

14th Street Parklet

ISSUE

Over the past number of years there have been many conversations related to a public parcel of land that has resulted from a street closure and work on the 14th Street Neighbourhood Bikeway. During engagement events, some members of the community expressed a desire to have the City of Saskatoon (City) consider formalizing this space as a public gathering space. This report provides an overview of options for consideration for the small parcel of land in the Nutana neighbourhood along 14th Street, at the intersection of Lansdowne Avenue and Temperance Street.

BACKGROUND

At its public hearing meeting held on March 27, 2017, City Council approved the road closure of 14th Street between Lansdowne Avenue and Temperance Street. City Council verbally requested that Administration engage the Urban Design staff to host a design charette to explore possibilities for the small triangular area created by the intersection of 14th Street, Lansdowne Avenue and Temperance Street. See Appendix 1 for the aerial view of the subject site.

On September 23, 2017, Administration hosted a design charette on the site. Approximately 12 people attended and an initial theme was presented. Public feedback regarding the initial theme was mixed.

Administration created a Stakeholder Working Group that included people who were for development of the area and those who were opposed.

On May 16, 2018, the Stakeholder Working Group held their initial meeting to explore options for both the permanent closure and the public space.

On June 19, 2018, the Stakeholder Working Group held their second meeting. Feedback included an indication that retaining the hardscape surface was preferred. There was no consensus on a direction for the vegetated public space; no further work was requested or completed on this specific area.

The meeting minutes and summary feedback from the various stakeholder working group meetings are provided (see Appendix 2).

On September 17, 2020, a public on-line meeting was held regarding the 14th Street permanent closure, and as requested by the Stakeholder Working Group, options and recommended solutions for the permanent closure were presented. The recommended option presented to the public included hardscaped surface for the permanent closure and some cleanup of the existing lilac bushes in the vegetated public space.

14th Street Parklet

At its Regular Business meeting on February 22, 2021, while considering a report from Transportation Department on the 14th Street Neighbourhood Bikeway project, City Council resolved:

- “1. That the 14th Street Bikeway plan be amended to establish the planned bike lanes along the existing south curb in the closed intersection at the south end of the space of 14th Street between Temperance Street and Lansdowne Avenue.
2. That City Council endorse the establishment of a parklet at the intersection of Temperance and 14th Streets.
3. That the Administration report back to the appropriate Committee in time for the next budget cycle following engagement with the 14th Street Parklet Steering Group, and the stakeholder working group established by the Transportation Department on the process to create this parklet in line with planning already initiated, including:
 - High level parklet planning with design features that preserve, protect, and enhance the natural space
 - Consideration of safety, as well as the character of the quiet neighbourhood
 - Consideration of all capital and operating costs.”

Appendix 3 provides an overview of the design considerations for the 14th Street Neighbourhood Bikeway to highlight the final configuration of the roadways and bikeway as it relates to this location. This report is to specifically address recommendations 2 and 3 of the above resolutions.

CURRENT STATUS

The land in discussion for this parklet is currently part of the public road right of way. It is not an existing parcel of land and is not considered to be formal park space. The existing condition of the site includes curbing, some paving stones, two benches, a little library installed by the community and a number of lilac bushes. Existing maintenance of this site is performed to a road right- of-way level of service.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

In addition to the community and stakeholder group meetings noted in the background of this report and summarized in Appendix 2, on June 1, 2021, Administration reconnected with the Stakeholder Working Group in a follow-up meeting to bring the community up-to-date on this file to discuss the potential options for consideration of this space and to provide an update on next steps in presenting a decision report to City Council for consideration and direction. In addition, on June 2, 2021, members of Planning and Development and Parks Departments presented the four options below to the Nutana Community Association. The participants at both meetings reached the conclusion that the development of the 14th Street Parklet should be an active, occupiable green space and include furniture for gathering, shade trees, more plantings and greenery than hardscaping and preferably should be redesignated as a Municipal Reserve in the long-term.

14th Street Parklet

OPTIONS

Option 1 – Minor Upgrades and Site Clean Up

Under this option, Administration would undertake to do some minor clean-up and maintenance of the current lilac bushes in the area and ensure the site amenities, (bench and paving stones) are in a good state of repair. Administration would further ensure that this area would continue to be included within the regular site maintenance service levels.

Advantages

- 1) this work could be done with already approved budgets;
- 2) pruning and maintaining the shrub bed will improve the overall appearance of the site;
- 3) the existing bench(es) provide for a place for respite or to enjoy;
- 4) does not require a subdivision to create a formal parcel for this level of improvement; and
- 5) existing established plant material would be protected and preserved.

Disadvantages

- does not add any new amenities to the parcel; and
- does not meet the desired design requested by some residents.

Option 2 – Naturalized Parklet

Under this option, the existing vegetation would be removed, and a non-irrigated, naturalized parklet would be established. Specifically, a grouping of taller native shrubs would be planted in the centre, surrounded by a variety of native wildflowers of varying heights and blooming periods that would provide a food source for native pollinators and birds. In addition, a small hard-surfaced area with two additional picnic tables could be installed at the south end of the parklet.

To establish a naturalized space, the approximate cost would be \$25,000 of new funding, including the establishment period. Under this option there would be no additional operating impact as the ongoing maintenance could be absorbed by the Naturalized Program. Metal picnic tables, if included, would cost \$5,000 each with an annual operating impact of \$200 per table.

Advantages

- 1) the resulting space does not require irrigation;
- 2) there is no ongoing operating impact;
- 3) naturalized spaces provide additional opportunities for education and support pollinators; and
- 4) does not require a subdivision to create a formal parcel for this level of improvement.

14th Street Parklet

Disadvantages

1. Aside from a potential picnic bench area, the remainder of the parklet would not be usable, active space.
2. Naturalized spaces can be seen as being less “green” and therefore less desirable.

Option 3 – Hardscaping/Public Realm Improvements

This option would undertake work similar to other streetscape projects and provide for public realm improvements. This could involve such things as: replacement of the current lilac bushes with more site appropriate shrubs, new street furniture, added street trees, additional hardscaping, additional lighting, bike racks, etc.

To undertake this work, it would require resources to design, tender, and manage construction, as well as the costs associated with the components noted above. The estimated cost for design and management of the project is approximately \$20,000 with additional estimated costs of construction of between \$35,000 and \$60,000. The final cost would be formalized at the detailed design stage. The ongoing operating impact would be approximately \$2,200 to \$2,500 annually.

Advantages

- provides for enhancements to the public space creating an inviting environment for people to enjoy;
- provides maintenance and investment into an existing area that has previously not been provided; and
- does not require a subdivision to create a formal parcel for this level of improvement.

Disadvantages

- requires additional resources and funding to complete the capital work and will require additional ongoing maintenance costs;
- potentially impacts the existing workload of the Urban Design team to provide this service outside of their current mandate within the BID areas; and
- loss of existing, established low maintenance plant material.

Option 4 – Create a new Park like parcel

This option would undertake the full scope of work to address the triangle boulevard north of the street closure being changed to create a Municipal Reserve parcel for this park-like space. This would include the requirement to subdivide the land, and have it designated as municipal reserve. In addition to this, it would then require formal work to design the parklet area with a combination of park amenities such as hard surface, irrigated grass, shrubs, and seating areas similar (but on a smaller scale) to the Village Square standards identified within the Park Development Guidelines.

To undertake this work, it would require a number of steps beginning with the legal subdivision and dedication of the parcel. Further, it would require landscape design work

14th Street Parklet

to formalize the design for the space and then the construction phase of establishing the park-like parcel.

The estimated cost to undertake this work to create a basic park-like space, mostly turf, is approximately \$30,000, including establishment costs. The final costs would need to be further refined during the detailed design phase. Additional amenities and site furniture would increase this amount further. To note, as there is no service connection nearby, the cost to install irrigation at this location would add approximately \$30,000, and potential drainage improvements would increase this additional cost. The cost to transition to Municipal Reserve space is \$8,500 (survey, subdivision, registration of the parcel), and the ongoing operating impact of this option would be approximately \$5,000 to \$7,500 annually for maintenance, depending on the final design and installation. In total, the estimated cost for this option ranges from \$68,500 to \$119,000. The final cost would be formalized at detailed design stage.

Advantages

- creates a more formalized gathering space and was supported by a number of the residents that participated in the public meetings over the last few years; and
- increases the standard of care and maintenance for this area, consistent with the standard applied to similarly-dedicated village square parks.

Disadvantages

- 1) designating this space as Municipal Reserve requires creation of a parcel through the subdivision process;
- 2) requires additional resources and funding to complete the capital work and will require additional ongoing maintenance costs;
- 3) potentially impacts the existing planned project priorities of the Parks Design team;
- 4) potential safety concerns given the size of the space and proximity of traffic;
- 5) the space is smaller than the current Park Development Guidelines outline as a minimum for village squares or pocket parks;
- 6) there are some known technical challenges with drainage around the site, which would require substantial investment to ensure the stormwater around the site drained properly and supplied the vegetation with the proper water for sustainment; and
- 7) loss of existing, established, low-maintenance plant material.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Standing Policy Committee on Planning Development and Community Services recommend to City Council implementation of Option 2 - Naturalized Parklet, as the preferred option, and that Administration work with the community to secure funds or potential grants to implement this option, or bring forward the resulting budget request for consideration during the 2022-2023 Business Plan and Budget deliberations.

RATIONALE

In consideration of the options presented above, the size and configuration of the space and feedback from the stakeholder groups, Administration is recommending Option 2 - Naturalized Parklet, as the preferred option. This option would require a small one-time cost of \$25,000 that Administration could work with the community to explore fundraising or potential grants. The ongoing operating impact could then be managed within already approved budgets. Further, this particular space is of a size that is not conducive for creating a formalized park-like space from a design and ongoing operating perspective.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Financial implications will depend on the option chosen. The details of financial implications for each of the options is included earlier in the report under the applicable option.

Should City Council direct Administration to undertake an option that does have financial implications, Administration would first work with the community to potentially raise some or all of the required funds and/or secure potential grants. Alternatively, Administration would then bring forward the applicable budget request as one of the items for consideration during the 2022 and 2023 Business Plan and Budget deliberations.

ADDITIONAL IMPLICATIONS/CONSIDERATIONS

There are no policy, privacy or environmental implications of Options 1, 2 or 3. If Option 4 - Create a new Park like parcel is selected, the notion of creating a municipal reserve parcel, with such a small parcel and in this location is not consistent with the currently approved Park Development Guidelines, so would be an exception to current policy.

COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES

Pending the direction of City Council on this matter, Administration would then undertake to provide updates to the community on the planned path forward.

APPENDICES

- 1. Aerial View of the Proposed 14th Street Parklet Site
- 2. 2017 and 2018 Stakeholder Meeting Notes - 14th Street Closure, Feedback on Public Space Design
- 3. 14th Street Neighbourhood Bikeway Project Figure

REPORT APPROVAL

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