

Small Swale and Richard St Barbe Baker Afforestation Area – Natural Area Management and Conceptual Master Plans

ISSUE

Natural Area Management Plans and Conceptual Master Plans (“the Plans”) have been prepared for the Small Swale and Richard St Barbe Baker Afforestation Area (RSBBAA). The Plans define the vision, management objectives, activities, and enhancements needed to conserve the unique ecological and cultural resources at these sites. This report seeks approval in principle of the Plans.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Standing Policy Committee on Environment, Utilities, and Corporate Services recommend to City Council:

1. That the Natural Area Management Plans and Conceptual Master Plans for the Small Swale and RSBBAA be approved in principle; and
2. That discussions with Meewasin on options and resources for site management at the Small Swale and RSBBAA continue.

BACKGROUND

At its regular business meeting on December 19, 2022, City Council received the [Natural Areas Management Pilots - Small Swale and Richard St Barbe Baker Afforestation Area](#) report and approved that Administration proceed with the development of pilots at the Small Swale and RSBBAA. The pilots include the preparation of Natural Area Management Plans and Conceptual Master Plans for each site.

Capital funding for the Natural Area Management Plan – Templates and Pilots project was approved at the 2022-2023 Budget deliberations and is available through the Green Infrastructure Strategy (P.02390).

On January 10, 2024 the Standing Policy Committee on Planning, Development and Community Services received for information the [Natural Areas Policy Framework](#) (PDCS2024-0103) report. In this, the following tools are 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.

At its regular business meeting on January 31, 2024, City Council approved design and construction of the [2024 RSBBAA site enhancement project](#).

Engagement Results

From May to October 2023, the City of Saskatoon (City) engaged the community on the preparation of the Plans. The engagement included environmental and conservation organizations including Meewasin, environmental advocacy groups, land developers, site user groups, local communities and adjacent landowners, and the City's Natural Areas Working Group. Engagement has informed the site selection, methodology, and content of Plans. Through meetings, information sessions, and workshops, stakeholders were asked:

- What features, ecosystems and/or species are important for us to protect and how can the City support their protection?
- How does the community use the sites and how can these uses be supported (e.g., improving trails, creating gathering areas, etc.)?
- How can we best balance conservation and public use at the sites?

Stakeholders are supportive of the Plans and provided comments emphasizing the importance of these sites to the community, and the need to protect and restore the sites. Feedback emphasized the ecological importance and need to protect the Small Swale, and the uniqueness and need to balance conservation and recreation at RSBBA. A complete engagement summary for each of the Plans can be found in Appendix 1.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

Overview of the Plans

In 2023, WSP Canada Inc. was contracted to complete a Natural Area Management Plan and Conceptual Master Plan for each site. The intention of the Plans is to:

- Provide guidance for how the City can conserve the important ecological and cultural features of these sites.
- Present a vision, site management goals, and associated management activities needed to restore and manage both sites.
- Provide recommendations for site uses that are compatible with the overall goal to conserve the areas.
- Provide recommendations and a conceptual plan map for proposed enhancements at both sites, including circulation routes, destinations and gathering areas, site furnishings, and ecological restoration work.

The Plans represent one step needed to protect, restore, and manage these sites. Implementation of the Plans would be subject to secured funding and would involve establishing a level of service, detailed design, consideration of the surrounding development and servicing context, and in some cases, additional public engagement.

Administration's summaries of each Plan are included in Appendix 2 and 3. The entire Plans are available online at saskatoon.ca/NAMP.

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Planning and Development Considerations

The Plans have been developed for the Small Swale and RSBBA as a pilot initiative to refine the City's approach to protecting, restoring, and managing significant natural areas. The Plans provide information that may not otherwise be collected early in the development planning process.

As they stand, the Plans are guidelines that do not dictate a final design or set mandatory requirements for site management. As such, the Plans' long-term vision and site management practices are presented to guide later initiatives with a best-practice approach to conserving, improving, and maintaining these natural areas.

These Plans have been prepared in parallel to the Natural Area Policy and Process (NAPP) project, which is intended to provide support and direction for the identification, prioritization, conservation and designation of natural areas and connections between those natural areas. The Natural Areas Policy Framework Report (PDCS2024-0103) summarizes the NAPP work scope, which may include formalizing site boundaries, establishing formal protections of natural areas, and coordinating with adjacent land uses, development, and servicing considerations.

Importantly, the NAPP project will also consider how Plans such as these may be formally incorporated into the planning and development regulatory framework.

Considerations for Future Site Management

The Small Swale and RSBBA were selected as pilot sites in part due to the lack of current management at these spaces. One goal of the Plan is to establish a formal level of service for both sites, which would require the identification of a site manager(s), and definition of roles and responsibilities.

The City's Naturalized Parks team and Meewasin have both historically been involved in maintenance activities at natural areas including the Northeast Swale, Saskatoon Natural Grasslands, Beaver Creek Conservation Area, Cranberry Flats Conservation Area, and Chief Whitecap Park. In some cases, such as at the Northeast Swale, maintenance agreements are in place that define the roles, responsibilities, and funding commitments between the City and Meewasin.

Discussions have begun between the City and Meewasin regarding interest in site management at one or both sites. Results of these discussions, and recommended roles and responsibilities for future site manager(s), will be brought forward in future reporting.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications of this report.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

CPTED Considerations

The Plans have been reviewed by the City's Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) Committee, which recommended that:

- Detailed designs for any washroom facilities and parking lots be submitted to the CPTED Review Committee Chair;
- Lighting be installed on timers to align with site hours;
- Additional waste bins be considered;
- Trails have identifiable entry and/or exit points approximately 200 meters apart to avoid movement predictors; and
- Specific signage and natural traffic calming be applied to the roadway from the west gate to the skills park at RSBBA.

These recommendations will be incorporated into the detailed design for each site prior to the implementation of the Plans and submitted to the CPTED Committee as necessary.

NEXT STEPS

Implementation plans will be prepared that will outline options for the operations, maintenance and level of service, and associated resources required. Site management discussions will continue with Meewasin. Further reporting on site operations is planned for early 2025.

APPENDICES

1. Final Engagement Summary
2. Administrative Summary of Small Swale Plans
3. Administrative Summary of RSBBA Plans

Report Approval

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