

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.

Report Prepared by: Elizabeth Bray, Landscape Architect, 902.240.4314
