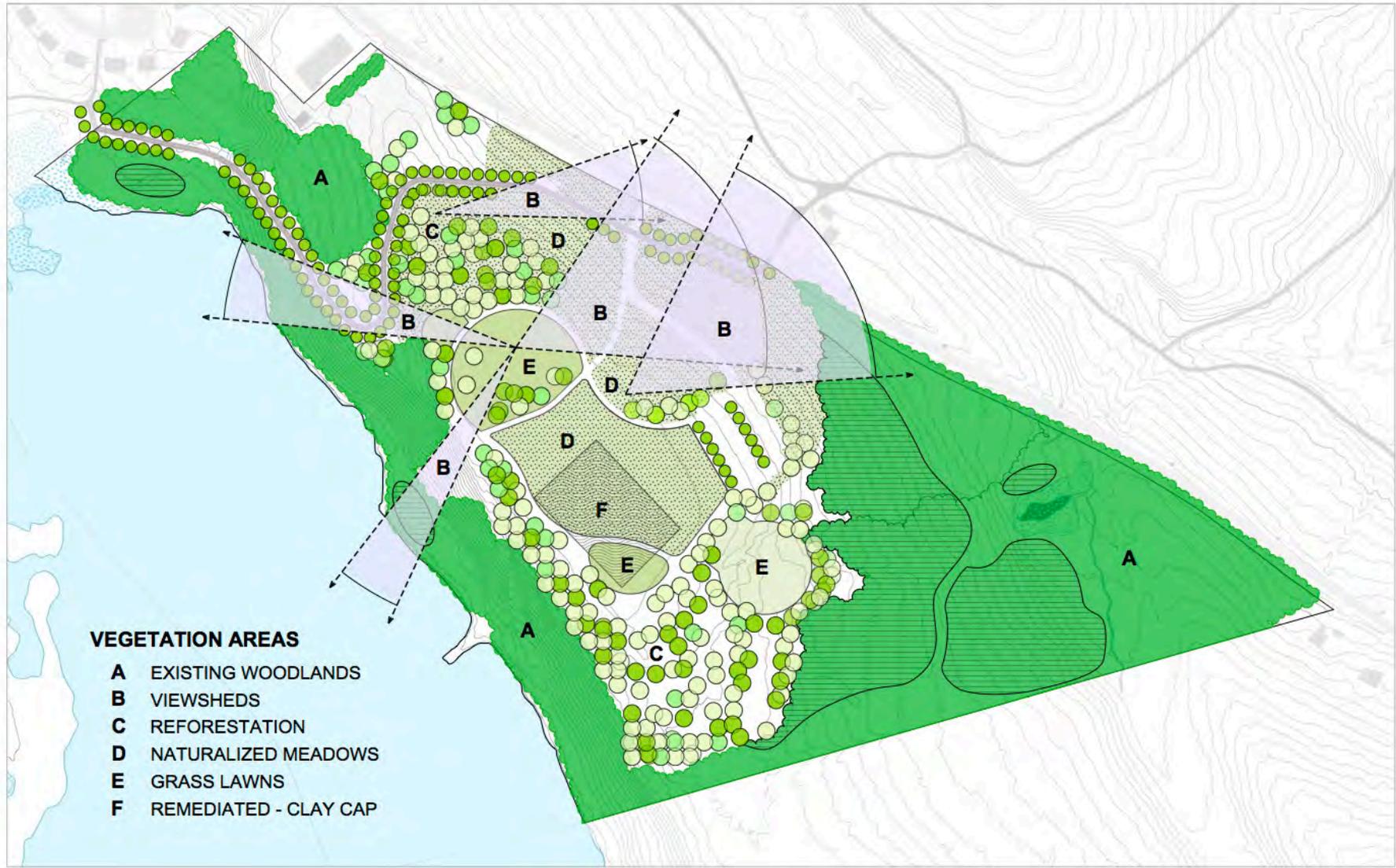
The most feasible location for a permanent washroom building with water and sewer hook-up is the north end of the property within the Municipal Service Boundary. For other locations in the park, washroom facilities that do not need municipal sewer service, such as pit toilets or septic disposal fields, could also be considered. There is a pit toilet within the Coastal Heritage Park, directly across the road from the Rehab Lands. Partnering with the Provincial Park for a shared washroom facility may be another option.

The decision for a washroom should consider the number of people who are staying in the park for longer visits, and the popularity of activities such as picnicking which necessitate washrooms. To anticipate washroom use for the park, portable toilets could be installed to test demand.

A washroom located off the Bissett Trail could also serve as a rest stop with a drinking water fountain/ bottle-filling station and bicycle repair kiosk for Trans Canada Trail users. The water lateral which served the former institution could potentially be reinstated to bring drinking water to the upper area of the park.

Other park amenity enhancements to consider:

- Lighting the parking lot and main pathways.
- Electrical service for the hilltop picnic area.
- Separate waste receptacles for dog waste.



- VEGETATION AREAS**
- A** EXISTING WOODLANDS
  - B** VIEWSHEDS
  - C** REFORESTATION
  - D** NATURALIZED MEADOWS
  - E** GRASS LAWNS
  - F** REMEDIATED - CLAY CAP

MAP 9: VEGETATION MANAGEMENT PLAN

# 6 IMPLEMENTATION

## 6.1 TIMELINE

Major project milestones are highlighted in the anticipated project schedule (Table 6). Without confirmed project capital, detailed design development and implementation timelines are only estimates.

Milestone	Date
Bissett Trail Official Opening and Information gathering	Fall 2019
Site Inventory and Assessment	Summer 2020
Park User Survey and Ideas Gathering (online engagement)	Winter 2020/21
Conceptual Design Refinement	Summer 2021
Presentation of Concept Options (online engagement)	Fall 2021
Preferred Concept Plan Refinement, Report Development	Winter 2022
Presentation to Regional Council	Spring 2023
Detailed Design Development	2024 and beyond
Implementation	2024 and beyond

## 6.2 PROJECT PHASING

Project phasing (Map 10) will depend on the capital available for park construction. Phasing would allow for the development of the park in stages. Three phases are described but can be reevaluated if an opportunity for park enhancement presents itself (e.g. external funding, community-led projects). The proposed phasing follows a logical construction sequence that starts with building the foundational elements for the park, filling in with the various recreation facilities, and finally adding enhancements or expanding facilities.

**PHASE 1:** The first phase will focus on the major earthworks and constructing the primary circulation routes through the site. The reforestation and naturalization projects should be started allowing time for the planting areas to establish.

**Major Earthworks:**

- Central parking lot & entrance driveway
- Sledding hill
- Spiral lookoff mound

**Primary Circulation/ Trail Development:**

- Upper pathways - gravel surfacing
- Trails through wooded area
- Trail along shoreline
- Service driveway reinstatement

**Reforestation/ Naturalization projects:**

- Tree planting
- Pollinator meadows

**PHASE 2:** Once the overall structure for the park is set, the second phase will focus on adding the various recreation facilities, upgrading the level of finish for some of the pathways, and adding the secondary circulation and trail development.

**Recreation Facilities & Amenities:**

- Fenced dog off-leash area
- Picnic areas and lookoff structures
- Lake pier
- Disc golf course
- Mountain biking area
- Meditation labyrinth
- Quiet seating areas

**Secondary Circulation/ Trail Development:**

- Upper pathways - asphalt surfacing
- Spiral ramp surfacing
- Staircase & ramp to lake
- Footpaths

**PHASE 3:** Once the park is established, the third phase will focus on enriching the park experience with interpretation and educational programming, adding park infrastructure and servicing, and expanding parking to support increased use.

**Interpretation & Education:**

- Material and signage for local history and cultural interest
- Material and signage for nature education

# 6.3 PHASING DIAGRAM



MAP 10: PARK DEVELOPMENT PHASING DIAGRAM

## 6.4 CAPITAL BUDGET PLANNING

### PHASE 3 (Continued):

#### Park Infrastructure Amenities:

- Washroom building and drinking water
- Trailhead parking lot/ rest stop
- Pathway lighting & electrical servicing

#### Program Expansion:

- Outdoor cooking facilities
- Disc golf course expansion

### SURPLUS LANDS CONSIDERATIONS

The lands identified at the south end of the Rehab Lands Property can be considered for disposal at any time. It is recommended that the lands at the north end of the property be retained until the park is established and park usage and parking needs can be determined.

The Park Plan proposes a small parking lot to be built alongside the trail rest stop and potential washroom building. Should the demand warrant, this parking lot could be larger and built on the site of the current storage yard, thus eliminating the need to expand into natural areas or park activity zones for additional parking.

There are no immediate financial implications to the recommendations in this report. Future capital expenditures would be considered in subsequent capital years during the business planning process.

The implementation of the park plan could be funded together as new park development or individual components of the plan could alternatively be funded through accounts set up for specific programs such as off-leash dog parks, recreation trails, or water access.

There is also the opportunity for the community to be involved with fundraising for the coordination of park enhancements. Having an adopted park plan in place will allow the Municipality and community groups to apply for external park funding programs as they arise.



FIGURE 18: VIEW OF BISSETT LAKE FROM THE REHAB LANDS

# What We Heard Report #1

Park User Survey for the Rehab Lands Planning



May 2021

**HALIFAX**

# What We Heard

## Overview of the Park User Survey for the Rehab Lands Park Planning

An online survey was conducted to better understand the community’s recreational needs and values for purposes of planning a new park on the lands of the former Halifax County Rehabilitation Centre on Bissett Road in Cole Harbour. The online survey ran from December 3, 2020 to January 18, 2021 and received 775 submissions. The survey was organized into four parts with questions on demographics, current use of parks, future recreation uses for the new park, and dog off-leash considerations.

### Who Participated

Over half the respondents (58%) are from the immediate local area of Cole Harbour with an additional 12% from nearby neighbourhoods of Cow Bay, Eastern Passage and Lawrencetown. People from Dartmouth and Halifax neighbourhoods make up 20% of respondents, and the remainder are from other parts of the municipality and province. (Figure 1)

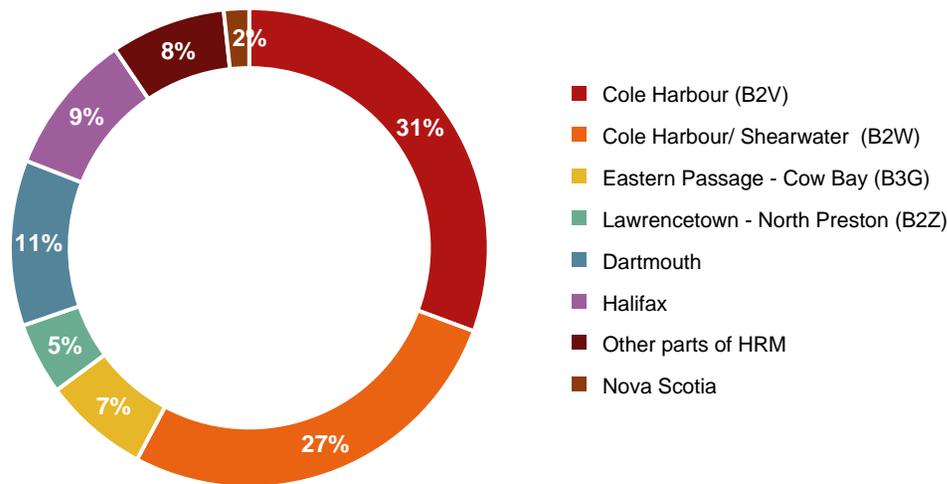


Figure 1: Participants' Home Neighbourhoods

### Household Makeup:

- The largest number of respondents are from 2-person households (43%). Single person households make up 10% with the remainder from larger households of three, four or five persons.
- About two-thirds of the participants are from households that do not have children age 18 or younger.

### Age & Gender:

- The largest age group are between the ages of 35-49 years (39%) followed by those between the ages of 50 to 64 years (30%); Seniors, 65 years and older, make up 11%, young adults make up 19% of respondents and 2 individuals are under the age of 18.
- The majority of survey respondents identify as female (59%) and 39% identify as male; 2 respondents identify as non-binary. (Figure 2)

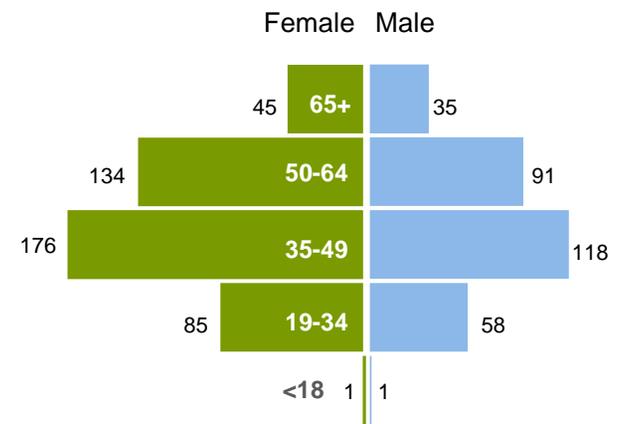


Figure 2: Demographics Chart for Age and Gender Identification

## Section 1: Current Use of Parks in the Area

This section of the survey asked questions that address current use of parks, trails and recreation open spaces in the area. Participants were directed to consider a typical year before the COVID-19 pandemic.

- The majority of respondents describe themselves as active park users who visit a park or trail a few times per week and spend 1 hour (46%) to 1-3 hours (48%) per visit.
- 67% of respondents usually visit a park with 1 or 2 others and 24% usually visit alone. Only 8% indicated that they usually visit a park in a group.
- Only 36% of respondents visit parks with children whereas 56% visit parks with a pet. This corresponds to the responses that most do not have children living in their household.
- During the summer, 64% visit a park a few times per week. In the winter this figure drops down to 32%. In the spring and fall, slightly more than half the respondents frequently visit a park. (Figure 3)

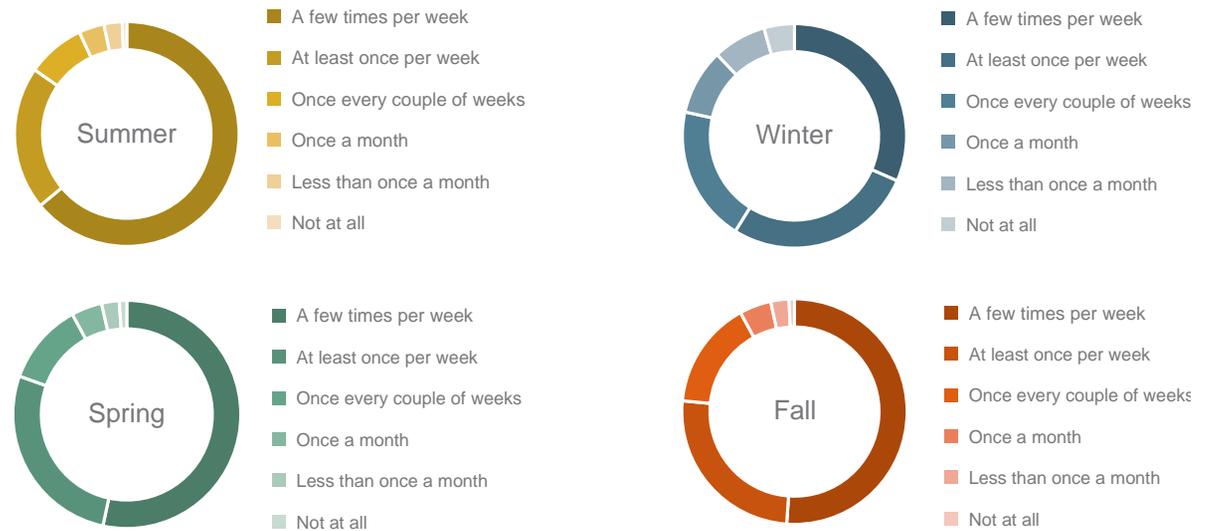


Figure 3: Seasonal Use of Parks

### Use of other Parks

Respondents were asked how frequently they visit other major parks in the area.

- Shearwater Flyer and Salt Marsh Trails are visited the most, at least once a week, followed by the Cole Harbour Heritage Park, which is across the road from the site, and Bissett Lake District Park which is connected to the site via the Bissett active transportation trail.
- Rainbow Haven beach has the highest occasional visits (44% visit a few times per year)
- Cole Harbour Common has the least number of visits with 42% indicating they do not visit the park at all. (Figure 4)

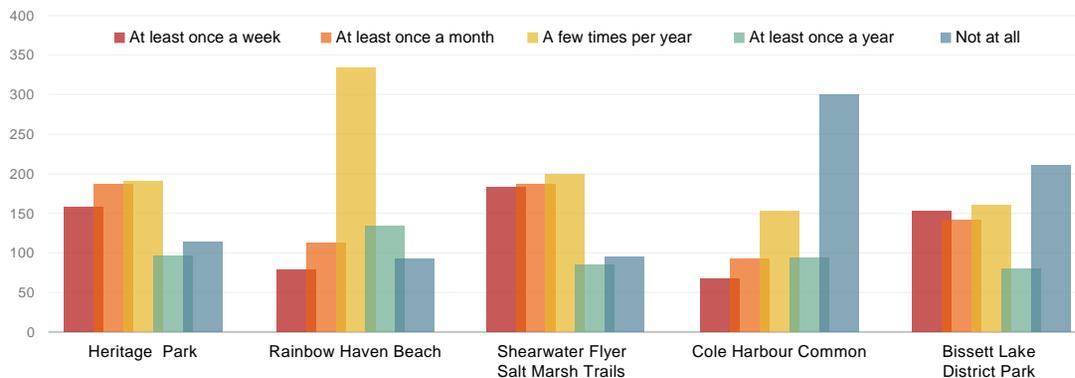


Figure 4: Visitation of Nearby Major Parks

## Section 2: Future Use of the New Park

This section of the survey asked questions about recreational interests and potential park infrastructure for a new park on the Rehab Lands site. Participants were asked to consider their future use of the site as a park.

### Travel and Visitation

- Nearly half of respondents currently visit the Rehab Lands property (46%).
- The majority indicated that they would drive to the site (79%), but there was a high number who would cycle (36%) or walk (32%).
- 40% chose multiple modes for traveling to the site but 49% answered they would drive as their only mode of travel.
- 24 respondents indicated that they would take public transit for part of their trip. Arriving by kayak was also noted as another mode of transportation.
- The most popular areas now being visited are the paved trail (40%) and the top of the hill (28%). The water's edge on Bissett Lake is visited by 26% of respondents.
- Only 25% felt comfortable allowing children to visit the new park on their own, 29% would not feel comfortable, and many admitted they don't know or are not sure (46%). Reasons noted for not feeling comfortable were that children need supervision or are too young. The unsafe conditions of the site such as the shoreline, steep slopes, and remoteness of the area were also noted concerns.

### Park Development

Participants were asked to choose what they thought was a reasonable level of development for this site from a series of choices that ranged from highly developed - with park infrastructure and facilities for active recreation - to leaving the site mostly natural. More people felt that the site should be left mostly natural (21%) than highly developed (11%). Most indicated that some level of development was appropriate, more for low impact passive recreation use (38%) than for active recreation use (28%). (Figure 5)

### Recreation Interests

Participants were asked about their level of interest or participation in 12 different outdoor park activities. (Figure 6)

- Physical activity, such as walking, jogging, cycling or exercising, is the most popular activity people are already doing (37%) or are very interested in doing (46%).
- Nature based activities is the next popular activity people are already doing and it ranked fourth in activities people are 'very interested' in doing.

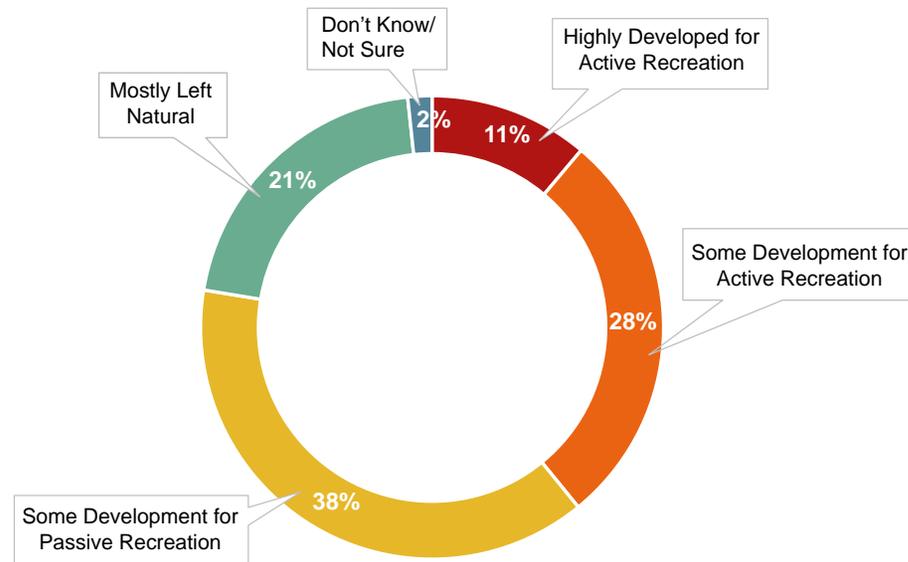


Figure 5: Level of Park Development

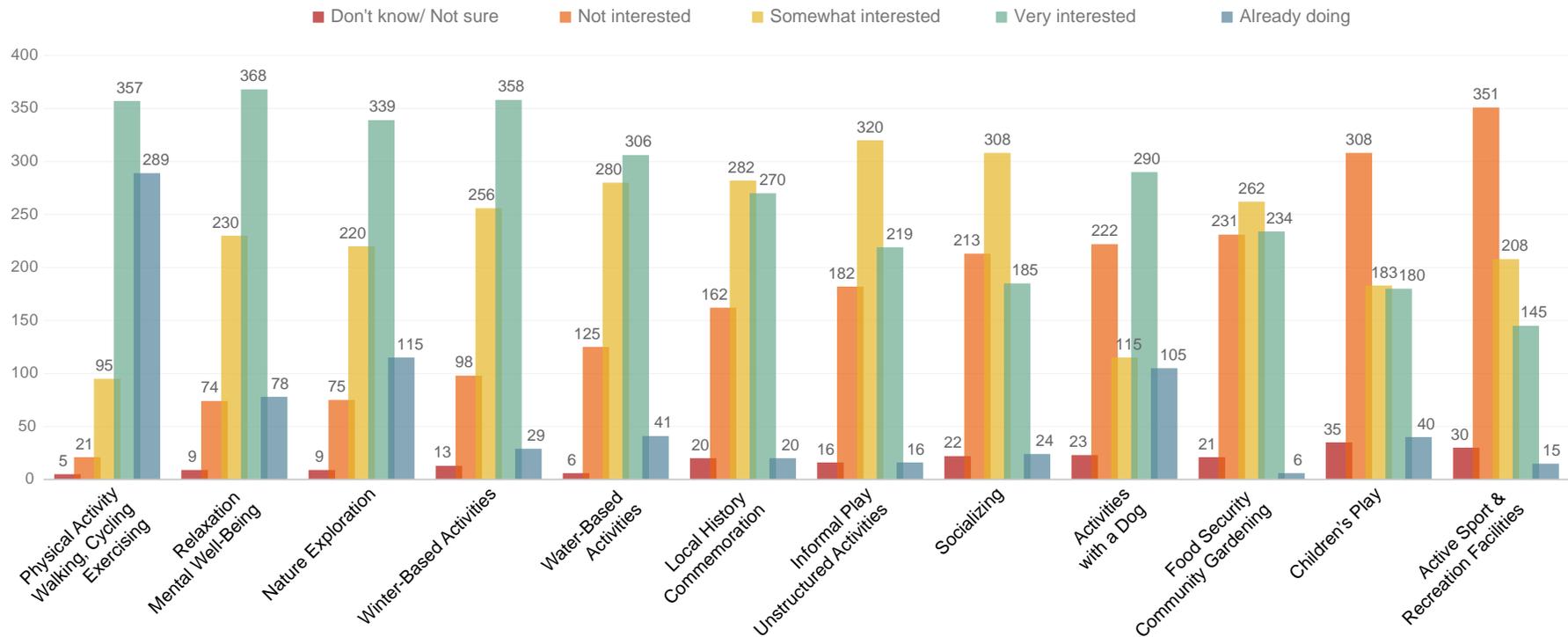


Figure 6: Recreation Interests for New Park

### Top Activities 'Already Doing':

1. Physical activity, such as walking, jogging, cycling or exercising (289 responses, 37%)
2. Nature exploration and appreciation (115 responses, 15%)
3. Playing with or exercising a dog (105 responses, 14%)

### Top Activities 'Very Interested':

1. Relaxation and activities for mental well-being (368 responses, 47%)
2. Winter-based activities, such as snow shoeing or skating (358 responses, 46%)
3. Physical activity (357 responses, 46%)
4. Nature exploration and appreciation (339 responses, 44%)
5. Water-based activities, such as fishing, kayaking, or swimming (306 responses, 39%)

### Top Activities 'Not Interested':

1. Active recreation sports or facilities (351 responses, 45%)
2. Children's play (308 responses, 40%)
3. Community gardening, food security (231 responses, 30%)
4. Playing with or exercising a dog (222 responses, 29%)
5. Meeting and socializing (213 responses, 27%)

*“Naturalization! I like visiting natural areas with native species and wildlife.”*

*“I was hoping a disc golf course could be included in this park. It brings a whole host of people there and is not intrusive.”*

*“I would love to have a bike park in my neighborhood.”*

- Relaxation and activities for mental well-being was the top activity type people are the most interested in doing. Winter-based activities and water-based activities both ranked in the top five ‘most interested’.
- Traditional park development for active recreation sports or children’s play received the least interest among survey respondents.
- Activities that have a narrow margin between ‘very interested’ and ‘not interested’ include community gardening (234 to 231 respondents); socializing (185 to 213) and informal play (219 to 182). Recreation activities with dogs was also divided with a close margin (290 to 231).

#### Other Recreation Interests

In addition to the listed activities, survey participants were also asked if there are other outdoor activities they are interested in for the new park. This question received 345 comments, or 45% of participants.

The most frequent comments included:

- **Dog off-leash area:** 25% of the comments were for a dog off-leash area or a dog park.
- **Disc golf** had a large showing with 15% of commenters advocating for a disc golf course for the new park.
- **Bike parks and mountain bike trails** were also popular suggestions with 14% of commenters suggesting bike infrastructure including pump tracks, bike skills park, or single-track mountain bike trails.
- **Recreation facilities:** 14% of commenters are interested in built facilities such as a splash pad, playground, fitness equipment, hockey rink, skatepark or pickleball courts.

Other comments can be organized around the following themes:

- **Trail development:** from rustic wilderness trails to flat, paved trails for roller blading and electric scooters;
- **Nature:** bird watching, wildlife, preserving natural areas, pollinator and native plantings;
- **Park programming:** nature education, local history interpretation, outdoor exercise classes, outdoor performances, night sky astronomy, and geocaching;
- **Park amenities:** hilltop viewing area, meditation and quiet seating areas, picnic area, and gardens;
- **Lake access:** pier with docks for kayaks, canoes and paddle boards, boat rentals, swimming, and fishing;
- **Winter activities:** skating, snow shoe rentals, cross country skiing, winter biking, skijoring and sledding;
- **Food and social gathering:** picnics and cookouts; fire pit, campfire singing; community oven, barbecues and grilling;
- **Commemoration and history:** memorials to individuals, local history of the area and past uses of the site, natural history, and Mi’kmaw culture.

### Section 3: Dog Off-Leash Area Considerations

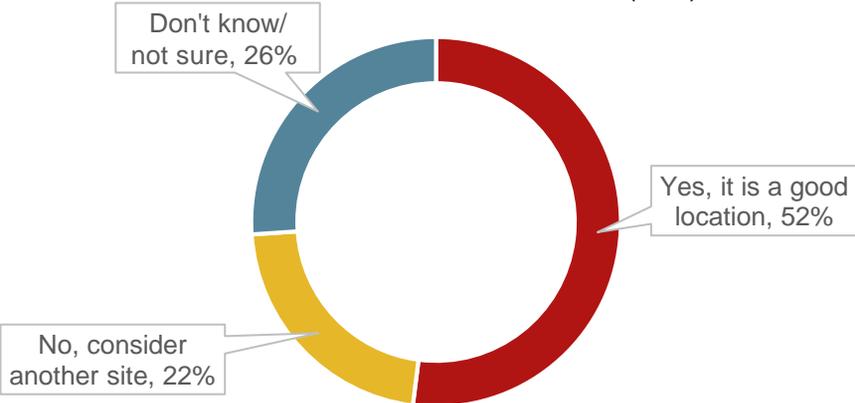
This section of the survey asked questions about the need and location of a dog off-leash area for the community of Cole Harbour, and questions about the Rehab lands property as a potential site for this activity.

Having dogs off-leash in parks can be a polarizing topic among park users. When combining the number of respondents who are already recreating with a dog with the number who are very interested, this activity ranked fourth in popularity for the question about recreational interests. Yet, recreating with a dog also ranked fourth in activities respondents were not interested in doing at the new park.

When asked if a designated dog off-leash area should be considered for the new park, only a slight majority feel it is a good location and many did not know or were not sure. (Figure 7)

- Just over half of the respondents indicated that they usually visit parks with a pet with 56% indicating yes versus 44% indicating no.
- Although 60% of respondents feel there is a need for a dog off-leash area in Cole Harbour, only 52% felt that the Rehab lands property is a good location. The Cole Harbour Basin Coastal Heritage Park across the street was mentioned most as an alternative site for off-leash, followed by the Cole Harbour Common and Bissett Park.
- 46% of respondents would use a dog off-leash area if it was included in the new park. Of the 355 respondents who would use a dog off-leash area, walking trails ranked highest in interest (81%) followed by open lawn areas (63%) and a fenced area (54%).

*“Halifax is one of the best cities I have lived in for active lifestyle but it needs more off-leash parks like Point Pleasant where it is active and allows people the benefit of moving with their dogs - not just standing around.”*



Q. Do you feel the Rehab lands is a good location for a dog off-leash area?

Figure 7: Support for Dog Off-leash Area in New Park

***“Fenced area with room to play fetch! I can take my dog for walks on trails on a leash, what I need is a safe place to let my dog run, socialize and play without fear he’ll run away.”***

***“I tend to avoid parks with prominent off-leash areas as they become overrun with dogs.”***

***“I would hate to see the land on top of the hill used for a dog park.”***

Survey participants were asked if they had any other comments about a dog off-leash area for the new park. There were 312 participants who provided additional comments.

### **Concerns**

The most frequent concerns raised were about potential conflicts between off-leash dogs and other park users or other dogs on-leash. Cycling trails, children’s play areas and disc golf courses were noted conflicts with off-leash dog activity. There were also concerns about the negative impacts to the area’s wildlife and lake water quality. A number admitted to a fear of dogs and felt that having dogs off-leash on the main paved trail would be a barrier for them and they would not use the park. Some noted previous altercations with dogs that have left them leery.

Some respondents raised concerns that the park could become overcrowded like Shubie Park with potential increases in road traffic and parking demand. Some gave the opinion that parks with off-leash areas become overrun by dogs as the dominant activity that pushes other users away and ruins the park experience for others. A number felt that the best areas of the site should not be used for the off-leash area but be for the enjoyment of all park visitors.

Other general concerns raised were about inattentive dog owners, untrained dogs, dog waste that is not picked up, and lack of bylaw enforcement and monitoring.

### **Considerations**

Many respondents affirmed the need for a dog off-leash area for Cole Harbour and that having another location would relieve some of the crowding and overuse of Shubie Park. Having a site closer to home was also seen as a positive to reduce travel time. Park designs that encourage owners to exercise with their dogs was noted as a benefit for mental and physical well-being.

Fencing the off-leash area was a frequently raised consideration both for keeping dogs safe and for containing dogs to reduce conflicts in other areas of the park. Many suggested fencing or barriers to separate the off-leash area from the main trail and other park zones. Using natural fencing could tie into the existing rural character of the surrounding area. Some asked that a separate area for small dog breeds also be considered.

Off-leash trails and open lawns are both popular considerations. Many like the looped, wooded trails of Shubie Park or Point Pleasant Park, but some would like to see longer distance trails. Some feel that trails are better because they encourage people to walk, whereas with fields dog owners tend to stand around more. Yet, others like having an open area to play fetch with their dog.

Many brought up the need for signage for clearly marking boundaries and informing about rules, bylaws and responsible dog ownership. Reminders to pick up after your dog or keep dogs on-leash outside the designated off-leash area were noted for consideration.

Other amenities mentioned include having drinking water and shelter for dogs and their owners, adequate number of garbage cans, and dog waste bags.



# What We Heard Report #2

## Public Engagement Round Two Rehab Lands Park Planning

November 2021

Policy & Planning | Parks & Recreation

**HALIFAX**

# What We Heard

## Overview of the Park Concepts Survey

The intent for Round Two of the public engagement for the Rehab Lands park planning was to share three concept scenarios for public feedback. The scenarios were developed around popular themes and ideas that emerged during Round One of the engagement. Public input from Round Two will help inform the development of a final concept plan for the park.

In October 2021, an online survey questionnaire was posted to the Shape Your City website. Participation in the survey did not require registration with Shape Your City and there was no intent to obtain a statistically representative sample. The responses were received from September 29, 2021 through November 1, 2021. Results showed that 638 people were aware of the project and visited at least one page online, 465 people were informed and viewed multiple project pages or downloaded information, and 321 people participated in the online survey.

## Park Concepts

During Round One we asked people how they use parks, their outdoor recreation interests, and thoughts on what should be considered for the new park on the Rehab lands. From this input, three park concept scenarios were designed around popular themes and ideas that came out during the initial engagement.

The public was invited to read the Park Concepts Presentation then participate in the online survey. The presentation gave an overview of the project and walked through the three different concepts highlighting different options for developing the various park amenities.

The three concept scenarios illustrate how the park might be developed with each scenario building on a different theme. The intention was to explore possibilities and see how different ideas could fit on the site.

Each concept looks at different options for:

- Dog off-leash facilities
- Location of a parking lot
- Trail development
- Access to the lake shoreline
- Development of a pier
- Winter activities
- Other features and amenities.



## Concept One - A Place to Play

This scenario focuses on developing the park as a destination, tying in with other nearby recreation attractions of the Provincial Coastal Heritage Park and Rainbow Haven Beach. It focuses on day use activities such as picnicking, disc golf, and access to the lake for boating. Features of the park emphasize social outings and having fun.

### Dog Off-Leash Provisions

- Fully enclosed open mowed lawn area located over the capped remediation area.

### Parking Lot Location

- Central location close to park activity areas
- Access driveway crosses AT trail

### Trail Development

- Single-track trails for hiking and mountain biking
- Dogs would be on-leash on all trails

### Access down Bank

- Staircase with ramps built in existing clearing
- Minimal disturbance to trees and sloped bank

### Development of Pier

- Floating docks for kayaks and paddle boards

### Winter Activities

- Reshape land for sledding hill

### Other Features

- Trail rest stop
- Spiral ramp look-off
- Picnic areas
- Disc golf course



Figure 1: Illustration Plan of Concept One - A Place To Play

## Concept Two - A Place to Learn:

This scenario looks at opportunities to learn more about the natural environment and strategies for adapting open space for climate change. The park development focuses on rehabilitating the former institutional site with naturalization projects. Site features include nature interpretation and an outdoor classroom for children's day camp programming.

### Dog Off-Leash Provisions

- Open lawn with trees and meadows
- No fencing
- Some trails designated as off-leash

### Parking Lot Location

- Close to Bissett Road
- Driveway doesn't cross AT trail
- Drop-off loop with accessible parking

### Trail Development

- Accessible walking trails with gravel paving

### Access down Bank

- From the north where grades are gentler

### Development of Pier

- Shoreline and lake ecology interpretation

### Winter Activities

- Winter hiking and snowshoeing

### Other Features

- Ecology and nature interpretation
- Outdoor classroom
- Weather observation equipment
- Pollinator gardens
- Meadow and forest naturalization



Figure 2: Illustration Plan of Concept Two - A Place To Learn

## Concept Three - A Place to Unplug:

This scenario explores the connections between access to nature, relaxation, and well-being. It builds on the Rehabilitation Center's former use of the site for mental health by developing therapeutic park features. There are opportunities for commemoration to bring awareness to mental health issues.

### Dog Off-Leash Provisions

- Enclosed area with mix of trees and meadows
- Outer trails designated as off-leash

### Parking Lot Location

- Terraced, built into hill
- Driveway access crosses AT trail

### Trail Development

- Wider trail around perimeter
- Narrower internal trails with meditation spots

### Access down Bank

- Accessible 5% grade switchback
- More tree cutting and alterations to the bank

### Development of Pier

- Fishing

### Winter Activities

- Skating on lake when ice conditions are safe
- Some trails maintained for year round use

### Other Features

- Meditation labyrinth
- Commemorative garden
- Yoga lawn
- Landscaped sundial



Figure 3: Illustration Plan of Concept Three - A Place To Unplug

# Survey Questions

For the first six sections of the survey, participants were asked to rank in order of preference, various options for the different program elements for the park. For each section, participants had an opportunity to provide additional comments.

## 1. Dog Off-leash Provisions

**Q1. Please rank in order of preference, the following options for a dedicated dog off-leash area in the park: (319 responses)**

RANK	OPTION
1.97	Dedicated area with a mix of natural areas and mowed lawn that is fenced off from the rest of the park. (Concept 3)
2.29	A large, mowed lawn area located on the remediated, capped area of the site. Fully enclosed by a fence or stone wall. Shade trees planted around the edges. (Concept 1)
2.69	Dedicated area with a mix of forest and meadow areas; no fencing but defined with signs and planting. Lawn mowing is kept to a minimum. (Concept 2)
2.84	Developing a dedicated dog off-leash area is not important to me.

**Q2. Please rank in order of preference, the following options for dogs on trails in the park: (317 responses)**

RANK	OPTION
1.75	Dogs are on-leash on all trails except for in the dedicated off-leash area. (Concept 1)
2.45	Dogs can be off-leash on the trails on the eastern side of the park. Dogs are on-leash on the Bissett Trail and trails on the western side of the park. (Concept 2)
2.6	Dogs can be off-leash on the perimeter trail. Dogs are on-leash on the Bissett Trail and interior trails. (Concept 3)
2.98	Having dog off-leash trails is not important to me.

**Q3. Do you have any other ideas to share or comments about the dog off-leash options? (88 responses)**

The common themes for feedback on the dog off-leash options were about responsible dog ownership and safety, having dedicated and fenced areas for off-leash dogs, and ensuring that the off-leash activities are in harmony with the park design and other activities.

## 2. Parking Lot Location

**Q4. Please rank in order of preference, the following options for the location of the main parking lot: (309 responses)**

RANK	OPTION
2.0	Outer location close to Bissett Road. Near the Bissett Trail but further away from other park activities. Uses second driveway. Vehicles don't cross Bissett Trail. Does not occupy flat area of the site. (Concept 2)
2.18	Central location close to park activities. Driveway is less steep. Terraced parking built into the slope of the hill to be hidden from view from the hilltop. Vehicles cross the Bissett Trail. Does not occupy flat area of the site. (Concept 3)
2.29	Central location on top of hill close to other park activities. Uses existing driveway. Vehicle access crosses the Bissett Trail. Occupies flat area of the site that could be used for other park activities. (Concept 1)
3.27	Developing a parking lot is not important to me.

**Q5. Do you have any other ideas to share or comments about the parking lot options? (48 responses)**

Additional feedback provided was about the location of the parking lot within the park, accessibility considerations, maintenance, and other amenities. Concerns about safety along Bissett Road were also raised.

## 3. Trail Development

**Q6. Please rank in order of preference, the following options for trail development: (314 responses)**

RANK	OPTION
1.68	Gravel trails developed for walking, jogging and mobility devices. (Concept 2)
1.94	Natural trails developed for strolling and meandering through varying landscapes. (Concept 3)
2.41	Single-track trails developed for hiking and mountain biking. (Concept 1)
3.88	Developing trails is not important to me.

**Q7. Do you have any other ideas to share or comments about the trail development options? (48 responses)**

The majority of the comments for trails were about the desire to have a variety of types within the park that compliment what is existing and to offer different activity and experiences which include accessible walking paths, natural hiking trails, and mountain biking facilities that take advantage of the terrain. There was also feedback on protection of the natural shoreline and bank, and design consideration for the increase of e-bikes on the trails.

#### 4. Access to Lake shore

**Q8. Please rank in order of preference, the following options for access down the steep bank to the lake shore: (306 responses)**

RANK	OPTION
1.67	Connection to Bissett Trail at the north end of the site where the bank is less steep and the grades are flatter. This option has less impact to existing trees and less alterations to the bank. (Concept 2)
2.3	Switchback ramp with staircase. This option is located in a cleared area with less impact to existing trees but has more built infrastructure. ("Colossal Climber" shown in Concept 1)
3.13	Reinstatement of the original service driveway built for the former Rehabilitation Centre. This option has less impact to existing trees, but the grade is steeper and greater than 10%. (All Concepts)
3.17	Accessible trails built at 5% grade (20:1) cut diagonally through bank. This option has more tree cutting and alterations to the bank. (Concept 3)
4.46	Developing access down to the lake shore is not important to me.

**Q9. Do you have any other ideas to share or comments about the options to access the lake shore? (28 responses)**

Accessibility was a common theme among respondents' comments about accessing the steep bank. Additional feedback was provided around the type of infrastructure and protection of the vegetation and natural shoreline. Being able to access the lake was also an important consideration raised.

#### 5. Water Access

**Q10. Please rank in order of preference, the following options for developing the existing concrete structure at the lake's edge: (311 responses)**

RANK	OPTION
2.28	Pier with floating docks for tying up small water craft such as kayaks, canoes, and paddle boards. Boats would be launched at existing facilities in Bissett Park across the lake. (Concept 1)
2.7	Pier with a shade structure and seating. (Concept 3)
3.15	Pier with interpretive signage and activity station for learning about the ecology of the lake. (Concept 2)
3.22	Pier with access to lake in winter for skating.
3.9	Pier for fishing.
5.38	Developing a pier is not important to me.

**Q.11 Do you have any other ideas to share or comments about the options for accessing the lake? (27 responses)**

Multi-use was a common theme with many respondents indicating that the pier could be used for more than one activity. Opportunities for swimming or boat rentals were also mentioned. There were some concerns raised about the pier being a popular evening spot with potential nuisance around noise and litter.

## 6. Winter Facilities

**Q12. Please rank in order of preference, the following options for winter facilities: (312 responses)**

RANK	OPTION
2.4	Some trails maintained for winter use.
2.42	The land reshaped for sledding and snowboarding. (Concept 1)
2.59	Lake access developed for skating when winter ice conditions are safe. (Concept 3)
2.61	Trails developed for snowshoeing. (Concept 2)
4.64	Winter activities are not important to me.

**Q13. Do you have any other ideas to share or comments about the options for winter facilities? (27 responses)**

Many respondents commented that year-round activities, such as disc golf and hiking, can also be considered as winter activities. There were also comments about warmer winters and the impact this will have on activities that rely on favourable snow or ice conditions.

## 7. Park Amenities

**Q14. Please select your top 7 preferred park amenities. You may choose any combination from all three of the options presented: (321 responses)**

ORDER	AMENITY	COUNT	
1	Washroom	266	82%
2	Picnic Tables - Lake shore	183	56%
3	Picnic Area - Hilltop	169	52%
4	Hilltop Look off	162	50%
5	Pollinator gardens, meadows	148	46%
6	Trail Rest Stop	146	45%
7	Disc Golf	118	36%
8	Quiet Seating/ Meditation Spots	114	35%
9	Spiral Ramp Look off	112	35%
10	Forest regeneration/ naturalization	97	30%
11	Rehab Center Interpretation	74	23%
12	Nature Interpretation	73	23%
13	Fitness Stations	66	20%
14	Outdoor Classroom	59	18%
15	Programmable Lawn	55	17%
16	Weather Observation Equipment	49	15%
17	Landscaped Sun Dial	42	13%
18	Meditation Labyrinth	34	10%
19	Commemorative Garden	29	9%
20	TV Shows Interpretation	26	8%
21	Other	19	6%

Having a washroom in the park was the most preferred park amenity with over 80% of respondents selecting it for one of their top 7 choices. The two picnic areas, hilltop look off, pollinator meadows, and the trail rest stop were also popular choices with about half the respondents (45% to 56%).

Disc golf, quiet seating areas, the spiral ramp look off and forest regeneration and naturalization were popular choices with about a third of respondents (30% to 36%).

A small percentage of respondents specified other park amenities, of which a playground was the most commonly noted. Expansion of the disc golf course to 18 holes, commemoration of the former Rehabilitation Centre, and a variety of other active recreation facilities were also noted.

### Preferred Park Amenities

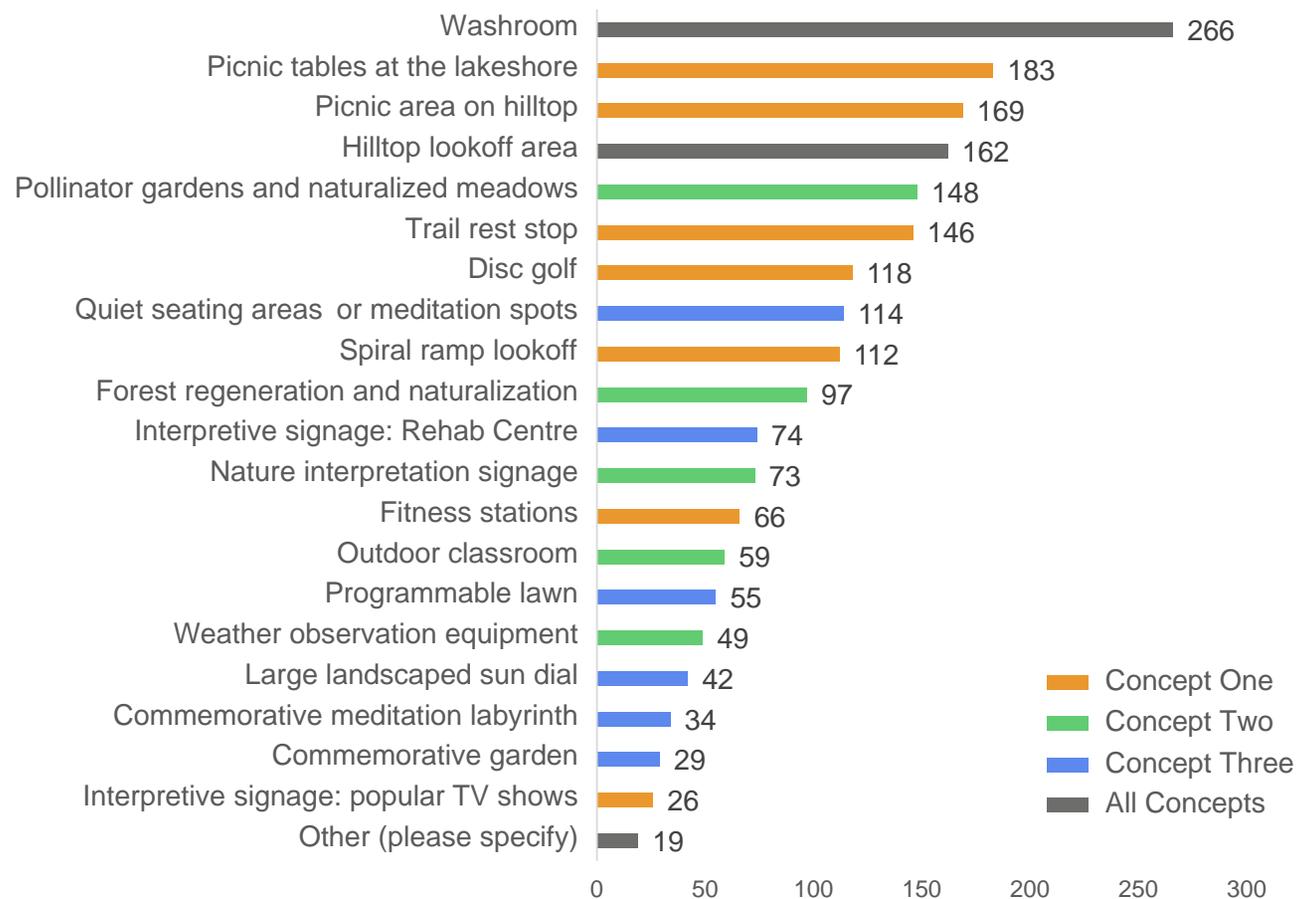


Figure 4: Preferred Park Amenities Graph

## 7. Concluding Questions

**Q15 In general, is there one of the park concepts you prefer more than the others? (319 responses)**

Of the three concepts presented, Concept One: A Place to Play was the most preferred with 46% of respondents selecting this park scenario. Concept Three: A Place to Unplug was the second preferred scenario with 35%. Although Concept Two: A Place to Learn was selected by 10% of respondents, many provided feedback that they would like to see the final plan have learning opportunities incorporated with one of the other themes.

**Q16 Do you have any final comments about the park planning for the Rehab lands? (73 responses)**

Many people commented that they would like to see some combination of the three scenarios in the final plan and that the approach should be to create a multi-generational park that has a variety of experiences and activities.

Other common topics included comments about off-leash dog provisions, advocacy for disc golf or mountain biking, and the value of retaining much of the natural beauty and greenspace of the site.

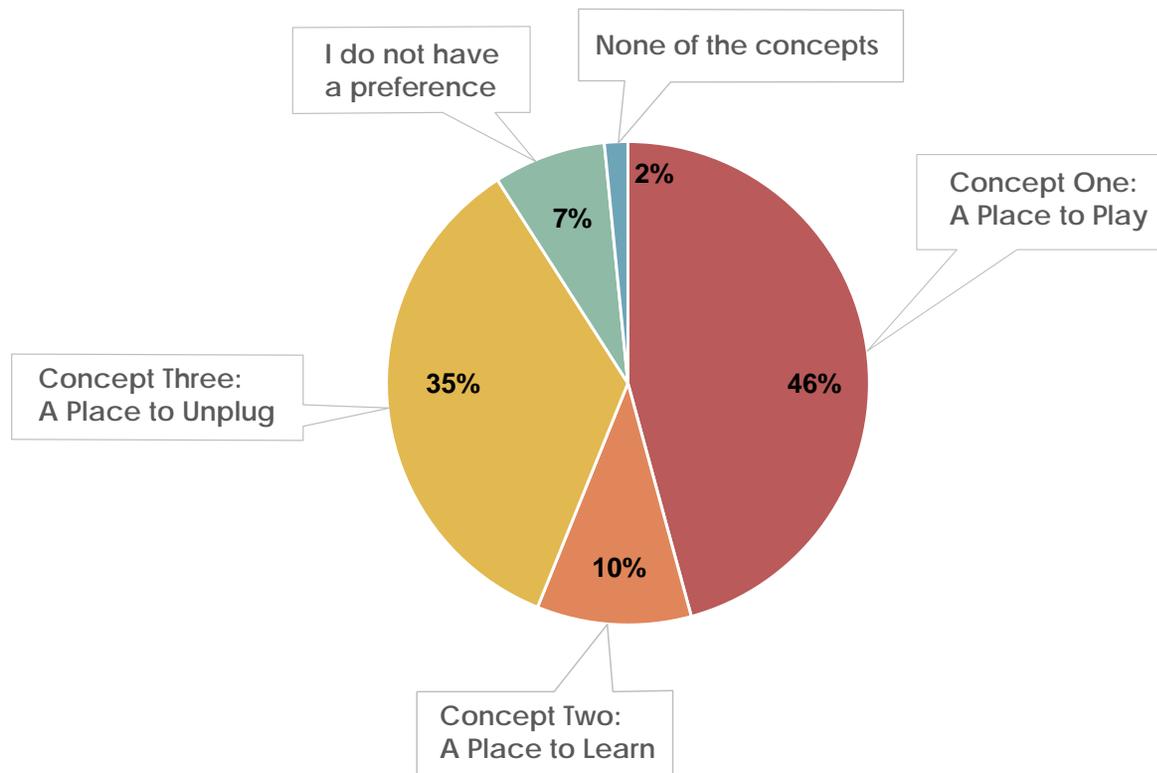


Figure 5: Preferred Park Concept Graph

**Dog Off-Leash Area (OLA) Administrative Order Selection Criteria for the Rehab Lands**

Administrative Order OLA Selection Criteria	Review Comments
<b>13a-i: Distance to existing designated OLA and service gaps</b>	The area within which the Rehab Lands is located has been identified as a service gap for off-leash areas within the Municipality. The nearest existing OLA is approximately 4.0 km away at Mel Braine Park Diamond (winter use only). The nearest year-round sites are Dartmouth Common (9.7 km) and Shubie Park (9.8 km).
<b>13a-ii: Extent of conflicts within existing OLAs</b>	The development of an OLA at the Rehab Lands is not a response to identified conflicts that need to be addressed at other OLA areas, but rather, to address service gaps.
<b>13b: Population distribution</b>	While the Rehab Lands OLA is not a central location within Cole Harbour, it was identified as the most favourable site within the community.
<b>13c: Park size (min 2.5 acres / 1 hectare)</b>	The park parcel is approximately 20.4 hectares and can readily accommodate the proposed OLA.
<b>13d: Existing classification &amp; park function</b>	The Rehab Lands have yet to be designated as parkland. The OLA has been designed with regard to the other intended parkland facilities within the Rehab Lands Park Plan.
<b>13e/f: Compatibility with:</b>	
<b>Play structures</b>	The OLA has been designed with regard to the other intended parkland facilities within the Rehab Lands Park Plan.
<b>Community gardens</b>	The OLA has been designed with regard to the other intended parkland facilities within the Rehab Lands Park Plan.
<b>Sports fields</b>	There are no existing sports fields, nor plans for the development of such facilities.
<b>Courts (tennis / basketball)</b>	There are no existing courts, nor plans for the development of such facilities.
<b>Environmentally sensitive features</b>	No such features have been identified.
<b>Monuments / public art / cultural</b>	There are no monuments, public art, or cultural structures in the area of the intended OLA.
<b>Memorial parks</b>	The Rehab Lands not a memorial park.
<b>Other: – ex. splash pads, supervised beaches</b>	The OLA has been designed with regard to the other intended parkland facilities within the Rehab Lands Park Plan.
<b>13g: Site's physical capabilities - topography hydrology vegetation property configuration</b>	The proposed OLA accounts for such physical features.
<b>13h: Jeopardize public safety</b>	Fencing is proposed to enclose dogs from other intended facilities.
<b>13i: Proximity of other land uses, to include adequate separation distances, possibility of mitigation measures, and visual / acoustic buffers</b>	The proposed OLA site is approximately 400m from the closest residential use on Bissett Road and is separated by forested lands that through the Rehab Lands Park Plan would be retained and provide both visual and acoustic buffers.

<b>Administrative Order OLA Selection Criteria</b>	<b>Review Comments</b>
<b>13j: Sufficient / appropriate parking</b>	Parking is planned within the Rehab Lands Park Plan.
<b>13l: Site specific restrictions</b>	The park would be open during regular park hours as per the Parks Bylaw (P-600).
<b>13k: Intended level of service and the park infrastructure requirements</b>	The OLA will be a dedicated facility approximately 1.4 hectares, with open field space and trails. Fencing will enclose dogs from other intended facilities.
<b>13m: Opportunities for active use by dog owners.</b>	The trail would allow for some active use. Colocation beside the Cole Harbour - Lawrencetown Coastal Heritage Park is favourable as owners can walk further with their dogs on-leash.
<b>13o: Financial implications</b>	The anticipated capital costs will be considered with the overall implementation of the Rehab Lands.
<b>13n: Community engagement</b>	The proposed OLA was considered through the development of the Rehab Lands Park Plan.