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Information Item No. 2
Halifax and West Community Council
April 19, 2016

TO: Chair and Members of Halifax and West Community Council

SUBMITTED BY: Original Signed
Brad Anguish, Director, Parks and Recreation

DATE: April 11, 2016

SUBJECT: BMX Park on Chain Lake Field

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

November 18, 2015 Halifax and West Community Council motion:

“MOVED by Councillor Mosher, seconded by Councillor Rankin that Halifax and West Community Council request a staff report for consideration of a BMX Bike Park on the Chain of Lakes field and bridge pass to connect to the Chain of Lakes trail.”

MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, Section 79(1): Council may expend money required by the Municipality for: k) recreational programs; (x) lands and buildings required for a municipal purpose; (y) furnishing and equipping any municipal facility; and (ah) ... trails, including trails developed, operated or maintained pursuant to an agreement made under clause 73(c), bike paths ... and other recreational facilities.

BACKGROUND

Chain Lake Field and Park

Chain Lake Field (the field) is a non-regulation size sports field located at 531 Crown Drive in Halifax (Attachment 1). The field is located within Chain Lake Park, a 3.29 ha community park that serves the following purposes: sports field, naturally vegetated area connected to Chain Lake Watershed, outflow watercourse from Chain Lake Backup Municipal Water Supply, Halifax Water underground potable water transmission line, passive walking trails and connection to the larger active transportation (AT) network through the adjacent Chain of Lakes trail (COLTA Trail). The field is approximately 80m long by 50m wide, or 80% of the size of a regulation soccer field. Its size makes it suitable for use by junior leagues or as a practice field for youth and adult sports teams. The surface is natural grass with a field classification 'D'. The field is located in a storm water control area for the downstream communities at Chocolate Lake and is designed to flood periodically.

Built in 1994, Chain Lake Field has traditionally been used as a practice field for soccer and ultimate frisbee leagues. More recent uses include rugby practice and football conditioning. The field is also a designated off-leash area with restrictions allowing morning use by dog owners.

Municipal BMX Facilities

The abbreviation BMX refers to the sport *bicycle motocross*. Locally, BMX means an assortment of activities involving tricks, stunts or jumps performed on a bicycle. There are two types of facilities which accommodate BMX by HRM. Skateboard facilities provide a hardscape (concrete, asphalt and wood) urban experience with rails, ramps and bowls for bike stunts. BMX dirt jump facilities provide a series of specifically designed earthen jumps along a soft track.

There are a total of 25 BMX facilities in HRM: 10 BMX dirt jumps facilities and 15 skateboard facilities. At its peak in 2013 there were 13 BMX dirt jump facilities, however, 3 have since closed. Those closed include Beaver Bank Kinsac, Laurie Lively, and Cameron Park. Two of those locations have since been converted into remote control car parks.

Current Request for BMX Facility at Chain of Lake Field

The request for a BMX dirt jump facility was submitted on November 17, 2015 at a public meeting about improvements to the park at Springvale School. The original requested site was along the old "Cow Path" in Edward Drillio Park beside Springvale School. This site has other merits associated with the school and offers a significant buffer between the school and surrounding homes. Chain Lake Field was suggested as an alternative location and subsequently, at the November 18, 2015 meeting, Halifax and West Community Council requested a staff report for the consideration of a BMX park on the Chain of Lake field.

DISCUSSION

In order for proper consideration of conversion of the Chain of Lakes field to a BMX park, a review of BMX park criteria and conditions along with assessment of the field and surrounding area is needed.

BMX Parks

Current Service Provision

Use of BMX parks is incidental and not scheduled so, as a result, usage data is difficult to acquire. However, the following patterns emerge by mapping the Municipality's current BMX facility provision (Table 1):

Table 1: Current Service Provision of BMX Facilities

	HRM Youth 5-19 Served (%)	Distance (km)	Driving Time (min)	Cycling Time (min)
BMX Dirt Jumps and Skateboard Facilities Combined	80%	6.0 km	10 mins	25 mins
BMX Dirt Jumps Only	80%	10.0 km	18 mins	45 mins

Based on the existing distribution, BMX facilities in HRM are achieving a regional level of coverage, meaning the majority (80%) of residents have access within a 20 minute drive or less. Gaps do exist in some rural communities (Attachment 3), however there are requests for consideration of additional sites in Eastern Passage and Musquodoboit Harbour.

To achieve a community service level, different travel times and modal means would apply. It is assumed that most 5-9 year olds will be accompanied by an adult and likely be driven to the site unless they lived nearby and did not have to cross major roads. A maximum driving time of 15 minutes is reasonable in that case. Youth 10-19 may access the BMX dirt jump facilities without parental accompaniment and

likely by bicycle. A travel time of 15 minutes by bicycle is noted as the maximum reasonable travel time. Table 2 outlines existing municipal access to BMX facilities at a community service levels:

Table 2: Target Population Currently within Community Level Catchment of BMX Facilities

	Percentage of Target Population (5-19) with Access within 15 minute Drive (35 km/h)	Percentage of Target Population (5-19) with Access Within 15 Minute Bicycle (15.5 km/h)
Existing Access		
BMX Dirt Jump and Skateboard Facilities Combined	91%	67%
BMX Dirt Jump Facilities Only	65%	22%
Access with Addition of BMX Dirt Jump Facility on Chain Lake Field		
BMX Dirt Jump and Skateboard Facilities Combined + Chain Lake Field	91%	68%
BMX Dirt Jump Facilities Only + Chain Lake Field	76%	30%

While 65% of HRM youth are within a 15 minute drive of a BMX dirt jump facility, only 22% are within a 15 minute bicycling distance. That percentage increases to 67% when BMX dirt jump and skateboard facilities are considered together. Therefore, as a municipality, HRM is providing a reasonable level of community-level access to BMX at either a BMX dirt jump facility or a skateboard park.

BMX Dirt Jump Facility Design and Maintenance Considerations

At its extreme BMX is a sport with some inherent dangers. Even for a beginner, users must be prepared to experience and accept some form of minor injury as they test their limits to develop new skills. The responsibility of the Municipality is to ensure BMX dirt jump facilities are built and maintained to suitable standards to ensure reasonable safety of users. Further, the municipality currently only provides for beginner and intermediate skill levels. To manage safety and risk, HRM provides a consistent approach for the design, construction and maintenance of its BMX dirt jump facilities. General site considerations include:

- minimum footprint of 0.25 ha (0.5 ha is preferable);
- site slope between 4-6% to promote quick drainage;
- ample sunlight to speed drying time; and
- good visibility to deter vandals, illegal activities.

The parks must be maintained to the level to which they were built. On occasion, HRM has found that users have altered the dirt jumps to build more difficult obstacles. This is potentially dangerous, and has resulted in increased maintenance to these sites to restore the original configuration.

Costs

In the past, new BMX facilities have been built on a cost shared basis with contributions by the Municipality, community members and the local Councillor. Depending on the site conditions, capital costs would range from \$15,000 to \$25,000. However, due to the design of the proposed site as a stormwater control area, the costs would be expected to be significantly higher. The annual costs to maintain the facilities are approximately \$2,500-\$3,500.

Proposed Chain of Lakes Field

In terms of Chain Lake Field as a BMX Facility, the following should be considered:

Usage of Chain Lake Field

Scheduled usage of the field has been varied since 2003 with usage varying from approximately 40-80 hours per season (which translates to 2-3 nights per week in the peak of summer) to bookings upwards of 190 hours, or 5 nights per week. Nearby trail construction and flooding has reduced scheduled use of the site during the past 3 seasons. It is not uncommon for sport field usage to fluctuate throughout the years, along with changing trends in fashion (e.g. popularity of soccer, ultimate). In addition, the field is used for incidental community use for pick-up games and other play. Chain Lake Field is a valuable resource for overflow field use or as a back-up field when other fields are closed for maintenance.

The off-leash use of the field is regular and consistent and appears to be predominantly at a local community level.

Population and Demographics Surrounding Chain Lake Park

Chain Lake Field is well located in a residential area on an AT route. Approximately 3,925 residents live within a 5 minute bicycle of the proposed site. That number grows to 15,127 within 10 minutes bicycling and 87,008 within 20 minutes cycling distance. Detailed population counts for both cycling and driving distances are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3: Residents within 5, 10, 15, and 20 minute Catchment Distances for Cycling and Driving

Residents within..	5 minutes	10 minutes	15 minutes	20 minutes
Cycling Time (13km/h)	2,063	10,006	22,823	52,347
Driving Time (35 km/h)	18,470	108,676	177,075	214,341

The demographics of the neighbourhood are characterized by:

- a larger than average proportion of older adult residents 45 to 70 years of age;
- few children with the exception of Fairmount/Springvale subdivision; and
- in Fairmount/Springvale: pockets of families with school age children, particularly 5-9 and 10-14 age groups (7.01% and 5.64% respectively), overall there is a below average percentage of youth 15-19 (5.26%).

Target users of BMX parks are children and youth between the ages of 5 and 19. Table 4 details the catchment of these populations within 10 minutes cycling of Chain Lake Field. A total of 1,377 children and youth are within 15 minute cycle of the proposed site, with a concentration of those 5-9 years.

Table 4: Demographics of Children and Youth within 15 Minute Bicycle of Chain Lake Field

Pop. Within 15 min Bicycle	5 – 9 years	10 – 14 years	15 – 19 years	TOTAL
Percentage of Residents	4.32%*	4.43% *	5.37%	14.12%
Number in Target Age Group	1,607	1,648	1,997	5,252

* below HRM average by 0.5% - 0.99%

Proximity of Chain Lake Park to Existing BMX Facilities

The proposed site at Chain Lake Park is currently adequately served at a regional level with the nearest BMX dirt jump facility at Glenbourne Park, 6.1 km away. This equates to a travel time of 9 minutes by car, and 24 minutes by bicycle. There are three other dirt jump facilities within 20 minute drive time of Chain Lake Field (Attachment 2). The closest skateboard facility to the proposed site is the Halifax Central Common (8 minutes driving, 20 minutes cycling). Three other skateboard facilities are within 20 minute drive time of Chain Lake Field. With the addition of a BMX dirt jump facility at Chain Lake Field, the percentage of youth with access to BMX and skateboard facilities combined would be relatively unchanged.

Environmental Impact of Proposed Site on Chain of Lakes Watershed

A large portion of the site is already developed as a grass field and filled area. Therefore, conversion to a BMX dirt jump facility would not have significant impact in terms of biodiversity or habitat loss. The

primary concern with a BMX facility is the erosion and runoff from the dirt jumps and soft tracks associated with the park. Chain Lake Field is located downstream of First Chain Lake, a designated backup water supply for the municipal drinking water system, therefore, contamination from runoff is not an issue. However, runoff from precipitation and erosion from seasonal flooding has a high potential of moving sediment from the BMX facility into the Chain Lake outflow and into Chocolate Lake. This could negatively impact the following water quality indicators downstream in Chocolate Lake, an important urban lake to the residents of Halifax.

Chain Lake Field is currently flat (0% - 1% grade) to accommodate sport uses. This is below the ideal grade for a BMX bike park (4% - 6%) which could lead to drainage issues for the facility. Flat sites take longer to dry after rain events, significantly reducing the number of functional days of the park. A history of flooding has also been identified for the area, potentially reducing the functional days that the site would be available to users. Flooding events also lead to erosion and can require significant reconstruction of the track.

Safety of Chain Lake Park

Chain Lake Park is located on the intersection of two AT routes (one pending) and the termination of Crown Drive. There are currently regular users of the field and forest areas area, and this continues to grow with the success of the COLTA Trail and the recent bridge connection from it to Chain Lake Park. However, there is not much through or drive by traffic. Visibility and nearby activity are important considerations to help deter vandalism and other unwanted activity. The future completion of the second AT connection to the site will improve connectivity and bring more regular users to watch over the park. Maintenance of the vegetation would also be necessary to improve visibility onto the site.

Summary of Assessment

- HRM's current service provides BMX facilities at a regional level (16-18 minute drive time), however, gaps do exist.
- The community surrounding Chain Lake Field is adequately served at a regional level by Glenbourne Park Bike Facility (9 minute drive).
- Provision of a BMX dirt jump facility at Chain Lake Field would translate into a community-level facility, which has implications for future BMX development across the municipality.
- Working to improve service at a regional level should be a priority over creating new community-level facilities. These include the requests for BMX dirt jump facilities in Eastern Passage and Musquodoboit Harbour (both on hold since 2013). Decisions on those requests should be the priority before considering other new BMX facilities.
- Although the scheduled hours fluctuate, Chain Lake Field is a valuable multi-purpose utility field with existing municipal investment which should remain as a practice sport field and swing space as well as for morning off-leash use.
- Flooding and grades of the field are not conducive to a BMX dirt jump track and would cause downstream concerns for Chocolate Lake.
- Due to the design of the Chain of Lakes field as part of a stormwater control system, the costs to convert it to a BMX park would be significant.

Community Facility Master Plan (CFMP2)

Staff is currently completing review of the final draft of the updated Community Facility Master Plan (CFMP2). The scope of that review does include skateboard and BMX parks. Through the consultation on CFMP2, the interest for more BMX dirt jump facilities in HRM was noted at three separate public meetings in October-November 2015. These included the Spryfield community, Sackville community, and a group of stakeholders including representatives from Bicycle Nova Scotia.

Additionally, two BMX projects have been on hold since 2013. The first is a facility requested by the community of Musquodoboit Harbour, an area where a gap in service exists. The second is a regional racing facility in Eastern Passage. The proposed racing facility has already been designed by the

interested group. The final siting for that facility was postponed pending decisions related to the new high school project in that area.

Upon adoption of the CFMP2, Regional Council will have the framework to consider completion of decisions related to BMX parks. If Council chooses to move ahead with a request for a BMX park in this area, staff should be directed to explore alternate sites that are better suited for use as a BMX park.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications associated with this Information Report. Any decision to move ahead with a BMX facility for the community would be subject to approval by Regional Council through established budgeting processes.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

This request came forward from a community consultation on Edward Drillio Park. Additional interest in other BMX parks was presented at the community consultation on CFMP2.

ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment 1: Context Map of Chain Lake Field and Area
- Attachment 2: Proximity of Chain Lake Field to Other BMX Bike Facilities
- Attachment 3: Current Distribution of BMX Parks and Skate Parks with Regional Catchment of 20 Minute Drive

A copy of this report can be obtained online at <http://www.halifax.ca/council/agendasc/cagenda.php> then choose the appropriate meeting date, or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210, or Fax 902.490.4208.

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