
Inquiry – Richard St. Barbe Baker Afforestation Area

Recommendation

That the report of the General Manager, Community Services Department, dated May 29, 2017, be forwarded to City Council for information.

Topic and Purpose

The purpose of this report is to respond to a City Council inquiry regarding the possibility of Richard St. Barbe Baker Afforestation Area being declared Municipal Reserve and any consultation plans within the area regarding the afforestation area in conjunction with the Area Sector Plan.

Report Highlights

1. The City of Saskatoon (City) is currently undertaking two initiatives that are expected to provide direction for future use of the Richard St. Barbe Baker Afforestation Area (Afforestation Area): a Green Infrastructure Strategy and an amendment to the Blairmore Sector Plan.
2. A Green Infrastructure Strategy is being developed to provide a vision and policies for areas that contribute to Saskatoon's ecological network.
3. An amendment to the Blairmore Sector Plan, to incorporate land within the city's southwest, will provide a land use and servicing framework for this area, including the Afforestation Area.
4. Community groups, stakeholders, adjacent land owners, and residents will be involved within consultation to determine the future direction of both City initiatives.

Strategic Goal

This report supports the long-term strategy of improving access to ecological systems and spaces, both natural and naturalized, under the Strategic Goal of Environmental Leadership.

Background

The Afforestation Area is located southwest of the Montgomery Place neighbourhood, specifically, south of the Canadian National Station and yards (see Part S½ 22-36-6 W3 and Part SE 23-36-6 W3 in Attachment 1).

This area was planted by the City's Parks Division in 1972, with the aim of "improving the future environment of the city." On October 30, 1978, City Council named part of the planted area after Richard St. Barbe Baker, an internationally known forest advisor and conservationist who crusaded against the widespread destruction of trees, and for their planting, to improve environments essential to the well-being of local residents and other living creatures.

In 2013, City Council approved the 5.86 hectare (14.5 acre) Southwest Off-Leash Recreation Area located in part SE 23-36-6 W3. Although the Southwest Off-Leash Recreation Area is not legally named under the Afforestation Area, it is considered within the realm of study for this inquiry and is the area most often visited by local residents.

At the April 25, 2016 meeting of City Council, the following inquiry was made by former City Councillor P. Lorje:

“Will the Administration please report on the following matters with respect to the Richard St. Barbe Afforestation Area:

1. Can/will it be declared Municipal Reserve and added to the City’s park space inventory?;
2. What measures can be taken in both the short-term (since there is no current budget for this) and the long-term to enclose the area in order to prevent unlawful dumping of garbage and trespass by motorized vehicles, including snowmobiles and ATVs? This could include measures such as strategically-placed boulders, gates and fencing.;
3. Can/will the City provide resources to pick-up the accumulated garbage in the area? This could be accomplished by either City crews picking-up this garbage, or by giving assistance for landfill tipping fees for community volunteers to start the clean-up of this significant urban asset.; and
4. What plans are there to consult with community groups, stakeholders and adjacent residents to develop a possible program for the area including the South West Concept Plan development?.”

Points 2 and 3 above were addressed by a report from the Parks Division to City Council on August 18, 2016. Based on that report, some barriers were installed in 2016 that have reduced illegal dumping in the area. Points 1 and 4 above are now being addressed within this report.

Report

The Afforestation Area is located within the city’s southwest and is comprised of trees, open areas, and wetlands. Vegetation is a mix of both planted and naturally-established trees, grasses, and shrubs. Though owned by the City, the Afforestation Area is not included in the City’s park inventory and, as such, no funding is available to support maintenance services, with the exception of the Southwest Off-Leash Recreation Area.

The City is currently undertaking two initiatives that are expected to provide direction for future use of the Afforestation Area: a Green Infrastructure Strategy, and an amendment to the Blairmore Sector Plan. The Green Infrastructure Strategy will provide a vision and policies for areas that contribute to the city’s ecological network. An amendment to the Blairmore Sector, to incorporate land within the city’s southwest,

will provide a land use and servicing framework for this area, including the Afforestation Area.

Green Infrastructure Strategy

Currently, a Green Infrastructure Strategy is being undertaken through collaboration between the Planning and Development and Environment and Corporate Initiatives Divisions. The purpose of the Green Infrastructure Strategy is to develop an integrated approach to planning for and maintaining a sustainable, biodiverse city by considering natural and supportive areas as part of an ecological system.

An inventory of natural and supporting areas will be catalogued as part of this project, along with quantification of the natural asset value of inventoried natural areas. The inventory of natural areas will include:

- i) natural areas outside the current urban footprint that have experienced no disturbance through urban development;
- ii) retained natural areas that have experienced minimal disturbance through urban development and are fully or partially contained within the urban footprint; and
- iii) naturalized areas that have been wholly or partially constructed to effectively recreate a true natural area.

The Afforestation Area is included in the review of natural areas.

The project will further define the necessary vision, strategy, policies, procedures, programs, roles, responsibilities, and funding for the successful conservation and integration of the ecological network into urban development at various scales.

Blairmore Sector Plan Amendment

The Long Range Planning Section, Planning and Development Division, is currently amending the Blairmore Sector Plan. This amendment will incorporate what has been known as the Southwest Sector, an area which includes the Afforestation Area, and surrounding areas.

The Blairmore Sector Plan provides a broad framework for future urban development and includes the location of future neighbourhoods, employment areas, parks, and significant natural areas. Sector plans are preliminary planning studies and future oriented; no specific time frame for development is applied to sector plans.

Through the proposed Blairmore Sector Plan amendment, the classification and future use of the Afforestation Area will be explored, and stakeholders will be engaged. Further study and community involvement is required prior to any potential development or classification options are proposed for the area.

The Afforestation Area and surrounding afforestation lands are owned by the City, and the City has no current intention of selling or developing these land parcels as the use of these lands will be addressed further through the Blairmore Sector Plan amendment.

Should any future development options be pursued within the Afforestation Area, an area concept plan would be required, subject to City Council approval. The majority of the Afforestation Area is located within the Meewasin Valley Authority Conservation Zone and is, therefore, subject to *The Meewasin Valley Authority Act*. Any development consideration requires approval of the Meewasin Valley.

Public and/or Stakeholder Involvement

Future consultation with the public will be necessary to determine the direction of the Afforestation Area regarding both the Green Infrastructure Strategy and the Blairmore Sector Plan.

Engagement with internal and external stakeholders is ongoing throughout the Green Infrastructure Strategy. Public consultation is expected to occur throughout 2017 and 2018, with initial engagement beginning in the fall of 2017.

The Blairmore Sector Plan and amendment will be widely circulated and reviewed. Consistent with the standard procedures, the proposed amendment to the Blairmore Sector Plan will be presented to property owners and other stakeholders within the Blairmore Sector, as well as through a wider public open house.

Communication Plan

Appropriate communication plans will be developed as initiatives progress and implemented accordingly.

Other Considerations/Implications

There are no options, policy, financial, environmental, privacy or CPTED implications or considerations.

Due Date for Follow-up and/or Project Completion

A Blairmore Sector Plan amendment that incorporates the Afforestation Area into the Blairmore Sector is to be brought forward for City Council approval by the end of 2017. The first phase of the Green Infrastructure Strategy is anticipated to be complete by the third quarter of 2017. A full report on the project will be submitted to the Standing Policy Committee on Environment, Utilities and Corporate Services by the end of 2017.

Public Notice

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

Attachments

1. Richard St. Barbe Baker Afforestation Area Location Plan

Report Approval

Written by: Ian Williamson, Senior Planner, Planning and Development

Reviewed by: Lesley Anderson, Director of Planning and Development

Approved by: Randy Grauer, General Manager, Community Services Department