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## The Northeast Swale – Heritage Considerations

### Recommendation

That a report be forwarded to the Standing Policy Committee on Environment, Utilities and Corporate Services recommending that the report of the General Manager, Community Services Department, dated January 4, 2017, be forwarded to City Council for information.

### Topic and Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide information on protection and commemoration of the Northeast Swale.

### Report Highlights

1. The Northeast Swale is valued as one of the largest pieces of unbroken prairie, riparian forest, and wetland in the Saskatoon region.
2. Through various policies and plans, the Northeast Swale is currently subject to several levels of protection to mitigate any impact on this sensitive ecosystem.
3. Municipal Heritage Designation of the Northeast Swale would add another layer of protection to this site. Doing so, however, poses certain challenges at this time.
4. The Administration will undertake further consultation with the Meewasin Valley Authority (Meewasin), the Northeast Swale Watchers, and the Municipal Heritage Advisory Committee (MHAC) to evaluate appropriate designation and/or commemoration of the Northeast Swale's heritage elements.

### Strategic Goal

This report supports the City of Saskatoon's (City) Strategic Goal of Quality of Life. As a community, new and creative ways are found to showcase Saskatoon's built, natural, and cultural heritage.

### Background

At its February 4, 2015 meeting, MHAC received a presentation from Meewasin regarding the Northeast Swale Master Plan. Following the presentation, it was resolved that MHAC recommend that a review be undertaken for the potential of designation as a natural heritage site.

The Northeast Swale has been identified as a significant heritage resource through the Saskatoon Register of Historic Places.

### Report

#### Description and Heritage Value of the Northeast Swale

The portion of the Swale located closest to the city of Saskatoon is referred to as the Northeast Swale (see Attachment 1). It is one of the largest pieces of unbroken prairie, riparian forest, and wetland in the Saskatoon region and has long been regarded as a significant environmental feature that has many unique ecological, hydrological, and hydrogeological characteristics.

The Northeast Swale contains many cultural heritage features still present and easily observed, including limestone quarries, kilns, and the Moose Woods-Batoche Trail, which played an important role in the settlement of Saskatoon and area in the late 1800s before the railway was extended to the city.

The Northeast Swale provides a variety of upland and wetland habitats; offers a large variety of plant species, birds, mammals, amphibians, reptiles, and insects; includes wetlands that provide a means of flood control for the surrounding community; and contains significant amounts of native prairie.

Additional information on the heritage value of the Northeast Swale is included in the property's Statement of Significance (see Attachment 2).

#### Current and Pending Protection

The Northeast Swale is located in the Meewasin Conservation Zone and is owned by the City. Through various plans and policies, the Northeast Swale has several layers of protection to ensure retention of its ecological and cultural features. Meewasin began conducting research in the 1990s to determine the Northeast Swale's significance as a natural area. Subsequently, through the University Heights Sector Plan, the City designated the Northeast Swale as an important natural area.

A parallel report will address the designation of Northeast Swale lands as Environmental Reserve land during the subdivision process.

#### Municipal Heritage Designation

Municipal Heritage Designation is another level of protection that could be put in place as a form of legal protection, conservation, and historic interpretation of the Northeast Swale. While it may be appropriate for the features relating to the Northeast Swale's natural and ecological significance (including its biodiversity and unique landscape characteristics), as well as features relating to its cultural value (including the limestone quarries, kilns, and trail remnants) to be protected and preserved, there are a number of challenges in doing so at this time. Two major issues include:

- i) Boundary Establishment - the boundaries of the Northeast Swale, while outlined in the University Heights Sector Plan, have not been formally established through the subdivision process. Municipal Heritage Designation requires that a bylaw be registered on the title of the property. This poses a significant challenge when

considering that the boundary of the Northeast Swale itself has not been created through formal subdivision.

- ii) Alteration Approvals of Natural Heritage – Through the *Heritage Property Act*, City Council has delegated the sole approval of any changes or alterations to the character-defining elements of a Municipal Heritage Property to MHAC. As the Heritage program moves to considering natural sites, such as the Northeast Swale for designation, it will be important to ensure that MHAC has access to the expertise and knowledge required to make comprehensive and complete decisions regarding ecological and/or biological resources.

### Future Consideration

The Administration will explore Municipal Heritage Designation and other forms of heritage recognition further in the coming years after the boundaries have been legally defined, capacity for rigorous approval has been established, and extensive consultation has occurred regarding which elements should be incorporated into any potential future designation. With the exception of Vancouver's Stanley Park, large naturalized urban parks or areas across Canada, similar in nature to the Northeast Swale, have not received Municipal Heritage Designation or commemoration (see Attachment 3). While formally recognizing that the natural and cultural heritage value of the Northeast Swale would make Saskatoon relatively unique amongst other Canadian municipalities, it does present certain challenges and needs to be evaluated further.

### **Options to the Recommendation**

City Council may wish to pursue other options. In this case, further direction would be required.

### **Public and/or Stakeholder Involvement**

In addition to addressing the resolution of MHAC, this report addresses questions raised by other stakeholders, including 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 at this time.

### **Public Notice**

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

### **Attachments**

1. Location Plan
2. Statement of Significance
3. Canadian Urban Park Heritage Recognition Comparison

**Report Approval**

Written by: Catherine Kambeitz, Heritage and Design Coordinator, Planning and Development

Reviewed and

Approved by: Lesley Anderson, Acting General Manager, Community Services Department

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