
Meewasin Valley Authority Northeast Swale – Special Conservation Area Designation

Recommendation

That the Standing Policy Committee on Environment, Utilities and Corporate Services recommend to City Council that the Administration's intended approach to require Environmental Reserve dedication at the time of subdivision, where appropriate, be endorsed.

Topic and Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of existing measures of protection for the Northeast Swale, to outline additional measures and their implications, and to inform City Council of the Administration's intended approach.

Report Highlights

1. The Northeast Swale (Swale) is currently protected by a number of layers of plans and policies.
2. The Administration reviewed a number of additional measures that could be used to ensure the long-term protection of the Swale.
3. The Administration intends to pursue dedication of Swale lands as Environmental Reserve (ER), incrementally, as part of the subdivision process.
4. Municipal Heritage Property Designation for the Swale is an option and is being considered under a separate report from the Municipal Heritage Advisory Committee (MHAC).

Strategic Goals

Existing and proposed measures to protect and enhance the Swale demonstrate the City of Saskatoon's (City) Strategic Goals of Environmental Leadership and Sustainable Growth.

Background

At its May 25, 2015 meeting, City Council endorsed the Northeast Policy submitted by the Meewasin Valley Authority (Meewasin). The intent of the Northeast Policy is to provide direction and guidelines for the continued balance of development and conservation in the northeast quadrant of the Meewasin Valley. This includes the future extension of Meewasin's jurisdiction to include all of the Swale within City limits. Meewasin has further recommended that swales, the riverbank, and other areas identified in the Conservation Zone, as illustrated in the Northeast Policy, should be dedicated as ER.

At its October 26, 2015 meeting, City Council endorsed the Meewasin Northeast Swale Master Plan. As part of this adoption, City Council directed the Administration to report

on the process and implications for designating the Swale as a special conservation area. As part of the review process for this master plan, the Administration was also asked by MHAC to evaluate the potential to designate the Swale as a natural heritage site.

Report

Protection Currently in Place

A summary of protection currently in place can be found in Attachment 1.

All development in the area of the Swale must be consistent with the University Heights Sector Plan and jointly-adopted Northeast Swale Development Guidelines. These plans/guidelines protect the Swale from development, identifying it as a significant environmental feature. The plans/guidelines also provide direction to minimize disturbance to the Swale, as well as meet transportation, utility, stormwater management, and other community needs.

Excluding the portion of the Swale known as Petturson's Ravine, the City is the sole landowner of the Swale lands within City limits. Community interests govern decisions related to the Swale and can ensure its protection from development.

Within City limits, Meewasin's Conservation Zone includes the majority of the Swale lands and will be expanded over time to include all of these lands. All improvements on lands within the Conservation Zone are subject to Meewasin's Development Review process and, ultimately, require approval of the Meewasin Board. This ensures that all development is consistent with Meewasin's conservation, education, and development goals, as defined by its plans and guidelines.

Options for Additional Measures

Attachment 1 includes a summary of potential options that could be used to further protect the Swale. Only those options recommended for use or further review are discussed below.

Environmental Reserve

ER is a form of dedicated land that may be required by an approving authority (such as the City) where land meets one or more criteria under *The Planning and Development Act, 2007 (Act)*. In consideration of these criteria and policies in Official Community Plan Bylaw No. 8769, the University Heights Sector Plan, and the applicable Meewasin plans and guidelines, the Swale is suitable for dedication as ER.

When City Council endorsed Meewasin's Northeast Policy, it also authorized a Memorandum of Understanding between the City and Meewasin that includes a commitment to dedicate Swale lands as ER at the time of subdivision, wherever possible.

The Administration intends to require dedication of Swale lands as ER when parcels are subdivided during adjacent neighbourhood development.

A number of implications have been noted with ER dedication:

1. The proposed approach to ER dedication will not occur immediately or on the entire Swale at once. As it is part of the subdivision process, ER dedication will occur incrementally over time as land is developed and parcels are subdivided.
2. ER land may only be used for purposes specified in the *Act* and the associated Dedicated Land Regulations, 2009. Based on the Administration's review, this will not inhibit any of the planned uses of Swale land, either by the City or Meewasin.
3. Capital Project No. 1663 (approved December 2016) provides funding for the development of Phases 1 and 2 of the Meewasin Northeast Swale Master Plan. However, a dedicated funding source for the development of future phases of the Swale and other protected environmentally significant areas is an outstanding issue. The Administration will be exploring this as part of the Green Infrastructure Strategy and Financing Growth initiatives. Fundraising by Meewasin is also expected to contribute to future phases.

Additionally, as urban growth proceeds in other sector plan areas with known or potential ecological significance, ER dedication will be identified where appropriate.

Designated Municipal Heritage Site

The Swale has been identified as a significant heritage and ecological resource in Saskatoon. It is appropriate that features relating to the Swale's natural and ecological significance (including its biodiversity and unique landscape characteristics) as well as features relating to its historical value (including the limestone quarries, kilns, and trail remnants) be protected and preserved. A report addressing heritage considerations for the Swale is proceeding separately to the Standing Policy Committee on Environment, Utilities and Corporate Services via MHAC.

Options to the Recommendation

City Council could choose to direct the Administration to not pursue dedication of Swale lands as ER through the subdivision process. The lands would still be covered by a number of practical and legal layers of protection. Choosing this option would be a departure from the agreed-upon terms of the Memorandum of Understanding between the City and Meewasin.

Public and/or Stakeholder Involvement

In addition to addressing the resolution of City Council, this report's evaluation of options to further protect the Swale addresses questions raised by members of the public and a number of stakeholders, including MHAC, the Saskatoon Environmental Advisory Committee, Meewasin, and the Northeast Swale Watchers.

Other Considerations/Implications

There are no policy, financial, environmental, privacy, or CPTED implications or considerations; a communication plan is not required at this time.

Due Date for Follow-up and/or Project Completion

No follow-up is required.

Public Notice

Public notice, pursuant to Section 3 of Public Notice Policy No. C01-021 is not required.

Attachment

1. Northeast Swale Layers of Protection

Report Approval

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