

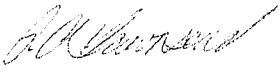
Info #1



PO Box 1749
Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3J 3A5 Canada

Harbour East Community Council
October 1, 2009

TO: Harbour East Community Council

SUBMITTED BY: 
Phillip Townsend, Director, Infrastructure & Asset Management

DATE: September 11, 2009

SUBJECT: Inclusive Playground, Dartmouth

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

Harbour East Community Council approved Councillor Karsten's motion that a staff report be requested on the process required to establish an "accessible playground" in Dartmouth.

BACKGROUND

At its meeting of May 8, 2005 Regional Council adopted the recommendations of the Inclusive Playgrounds staff report to develop a regional strategy for the provision of an Inclusive Playground Program and to select Westmount School, Halifax, as a pilot project site for the development of HRM's initial inclusive playground. The report employed the following terminology:

Rather than referring to such playgrounds as "accessible", industry practitioners are using the terms "inclusive", "playability" and "universal" to better reflect the true intent of the philosophy. For the purpose of this report we will be using the term "inclusive".

The report describes the approach to inclusive playground design as follows:

Inclusive playgrounds are designed with everybody's needs and challenges in mind. It not only provides the users with the opportunity to enjoy the playground, but also allows for greater interaction with each other. Inclusive playgrounds move beyond "accessibility" by providing higher quality activities for the large spectrum of disabilities/abilities, rather than focussing only on wheelchair access.

The report includes a discussion on additional costs associated with inclusive design:

The main impediment in constructing inclusive playgrounds in the past has been cost. Generally, the cost of a well designed inclusive playground has been twice that of a traditional approach. The majority of this increase is due to the use of the protective rubberized surfacing, which is more than ten times the cost of pea stone and wood retaining methods used in traditional playgrounds. In addition, the equipment requiring ramps, transfer stations, expanded decks, or adaptive items such as swings all impact on the cost. In theory, it would be the correct approach to weigh the benefits of making all HRM's playgrounds inclusive; however, the reality is one of major fiscal constraint. If the approach taken was to incorporate inclusive standards to all playground upgrades and new projects, based on projected budget capabilities, the impact on proposed upgrades and new projects, would be a 50 percent reduction in both programs.

The report cited recent playgrounds constructed in Dartmouth and Eastern Passage (Dartmouth Waterfront Park, Mount Edward Road School, Ian Forsythe School, and Crichton Park School) that contained some inclusive elements such as rubberized surfaces.

The report recommended a phased-in inclusive playground development strategy (similar to the approach used in establishing skateboard parks) to be extended over future fiscal periods. The report also suggested that initial inclusive playgrounds should be located at schools or regional facilities serving larger catchment areas.

Guidelines for the design and location of inclusive playgrounds were also included in the report. Regional Council accepted the staff recommendation to adopt the Playability Growing Learning Together Through Play manual published by the Ontario Parks Association.

A recommendation for the HRM Advisory Committee for People With Disabilities to foster the implementation of the inclusive playground philosophy and encourage initiatives in the provision of this service through ongoing communication with staff was also accepted.

Finally, the report identified Westmount School in Halifax for a pilot program. It was a site with strong community support that could serve a significant number of children with special needs. A local stakeholders' committee developed the project proposal and co-ordinated fundraising efforts.

The staff report concluded with an intent to evaluate financial impacts, community use, maintenance requirements and design efficiencies of the pilot program and then report back to Council with more definitive recommendations towards the delivery of this service and development of this policy.

By Autumn of 2006, the Westmount Inclusive Playground Park was operational. Total cost of the facility was \$377,000. Community involvement and fundraising were essential components of the venture. Donations from the Province and other sponsors contributed \$161,000 to capital costs for the project.

Ongoing observations of the site indicate that school children continue to utilize the playground. It is expected that cost estimates regarding financial impacts related to maintenance and design efficiencies will be evaluated when the playground structures have undergone at least 3 years of weather-related and usage impacts.

DISCUSSION

No conclusions regarding inclusive playground policies or related service delivery options have been made by staff. However, the success factors and financial records associated with the Westmount Inclusive Playground Park can provide interim guidance for the the process required to establish an inclusive playground in Dartmouth. The following considerations could be part of an interim process:

1. There is an organized community support group with a proposal for an inclusive playground. Fundraising will be an essential component of the venture.
2. There is a centrally located school or recreation facility with a significant population of children with special needs.
3. The proposed site is located within a densely populated area, in close proximity to Access-a-Bus services.

Inclusive Playground, Dartmouth

October 1, 2009

- 4. The site features and services are favourable to the development of an inclusive playground.
- 5. The HRM Advisory Committee for People With Disabilities will contribute its expertise to the project.
- 6. The overall design and location of the inclusive playground will be guided by the Playability Growing Learning Together Through Play manual.
- 7. The project will require considerable capital costs, approximately twice that associated with the development of conventional playgrounds.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

There are no immediate financial commitments required on the part of HRM regarding this report.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT POLICIES / BUSINESS PLAN

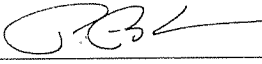
This report complies with the Municipality's Multi-Year Financial Strategy, the approved Operating, Capital and Reserve budgets, policies and procedures regarding withdrawals from the utilization of Capital and Operating reserves, as well as any relevant legislation.

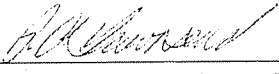
ATTACHMENTS

There are no attachments.

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:	Blair Blakeney, Coordinator Parks Capital Projects, IAM	490-6789
	John Charles, Planner, Real Property Planning, IAM	490-5771

Report Reviewed/ Approved by:	 Peter Bigelow, Manager, Real Property Planning, IAM	490-6047
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Report Approved by:	 Phillip Townsend, Director, Infrastructure & Asset Management	490-7166
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