
Green Infrastructure Strategy Update – May 2018

Recommendation

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

1. That the Green Infrastructure Baseline Inventory Report be received as information;
2. That the draft guiding principles be endorsed;
3. That community engagement on amendments to the Official Community Plan to reflect the Green Infrastructure Strategy be planned and a report be brought to the Municipal Planning Commission with a recommendation to City Council for approval in the fall; and
4. That \$150,000 be approved from the Reserve for Capital Expenditures (RCE) for this initiative as outlined in this report.

Topic and Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide City Council with an update on the progress of the Green Infrastructure Strategy.

Report Highlights

1. Phase 1 of the Green Infrastructure Strategy (Strategy) included gathering information about the City's existing green spaces to establish the baseline Green Infrastructure Network (Network) and identified areas that need to be strengthened.
2. Ten draft guiding principles outline what the Strategy strives to achieve.
3. Amendments to the Official Community Plan, that reflect and support the Strategy and the principles it is based on, are recommended.
4. Phase 2 of the Strategy will include the development of a Green Infrastructure Action Plan.
5. Several key findings of the Green Infrastructure Baseline Inventory Report can be addressed through Natural Areas and Assets Standards. Work to develop these Standards are proposed to proceed immediately.
6. Support for the Urban Forest can be achieved through the Green Infrastructure Strategy.

Strategic Goals

This report supports the Strategic Goal of Sustainable Growth by providing a framework for a new approach to land use that considers natural areas, surface water management, and other urban activities in an integrated fashion. Green infrastructure is identified and managed for the benefit of current and future generations. The goal of Environmental Leadership is supported by ensuring that climate change mitigation and adaptation are considered during land use planning, by promoting biodiversity, by improving access to ecological systems and spaces, and by improving the quality and reducing the quantity of storm water run-off that is going to the river. The goal of Asset

and Financial Sustainability is supported by exploring options to reduce gaps in the funding required to rehabilitate and maintain our infrastructure.

Background

During the 2017 Business Plan and Budget Deliberations held on November 30 and December 1, 2016, Capital Project #2390 – Green Infrastructure Strategy (Strategy) received approval to support planned activities predicted on anticipated grant funding from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) in the amount of \$100,000. Prior budget approvals of \$155,000 were to support developing the scope of the project to bring together initiatives related to natural area standards and stormwater practices, creation of the initial inventory and policy study (provided here), and engagement with community stakeholders, including a Wetland Development Workshop.

Standing Policy Committee on Environment, Utilities & Corporate Services, at its meeting held on December 5, 2017, considered the Green Infrastructure Strategy Update report which highlighted ten draft guiding principles and the map-based baseline inventory that formed the basis of a technical workshop with community experts from a wide range of fields.

Standing Policy Committee on Environment, Utilities & Corporate Services, at its meeting held on January 15, 2018, received a letter from Mr. James Wood, President, SOS Elms Coalition dated January 4, 2018, regarding support for the Urban Forest through a Green Infrastructure Strategy. The committee resolved:

- “1. That the matter be referred to the Administration for a report on the points contained in the letter and more information on large trees.”

Report

Green Infrastructure Baseline Inventory

The first phase in developing the Strategy was to establish a baseline for current green infrastructure and to provide a framework for organizing and characterizing the diverse aspects of green infrastructure. This includes identifying existing conditions within five organizing themes: Governance, Land Allocation, Green Network, Storm Water Services, and Heritage and Culture.

Gathering information about the City’s existing green spaces established the baseline Network and identified vulnerabilities, as documented in Attachment 1, Green Infrastructure Strategy - Baseline Inventory Report. With a better understanding of the current situation, goals can be created, targets can be set and an action plan for achieving the desired Network can be put together. The baseline inventory is consistent with the Asset Management Framework currently being created by the corporation.

Thirty-two key findings were identified, outlining gaps in policy or information that should be addressed, as well as opportunities to enhance and support the Network. These findings form the basis for the work of Phase 2; these will be used to develop an action

plan for the Strategy and integrate with the climate change initiatives at the City. Further findings are expected to be discovered through planned engagement activities.

Draft Guiding Principles

Ten guiding principles outline what the Strategy strives to achieve. Administration recommends these Principles be endorsed and used as the basis for developing strategic actions to achieve the future desired Network.

The development of a systems-based asset management approach to green spaces in Saskatoon will require a substantial shift in policy and procedures currently used for development of, and adjacent to, natural areas and assets. A description of the draft guiding principles for the Strategy can be found in Attachment 2, The Draft Guiding Principles.

Draft Amendments to the Official Community Plan (OCP)

To support a more integrated approach to planning and maintaining a sustainable, biodiverse city, the Administration is proposing to amend the OCP. The amendments are intended to serve as an interim measure to ensure the Official Community Plan reflects and supports the current direction of the Green Infrastructure Strategy and the principles it is based on. As part of the development and implementation of the Green Infrastructure Strategy, future policy changes are expected to be proposed, including further changes to the Official Community Plan.

Administration recommends that community engagement on proposed amendments proceed with the Strategy's planned engagement and that a report be brought to the Municipal Planning Commission with a recommendation to City Council for approval in the fall.

Phase 2 Outline

In consultation with technical community experts, civic experts and the community at large, Phase 2 will:

- Analyze the key findings discovered during Phase 1;
- Develop possibilities and options to address the key findings, and evaluate them using the principles;
- Identify preferred options and define impacts (scope, time, budget, risks);
- Incorporate recommendations into a Green Infrastructure Action Plan; and
- Prioritize and resource action items with an implementation plan.

Natural Areas and Asset Standards

Concurrent to Phase 2, work will focus on establishing new Natural Areas and Assets Standards. This includes:

- Developing a consistent framework for approving development that has the potential to impact natural areas and assets;

- Providing policy and guidance for development and land management within and adjacent to natural areas;
- Developing processes and procedures to implement the Natural Areas and Assets Standards that are aligned with Meewasin's Valley-wide Resource Management Plan;
- Developing a reporting framework with the Natural Asset Valuation project;
- Amending park classifications to recognize natural areas and assets;
- Developing criteria to determine which natural areas should be designated to Natural Areas Park classifications such as Environmental Reserve and Nature Park; and
- Identifying existing areas that meet the criteria for Natural Areas Park classifications.

A number of key findings can be addressed through the Natural Areas and Assets Standards. A plan to address the remaining key findings will be developed through the Green Infrastructure Strategy.

Support for the Urban Forest through a Green Infrastructure Strategy

The January letter from Mr. James Wood, President, SOS Elms Coalition outlines the important role that the urban forest has in Saskatoon. The letter also describes challenges to protecting this significant green infrastructure asset. The information contained in the letter has been incorporated in the inventory and key findings of the Green Infrastructure Baseline Inventory Report.

Members of the project team have met with Mr. Wood to discuss the Green Infrastructure Strategy. Mr. Wood has stated that he would like to participate in future engagement activities and has offered his help and support to the project.

Options to the Recommendation

City Council could choose to deny the recommendations. In this case, further direction would be required in order to proceed with the Green Infrastructure Strategy and the Natural Areas and Assets Standards.

Public and/or Stakeholder Involvement

During Phase 1 of the Strategy, the following activities helped initiate community involvement and inform the findings contained in the Green Infrastructure Baseline Inventory Report:

- Meewasin is a member of the project team that is working on the Strategy.
- In December, 2017, a workshop was held to review the preliminary baseline inventory. Workshop participants represented a diverse set of community groups and organizations, with mandates linked to ecology, culture, land development, heritage, and health care. Their feedback has been used to refine the inventory, identify additional gaps and generate the key findings presented in the report. In general, participants expressed cautious optimism that green infrastructure is becoming a higher priority for the City and that a consistent framework could be

- developed.
- On February 8, 2018, a presentation at the Native Prairie Restoration/ Reclamation Workshop was made to introduce the Strategy to a wider audience of potential community champions. The presentation was well received and garnered additional feedback that will be considered during Phase 2 of the Strategy.

Moving forward, the involvement and effort of the broader community will be needed to develop the Strategy, including other levels of government, schools, community groups, developers and individuals. Engagement in fall 2018 is planned to introduce the idea of Green Infrastructure; discover how green infrastructure integrates with daily life; discover which guiding principles people feel will improve quality of life; and consult on proposed Official Community Plan amendments and other related initiatives such as the Landscape Design and Development Standards.

Communication Plan

Initial communications elements such as a project webpage with an option for people to subscribe to project updates (saskatoon.ca/greeninfrastructure) have been developed to provide the public and stakeholders with updated information on the Strategy. As the project moves into Phase 2, a full Communications Plan will be developed in conjunction with a Community Engagement Plan to ensure the broader community is informed and engaged in the development of the Strategy, including Natural Areas and Asset Standards as well as the proposed amendments to the Official Community Plan.

Financial Implications

The most urgent next step for the Green Infrastructure Strategy is to develop the Natural Areas and Assets Standards. The City of Saskatoon was unsuccessful in gathering the information necessary to make a submission for external grant funding, resulting in a funding gap of \$150,000 to complete the identified capital program. Administration recommends a budget adjustment from RCE in order to complete this phase of the capital work. Various returns from other programs, which have been completed under budget, ensures sufficiency in the RCE reserve.

A 2019 business plan for Green Infrastructure is being developed as part of the 2019 Business Plan and Budget process. Funding for other Phase 2 initiatives under the Strategy will be identified in this plan.

Administration still plans to apply to the FCM Green Municipal Fund for support to complete capital activities that advance the guiding principles described in Attachment 2.

Other Considerations/Implications

There are no policy, environmental, Privacy, public notice or CPTED implications or considerations.

Due Date for Follow-up and/or Project Completion

Administration will report back to the Standing Policy Committee on Environment, Utilities & Corporate Services in late 2018 with the Natural Areas and Assets Standards engagement results and a proposed OCP amendment.

Public Notice

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

Attachments

1. Green Infrastructure Strategy - Baseline Inventory Report
2. Guiding Principles

Report Approval

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