

**TO:** MAYOR & COUNCIL

**FROM:** DEPUTY GENERAL MANAGER PARKS, RECREATION AND CULTURE

**SUBJECT:** **INVESTING IN BURNABY PARKS: PARK PRIORITIZATION FRAMEWORK**

**PURPOSE:** To provide information to Council about the proposed park prioritization framework for the sustainable management of the City's parkland and outdoor amenities.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

**THAT** the Park Prioritization Framework, as outlined in Section 3.2 of the report titled "Investing in Burnaby Parks: Park Prioritization Framework" dated November 20, 2023, be approved.

## **CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER'S COMMENTS**

I concur with the recommendation of the Deputy General Manager Parks, Recreation and Culture.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The City of Burnaby has experienced significant continued growth in recent years. With this growth, the city's park system needs to evolve to meet diverse park service demands and community pressures. To ensure resources are managed and allocated efficiently and responsive to the needs of current and future residents, it is crucial that values, objectives and needs are strategically aligned. Given this, the Park Prioritization Framework is proposed to help enhance the sustainable delivery of park-oriented development. This report outlines the proposed evaluation criteria and weighting to balance park related quantity, quality and access considerations for Council information.

### **1.0 POLICY SECTION**

The creation of a parks prioritization framework is aligned with the following Council adopted policies and plans/strategies: Corporate Strategic Plan (2022), Social Sustainability Strategy (2011), and Burnaby Environmental Sustainability Strategy (2016).

### **2.0 BACKGROUND**

The City of Burnaby park system is innovative by nature. It has grown and evolved over time to serve the community well, while continually balancing the importance of

protecting valuable municipal natural areas with opportunities for residents to experience and enjoy open spaces and local parks. Today, the City's park system consists of 164 parks and 84 playgrounds, and plays an important role in providing a desired quality of life for our residents and businesses in a competitive region. Access, quantity, and quality of city park spaces and outdoor amenities shape Burnaby neighborhoods and ways in which residents experience everyday life.

Burnaby has seen exponential population growth of 7% over the past five years, particularly within town centers. The need to have effective and resilient parks and open spaces as the city rapidly urbanizes and densifies has never been greater. This intensification is adding more residents to existing neighbourhoods, primarily in residential high-rise buildings, and located within proximity to transit stations. In these higher-density urban areas the provision of parks is critical to the livability of these new vertical communities and to support Burnaby's growing population and families. At the same time, the demographic composition of neighbourhoods is also changing, as are park user preferences and expectations. Parks can help address inequities across the city to ensure access to high quality parks with outdoor recreation and cultural amenities as well as natural areas for all.

The city continually faces requests to advance park development and outdoor recreation amenity provision to support the diverse and evolving needs of the growing population. Historically, park areas that serve to protect ravine and conservation areas have been well advanced, however, park areas intended for active recreation spaces particularly within densely populated neighborhoods have been insufficient. The existing neighbourhood park gaps are compounded by continued growth, making the need for planning and designing neighborhood parks to fill service gaps critical. Neighbourhood parks and park-oriented development continue to be essential building blocks of the community, and capital and operating investments in the park system in these areas will continue to pay long-term recreation, social, cultural, environmental, health and economic dividends for the city.

The growth experienced over the past several years has put pressure on the existing park system. The Parks, Recreation and Culture (PRC) Department does not have an existing method for prioritizing needs, which has resulted in more reactive day-to-day management rather than long-term strategic planning. With the Official Community Plan (OCP) update, Burnaby 2050, underway there is an opportunity to strategically align values, objectives and community needs with park system realities. A framework to guide investments in the city's park system will ensure limited resources are managed efficiently, equitably and transparently while also addressing ongoing park service demands and improving the lives of current and future residents.

All projects, including park projects, compete for limited capital and operation funding and must demonstrate needs and the value proposition. To support this work, staff are proposing a Park Prioritization Framework to evaluate, organize, and eventually rank the numerous park development and enhancement projects, and to help guide the long-term parkland acquisition program.

The development of a Park Prioritization Framework is an important first step in organizing and assessing park related needs. This process forms a part of a broader needs assessment process, and the establishment of relevant service standards with connected sustainable funding tools that will ultimately lead to the delivery of effective park services and amenities. As such, this work forms a first foundational building block to analyzing our municipal park system which will be integrated in the forthcoming OCP as well as the PRC Master Plan.

**3.0 GENERAL INFORMATION**

Staff have developed a Parks Prioritization Framework, which includes specific evaluation criteria and their relative importance (weighting) for Council’s consideration. The proposed evaluation criteria were selected to reflect Council values as outlined in the Corporate Strategic Plan, industry best practices, the City’s unique needs, strengths, challenges, and opportunities. The criteria and associated weighting have also been refined based on engagement with the city’s PRC Commission and Environment Committee.

If the proposed Framework is approved by Council, it will inform ranking of future projects, guiding park development, asset replacement, and parkland acquisition. These project lists will be organized and grouped, based on project categories, park typologies, and anticipated project completion timelines.

**3.1. Current Park Service Standards**

The existing PRC Master Plan developed in 1984 outlined park service standards and park typologies. The park standards are based on park space provision per population ratios to service the needs of new population growth. Of course, Burnaby and society has changed immensely since the development of the PRC Master Plan. Furthermore, existing park provisions have not been closely tracked or correlated with population growth. For example, Burnaby’s historical standard for neighbourhood level park provision is 2.25 acres per 1,000 people with current service levels in Edmonds Town Centre being 1.2 acres per 1,000 people; Cascade Heights Urban Village being 1.3 acres per 1,000 people (with the inclusion of Avondale Park); and Royal Oak Urban Village being 0.4 acres per 1,000 people. With many neighborhoods projected to grow substantially, it is vital to utilize meaningful frameworks to set standards and prioritize investments in parks that are needed to support the growing communities.

Today to provide distribution equity, many park systems consider walking access to park spaces, with dense urban communities aiming to have neighbourhood park access for every resident within a 5-minute walking radius. This means that access and quality of amenities is particularly important in understanding park service standards today. Burnaby’s park service standards and associated park typologies will need to be reviewed and updated as part of the OCP update and forthcoming PRC Master Plan development process. The Park Prioritization Framework provides a great foundation for this work.

**3.2 The Park Prioritization Criteria**

The Park Prioritization Framework is based on seven evaluation criteria to assess and prioritize the park development program. These criteria are meant as a guide to enable Council to sort and evaluate each park project based on a consistent set of values; however, the ultimate park development priorities may be adjusted at any time as the park projects are also subject to emerging opportunities such as partnerships, funding from external grants, gifts or sponsorships, or alignment with other City capital projects. The criteria below have been weighted to further influence the importance and value of each.

**Criteria 1 – Safety & Belonging (100% weighting)**

This assesses the potential to develop or revitalize physical elements and programming in existing park spaces to address social inclusion, safe operation and maintenance to meet current industry standards. Recognizing both physical access and the ability for the public to have a safe and positive environment to come together and build community without risk or prejudice is a core requirement of providing social equity in parks service.

**Criteria 2 - Demand & Demonstrated Need (100% weighting)**

This assesses how well the area proposed for parkland or improvement is currently served and whether the proposed improvement will fill any identified existing service gaps in recreation, sports, arts and culture. In addition, it assesses the ability to improve existing services for future growth, and the ability to address social, environmental, and economic objectives.

**Criteria 3 - Equity in Geographic Distribution (100% weighting)**

This criteria looks at the quantity, quality and access to parks space city wide. It assesses whether the park development by location will help provide better access and distribution of park and whether it helps bridge current service gaps or projected service needs.

**Criteria 4 - Environmental Value (75% weighting)**

This assesses opportunities to preserve, enhance, or celebrate natural areas of distinct environmental value, and for the site to contribute to City’s resilience and climate action goals.

**Criteria 5 - Project Implementation Readiness (50% weighting)**

This assesses a collection of elements that may affect the site that could prevent it from being buildable within the capital budget timeframe. Those include: legal considerations, environmental constraints and processes, availability of special or alternative funding, desire to be timed with other projects, budget planning, and phasing potential and affordability.

**Criteria 6 - Partnership Potential & Opportunities (50% weighting)**

This assesses the opportunity for timely internal or external partnership or collaboration, or whether existing partnership agreements are in place. It considers whether the park project will enable an emerging partnership opportunity or provide a significant public contribution or third-party funding to help expedite the project.

### **Criteria 7 - Other Special Value (25% weighting)**

This assesses unique opportunities for development of parks to provide culture and festival gathering purposes; interpretative or educational value; higher level sport competition; destination attraction potential; regional asset linkage; and any other notable natural qualities, assets, resources.

### **3.3 Additional Factors Influencing the Prioritization**

The Park Prioritization Framework will provide a base evaluation, and is not intended to encompass all factors that may bear on a priority since unique elements or factors may arise at any time that affect a specific project. Additionally, the framework will be developed with the following understanding:

- Council has approved masterplan reviews for Barnet Marine Park, Central Park and Burnaby Mountain. This work will be factored in as first priorities;
- Council has approved asset replacement strategy plans for washrooms, playgrounds and outdoor aquatics. These strategies may collectively or individually elevate a park development program as a priority. This would be reflected in the prioritization model;
- The focus for park development is first to improve and build on existing parks and parklands to optimize existing assets and infrastructure. Currently, the City does not collect Development Cost Charges (DCC) for park development. However, having a DCC program would help support park-specific development tied to growth and staff are currently developing such a program in Burnaby. This prioritization framework will work within the confines of existing funding tools and processes while seeking to address most pressing park amenity needs in a cost effective way;
- The development of a strategy for parkland protection and preservation has also been identified as a priority by staff, who are working to bring forward another report regarding that interconnected discussion. Critical to parkland protection is the utilization of various levels of parkland protection tools, such as lot consolidation, Zoning, Official Community Plan land designations and policies, as well as park protection bylaws where additional levels of protection is appropriate.

### **4.0 COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

The establishment of the Park Prioritization Framework will provide the necessary foundation to further refine and set park service standards and park typologies. The proposed framework evaluation criteria have been presented to the Parks, Recreation and Culture Commission as well as the Environment Committee for input, with feedback integrated into the presented criteria and weighting for Council. The framework will become instrumental in informing the forthcoming Official Community Plan and PRC Master Plan which will both invite community feedback.

It is important to note that the Park Prioritization Framework is intended only to provide a framework for analysis and the evaluation criteria which will help to guide the selection of work programs to be undertaken. The annual work plans will be updated regularly to stay relevant and aligned with Council priorities.

## **5.0 FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

There are no imminent impacts associated with the proposed Park Prioritization Framework. This work is being completed internally within the established 2023 operating budget. The intent of this work is to help inform future business plan priorities as well as future capital and operating budget requests creating better alignments and efficiencies.

Funding for the projects identified in the outcome of the Park Prioritization Framework would be approved by Council as part of the 5-Year Capital Plan and for each individual park project when the design is finalized and a budget will be determined based on current construction costs. At that time, staff will also highlight the long-term maintenance impacts on the City's operating budgets to ensure that the collective increase in operating costs related to new park development is considered and understood as part of the initial park project approval process.

Respectfully submitted,

Carmen Gonzalez, Deputy General Manager Parks, Recreation and Culture

## **REPORT CONTRIBUTORS**

This report was prepared by Heather Edwards, Manager Parks, Planning and Design; Andre Isakov, Director PRC Planning; and reviewed by Steve Bruneau, Director Parks; Carmen Gonzalez, Deputy General Manager PRC; Sarah Alexander, Director Real Estate and Business Operations; Ratan Grewal, Director Budgeting and Reporting.