

Request to Investigate the Potential of Optimist Park as the Location for a Consolidated City Centre School

ISSUE

The Saskatoon Public School Division (School Division) is seeking permission from the City of Saskatoon (City) to conduct a site validation study of a portion of Optimist Park to investigate the potential as an alternative location for the consolidated city centre school. The School Division had initially identified the site of the current Princess Alexandra School as the location for the new consolidated school.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Saskatoon Public School Division be given permission to conduct a site validation study of Optimist Park as a potential location for the consolidated city centre school.

BACKGROUND

The School Division received approval from the Province of Saskatchewan for its City Centre Consolidated School Project in March of 2020. The project was approved as a consolidation of Princess Alexandra, King George and Pleasant Hill elementary schools on the Princess Alexandra school site (see Appendix 1).

At the May 19, 2020 Governance and Priorities Committee meeting, Committee received an information report on the City Centre Recreation Facility. The report outlined Administration's plan to renew conversations with the School Division in being a potential partner and to consider the option of integrating a planned renewal of White Buffalo Youth Lodge as the city centre recreation facility, as part of the planned school consolidation project. Administration confirmed they will continue working with the School Division and the White Buffalo Youth Lodge Partnership to advance the concept and will report back to City Council in due course.

At its February 2, 2021 meeting, the Standing Policy Committee on Planning, Development and Community Services was presented with a letter from the School Division requesting the City's permission to investigate the potential of Optimist Park as a location for the City Centre Consolidated School Project (see Appendix 2).

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

As envisioned by the School Division, the consolidated city centre school will have a capacity of 500 to 600 pre-kindergarten to grade eight students. The school will also include a daycare with 74 childcare spaces. There is also the potential for other partner organizations to have space connected to or integrated within the new facility (including the potential for the renewal of the White Buffalo Youth Lodge/City Centre Recreation Centre). The anticipated opening date of the school is September 2024 or September 2025.

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The School Division has identified the following positive factors regarding the Optimist Park site:

1. In comparison to the Princess Alexandra location, Optimist Park is more centrally located to the three catchment areas of the affected schools, which would lessen pedestrian/student walking distances to the new school. The streets in this area are relatively quiet for school children walking or biking to school (i.e. less busy than 20th Street). This supports the Official Community Plan policy that all elementary school sites and community centre sites will be centrally located, and generally within 700 metres walking distance of residential development.
2. This site is 7.1 acres in size and is located between Avenue J and L, and 18th and 19th Streets. It is one block in from 20th Street and two blocks over, along 20th Street from the Princess Alexandra site. It should be noted that the school site would take up to 3.5 acres of the 7.1 acres (see appendix 3).
3. Optimist Park is fully developed as recreational space with amenities including a bike polo court, paddling pool, washroom and storage areas, playground, picnic area, walking paths, baseball diamond and open green space. This provides green space for outdoor activities for the school children, similar to new neighbourhoods where schools are built adjacent to neighbourhood parks.
4. Phasing of the project would be less disruptive than would be the case for the Princess Alexandra site, as none of the existing schools would be affected by the construction of the project.

From the City's perspective, there are a number of implications which would require consideration if a formal request was made by the School Division to construct a school on a portion of Optimist Park, including but not limited to:

1. Loss of green space. By current standards, Riversdale is deficient by 7 acres while King George is deficient by 2 acres. A loss of 3.5 acres in Optimist Park could exacerbate this, if not offset. Green space acquisition, including portions of existing school sites and evaluation of other options could be explored.
2. The site would have to be evaluated for transportation impacts including transit service, active transportation access (walking and biking), school parking, as well as adequate pick-up and drop-off zones for students. Consideration also needs to be given to the traffic impact of nearby industrial users.
3. Optimist Park is not designated Municipal Reserve, although it functions as such. [Bylaw No. 9700, Official Community Plan Bylaw, 2020](#) (Section 6, Page 30) states:

“School sites will be located on Municipal Reserve and, wherever possible, adjacent to other public open spaces in the area.”

It should also be noted, as previously developed schools, none of the three current school sites are designated Municipal Reserve, but any newly-developed school must abide by this bylaw provision, wherever it is located.

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4. The Princess Alexandra site includes the potential of a new White Buffalo Youth Lodge, which could be located on the same footprint as and adjoined to the new consolidated school. A site validation study of the Optimist Park site would include an assessment of the potential for the White Buffalo Youth Lodge at this location.
5. Compatibility with the 2014 Junction Improvement Strategy and 2004 West Industrial Local Area Plan. Optimist Park borders the West Industrial Employment Area for which the Strategy recommends public realm improvements and identifying future uses for vacant/contaminated lands. There are two vacant sites to the northwest of the park. One site located at 1112 – 19th Street (1504 acres) is privately owned. The other is City-owned (0.872 acres) (see Appendix 4).

The City continues to collaborate with the School Division related to a potential new White Buffalo Youth Lodge integrated into the new city centre school. This includes parallel and supportive work requiring an interconnected communication and public engagement strategy. There are three components to this project:

- 1) New City Centre Consolidated School;
- 2) Future use of old school sites; and
- 3) Renewal of White Buffalo Youth Lodge

The project work includes ensuring regulatory processes are adhered to and are not a barrier, long-term planning and policy considerations are addressed, and potential options for integrating the White Buffalo Youth Lodge are explored. The School Division has begun public engagement related to the city centre school project with some stakeholders. Future engagement will include:

- 1) parents of children attending the three schools;
- 2) school community councils;
- 3) community associations;
- 4) after-care providers;
- 5) Saskatoon Tribal Council;
- 6) Central Urban Métis Federation Inc.;
- 7) Saskatchewan Health Authority;
- 8) neighbourhood residents; and
- 9) property owners facing and on the streets leading to Optimist Park.

The Saskatoon Public Schools site review process includes public input and consultations, and while the City will assist, monitor and receive the results of this feedback, and which is partly set out in this report, Administration will advise Saskatoon Public Schools that such consultations will not replace the public notice and consultations that may be required under our legislation or bylaws and which will only

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be known when this site review is complete and a more detailed and comprehensive request perhaps materializes.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are currently no financial implications from this report.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

There are no privacy, legal, social or environmental implications identified at this time.

NEXT STEPS

Should approval be granted, the School Division will immediately undertake a validation study of both the Princess Alexandra and Optimist Park sites with a target completion in April 2021. The site validation report will be provided to the Saskatoon Board of Education and the City when completed. Administration would then report back to the Standing Policy Committee on Planning, Development and Community Services on next steps.

Subject to approval of this report, the City would conduct public engagement with the residents and community surrounding Optimist Park regarding the potential for the new school to be constructed in a portion of the park.

The School Division notified Administration that the project will take approximately five years to complete and involve the following stages of work:

- 1) 2021 – 2022: securing partners, further design and cost estimate;
- 2) 2022 – 2023: formal design and development refinement and approvals; and
- 3) 2023 – 2025: construction of the new school.

Administration will continue to work with the Saskatoon Tribal Council, Central Urban Métis Federation Inc, and the Saskatchewan Health Authority to advance the concept of a renewed White Buffalo Youth Lodge.

APPENDICES

1. Princess Alexandra School Site
2. Optimist Park
3. Area Location Map
4. Vacant Lots Across from Optimist Park

REPORT APPROVAL

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