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Item No. 14.1.2
Harbour East Marine-Drive Community Council
October 3, 2024

TO: Chair and Members of Harbour East Marine Drive Community Council

FROM: Brad Anguish, Commissioner of Operations

DATE: August 27, 2024

SUBJECT: **Parks Plan for the North Woodside Community Park**

ORIGIN

December 7, 2023 Harbour East-Marine Drive Community Council motion (11.3.1):

MOVED by Councillor Austin, seconded by Councillor Kent

THAT Harbour East Marine-Drive Community Council request a staff recommendation report on a Parks Plan for the North Woodside Community Park.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A community presentation to Harbour East Marine-Drive Community Council (HEMDCC) in December 2023, resulted in the Community Council requesting a staff report and the development of a park plan to guide long-term improvements for the North Woodside Community Centre Park.

The North Woodside Community Centre Park is an important park that serves the recreation needs of several community neighbourhoods and operates as a community hub alongside the North Woodside Community Centre. The centre is part of a broader network of parks along the Dartmouth side of the Halifax Harbour and is the most developed park in the area. The park's facilities and amenities include playgrounds, a half basketball court, an outdoor gym, pathways including some sections with lighting, a play lawn, wooded and naturalized areas, and benches.

There is no formal plan to establish a vision or prioritize park improvements. As a result, several community-driven initiatives have been proposed and evaluated on an ad-hoc basis. There is merit in the development of a park plan, to be established with community consultation, to identify the park's purpose and character, and to guide future improvements. This report recommends the development of a park plan for the North Woodside Community Centre Park.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Harbour East Marine-Drive Community Council recommend that Halifax Regional Council direct the Chief Administrative Officer to include the development of a park plan for the North Woodside Community Centre Park within the municipality's 2025/26 Budget and Business Plan.

BACKGROUND

On December 7, 2023, Harbour East Marine-Drive Community Council (HEMDCC) received a joint presentation from the Pleasant Woodside Neighbourhood Association, the North Woodside Community Centre, and Homebridge Youth Society. These organizations expressed a shared interest in improving the North Woodside Community Centre Park. They undertook a community survey to seek input and ideas with an emphasis on an underused wooded area that occupies more than half of the park parcel. The presentation focused on the results of the survey, which included the following:

- most survey respondents are daily or weekly users of the park;
- while most respondents feel safe walking in or near the park during the day, more than half of the survey respondents reported feeling unsafe after dark;
- the top three park concerns among respondents are:
 - the presence of encampments and occasional antisocial behaviour;
 - inadequate lighting, poor visibility, and overall safety after dark; and
 - the loss of natural spaces within the park;
- the top three desired improvements for the park are the:
 - development of walking paths;
 - protection of natural space and vegetation; and
 - additional of amenities to support park use (e.g. benches, garbage cans).

Based on the presentation, HEMDCC requested a staff report and park plan. Given the history and context of community interest, this report has been prepared, as an interim step, to confirm and outline the merit and intended scope of a plan.

DISCUSSION

Park plans, prepared by municipal staff with community engagement, have been developed in situations where a plan is needed to help address functional space issues and establish a sense of place in parks that are often important community spaces. Such is the case for the North Woodside Community Centre Park, which is an important park within the community and overall district.

North Woodside Community Centre Park

The North Woodside Community Centre Park spans 2.65 hectares (ha), fronting on Pleasant Street and connecting to the Dartmouth Harbourfront Trail (Attachment A). The park serves the recreation needs of several neighbourhoods within the community and operates as a community hub with the presence of the North Woodside Community Centre (Community Centre). Prominent in the most northern corner of the park, the Community Centre and its associated parking lot occupies 0.32 ha. The Community Centre is owned by the municipality but managed by the North Woodside Community Association Board, which is a volunteer-led, non-profit organization. The board runs community programs, and its indoor facilities are available for community use.

The park is part of a network of parkland along the Dartmouth side of the Halifax Harbour and is the most developed park in the area. Its facilities and amenities include playgrounds, a half basketball court, an outdoor gym, pathways including some sections with lighting, a play lawn, wooded and naturalized areas, and benches. A not-for-profit daycare operates out of the Community Centre and has a fenced in playground for the daycare's use.

Planning Initiatives and Park Direction

There have been several community and municipal initiatives in recent years that have referenced possible improvements to the park:

- On October 11, 2012, the Community Planning & Economic Development Standing Committee endorsed in principle, a community vision for Woodside. The development of the vision was facilitated by HRM Community Development staff and included participation from the public and the Woodside Community Liaison Group. While not specific to the North Woodside Community Centre Park, the community vision included actions to encourage:
 - improved connections from Pleasant Street to the Dartmouth waterfront;
 - attention to accessibility for all ages and abilities;
 - solutions for improved park safety;
 - orientation through park and trail wayfinding;
 - activation of space through events and other community uses;
 - stewardship of outdoor spaces by volunteers; and
 - enhancement and protection of natural spaces.
- The 2013 Urban Forest Master Plan identified site-specific recommendations for the North Woodside Community Centre Park, including:
 - increasing tree canopy cover to approximately 40%;
 - focusing efforts on shading recreation facilities such as play lawns and playgrounds; and
 - including community organizations in the planting of trees.

Although this plan is being updated for a 2025-2050 timeline, the recommendations are still relevant.

- As part of the “Making Connections: 2014-2019 Halifax Active Transportation Priorities Plan”, the North Woodside Community Centre Park was identified for an active transportation greenway to connect Pleasant Street to the Dartmouth Harbourfront Trail. This pathway connection is a typical sidewalk width of approximately 1.5m - 1.8m, rather than the multi-use pathway width of approximately 3m - 4m that would be more capable of satisfying the needs for this connection.
- There is a long-standing interest from the Community Centre to expand the facility to improve community space functionality, access, and parking. Although there is no defined building plan in place, an active campaign is seeking donors and sponsors to fund a facility expansion.
- A motion from the January 2019 HEMDCC meeting indicated staff respond to a proposal from the Maritime Disc Golf Association for use of the wooded portion of the park for a disc golf course. On May 6, 2021, staff responded. The proposal had implications for the naturalized landscape and capital budgets that required more investigation to understand the overall feasibility of the proposal and the park. The staff recommendation was to take no further action on the proposal for a disc golf course and explore a disc golf pilot project and future recreation programming elsewhere in the municipality. Ultimately, the Dartmouth Common became home to this course.
- The North Woodside Community Centre Park was identified as one of 30 potential naturalization sites in a September 13, 2022, Naturalization Strategy report to Regional Council. Specifically, the site-specific recommendation was for the enhancement and implementation of Acadian forest plantings.
- The draft municipal Park Lighting Strategy is proceeding to the Community Planning and Economic Development Standing Committee for review. The Strategy proposes lighting along a pathway within the North Woodside Community Centre Park that connects Pleasant Street and the Dartmouth Harbourfront Trail.

Park Planning Approach

Given the community interest, municipal initiatives that reference the North Woodside Community Centre Park, and the identified park issues and opportunities, there is merit in preparing a park plan. Early in the park planning process, specific community guidance would be expected to come from the Pleasant Woodside Neighbourhood Association, the North Woodside Community Centre, and Homebridge Youth

Society. This would be supplemented by general community consultation to build upon the engagement and survey work that has already been undertaken.

Recreation and site needs assessments are to be prepared to inform the development of the park plan and would include evaluations of:

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

With these evaluations, a conceptual park plan would be developed and made available for public review to confirm assumptions from previous engagement sessions and public submissions.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications presented within this report. Resources to develop a park plan would be included within the 2025/26 Budget and Business Plan.

RISK CONSIDERATION

Risks considered include submission of uncoordinated community proposals and park upgrades over time that do not meet a defined vision for the park.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community engagement to date has been limited to Pleasant Woodside Neighbourhood Association, the North Woodside Community Centre, and Homebridge Youth Society who presented to the HEMDCC. Additional engagement would occur with the development of the recommended park plan.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

No environmental implications were identified.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Harbour East Marine-Drive Community Council could direct changes to the scope of work that is outlined in this report. This may require additional review and a separate staff report.
2. Harbour East Marine-Drive Community Council could choose to not proceed with the development of a park plan as recommended in this report.

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

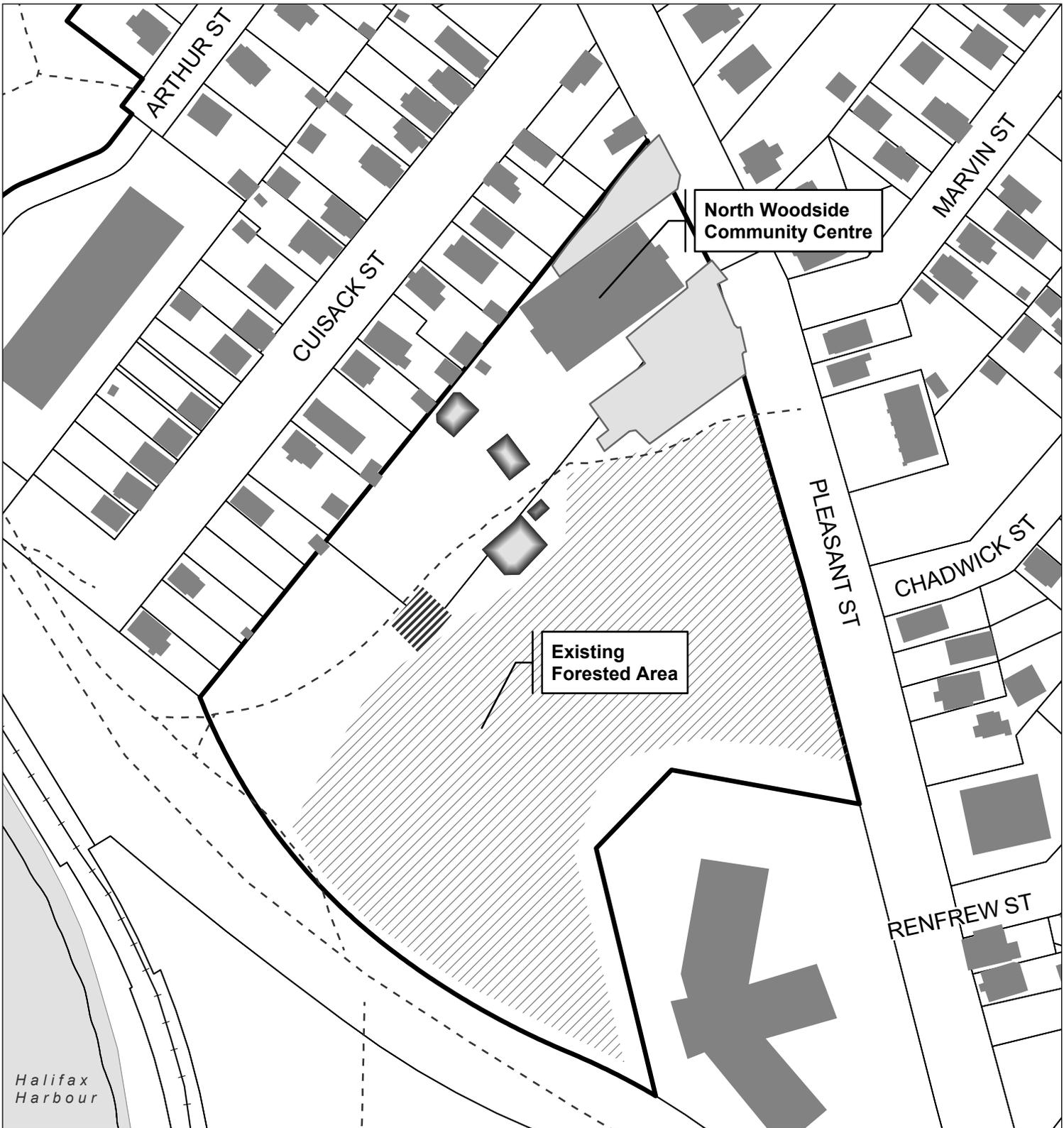
Section 70 (1): The Municipality may (a) beautify, improve, and maintain property owned or leased by the Municipality.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A North Woodside Community Centre Park Context

A copy of this report can be obtained by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210, or Fax 902.490.4208.

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North Woodside Community Centre Park Context

- - - Trail
- +— Railroad
- /// Existing Forested Area
- Playground
- /// Sports Court
- Building
- Parking Lot

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**Parks & Recreation
Strategic Planning & Design**

