

Meewasin Updates - Capital Campaign, Funding Request and Urban Park Feasibility Study

ISSUE

The City of Saskatoon and Meewasin Valley Authority (Meewasin) continue working together on programs, services, and initiatives. This report provides an update on some recent announcements related to urban parks, requests approval on Meewasin's planned approach for Sponsorships as part of their capital campaign, proposes options for potential consideration of capital funding from the City to Meewasin for the proposed trail upgrades to four sections of trail, and is seeking consideration for Meewasin's request to be an active partner in a feasibility study on urban parks.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the direction for donor solicitation and recognition, as well as the offering of presenting sponsor or naming rights related to the Meewasin Valley Authority Capital Campaign, as outlined in this report, be approved; and
2. That the City of Saskatoon be an active partner in collaboration with Meewasin on the recently announce feasibility study for an Urban Park model in Saskatoon.

BACKGROUND

The Governance and Priorities Committee (GPC), at its meeting held on May 17, 2021, received a report from Administration with an update on work underway with Meewasin. At this same meeting, Andrea Lafond, CEO of Meewasin, presented Committee with a formal request for capital funding to support the capital campaign for trail upgrades (Please refer to Appendix 1 for Letter of Request). The Committee resolved that:

“that the Administration bring forward options to Council's budget deliberations, including funding to support Meewasin, as part of the trail expansions and upgrades.”

On August 4, 2021 a joint public announcement was made regarding funding from the Federal Government for Meewasin to lead a regional project to undertake a feasibility study to explore potential models for the formalization of an Urban Park in Saskatoon and region. Please refer to Appendix 2 for the News Release.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

Capital Campaign and Planned Trail Upgrades/Expansions

Since the May meeting of GPC, Administration has been in discussions with Meewasin regarding their plans for a formal capital campaign. The primary focus of discussion has been related to the trail expansion/upgrade projects for sections of the trails within City owned parks, and that once completed, the new trails and amenities along the trails, will be under the care and maintenance of the City.

Part of the capital campaign includes providing sponsorship and naming recognition for key donors for some of the public spaces and amenities along the trails. And since the majority of these will ultimately become City owned assets, any consideration for donor recognition and/or naming rights needs to comply with the City of Saskatoon Sponsorship Policy C09-028. This policy applies to all City owned facilities, land, equipment, services, and programs, and for the purpose of this policy Meewasin functions as a Civic Partner.

To achieve the capital campaign's objectives, Meewasin is requesting consideration to proceed with a program for donor solicitation and recognition. Meewasin's intent with onsite recognition would be to work within the current City Sponsorship Policy No. C09 028 where recognition will, as a general principle, support the goals and objectives of the City and be compatible with, complimentary to, and reflect the City's values. With this approach to donor solicitation, it is expected that donors, whether corporate or individual, would be appropriately recognized for any donations made toward the projects.

Meewasin has provided a summary of their plans for the major donations and has identified a number of donations which will exceed \$100,000 (which as outlined in Policy C09-028 requires Council approval). Meewasin is looking to get approval from the City to streamline the processes for all donations exceeding \$100,000, as opposed to requiring individual approval for each large donation/sponsorship. The summary outlines potential new assets, opportunities, and the number of years of recognition for their planned approach for donor recognition. It is being presented for City Council's consideration and approval. Please refer to Appendix 3 for summary/sponsorship list.

Administration recommends supporting this request which is similar to the approach used with the Gordie Howe Sports Complex capital campaign. Administration has reviewed the list of assets and is working with Meewasin to identify, who the owner of the assets will be, and will ensure the approach to naming and sponsorship is consistent with the goals and objectives of the City and reflect the City's values.

Request for Funding Support from the City

In May, Meewasin requested \$1.25 million in capital funding from the City, over five years, for trail upgrades and expansions. The letter in Appendix 1 outlines, the overall estimated capital cost for all trail work is in the magnitude of \$13.8 million. Meewasin was successful in their application to the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program (ICIP) and has received \$4M in funding, which is helping fund much needed trail improvements in three primary areas: Meewasin Park in River Heights neighbourhood; Kinsmen Park near Shakespeare on the Saskatchewan and Downtown; adjacent to Circle Drive south near the Gordie Howe Bridge. All four sections of trail, including the Downtown segment, will include: improving safety and accessibility for all users and adding much needed lighting and furnishings.

In addition to the funding secured through ICIP and the current \$1.25 million capital request of the City, Meewasin will also direct the existing \$250,000 received annually,

from the City for trail upgrades, to the above projects over the next five years. This would then represent a total contribution from the City of \$2.5 million for trail upgrades and expansions, approximately 18% of the total costs. Meewasin will then generate the balance of the funding through their capital campaign noted earlier in this report.

In addition to the annual trail upgrade funding of \$250,000 the City provides to Meewasin, this new capital funding request specified by Meewasin is to provide \$500,000 in 2022 and \$187,500 in each of the subsequent four years (2023 to 2026).

Administration has submitted a capital project option request, for consideration with the 2022-2023 Business Plan and Budget deliberations. The current request is for \$500,000 in 2022 and \$187,500 in 2023. Related to this funding request, during Budget deliberations, City Council could consider any of the options noted below.

- A. Provide the funding requested over five years, from the Reserve for Capital Expenditures (RCE). Recognizing that City Council is only able to approve capital projects for 2022 and 2023, during the upcoming budget deliberations. Future year's funding supports, for 2024 to 2026, would need to be brought forward for approval at the appropriate time.
- B. Provide the full funding requested of \$1.25 million, over just two years, funded through the RCE.
- C. Provide the funding requested through consideration under the Recreation and Parks Facilities Game Plan Funding Plan. This would first require approval to have these trail upgrade projects included within Game Plan Funding Plan and then consideration for a commitment to the full five years of funding (similar to the approach to funding for the Gordie Howe Sports Complex and Merlis Belsher Place). Under this option, it is important to note the current Game Plan and Partnership Reserve are underfunded, so it would require consideration, during the Business Plan and Budget deliberations, for an increase to the annual operating contribution to the Partnership Reserve of a minimum of \$250,000.

Framework for an Urban Park in Saskatoon

Meewasin has been in conversations with the Federal Government through the Department of Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) regarding Federal supports and opportunities for Meewasin. This resulted in an interest from ECCC, in having Meewasin undertake a Feasibility Study for an Urban Park model for Saskatoon and region. This was formally confirmed through the recent funding announcement made on August 4, 2021 with Federal Minister Wilkinson.

ECCC recognizes Meewasin as a national leader in conserving natural areas in urban settings, and they want to explore whether the Meewasin model could be replicated in other jurisdictions under a new Canadian urban park model, framework and policy. They want to partner with Meewasin to conduct a feasibility study around this concept.

With approval from the Meewasin Board to proceed with the feasibility study, and the recent funding announcement, Meewasin is now reaching out to important

organizations, partners in the region and is formally asking the City to be an active partner in this study.

Since the City is both a governing partner with Meewasin and would be a key stakeholder in such a feasibility study, Administration supports this request and understands it would require involvement in varying degrees from the following departments: Planning and Development, Sustainability, Parks, Recreation and Community Development, Indigenous Initiatives, Transportation, Facilities Management, Saskatoon Water, and Saskatoon Land. Meewasin anticipates through this study there will be opportunities to explore and continue to align and contribute to many shared goals and initiatives. For example, the Urban Park Model could both advance actions and contribute to upcoming programs of the Green Infrastructure Strategy such as the proposed Natural Areas program.

The Feasibility Study is just as it states, it is a study to explore the opportunities and requirements of a formalized and expanded urban park area. Throughout the process of the study, it will also require formal stages of reporting out and in due course, at the conclusion of the Feasibility Study would be looking for approvals from the partners in Meewasin (Province, City and University) as well as the current stakeholders and expanded opportunities for key stakeholders in Saskatoon and beyond.

This feasibility study will provide the opportunity to build on the strong history and work of Meewasin by exploring the opportunity of expanding the conservation zone as Saskatoon and region continue to grow and has the potential to formalize sustainable funding from the Federal Government to support the important work of Meewasin.

This initiative is significant and will allow Meewasin to effectively work with many partners and the public to determine what comes next, as the Saskatoon region's growth over the past four decades has already outpaced the population projections made in the Meewasin 100-year plan. An expanded urban park model has potential for positive implications for the region, for Saskatchewan and for the environment in and around Saskatoon.

Please refer to Appendix 4 - Urban Park Model Feasibility Study, an FAQ document provided by Meewasin.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Financial Implication of this report is related to the additional \$1.25 million capital funding request from Meewasin over a number of years. This request has been submitted as part of the upcoming 2022-2023 Business Plan and Budget deliberations. Other financial implications will be the operating impacts for the Parks and the Facilities Management Departments for care and maintenance of the new trail segments and trail side furniture/amenities. These operating impacts will be based on final design and will be brought forward as part of future operating budgets.

The work on the Urban Park feasibility study will not have direct financial impacts to the City but will require a time commitment of Administration. Meewasin will be the lead on all aspects of the feasibility study, and where there are significant time requirements of City Administration, as is expected with the Sustainability and Planning and Development Departments, the project is able to provide supports.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

There are no privacy or legal implications identified.

Sponsorship Policy No. C09-028 (Policy) provides guidelines to facilitate and support opportunities for entering into sponsorship agreements and naming rights agreements for City-owned assets for the purpose of enhanced financial sustainability. Meewasin is requesting a slight departure from the current Policy guidelines and recognize this is subject to City Council approval. The Policy indicates that City Council is to provide concept approval for:

- a) all sponsorship arrangements that are of a sensitive nature or with the total value in excess of \$100,000;
- b) all naming rights arrangements; and
- c) sale of naming rights before sponsors are approached or agreements made.

The Policy further states that there be a fixed term of up to a maximum of ten years. City Council has the authority to approve an exception to policy as outlined in this report.

Environmental Implications

Designation of National Urban Park sites could have notable environmental benefits including the long-term protection of significant natural areas in the city and the preservation of critical remaining habitat; as well as the designation of habitat corridors to connect these sites. Critical habitat in Saskatoon is currently under threat from urban development, fragmentation, and invasive species. The restoration of key sites, and connectivity through an Urban Park, could reduce these threats. Additionally, the protection and restoration of natural areas could have significant climate adaptation benefits, such as carbon sequestration and mitigation of climate related risks such as wildfires, droughts, and overland flooding.

Social Implications

Social distancing measures related to COVID-19 highlighted the importance of residents' connection to nature for mental and physical health. The designation of an interconnected Urban Park would help ensure all residents of Saskatoon have easy access to a natural space and improve overall equity and access to Saskatoon's green infrastructure.

Additionally, there are significant opportunities to work in partnership with Indigenous rights-holders; both to acknowledge and support their long-term relationship and stewardship of this land, and to determine ways that ongoing Indigenous stewardship of natural areas can be fully supported.

NEXT STEPS

If the recommendations of the report are approved, the next steps will be to continue to work with Meewasin on applicable projects and initiatives, and to report back at key milestones within the various projects. Meewasin confirmed that during the design and construction phase of all trail extensions they already have, or will at the appropriate time, consult with and seek approval from the applicable City departments on the trail development.

APPENDICES

1. Meewasin Letter Request for Capital Funding
2. Urban Park Model Feasibility Study – News Release
3. Meewasin More Than a Trail Campaign Recognition
4. Urban Park Model Feasibility Study - Partners FAQ

REPORT APPROVAL

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