

Northeast Swale and Small Swale Boundary Endorsement

ISSUE

In advance of a Concept Plan being brought forward for the University Heights Neighbourhood #3 (UH3), Administration is providing a report recommending endorsement of a new north boundary for the Northeast Swale and new boundaries for the Small Swale, based on a review of a Natural Area Screening (NAS) completed for this area.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Standing Policy Committee on Planning, Development and Community Services, recommend to City Council that the boundaries for the Northeast and Small Swales, as outlined in Option 2, be endorsed.

BACKGROUND

The Standing Policy Committee on Environment, Utilities and Corporate Services, at its meeting on March 13, 2017, in response to a submission, regarding the “Development of the Swale – Response to Northeast Swale Watchers’ 12 Points”, [resolved](#), in part:

- “3. That the Administration bring together stakeholders in regards to the Northeast Swale (Swale) to continue the discussion about protection of the Swale. Stakeholders should include, but are not limited to, the City of Saskatoon, University of Saskatchewan, Meewasin Valley Authority, Saskatoon Environmental Advisory Committee, Municipal Heritage Advisory Committee and the Swale Watchers.”

As a result of this resolution, the Northeast Swale Working Group (NSWG) was established as an ad hoc group, with a short-term focus on current issues and policy outcomes. Eleven NSWG meetings were hosted to review and assess various issues raised. Four of these meetings included discussions on swale boundary delineation.

The Standing Policy Committee on Planning, Development and Community Services, at its meeting on March 11, 2019, received a [report](#) which provided a status update on the NSWG’s work. Since that time, all items raised have been addressed, either through an action item, a provision of information or through identification of initiatives in process of addressing the item, which completed the work of this group. A detailed summary of how each point was, or is, being addressed is provided (see Appendix 1).

The Standing Policy Committee on Planning, Development and Community Services, at its meeting on August 16, 2021, [resolved](#) that:

- “In support of ongoing work regarding the boundaries for the Small Swale and northern boundary of the Northeast Swale, that Administration work with Meewasin, as requested, to ensure that boundaries are established prior to completion of the UH3 Concept Plan.”

The Standing Policy Committee on Planning, Development and Community Services, at its meeting on September 13, 2021, received a report outlining the process for delineation of boundaries of the Northeast Swale and the Small Swale (see Appendix 2). In response to this report, it was [resolved](#):

“That Administration review the Natural Area Screening (NAS) provided by the developer and bring forward a recommendation to formally endorse the north boundary of the Northeast Swale and both boundaries of the Small Swale in advance of the University Heights 3 Concept Plan based on the recommendations of the NAS and pursue dedication as Environmental Reserve through the process outlined in the September 13, 2021 report of the General Manager, Community Services.”

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

Natural Area Screening

Developers are required to have a NAS completed as part of the concept planning process. The intent of this NAS is to provide a more detailed, field-based study of a development area to refine the higher-level, desktop NAS which would have been conducted as part of the development area’s relevant Sector Plan.

With development of a concept plan for UH3 on the horizon, Saskatoon Land has completed a NAS for the UH3 area. To ensure appropriate information is collected as part of this study, Administration worked with community stakeholders through the NSWG, then worked with Saskatoon Land, to confirm the scope of the NAS before the request for proposals for this work was released.

The NAS was completed by Environmental Dynamics Inc., a qualified, professional consultant. As it was developed, drafts of the NAS were reviewed by Administration to ensure the final report would reflect relevant Municipal, Provincial and Federal policies, plans and standards.

On December 17, 2021, the final NAS was formally submitted to the City of Saskatoon. Following this, Administration completed a review of the NAS. Confirmation the NAS was accepted by Administration was provided to Saskatoon Land on August 15, 2022. This means Administration has confirmed the report meets the study scope, as outlined in the request for proposals, and included information aligned with applicable policies, plans and standards. The final NAS can be viewed on the [City’s engage page](#).

Stakeholder Engagement

A summary of stakeholder engagement is provided (see Appendix 3). As outlined, four NSWG meetings occurred related to swale boundaries. A [public information meeting](#) was also hosted by Saskatoon Land on June 21, 2021. These meetings provided an opportunity for stakeholders to provide comments to ensure the scope of the NAS was appropriate, then, once complete, an opportunity to review the NAS and submit comments on the resulting document and its recommendations. Stakeholders were also provided an opportunity to review and discuss recommendations, developed by Administration, based on their submitted comments.

Swale Boundary Analysis and Review

As part of the NAS, Environmental Dynamics Inc. included a recommendation for a new north boundary of the Northeast Swale and new boundaries for the Small Swale. This is presented as Option 1 below.

Following the June 21, 2021, public information meeting, various stakeholder organizations reviewed the NAS. Comments on the NAS were received from Meewasin, the Northeast Swale Watchers, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, Wild About Saskatoon as well as the Saskatoon Nature Society. All comments received were subsequently reviewed and analyzed by the City's Sustainability Department and the Planning and Development Department for alignment with relevant policies, plans and standards.

This process resulted in Administration developing a recommendation to expand boundaries of the swales beyond the recommendations included in the UH3 NAS, incorporating several suggestions received during the engagement on and review of the NAS. This is presented as Option 2 below.

A final meeting of the NSWG was held on December 7, 2022, to discuss Administration's recommendation. The resulting discussion did not result in full consensus on a desired set of recommendations for new swale boundaries. As a result, three options that are deemed viable, are being provided to Council for consideration and endorsement.

Options

Option 1 – Natural Area Screening Recommended Boundaries

This option is the recommendation included in the UH3 NAS (see Appendix 4), and was the starting point for review, engagement, and consideration on the proposed swale boundaries. It proposes:

- a) An expansion of the Northeast Swale boundary, beyond what is shown in the University Heights Sector Plan, to incorporate an area known to include a Lek (a Sharp-tailed Grouse breeding ground), as well as newly identified native grasslands;
- b) The inclusion of a forebay within the Northeast Swale and another adjacent to it;
- c) New north and south boundaries to the Small Swale, with disturbed areas being recommended for use as Municipal Reserve and a forebay; and
- d) Development of greenways (linear open space buffers, which can include pedestrian infrastructure) along all swale boundaries. The greenways would also border two proposed and one existing forebay, resulting in those forebays appearing to be within the swales.

This option provides additional buffering and protection of ecologically sensitive areas within both swales, while allowing for less ecologically valuable and disturbed areas to be considered for stormwater management infrastructure or Municipal Reserve.

Option 2 – NAS Recommended Boundaries plus Additional Areas for Inclusion

This option is based on Administration’s in-depth analysis of the UH3 NAS and all stakeholder comments received (see Appendix 5). It proposes:

- a) Incorporation of boundaries recommended as part of the UH3 NAS;
- b) Expansion of Northeast Swale boundary to incorporate additional native grassland habitat in two locations;
- c) All proposed forebays near the Northeast Swale be located outside the swale boundary;
- d) Expansion of Small Swale boundary, at points, to incorporate existing habitat, provide additional buffering for the Riddell paleontological site, as well as provide better access and egress from the area for wildlife;
- e) Inclusion of Area 1 as a buffer for the Small Swale to allow movement of wildlife and provide further protection of the Small Swale, as well as guidance that this area be naturalized but may include a forebay or other stormwater management infrastructure;
- f) Inclusion of a restricted open space area, near Lowe Road, which would not be part of the Northeast Swale but expected to be maintained as open space to reduce a “pinch-point” for wildlife and allow for a better buffer around wetlands; and
- g) Development of greenways along all swale boundaries, as well as the boundary of Area 1.

This option expands beyond the NAS recommendations to incorporate additional native grassland habitat within the swales, while also providing additional buffers for the Small Swale and the Riddell paleontological site. Areas recommended for swale boundary expansion and buffers tend to be in places where either slopes or wetlands would act as pinch points for wildlife movement. These recommendations reflect comments received from Meewasin, and others, based on their observations and experience doing natural area management work, both in and around the swales.

Option 3 – Further Expanded Areas for Addition

This option expands on Option 2 and is based on a detailed review of the UH3 NAS overlaid with Meewasin’s experience studying the swales throughout their work (see Appendix 6). Along with all elements of Option 2 being included, Option 3 further proposes:

- a) Three additional expansions of the Northeast Swale south of McOrmond Drive; and
- b) That an area north of McOrmond Drive, which includes a proposed forebay, be included within the Northeast Swale boundaries, with a recommendation of a naturalized wetland system be included as part of the forebay design in order to reduce the flow of pollutants into the Northeast Swale wetlands.

This option incorporates additional native grassland areas into the Northeast Swale, while also allowing greater wildlife movement between areas of the swale and providing additional buffering of the Lek.

Other Suggestions

In addition to the above options, comments were received recommending either no further development in the UH3 area, or the swale boundaries be expanded to the remainder of the quarter section (NW-18-37-04-W3M), which includes the Lek.

Due to significant feasibility challenges, Administration cannot support either of these options. Preventing all development in this area would challenge the ability to meet Saskatoon's long-term growth needs and would require a substantial reassessment of how and where Saskatoon is expected to grow. Expanding the Northeast Swale to include the remainder of the quarter section around the Lek would create significant design and feasibility challenges for development of this area. Furthermore, rangeland health assessments indicate the area is currently unhealthy, due to the presence of non-native and invasive grass species and weeds. Range management would be required to reduce proliferation of invasive species and weeds.

Recommended Option

Administration is recommending Option 2. This option considers recommendations from UH3 NAS, alongside on-the-ground experience and knowledge which was informed by comments received from Meewasin, the NSWG members and other stakeholder organizations who reviewed the NAS. The resulting option balances the ecological value of the area, alongside Saskatoon's long-term growth needs and current policy direction. Option 2 is also in alignment with all applicable Municipal, Provincial and Federal plans, policies, and standards.

It is also important to note that the process of delineating boundaries within a neighbourhood area in advance of the submission of a Concept Plan is very atypical. This additional step demonstrates the uniqueness of this area, the recognition of the ecological value of this area, and provides greater assurances on the protection for the Swales as plans for development get underway. Endorsing the recommended boundaries, will then enable the Developer (Saskatoon Land) to move forward with developing their proposed Concept Plan for this neighbourhood.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications expected at this time. At the time of a Concept Plan being brought forward, analysis may be brought forward outlining financial implications based on detailed land use, transportation and servicing strategies or plans, which at this time have not been developed.

NEXT STEPS

1. City Council's decision will be communicated to the Developer (Saskatoon Land), as well as interested community groups and relevant City Departments.
2. The endorsed boundaries will guide the developer in the preparation of the Concept Plan.
3. At the time of a Concept Plan submission, the Council-endorsed boundary will be used by Administration as part of review of the Concept Plan.

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4. As part of the Concept Plan review and approval process, at minimum, the public will have opportunity to review and comment on the proposed Concept Plan and swale boundaries at a public open-house, Municipal Planning Commission meeting and a Public Hearing. If changes from the endorsed boundaries are proposed at this stage, additional stakeholder and technical review may be required.
5. Formal final boundaries for the Swales will be confirmed via the Concept plan approval.

APPENDICES

1. Northeast Swale Working Group Issue Actions Summary
2. Information Report - Northeast Swale and Small Swale Delineation Process
3. Stakeholder Engagement Summary
4. Boundary Option 1 – Natural Area Screening Recommended Boundaries
5. Boundary Option 2 – NAS Recommended Boundaries plus Additional Areas for Inclusion
6. Boundary Option 3 – Further Expanded Areas for Addition

REPORT APPROVAL

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