

CITY OF NANAIMO

BUSINESS CASE – Facility and Parks Operations Department: Natural Area Technician (2)

CURRENT OVERVIEW

The City of Nanaimo (the City) Parks Operations Section is a diverse work area which includes responsibility for conservation, development, and maintenance of parkland. Since 2005, the City has acquired approximately 589 hectares of parkland bringing the current inventory to about 1,170 hectares. Roughly 10% of all land within the City boundary is designated as a park, 72% is Natural Area Parkland, and 30% of this Natural Area Parkland is designated as an Environmentally Sensitive Area.

Nanaimo's natural area parks include forests, grasslands, wetlands, streams, and coastal areas which provide a range of uses and ecological services to the community. To ensure the protection of these natural areas, City plans are developed to ensure there is a balance of environmental protection and desires of the community such as the recent Council approved East Wellington Park Plan. Additional park plans on the horizon for City staff will formalize management practices in some of the City's large natural area parks such as Linley Valley Park and Nanaimo Lakes Road Park, and some smaller but very sensitive parks including Lotus Pinnatus Park.

The Horticulture and Arboriculture Unit within the Parks Operations section currently manages the City's Natural Areas and consists of the following FTEs:

- Supervisor, Horticulture and Arboriculture
- Landscape Horticulturist (4)
- Equipment Operator

* The Urban Forestry Coordinator also contributes to this workload and reports directly to the Lead Supervisor, Parks, Trails, and Natural Areas.

Maintenance of these natural areas includes trail maintenance, arboricultural work, habitat restoration, invasive species removal, fire load reduction and refuse removal.

BUSINESS ISSUE

Currently there are no dedicated positions in the Parks Operations department to manage the City's natural areas, and the increase in the City's natural parkland has not been met with proportionate resources to adequately maintain these spaces. This has resulted in a reactive approach in the stewardship of these natural areas and having to accept a higher level of risk which presents both safety and liability issues.

The effect of the backlog of arboricultural work orders is an average wait time of one month to inspect reported tree issues. Often work orders need to be issued to an arboricultural contractor as staff do not have the capacity to address issues in a timely manner.

In addition, the Integrated Action Plan (IAP) sets out several strategic priorities within the Green policy area in year 0-4 related to parks. This will further stretch available resources.

EXPECTED OUTCOME

The addition of two Natural Area Technicians will allow Parks Operations to manage Natural Area Parkland in a proactive manner. This will allow Parks Operations staff to undertake planned maintenance of all City Parks without disruption, will lower risk levels, and will ensure City natural areas are adequately maintained.

OPTIONS

Option #1 – Add two Natural Area Technicians in 2024

Create two permanent full time Natural Area Technician positions reporting to the Supervisor, Parks, Trails and Natural Areas.

Benefits:

- Increased capacity to manage parks assets proactively and strategically.
- Provision of valuable and sustainable ecological services to citizens through higher standards of management and maintenance.
- Improved responsiveness to requests from the public.
- Reduction of safety and liability issues.
- Eliminate the use of contractors for minor tasks and disruption to other parks maintenance tasks.
- Greater ability to implement the strategic priorities of the green section of the IAP.

Weaknesses:

- Permanent increase to operating budget.

Financial Analysis:

- Positions are anticipated to be at a CUPE pay level 12, subject to JEC, with an annual salary of \$95,950 plus benefits. 2024 budget impact including wages and benefits for two positions is \$182,350 based on an April 1st start, 2025 budget impact is estimated at \$251,650.
- Additional annual costs are estimated at \$124,700 for fleet charges, professional development, memberships, computer charges, cell phones, and materials and supplies.
- One-time costs upon the creation of the position are projected at \$459,900. This includes the purchase of two dump trucks, tools, computer equipment and cell phones.

Option #2 – Add one Natural Area Technician in 2024 and one Natural Area Technician in 2025

Create two permanent full time Natural Area Technician positions over two years reporting to the Supervisor, Parks, Trails and Natural Areas.

Benefits:

- Some increased capacity to manage parks assets proactively and strategically.
- Improved responsiveness to requests from the public.
- Some reduction of safety and liability issues.
- Ability to implement some the strategic priorities.

Weaknesses:

- Permanent increase to operating budget.
- Delayed response to managing workload currently faced by department.
- May require some use of contractors or disruption to other parks maintenance tasks to respond to requests/manage tasks.

Financial Analysis:

- Positions are anticipated to be at a CUPE pay level 12, subject to JEC, with an annual salary of \$95,950 plus benefits. 2024 budget impact including wages and benefits is \$91,200 based on an April 1st start for the first position, 2025 budget impact is estimated at \$251,600 based on a January 1st start for the second position.
- Additional annual costs are estimated at \$127,100 for fleet charges, professional development, memberships, computer charges, cell phones, and materials and supplies for two positions. 2024 budget impact is estimated at \$44,700.
- One-time costs upon the creation of the position are projected at \$230,400 for 2024 and \$230,600 for 2025. This includes the purchase of a dump truck, tools, computer equipment and cell phone each year.

Option# 3 – Status Quo

Continue with the current organizational structure.

Benefits:

- No impact to operating budget.

Weaknesses:

- Reduced capacity to proactively preserve and restore our natural areas.
- Continued backlog of arboricultural work orders and long wait times for incident response.
- No reduction in safety and liability issues.
- Limited ability to implement the strategic priorities of the green section of the IAP.
- Natural assets may deteriorate resulting in a reduction of the ecological services they provide.
- Inability to meet the high expectations of parks users in terms of well managed and environmentally focused outdoor recreational opportunities.

RECOMMENDATION

Option #1 is recommended.