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Item No. 13.1.1
Community Planning and Economic Development Standing Committee
January 18, 2024

TO: Mayor Savage and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY: -Original Signed-

John Traves, K.C., Acting Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: July 17, 2023

SUBJECT: Lake Banook Master Plan

ORIGIN

January 28, 2020 Regional Council motion (Item 15.3.1)
MOVED by Councillor Austin, seconded by Councillor Mancini

THAT Halifax Regional Council assess the need for a new Master Plan for Lake Banook, that would include all stakeholders, after Canoe '22."

MOTION PUT AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

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

Purposes of the Municipality

Section 7A: The purposes of the Municipality are to...

(b) provide services, facilities, and other things that, in the opinion of the Council, are necessary or desirable for all or part of the Municipality; ...

Municipal expenditures

Section 79A (1): subject to subsections (2) to (4), the Municipality may only spend money for municipal purposes if

(a) the expenditure is included in the Municipality's operating budget or capital budget or is otherwise authorized by the Municipality.

Area improvement and promotion

Section 70 (1): The Municipality may (a) beautify, improve, and maintain property owned or leased by the Municipality.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Community Planning and Economic Development Standing Committee recommend that Halifax Regional Council direct the Chief Administrative Officer to prepare the Coordination Plan as outlined in this report and return to Regional Council with a staff report.

BACKGROUND

Lake Banook (the lake) is a freshwater lake located in downtown Dartmouth. Banook is an anglicized version of the Mi'kmaq word, *Panuk*, translating into “at the first opening”; as the first lake encountered in the waterway between Dartmouth Cove and the Minas Basin, Lake Banook is culturally and ecologically significant at the local and regional scale. Paddling clubs, a historic lock, and a water controlling weir are features defining the Lake's southern boundary. The lake connects to Sullivan's Pond to the south. Crichton Park, an established residential neighbourhood, provides the lake's western edge. Highway 111 forms Lake Banook's northern boundary, marking Lake Banook's transition into Lake Micmac. Prince Albert Road follows the lake's eastern edge (Attachment A).

Lake Banook's central location within a primarily residential area and its proximity to downtown has made the site an important recreational hub for the Dartmouth community. Whereas most international racing venues are artificial, concrete basins, Lake Banook is one of the few remaining natural racecourses in the world. The lake's north-to-south orientation provides ideal paddling conditions and its near 1000m length meets the standards required to host international and national racing events. Further, the residences and public spaces located along Lake Banook's shoreline make competitions a unique experience for athletes and spectators alike.

In 2019, Lake Banook was selected as the venue for the International Canoe Federation (ICF) Canoe Sprint World Championships (Canoe '22). Lake Banook previously hosted the event in 2009, 1997, and 1989. For the 2009 and 2022 events, Regional Council approved funding for park improvements, ensuring Lake Banook was able to meet the ICF's increasingly technical hosting standards. On January 28, 2020, staff made a secondary recommendation to Regional Council to direct staff to assess the need for a master plan following Canoe '22. This recommendation was made to ensure that the public infrastructure surrounding Lake Banook could adequately support future paddling competitions. The recommendation was adopted by Regional Council and is the subject of this staff report.

DISCUSSION

Approach

To assess the need for a new master plan, internal and external stakeholders were interviewed. Internal interviews included municipal staff involved with the management of Lake Banook and the Canoe '22 event. External stakeholders included the Canoe '22's organization committee and representatives from paddling clubs. Two Lake Banook master plans, completed for previous ICF competitions, were also reviewed.

This report outlines the findings from the internal and external stakeholders and has recommendations to improve the continued use of Lake Banook as an international racing venue.

Previous Master Plans

In 2007, Ekistics Planning and Design (now Fathom Studio) completed the “Sullivan's Pond and Lake Banook Masterplan Report”, which was commissioned and subsequently approved by HRM. In advance of Canoe '22, Fathom Studio prepared the 2019 “Lake Banook Water Sport Park Concept Plan”. This was prepared by Canoe '22 organization. Both of these plans were reviewed to evaluate:

- recommendations for new or improved facilities;
- the need and potential for future parkland and facility improvements.

Both reports focus on developing facilities to support large sporting events like the ICF championships. However, the 2007 Masterplan focuses on a larger site context, developing long-term amenities for the local community, and the use of Lake Banook as a sporting venue. The 2019 plan prioritizes amenities specific to a water sport park.

Necessity for a Full Master Plan

A master plan is typically required when a development requires comprehensive, long-term guidance and strategies. Projects necessitating master plans often have problems or feature significant changes requiring resolution through stakeholder and public engagement. Lastly, master plans become necessary when the project requires the development of new facilities.

The previously discussed master plans contain short and long-term strategies and projects to improve Lake Banook as a competition venue. The main improvements from the Master Plans focus on spectator and parkland improvements municipally owned land, with many having been implemented in advance of each of the past major competitions.

To date, the programming and facility management function well on a long-term basis. Based on these outcomes, a master plan is not required. Rather, the development of a plan that coordinates the various facility and parkland initiatives and to build on the improvements that have already been made for the lake as a paddling venue is recommended.

Lake Banook Parkland Coordination Plan

While the two previous master plans resulted in park improvements, there are still recommendations that have not been realized. A Coordination Plan will enable the previous master plans to be carried out effectively while simultaneously ensuring upgrades to Lake Banook's parkland are on track to meet ICF's current hosting standards for future events. The sum of the individual initiatives will result in substantial park improvements for the public and ensure the continued use of Lake Banook as a racing venue.

The Coordinating Plan's priorities are also based on outcomes gathered during the staff's post-Canoe '22 assessment, previous master plans' recommendations, and ongoing issues affecting the long-term use of Lake Banook and its surrounding parkland. Focus areas are described in Attachment B and address:

- water quality improvements;
- accessibility improvements;
- improvements for water access;
- active transportation improvements;
- wayfinding and interpretative planning; and
- infrastructure improvements.

An initial outline of the prospective Coordination Plan is contained in Attachment A.

Potential Changes to Parks

Based on outcomes from discussions with internal and external stakeholders, some relatively more substantial changes to Birch Cove Park and Henry Findlay Park would be required to improve Lake Banook as a paddling venue.

Henry Findlay Park

In previous years, Birch Cove Park was traditionally used as the athletes' village. However, due the park's uneven terrain, para-athletes and other athletes were separated into different areas. For Canoe '22, organizers decided to unify all athletic divisions into a single athletes' village in Henry Findlay Park. ICF organizers said the co-location set the standard for future events due to Henry Findlay's ability to accommodate all the athletes together, as well as the park's proximity to the finish line and disembarkment area. However, this co-location required the temporary removal of playground within the park and some site upgrades.

HRM has recently approved the establishment of a fish passage between Lake Banook and Sullivan's Pond that will result in the creation of daylighted channel in the park, further reducing the amount of available space for future events.

To accommodate the athletes' village in the future, the playground's existing location must be considered along with additional site upgrades as identified in Attachment C.

Birch Cove Park

Birch Cove Park has received significant funding due to its previous use as an athletes' village during ICF events. However, the upgrades and short-term use of the site during ICF events have caused programming conflicts with community's long-term passive uses. Several stakeholders noted Birch Cove Park's deteriorating water quality, receding shoreline, and waterfowl presence.

The Coordinating Plan will explore strategies for Birch Cove Park to receive funding for park reprogramming that supports long-term recreational uses and shoreline projects. Naturalization projects will assist in improving the park's biodiversity and the lake's water quality; overall improvements to Birch Cove Park will continue to consider its use as a recreational hub by the community. Recommendations include shoreline stabilization, living shorelines, park naturalization, and projects to improve the health of the park's trees and bird population. The location and sizes of the proposed amenities can be found in Attachment D.

Community Consultation and Next Steps

Routine components of the intended Coordination Plan, such as those related to maintenance improvements may not warrant community engagement on their own. But, given the overall sum of the components being outlined and the prospective changes to Henry Findlay Park and Birch Cove Park, community engagement is recommended as a next step, which would be followed by a finalization of the Coordinating Plan and staff report to Regional Council for approval. A public open house is envisioned as the priority for community engagement, along with other methods to be verified through the development of a communications plan.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications related to the recommendation in this report.

RISK CONSIDERATION

The risk in not proceeding with the recommendation to develop the Coordination Plan may include impacts on ability to meet the hosting requirements for the next ICF and other major paddling events.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Internal and external stakeholders involved with the Canoe '22 Event were contacted. Interviews discussed the short and long-term use of Lake Banook, the success of Canoe '22, and potential logistical issues.

Further stakeholder and general public consultation are recommended to discuss the overall components of the Coordinating Plan and in particular, the potential changes to Henry Findlay Park and Birch Cove Park.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

Declines of Lake Banook's water quality will correlate with increased lake closures and the inability to use the lake as a recreational amenity – both for the local community and to host paddling events.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A - Lake Banook Context
Attachment B - Coordination Plan Identified Focus Areas
Attachment C - Birch Cove Park Identified Focus Areas
Attachment D - Henry Findlay Park Identified Focus Areas

A copy of this report can be obtained online at halifax.ca or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210.

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Lake Banook - Context

- HRM Park
- Water
- Buildings
- Parcels

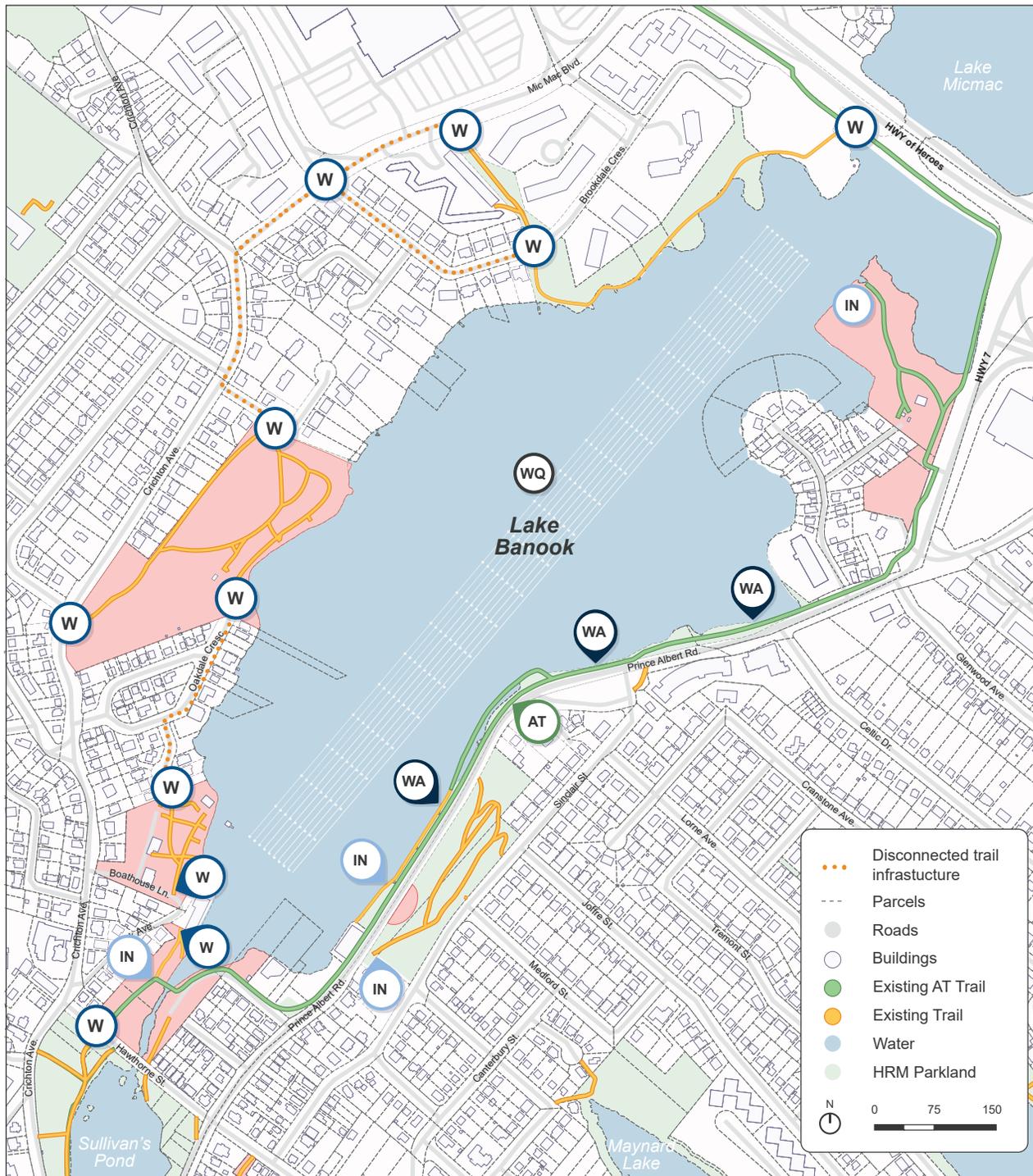
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Coordination Plan - Identified Focus Areas

The following plan details emergent themes from stakeholder consultation. Future engagement will focus on refining the following focus areas:

- WQ** **Water quality:** The continued degradation of Lake Banook's water quality poses significant risk to the recreational usage of the lake and its ability to host future ICF events. Strategies for improving and maintaining water quality will be considered in the Coordination Plan.
- WA** **Water Access:** Dispersing the concentration of swimmers will reduce the potential for bacteria buildup in specific areas. Future engagement sessions will discuss the possibility of additional water access points and their locations along Lake Banook's eastern shoreline.
- AT** **AT Infrastructure:** Stakeholders discussed several limitations to the existing active transportation network surrounding Lake Banook. The Coordination Plan will explore strategies to improve the existing network.
- W** **Wayfinding and Interpretive Panels:** Stakeholders and previous master plans highlight the need for an improved wayfinding system and interpretive panels detailing the Lake's history.
- IN** **Infrastructure Upgrades:** Canoe '22 organizers were concerned with the lack of water hook-ups, and the existing Wi-Fi and power infrastructure surrounding the lake. Strategies to improve the accessibility at Silver's Hill and the boardwalk will also be explored.
- Park Upgrades:** These parks were selected for upgrades based on stakeholder interviews, master plan recommendations, and site visits. Future engagement sessions will be used to refine the recommendations in the ultimate Coordination Plan.
- Accessibility:** Wherever possible, pathways should be graded to meet accessibility standards, with specific attention to the areas accessed by para-athletes.



Coordination Plan Priorities

Birch Cove Park - Identified Focus Areas

Birch Cove Park's uneven terrain poses challenges in meeting accessibility standards. Prior to Canoe '22, event organizers made the decision to re-locate the athletes' village to Henry Findlay Park to ensure inclusivity for para-athletes and athletes within a single venue. The success of the co-location led to the decision to not consider Birch Cove Park as the future venue for the athletes' village.

Moving forward, future community engagement sessions will be conducted to refine Birch Cove Park's future programming. Consultation will prioritize the following themes derived from stakeholder interviews and research:

-  **Wayfinding:** Trail connections to the surrounding parkland from Birch Cove Park is limited. Engagement will determine whether wayfinding would be beneficial to the overall park system and how the trail's connectivity can be improved
-  **Naturalization:** The high-intensity use of Birch Cove Park during ICF events conflicts with the passive recreational use by the community. The outcomes from the discussion will be used to determine whether naturalized areas are a suitable use for Birch Cove Park and their possible locations.
-  **Living shorelines:** Living shorelines help filter containments from runoff entering the water, deter waterfowl, and help improve the Lake's overall water quality. Engagement sessions will be used to evaluate the public's perception of living shorelines, and whether their implementation in Birch Cove is a suitable location. The final Coordination Plan will reflect stakeholder and public feedback.



Henry Findlay Park - Identified Focus Areas

Based on Canoe '22's success, event organizers would like to continue using Henry Findlay as the designated site for the future athletes' village. To do so, capital investment and consideration for the site's existing infrastructure will be required. Due to the potential upgrades to the existing site, input from Regional Council, the community, and stakeholders will be required.

The Coordination Plan will concentrate on the following focus areas which emerged during the stakeholder interviews:

- ✳
Existing Playgrounds: The location of the existing playgrounds conflicts with the space required to host the athletes' village. Temporarily removing and re-installing the playgrounds is costly and comparative to the price of a new structure. Community engagement and stakeholder discussions will discuss alternatives to accommodating both uses in the final Coordination Plan.

- **Fish Passage Project:** A fish passage project is currently underway in Henry Findlay. The community engagement session can be used to educate residents about both projects at the same time, and park improvements should be undertaken in tandem with improvements to the fish passage.

- ⊙
Erosion: The shorelines of Henry Findlay Park experiences significant erosion. The Coordination Plan will explore mitigation strategies and identify eroded areas to understand where the athletes village should be located.

- ⓘ
Infrastructure: Event organizers highlighted the need for a water hook-up and improved Wi-Fi near the finish line and judges' tower. Future discussions will explore how these needs can be accommodated in the Coordination Plan.

