

BACKGROUND

Western Common:

HRM's Western Common was the former Indian Lake water supply for Halifax prior to the commissioning of Pockwock. It contains eight lakes, twelve streams and considerable wetland and forest stands; it straddles two watersheds, the Nine Mile River and the Prospect River. It is also the home of the Regional Waste Management Facility at Otter Lake; sits adjacent to the Chebucto Peninsula Provincial Protected Area and the Ragged Lake Industrial Park; and is adjacent to the communities of Beechville/Lakeside/Timberlee, Goodwood and Hatchet Lake.

A master plan for the lands, creating the Western Common Regional Park, was completed and approved by Regional Council in 2010. The strategic purpose of the Western Common is to protect the environmental assets of the area, host and buffer the waste facility, as well as provide for wilderness recreation.

The current Phase I of the five phase 50-year master plan for the implementation of the park, is quite prescribed. It involves creation of the Nicoles Lake Day Park with trails emanating from the Prospect Road Recreation Centre to and around Nicoles Lake and connecting to the local schools. It is a relatively small component of the Regional Park but is immediately adjacent to residential areas. It will primarily serve the local communities as a district facility. The current budget amount for capital improvements to Nicoles Lake Day Park (Phase I of Western Common Master Plan) is \$50k annually from Project No. CPX01328 - New Parks and Playgrounds, subject to Regional Council's annual approval. No other funding sources, other than HRM, are anticipated for development of the Western Common Regional Park at this point.

Other Related Issues:

The Western Common Master Plan does identify three regional issues, which have potential to impact or require detailed integrated planning on the Western Common. These are:

- 1) Otter Lake Waste Resource Facility - The plan understands that there could be an extension of the Waste Resource Facility beyond the original 2023 closure date. The plan recognizes that both the Otter Lake Facility and the Western Common were born of each other with the idea that the two uses can co-exist, if properly managed, for overall regional purposes.
- 2) Greenbelting - The Western Common would play a role in any conceptual greenbelting plan currently being discussed as part of RP+5, but yet to be approved by Council.
- 3) Ragged Lake - In the next year, staff will begin looking at details around the future of the adjacent Ragged Lake Industrial Park. The Western Common Master Plan recognizes areas for commercial development but calls for a high level of integration to protect water courses, which are headwater and constitute key connections into the Western Common Park.

DISCUSSION

General Role of Advisory Committees:

When considering the creation of Advisory Committees it is important to understand that their role is to:

- provide recommendations on specific questions as requested by Council;
- provide expert advice and information to Council on specialized matters;
- facilitate public input for Council; and
- through managing implementation of projects assist in enhancing the quality of life of the community.

Advisory Committees do require support and attention from staff and Municipal Clerks office in order to be effective; therefore, resourcing implications are always a consideration. Committee support and associated cost will vary in accordance with their assigned role and issues. A Citizen Advisory Committee was involved with the development of the Western Common Master Plan. It was dissolved at the end of that process.

Citizen Committee for Western Common Regional Park:

At the current capital allocation level of \$50K yearly, subject to Council's annual approval, and the limited park development to date, there is no compelling reason to create a citizen steering committee to oversee or advise on the planned annual improvements. Instead, local public meetings could be held as needed to review plans and capital and operational issues as required.

Relating to the future planning and integration matters identified in the Master Plan and articulated in this report, Community Council, through Regional Council, could utilize an advisory committee to explore and advise on park related issues when they feel that focussed advice, beyond what can be achieved through other community consultation processes, is required. As these matters are of a regional nature, it should be Regional Council that creates the advisory committee, should it be required. However, this could be requested through a recommendation of Halifax and West Community Council to Regional Council. Council would have the choice of delegating the task to Halifax and West Community Council or Environment and Sustainability Standing Committee to deal with the specifics, in association with appropriate staff.

None of these issues are advanced enough presently that staff feel a citizens committee for the Western Common could presently coalesce around and occupy themselves with meaningful work. The discussions around the Regional Waste Resource Facility are the most advanced; however, the proposed Otter Lake Plan presently before Council does indicate a good deal of public consultation within its process. Community Council, Regional Council and staff should mark these upcoming issues; monitor them as they evolve; and if they wish focussed citizen input, specifically for the Western Common, may at that time request that Regional Council form an advisory committee. A clear terms-of-reference would be developed at that time, based on Council's specific direction.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Capital investments for the Western Common are laid out in the approved master plan. Facility investment is subject to Council's annual budget process, which seeks to allocate on a priority basis.

Operational costs of a committee would involve allocating staff resources with co-ordination responsibilities from Planning and Infrastructure (who are responsible for Open Space), legislative support from the Municipal Clerks Office and subject area staff as required from other business units. Incidental costs for advertising, meetings, public information meetings, and specialized analysis, would vary in accordance with the particular matter being examined. Currently, there are no additional operational budgets approved to create this support. Instead, support would likely be created by placing this matter as a high priority and delaying other work.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The 2010 Western Common Master Plan was created through a series of public consultations between 2008 and 2010, including detailed work with a citizen Western Common Master Plan Steering Committee.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

The recommended action recognizes the importance of the Western Common in achieving water quality, wilderness, and Waste Management objectives of HRM. The recommendation does not infer that Council remains less vigilant in balancing these objectives through the Western Common.

ALTERNATIVES

If Halifax and West Community Council feel that Regional Council would benefit from formation of an advisory committee for the Western Common presently, it could make the request through to Regional Council.

ATTACHMENTS

Map - Western Common Master Plan

A copy of this report can be obtained online at <http://www.halifax.ca/commcoun/cc.html> then choose the appropriate Community Council and meeting date, or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 490-4210, or Fax 490-4208.

Report Prepared by: Peter Bigelow, Manager, Public Lands Portfolio Management, Real Estate and Land Management

original signed

Report Approved by: Peter Stickings, Manger Real Estate and Land Management

original signed

Financial Approval by: Greg Keefe, Director of Finance & ICT/CFO, 490-6308

Attachment 1 Western Common Master Plan Map

