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Item No.
Community Planning & Economic Development Standing Committee
October 15, 2015

TO: Chair and Members of Community Planning & Economic Development
Standing Committee

SUBMITTED BY: Original signed by _____
Brad Anguish, Director, Parks & Recreation

DATE: October 5, 2015

SUBJECT: Fort Needham Park Master Plan

ORIGIN

- June 10, 2014 Halifax Regional Council motion:

MOVED by Councillor Watts, seconded by Councillor Craig that Halifax Regional Council:
 1. Adopt Administrative Order 2014-005-GOV providing the Terms of Reference for the Halifax Explosion 100th Anniversary Advisory Committee as outlined in Attachment 1 of the April 10, 2014 staff report, and
 2. Future recommendations in regard to the Halifax Explosion 100th Anniversary Program be brought forward to Community Planning and Economic Development for consideration during the annual budgeting process.
- April 28, 2015 – Regional Council motion put and passed to approve the 2015/16 Capital and Operating Budget. Includes funding in Account CP000012, Fort Needham Master Plan Implementation..

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, Section 79 (1), The Council may expend money required by the Municipality for; (k) recreational programs; (x) lands and buildings required for a municipal purpose; (ah) playgrounds, trails, including trails developed, operated or maintained pursuant to an agreement made under clause 82(c), bicycle paths, swimming pools, ice arenas and other recreational facilities;(ai) public grounds, squares, halls, museums, parks, tourist information centres and community centres.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Community Planning & Economic Development Standing Committee recommend that Regional Council:

1. Adopt the Fort Needham Master Plan as direction for future improvements to Fort Needham Memorial Park;
2. Direct staff to include additional funding in the 2016/17 capital budget in the amount of \$2.2M for Phase 1 of the project and to undertake detail design for the implementation of Phases 1 and 2 as outlined in the Master Plan;
3. Direct staff to include additional funding in the 2017/18 capital budget for Phase 2 in the amount of \$3M, subject to receipt of cost shared funding, and
4. Pursue partnership funding for capital costs from other levels of government and private sector.

BACKGROUND

The Halifax Explosion on December 6, 1917 was a pivotal moment in this region's history, prompting mobilization of human and material resources in a multi-faceted program of rescue, rehabilitation and reconstruction. To recognize the 100th Anniversary of the Halifax Explosion, HRM is undertaking a Municipal Commemorative Program that will include a civic commemorative event, a designated grant program, and legacy capital projects. To prepare for the commemorative program, Regional Council directed the creation of a Halifax Explosion 100th Anniversary Advisory Committee. The terms of reference for the committee were approved in June 2014 and the committee has been meeting regularly to discuss proposed components for the commemoration program.

Fort Needham Memorial Park is the most notable site associated with the Halifax Explosion. It is located within the epicentre of the devastated area. The Halifax Relief Commission donated the park as a continuing memorial to the Halifax Explosion. The park is the site of the Halifax Explosion Memorial Bell Tower and the annual memorial gathering. Improvements and rededication of Fort Needham Memorial Park has been identified as a legacy project for commemoration of the upcoming 100th Anniversary and supported by the Advisory Committee. While Fort Needham Park is a memorial to the Halifax Explosion, it suffers from a loss of focus of its original purpose. In addition, the park has not achieved its full potential in satisfying the broader objectives of a regional park to better present its cultural and heritage offerings. Fort Needham is a hilltop park with inherent challenges of lack of visibility from the street and steep grades that impede access. Over the years the park has evolved in an ad-hoc fashion resulting in poorly sited facilities that disrupts the circulation and views into and out of the park.

The Master Plan for Fort Needham Park is a long-range vision and design concept for Fort Needham Park that balances the needs of the local community, while enhancing the memorial capacity of the site. The future vision for the park balances the regional and national commemorative significance with the local recreation needs of the community. The master plan gives direction on how future development can:

1. enhance the commemorative experience of the Memorial Park as a cultural landscape and place of gathering;
2. continue to provide a range of healthy, vibrant, and active recreation opportunities for the local residents; and
3. overcome the functional impediments in the park.

Funding to complete a master plan to address deficiencies at the site was approved in the 2015/16 Capital budget. The project was further outlined in the terms of reference of the Halifax Explosion 100th Anniversary Advisory Committee. The proposed master plan has been completed and is being presented for approval.

DISCUSSION

Fort Needham is a 15.6 acre regional park located in the north end of the Halifax peninsula. It is the site of the Halifax Explosion Memorial Bell Tower, a monument erected in the 1980's to commemorate the Halifax Explosion. Each year the municipality commemorates this event at Fort Needham Park, overlooking the spot in the harbour where the Explosion occurred.

Regional parks are intended to serve the educational, cultural and recreation needs of the population of the entire region as well as visitors to Halifax Regional Municipality. Fort Needham is classified as a regional park because of its cultural significance, particularly its association with the Halifax Explosion and its past military use as a fort.

As a memorial to the Halifax Explosion, the site has an important cultural identity and aligns with the Regional Plan's Cultural and Heritage objectives, including broadening heritage protection through the identification and preservation of cultural landscapes, and supporting cultural tourism by investing in signature cultural attractions and events. Fort Needham is a place of commemoration and reflection, and is also an active local park for residents, providing recreation opportunities and green space for the surrounding neighbourhoods.

Master Plan Objectives

The master plan for the Fort Needham Park seeks to balance the regional and national commemorative significance with the local recreational needs and open space objectives. The master plan identifies key capital projects and park improvements to be implemented to enhance the memorial capacity of Fort Needham Park in preparation for the Halifax Explosion 100th Anniversary in 2017.

The main objectives of the plan are to:

- Emphasize the regional and national significance of the park by clarifying its commemorative nature as a memorial park to the Halifax Explosion;
- Continue to provide a range of healthy, vibrant, and active recreation opportunities for the local community; and
- Overcome the functional impediments in the park such as steep grades, lack of presence on the streets, lack of internal circulation, and the loss of important views of the Bell Tower monument and the hilltop views of the harbour and surrounding city.

Commemorative Principles

Commemorative landscapes are cultural places established to remember, celebrate, honour, or memorialize noteworthy locations, people or events. Fort Needham Park has the opportunity to be a commemorative landscape and 'outdoor museum' for the Halifax Explosion story as well as the link to other key sites that were impacted by the explosion.

The Halifax Explosion 100th Anniversary Committee appointed by Regional Council has developed a vision statement and guiding principles for how the municipality should commemorate and mark the centenary of the Halifax Explosion.

The vision statement for the Commemorative Plan is:

- To honour the memory of those who died and suffered;
- To educate current and future generations; and
- To celebrate the resilience of Halifax.

The guiding principles for commemoration are:

- To be solemn, respectful, and reflective;
- To reflect the legacy of the story;
- To represent all communities;
- To educate and connect people to the history;
- To capture the national imagination;

- To explore the compassionate response;
- To explore the institutional responses; and
- To be compelling, meaningful, evocative, and enduring.

The master plan has interpreted the Advisory Committee's vision and principles as a basis for the commemorative intent for the park to help shape the interpretive strategy for the park's redevelopment.

Highlights of the Master Plan

The park redesign seeks to address many of the challenges of its current layout. Due to size constraints, the Fort Needham Master Plan has not been attached to this report, but rather is available at <http://www.halifax.ca/parks/fort-needham/index.php>. Key features of the plan that meet municipal objectives and add new commemorative elements to mark the 100th Anniversary are as follows:

1. Enhance the commemorative experience of the Memorial Bell Tower: Improve the grounds around the Memorial Bell Tower to create a better setting for the monument and the annual community gathering. Provide space around the monument for quiet contemplation and interpretation. This work includes new plaza paving, stairs and walls, accessible paths, interpretive elements, seating, landscaping and lighting.
2. Express the relationship of the park to ground zero of the Explosion: The Halifax Memorial Bell Tower, built in 1984, was deliberately located on an axis with a view down Richmond Street to the point of the explosion in the harbour. With recent construction in the Halifax shipyard, this sightline has been obstructed. The master plan proposes to reveal a new relationship of the park to the explosion site in the harbour with a curved path that follows the radius from the point of the explosion blast. This curved esplanade becomes the main access spine along the western edge of the hill, a memorial walk where views of the city are captured, and important stories are conveyed. Concentric rings which represent the shockwaves that would have radiated from the centre of the blast will be represented in the shaping of the ground.
3. Strengthening the park's identity and presence: Improve the current park entrances and create new entrances on Novalea Drive that are more visually prominent and accessible from the surrounding streets.
4. Improve the access into the park and up to the monument site: Construct a new service road with gentler grades, accessible pathways, staircase from Union Street up to the Bell Tower monument along the Richmond Street view corridor, and new trails up the forested hill.
5. Visually orient people to the landmark of the Memorial Bell Tower: Reconfigure the pathways and frame important spaces. Reduce the visual clutter by reorganizing the site and removing the tennis courts and chain link fence that block views and access to the Bell Tower.
6. Protect and strengthen the original commemorative intents of the Memorial Bell Tower design and siting: Selectively clear some of the vegetation to open up views to the Bell Tower, and key hilltop look-off views out to the harbour and city.
7. Continue to provide local recreation: Develop a central hub of activity for community recreation related amenities such as the playgrounds, community gardens, and seating areas off the neighbourhood entrance on Needham Street.

Plan Implementation

With the upcoming Halifax Explosion centenary anniversary, the proposed park design provides opportunity to transform Fort Needham Park into an outdoor commemorative landscape that commemorates the explosion story for residents and visitors. The Halifax Explosion has cultural significance at a regional, national and international scale so the plan has the ability to create a meaningful legacy.

The site master plan would be implemented over several phases of construction. Phases of work were prioritized for their multiple benefits of improving the commemorative experience, enhancing the local park use, and upgrading the park's functionality. The timing of the phases will meet direction of Regional Council with the first expected to create a legacy for the 100th Anniversary commemoration. The proposed implementation of the park master plan has been broken into 3 phases. Details of the implementation plan contained within the Fort Needham Master Plan are outlined in Attachment 1, with an overview outlined below.

Phase 1

Pending capital funding approval by Regional Council, identified projects would be completed by December 2017 for the 100th Anniversary commemoration event. These projects would focus on improving the grounds around the Halifax Explosion monument and providing better street presence and access up to the park's hilltop areas. The scope of redevelopment for this phase is confined to the main entrances and the area around the Memorial Bell Tower. This work can be done with limited impact to the remainder of the park site. Important objectives in this phase are reconnecting the park to the explosion site at the foot of Richmond Street, opening views to the Harbour, strengthening the sense of place and understanding of the Explosion's scale and impact. The primary focus of Phase 1 is to improve the functionality of the park and enhance past commemorative initiatives such as the Memorial Bell Tower. Estimated capital cost: \$2.2 million.

Phase 2

Identified projects are both commemorative and functional through the creation of better circulation and spatial organization within the park. Phase 2 also affects a larger area of the park for redevelopment. This work includes changing the park's layout to improve the internal circulation. It would include shifting the sport field towards the east and lowering the grades to create the space required for the Esplanade and look-off on the western edge of the hill.

The Esplanade and Shattered Path introduce new commemorative elements and could be completed as new memorials for the 100th Anniversary. Pending approval of capital funding, Phase 2 could also be completed by December 2017. Estimated capital cost: \$3.0 million.

Phase 3

Identified stand-alone projects could be completed incrementally over a longer timeframe as budgets allow. These projects include improvements to community recreation components and are not commemorative focused. Estimated capital cost: \$2.7 million.

Funding Assembly

Currently, Regional Council has approved funding for the preparation of the master plan and design work for the Fort Needham Park only. Preliminary capital funding for the implementation was estimated at \$500,000 for the 2016/17 and 2017/18 fiscal years. With completion of the master plan, the estimated costs of the work is better known and has increased significantly from preliminary estimates. Phases 1 and 2 include improvements to the park to better incorporate the commemorative history of the site.

Preliminary discussions have been held with other government agencies that have indicated there is interest in the project for potential funding due to the significance of the Halifax Explosion's 100th Anniversary. As well, the new park commemorative design could also receive potential support from other funding partners. Therefore, it is recommended that Regional Council direct staff to formally explore funding partnerships.

With the total estimated costs associated with Phases 1 and 2, completion of both phases prior to the 2017 100th Anniversary would have a significant impact on the funding availability for other important capital projects. Therefore, it is recommended that Regional Council direct staff to include funding for Phase 1 in the 2016/17 capital budget in order to be able to complete those improvements to the site which directly improve the site access and the grounds around the Halifax Explosion monument.

While work on items outlined in Phase 2 could also be completed in time for the 100th Anniversary, it is recommended that the work be dependent on receipt of additional partnership funding. Therefore, it is recommended that staff be directed to apply for funding from other levels of government to offset costs associated with Phase 2.

Next Steps

In order to meet the target date for site improvements for the December 2017 centenary anniversary, the detail design phase of work would commence, pending approval of the Fort Needham Master Plan. This work would begin immediately in order to tender and award the construction contract in the spring of 2016. Site construction work would then be anticipated to occur over two construction seasons beginning 2016 with work completed for the fall of 2017.

The detail design would be done for both Phases 1 and 2 with the final construction tender packages tailored to meet available funding and approved capital budget.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Capital Account #CP000012 - Fort Needham Master Plan Implementation included approved funding in the 2015/16 budget for consulting services of detail design for the implementation of the Fort Needham Park Master Plan. Pending council direction, additional funding will be allocated in 2016/17 and 2017/18 for capital projects and park improvements to be implemented for the Halifax Explosion 100th Anniversary in 2017. A RFP for Consulting Services for Detail Design is expected to be issued in fall 2015.

Due to the time sensitivities to make improvements to the park for 2017, advanced capital funding from the 2016/2017 Capital Budget would be requested to allow for construction work to be tendered in the spring of 2016. The Class D (probability of costs) estimates to implement both Phases 1 and 2 of the master plan is \$5.2 M. To implement Phase 1 only, the estimated cost is \$2.2 M.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Preceding the master plan study, two public meetings were held to solicit feedback on general park issues as well as short and long-term goals. The first meeting occurred on February 28, 2013. A follow up meeting occurred on February 26, 2014 where the public was informed of the municipality's intent to develop a Commemoration Plan for the 100th Anniversary of the Halifax Explosion, and proceed with a master planning study for Fort Needham Park.

As part of the master plan design process, a public design workshop was held on December 4, 2014. In addition to the public workshop, an online survey was available to gather feedback from a wider audience. There were 129 people who responded to the survey.

On January 24, 2015 an Interpretive Design Workshop was held with the Halifax Explosion 100th Anniversary Advisory Committee to gather input on the key themes, stories and interpretive approaches for the site.

On October 1, 2015 a public presentation was held at the United Memorial Church hall to present the park master plan's design concept and implementation strategy to the community. There were 50 residents in attendance. Overall, the park master plan was well received with positive feedback on the vision for the park and the level of consideration for making the park a destination for commemorating the Halifax Explosion. However, there were a number of concerns raised around the future of the off leash dog area in the park. Approval of the Fort Needham Park Master Plan does not remove the off leash use in the park. However, the approval of the plan does increase the commemorative nature of the park and Council will need to decide how to address off leash use at memorial sites as part of the Off Leash Strategy. The report on the off leash strategy is expected to be presented to CPED at the November meeting and will outline proposed policy direction for off leash areas.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

An Archaeological Resource Impact Assessment was completed as part of the Master Plan study for Fort Needham Memorial Park under a Heritage Research Permit related to the Provincial Special Places Act. The assessment resulted in an inventory of potential archaeological resources within the park boundary associated with the various phases of military development and the devastation of the Halifax Explosion. The assessment recommends that any ground disturbance in these areas be monitored by an archaeologist.

ALTERNATIVES

- Alternative 1: Community Planning & Economic Development Standing Committee could recommend that Regional Council not adopt the Fort Needham Master Plan.
- Alternative 2: Community Planning & Economic Development Standing Committee could recommend that Regional Council defer decision on the Fort Needham Park Master Plan until consideration of the Off Leash Strategy. It should be noted that this would result in the commemorative changes to the park not being able to be completed in time for the 2017 100th Anniversary.
- Alternative 3: Community Planning & Economic Development Standing Committee could recommend amendments to the phasing or funding levels to Regional Council

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Implementation Plan Summary

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

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Attachment 1



Figure 1

Park Master Plan Implementation

With the upcoming Halifax Explosion centenary anniversary, the proposed park design provides opportunity to transform Fort Needham Park into an outdoor commemorative landscape that interprets the explosion story for residents and visitors. The Halifax Explosion has cultural significance at a regional, national and international scale. The plan has the ability to create a meaningful legacy.

The master plan describes a long-term vision for Fort Needham Park and gives direction on how future development of the park can enhance the commemorative experience of the Memorial Park as a cultural landscape in our region, and continue to be an active park for local residents providing recreation opportunities and green space to the surrounding neighbourhoods.

The site master plan would be implemented over several phases of construction. Phases of work were prioritized for their multiple benefits of improving the commemorative experience, enhancing the local park use and enjoyment, and upgrading the park's functionality. The timing of the phases will meet direction of Regional Council to create a legacy for the 100th Anniversary commemoration.

The proposed implementation of the park master plan has been broken into 3 phases. The following outlines the phasing for development.



Phase 1

Identified projects would be completed by December 2017 as a priority for the 100th Anniversary commemorative event. These projects would focus on improving the grounds around the Halifax Explosion Memorial Bell Tower and providing better street presence and access up to the park's hilltop areas. The scope of redevelopment for this phase is confined to the southern section of the park and the area around the Bell Tower. This work can be done with limited impact to the rest of the park site. Important objectives in this phase are to reconnect the explosion site at the foot of Richmond Street and open views to the Harbour, strengthening the sense of place and understanding of the explosion's scale and impact. Phase 1 looks at improving what is in the park today and enhances past commemorative initiatives such as the Memorial Bell Tower built in the mid 1980's.

Estimated capital cost: \$2.2 million.

Scope of work in Phase 1 includes:

- Improve the grounds around the Memorial Bell Tower to create a better setting for the monument and stage for the annual community gathering and commemorative ceremony. This includes new plaza paving, stairs and walls, accessible paths, interpretive elements, seating, landscaping and lighting.
- Improve the access up to the monument site with the construction of accessible pathways; a new service road with gentler grades; a staircase from Union Street up to the Bell Tower monument along the Richmond Street view corridor; and new trails up the forested hill to the Bell Tower monument.
- Give the park more presence on the surrounding streets by constructing a new park entrance at the Novalea Drive /Kenny Street corner; Improve the southern park entrance and pathway off Novalea Drive near the Hydrostone Market; improve the northern park entrance on Union Street;
- Selectively clear vegetation to open up views to the Bell Tower landmark, and key hilltop look-off views out to the harbour and surrounding area.
- Remove the tennis courts to improve access into the park and open up views of the Bell Tower from the main southern entrance to create a better sense of arrival and circulation.
- Build Blossom Plaza, a central place in the park for seating with good views to the monument and proximity to the popular Hydrostone Market on Young Street. The plaza will help strengthen the sense of arrival and progression into the park from the south.



Phase 2

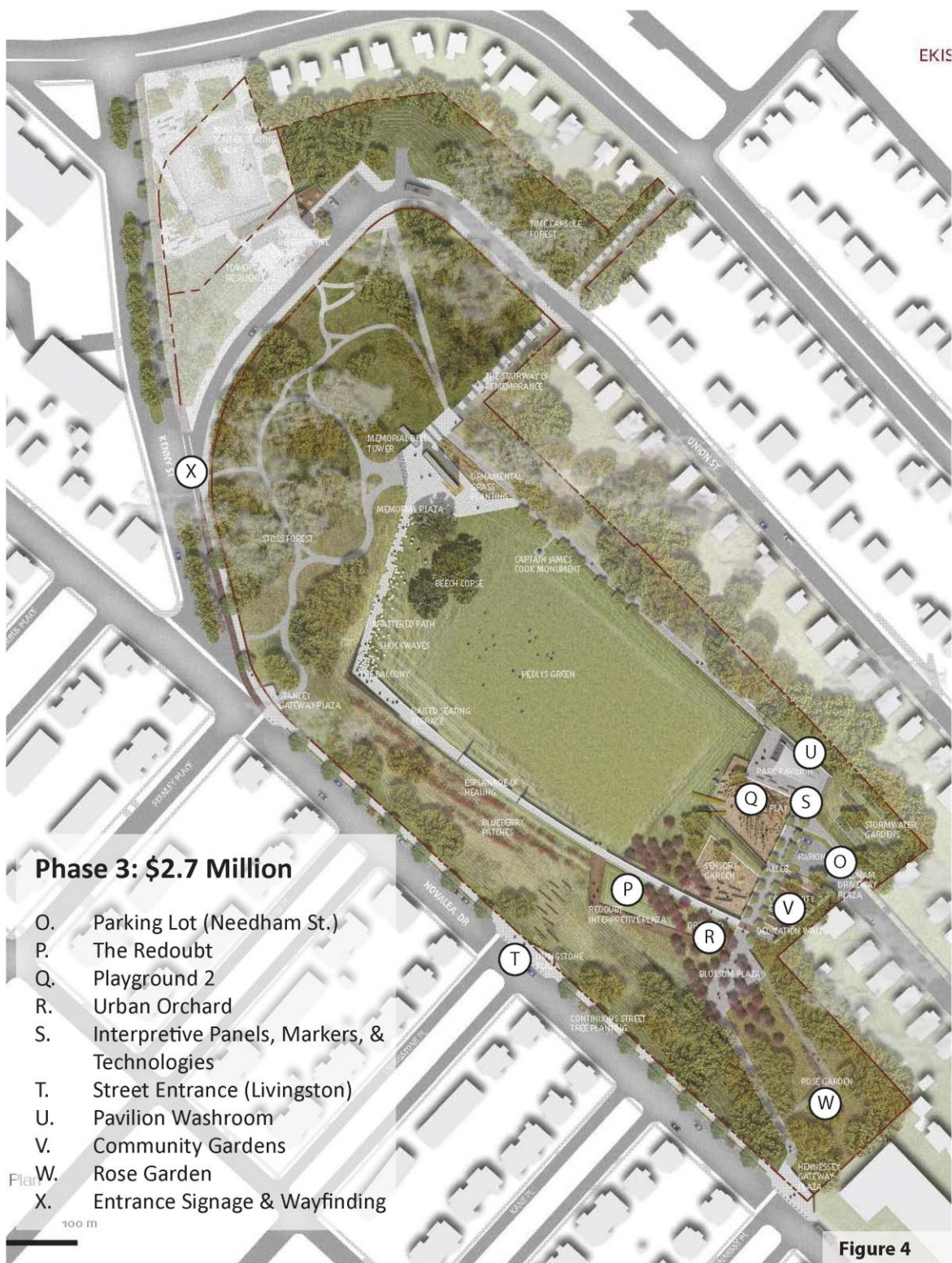
Identified projects are both commemorative and functional, creating better circulation and spatial organization within the park, and affect a larger area of the park for redevelopment. This work includes changing the park's spatial layout to improve the internal circulation and necessitates shifting the sport field towards the east and lowering the grades to create the space required for the Esplanade and look-off on the western edge of the hill.

The Esplanade and Shattered Path introduce new commemorative elements and could be completed as new memorials for marking the 100th Anniversary. Phase 2 could also be completed by December 2017, and would complete the memorial aspects of the site to visitors for the 100th Anniversary.

Estimated capital cost: \$3.0 million

Scope of work in Phase 2:

- Relocate the sports field to the east; lower the grades and improve the field's drainage.
- Sculpt the ground around field to create the landscape Shockwaves that will be both interpretive of the Explosion and functional for channeling drainage run-off and catching stray balls.
- Construct the internal circulation loop that includes the Allée, the Esplanade, and the Shattered Path. The detail design of these walkways would include commemorative and interpretive elements and be coordinated with the interpretive plan.
- Construct one of the new playgrounds to replace the existing play equipment required to be removed with the site regrading. The smaller Sensory Playground is comparable in size to what is in the park today. Designing a playground around the themes of sensory play and universal design adds an interpretive layer to tell the story of the many children who lost limbs or were blinded by the flying glass and debris from the explosion.



Phase 3

Identified stand-alone projects could be completed incrementally over a longer timeframe as budgets allow. These projects include improvements to community recreation components and are not commemorative focused. They could be implemented through future municipal programs and budgets.

Estimated capital cost in 2015 dollars: \$2.7 million.

Scope of work in Phase 3:

- Additional interpretive initiatives, such as interpretive panels, explosion markers and mobile device technologies can be implemented independently from the site construction work.
- New signage for park entrances and wayfinding.
- Relocate the community garden to the central hub of the park near the playground and the Needham Street entrance.
- Plant an Urban Orchard including re-establishing the berry patches on the hill slopes.
- Build the Nature Playground to expand the play area.
- Re-establish the historic Rose Garden and horticultural area.
- Develop the Redoubt Plaza to interpret the military history of the site.
- Build a small parking lot at the Needham Street entrance for accessible parking for the playground and drop-off zone for the community gardens.
- Replace the old canteen bunker with a new park washroom facility and pavilion with covered, outside interpretive area.
- Create a new street level entrance on Novalea at Livingston with a trail access up the hill to the Esplanade walkway.