

Business Case for Heritage Designation - Richard St. Barbe Baker Afforestation Area

ISSUE

This report provides information on the implications of pursuing heritage designation of the Richard St. Barbe Baker Afforestation Area (Afforestation Area). It includes an overview of the site and outlines the implications of designation and some of the key challenges of the municipal heritage designation specific to this site.

BACKGROUND

At its meeting held on December 2, 2019, the Standing Policy Committee on Environment, Utilities and Corporate Services, resolved:

“That the Administration report on the implications and considerations of heritage designation of the afforestation area, through the appropriate committee.”

Richard St. Barbe Baker Afforestation Area is one of three afforestation areas located within city limits. It is situated southwest of the Montgomery Place neighbourhood and south of the Canadian National Railway station and yards.

CURRENT STATUS

The Afforestation Area is a parcel of land owned by the City of Saskatoon (City) that is not currently included within the boundaries of any Sector Plan or Concept Plan area. There are currently no plans to sell or develop the site, or for any conservation initiatives or other improvements. It also falls within the Meewasin Valley Authority Conservation Zone and is subject to *The Meewasin Valley Authority Act*; therefore, proposals for development are subject to their development review process.

The site is comprised of trees, open areas and wetlands. Vegetation is a mix of both planted and naturally-established trees, grasses and shrubs. There is evidence this site is of cultural and environmental significance to the community. Two initiatives being undertaken by the City that will provide direction for the future use of the Afforestation Area are the Green Infrastructure Strategy and plans to include this area in the Blairmore Sector Plan through an amendment to that Plan. The Green Infrastructure Strategy provides a vision for the City's Green Network and aims to protect, restore and manage significant natural areas, as well as develop coherent policies to inform the future of the city's ecological network. The Blairmore Sector Plan amendment will inform future land use and servicing for this portion of the City. Both initiatives impact the Afforestation Area and will include further public and stakeholder engagement.

To date, Green Infrastructure Strategy Engagement sessions have reiterated stakeholder desires to increase the management of the Afforestation Area and to establish its importance as an ecological site and area for outdoor recreation. Increased interest from various stakeholder groups culminated in a stakeholder

engagement session held on February 1, 2018. Several themes emerged from this consultation, including recreation, ecological importance, education and heritage, aesthetic beauty, animal habitat, access control, maintenance and safety concerns. A summary of the engagement session, included as Appendix 1, specifically highlighted the significance of the site as an important animal habitat with desirable ecological features and heritage value as related to the vision of Richard St. Barbe Baker. It was further noted that this area is popular for walking and cycling activities.

A Natural Area Screening (Screening) was completed by Golder Associates in 2012. This Screening provided a high level environmental assessment of the Afforestation Area and surrounding area. It is expected that this study will help inform future amendments to the Blairmore Sector Plan, which will provide direction regarding future uses and management of the Afforestation Area.

An Off-Leash Recreation Area (OLRA) was approved by City Council in 2013 for 5.86 hectares of land immediately adjacent to the Afforestation Area. This off-leash area is not considered a part of the Afforestation Area, but user groups between the OLRA and the Afforestation Area overlap.

There are three Afforestation Areas owned by the City of Saskatoon. These are not included within the City's park inventory, and with the exception of the Southwest Off-Leash Recreation Area, no funding is currently available to support maintenance services.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

History

The Richard St. Barbe Baker Afforestation Area was originally planted by the City's Parks Department in 1972 when City Council approved 660 acres of tree planting within the Parks and Recreation Department budget under the category of forest in perpetuity. Several tree species were planted in rows, including American and Siberian elm, Manitoba maple, green ash, poplar, willow, caragana, Colorado spruce and Scotch pine with the aim of "improving the future environment of the City". The intention was to have mature trees to transplant for future subdivision developments.

At its January 2, 1979 meeting, City Council resolved that the site should be named Richard St. Barbe Baker Park (Urban Regional Park). The area was formally included within the Meewasin Valley Authority's West Bank South Development Plan. A resulting report from the 1979 meeting recommended the area should remain in its current land use as an example of afforestation efforts in a prairie environment; and a modest increase in activities complimentary in nature should be considered appropriate for the site. It was recommended that any improvements proposed have minimal maintenance. The report also mentioned there could be opportunities to include interpretive activities at the site.

Heritage Significance

This Afforestation Area was named after English biologist and botanist, Richard St Barbe Baker, who was an internationally recognized forest advisor and conservationist. He was an early graduate of Emmanuel College at the University of Saskatchewan before World War I. During his active lifetime of travel, he published more than thirty books pertaining to trees, forestry and conservation and founded the Men of the Trees association in 1922, now called the International Tree Foundation in the UK. In its 2019 Impact Report, this organization noted an estimated 26 billion trees have been planted by the organization internationally. Richard St. Barbe Baker was awarded an honorary Doctor of Laws degree by the University of Saskatchewan in 1971. According to the University of Saskatchewan Library Archives, Richard St. Barbe Baker died in Saskatoon on June 9, 1982, while visiting friends at the university, only days after planting a tree near the Diefenbaker Centre. His legacy and connections to the University of Saskatchewan and the city are recognized through the naming of this Afforestation Area.

Cultural Significance

The cultural significance of this site exists in the history of afforestation areas, its current use and its significance to the community. Afforestation areas emerged as an internationally accepted practice of planting trees on marginally productive agricultural land and has become a widespread practice over the last fifty years. The Richard St Barbe Baker site is one of three afforestation areas planted within city limits. This site has not been routinely managed by the City since it was planted. As a result, uses on the site are focused on enjoying its natural beauty and non-motorized recreational uses. Several community groups have informally taken responsibility for the site and have collaborated to provide additional site maintenance and trail creation for community enjoyment. This has included significant efforts on behalf of community groups and individuals to organize community clean-up efforts, participate in fundraising activities and assemble non-profit organizations. The cumulative result of these efforts has increased the maintenance of the site in the absence of a formal maintenance strategy. This has further demonstrated the site's importance to the community as a whole, and the level of dedication on behalf of the community to see it recognized for its significance.

Designation

Stakeholder groups share an interest in retaining Richard St. Barbe Baker Afforestation Area as a place to enjoy wildlife and ecological attributes as well as for its outdoor recreational use. Interest in designating the area as a municipal cultural heritage site has been communicated by members of the stakeholder groups and by nearby community members of Cedar Villa Estates and Montgomery Place neighbourhood. The basis for municipal heritage designation could be introduced based on the site's history as an afforestation area, the site's namesake, Richard St. Barbe Baker, as well as its significance as an area of ecological and cultural enjoyment.

Policy No. C10-020, Civic Heritage Policy (Civic Heritage Policy) permits municipal heritage designation of sites and is meant to support and facilitate the consideration,

designation, conservation and management of Heritage Resources for the benefit of current and future generations of Saskatoon citizens and visitors. This policy permits the designation of a Cultural Landscape, which is defined as:

“...a landscape designed and created intentionally by man; an organically evolved landscape which may be a relict (or fossil) landscape or a continuing landscape; or an associative cultural landscape which may be valued because of the religious, artistic, or cultural associates of the natural element.”

Civic heritage designation of the site as a cultural landscape would be appropriate given its history as an afforestation area and its cultural significance to the community. The history of the site as an afforestation area and plantings provide a unique site experience. The site’s association with Richard St. Barbe Baker also contributes to the site’s cultural value. There may be additional merit for the site to be designated for its ecological value, but more information in the form of an updated Natural Area Screening Study would be required for consideration.

Challenges

With any municipal heritage designation, character-defining elements must be determined for the property or site. Defining these elements (which are to be outlined at the time of designation) ensures the heritage resource is protected and provides guidance for its future use. Determining character-defining elements for the Richard St. Barbe Baker Afforestation Area could prove to be difficult. An updated Natural Area Screening Study specific to the Afforestation Area would determine important ecological areas, vegetation communities, wildlife and wildlife habitat, as well as wetlands and drainage patterns. This would also confirm any listed species identified by the Saskatchewan Conservation Data Centre, Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada and Schedule 1 of the Species at Risk Act.

Management of the site is another issue and heritage designation of the site will not resolve this. The recent installation of jersey barriers to the site has positively impacted illegal dumping and illegitimate uses; however, there are costs associated with increased management of the site and as a Municipal Heritage Property, the site is required to be properly maintained as outlined in *The Heritage Property Act*.

Designation of the Richard St. Barbe Baker Afforestation Area as a Municipal Heritage Property would require proper interpretation of the site, which could include commemorative signage and interpretive panels. A funding source would need to be identified for this work.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Should the site be designated, it would potentially be eligible for monetary or non-monetary incentives through the Civic Heritage Policy. There is currently no funding available for new municipally designated heritage properties or sites, but future incentives could be considered, should funding become available. Prior to, or along with, designation, a Natural Area Screening Study, an interpretation plan and a

management plan should all be completed. There would be a cost associated with these items, with no identified funding source at this time.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

The Richard St. Barbe Baker Afforestation Area site is important to the community and its dedicated group of users. Designation as a Cultural Landscape through the Civic Heritage Policy would capture the history of the afforestation areas in Saskatoon and their cultural association with Richard St. Barbe Baker. This would also capture the dynamic and evolving nature of the prairies as the site has since started to revert to a naturalized space since its planting. While the site currently has some municipal protections in place that would prevent development of the site, municipal heritage designation would provide an additional measure of protection and an opportunity for interpretation of the site.

Additionally, the alteration approvals of cultural landscape sites would need to be addressed. Through the *Heritage Property Act*, City Council has delegated the sole approval of any changes or alterations to the character-defining elements of a Municipal Heritage Property to the Municipal Heritage Advisory Committee (MHAC). The expertise and knowledge required to make comprehensive and complete decisions regarding cultural or ecological landscape resources is currently outside the realm of expertise of the MHAC. As a result, designation of the Richard St. Barbe Baker Afforestation Area may require additional resources to assist MHAC with cultural landscape conservation and environmental assessments or modifications to MHAC to include this expertise.

NEXT STEPS

Administration sees merit in pursuing designation of this site; however, should Committee wish to proceed with investigating designation further, a work plan and funding source to pursue the development of a management plan for the site, undertake a Natural Area Screening Study and opportunities for interpretation should be developed. Further consultation with Meewasin Valley Authority and other stakeholders would also be required.

Staff with the Recreation and Community Development Division met with members of the Friends of the Saskatoon Afforestation Area Inc. to discuss their request to install interpretive signage within the Richard St. Barbe Baker Afforestation Area. The interpretive signage would focus on the history and ecological significance of the area. Recreation and Community Development Division is working with stakeholders on the wording for one temporary sign to be placed on the site. Future signage will be evaluated after further planning work, as identified in this report, is completed. The cost of the interpretive sign and installation is being covered by the Friends of the Saskatoon Afforestation Area Inc.

APPENDICES

1. Afforestation Area Engagement Summary

REPORT APPROVAL

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