

Natural Areas Policy Framework

ISSUE

"Pathways for an Integrated Green Network: An Implementation Plan for Saskatoon's Green Infrastructure Strategy" (Green Pathways) includes an action to pursue the development of tools and a policy to provide support and direction for identification, prioritization, conservation and designation of natural areas as well as the connections between those natural areas. This work includes exploring updates to existing policy and processes and/or the creation of a new policy.

BACKGROUND

The Natural Area Management Plan – Templates and Pilots and the Natural Areas Policy and Process Development projects address the following actions from [Green Pathways](#):

- Action 1.1: Protect prioritized natural areas through policies and processes.
- Action 1.2: Manage and restore natural areas through Natural Area Management Plans.
- Action 1.4: Integrate natural assets into the City's asset management system.

CURRENT STATUS

The City of Saskatoon (City) has conducted several engagements on natural areas and how they integrate into urban development (see Appendix 1). Throughout these engagements, key themes emerged as challenges and opportunities for improvement within the City's existing systems for identifying and conserving natural areas. This process led to stakeholder groups identifying perceived gaps, related to how natural areas are considered through the development process.

As part of the initial work to address these gaps and any opportunities for improvement, Administration conducted an in-depth review of relevant City policies and processes (see Appendix 2). This review focused on the development process as a key means through which natural areas are identified, boundaries for conservation are determined and land use designations and dedications are applied.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

To develop recommendations for improvements to the City's natural areas framework, Administration reviewed policies, bylaws, regulations and tools used by other Canadian municipalities to consider natural areas and assets (see Appendix 3). Tools were evaluated in the context of the *Planning & Development Act, 2007*, to determine potential for use in Saskatchewan.

Administration presented these tools to both internal departments and external stakeholders, including the Natural Areas Working Group and the Saskatoon and Region Home Builders' Association, to identify any significant concerns or challenges with any of the options.

Through these discussions, stakeholders provided valuable considerations for evaluating these options. This process led to the following tools being identified as priorities to evaluate further and, if appropriate, to consider for implementation:

- Natural Area Policy;
- Natural Area Screening Improvements;
- Natural Areas Mapping and Prioritization Resource;
- Administrative Procedures;
- Heritage Property Designation;
- Design and Development Standards;
- Zoning Tools; and
- Natural Areas Acquisition Fund

A further description of the intent of each tool is described in Appendix 3.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications at this time; however, future implications are expected to vary depending on the tools pursued. Financial implications will be identified and reported to the relevant committee(s) during further phasing work of this project.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal, privacy, social or environmental implications at this time. Some potential tools may require changes to existing bylaws, policies or other management documents, or the introduction of new bylaws, policies or management documents. Specific implications will be identified and presented during future reporting, related to this project.

NEXT STEPS

Administration will investigate the tools presented in this report in greater detail and will engage internal and external stakeholders on each individual tool chosen to be considered for implementation. Based on this engagement, chosen tools will be further refined and brought forward for approval and adoption from relevant committee(s) and City Council, when appropriate.

APPENDICES

1. City of Saskatoon Natural Areas Engagement Overview
2. City of Saskatoon Natural Areas Policy Current State Summary
3. City of Saskatoon Natural Area Policy Framework: Tools Summary

REPORT APPROVAL

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