

Report to Council



Date: June 20, 2022
To: Council
From: City Manager
Subject: Knox Mountain Management Park Plan Update
Department: Parks and Buildings Planning

Recommendation:

THAT Council receives, for information, the report from the Parks and Buildings Planning Department dated June 20, 2022, with respect to the Knox Mountain Park Management Plan Update;

AND THAT Council endorse the Knox Mountain Park Management Plan Update as attached to the report from the Parks and Buildings Planning Department dated June 20, 2022;

AND THAT Council direct staff to begin implementation of the recommendations and actions.

Purpose:

For Council to update the Knox Mountain Park Management Plan for the next ten years.

Background:

The first Knox Mountain Management Plan was completed in 1999 and primarily focused on issues concerning forest health. The first Update completed in 2011 established the current vision and strategic goals for the park. The Knox Mountain Park Management Plan (KMPMP) 2022 Update summarizes the improvements made at Knox Mountain over the last ten years and outlines priority projects through the next ten years. It includes a bio-physical inventory and provides an assessment of current issues facing the park today. Further, it outlines 20 capital items and 8 operational maintenance items for action over the next 10 years.

Knox Mountain is our largest park, and one of our busiest, with over 260,000 visits last year. Knox Mountain Drive has seen a dramatic increase in walking and biking in addition to vehicle demand. In the spring of 2021, staff initiated a public engagement survey that provided five options for the public to choose from, which ranged from options with cars completely prohibited to having full access. In November of last year, Council voted to undertake a two-year trial with a hybrid 'Share the Road' approach, where the road to the First Lookout is open to vehicles from noon to 8 pm daily in the frost-free season, except for extreme fire hazard conditions. The trial includes traffic calming measures and signage upgrades, as well as vehicle, pedestrian and cyclist counts. This trial started in April of this year and will go on to 2024.

During the Summer and Fall of 2021, a biophysical inventory was prepared, as well as a full review of the management plan. In the winter and spring of 2022, the capital and operational projects were reviewed and updated.

Public Engagement – Update

In Spring 2022, the draft management plan update was presented for public review and feedback. The draft plan was available for review and poll questions were asked to ensure alignment with the park's vision and strategic goals. The online draft and survey link were sent directly to stakeholder groups. Over 1450 people participated in the engagement. Eighty-five percent of respondents agreed, strongly agreed, or felt neutral when asked if the investment areas advanced the vision and strategic goals through the updated plan. A full outline of the engagement results is attached to this report.

Biophysical Inventory Results

A biophysical Inventory was completed as part of the update. One of the issues that continue to be a primary concern with respect to ecological health is access management and the proliferation of rogue trails through the park. The study notes that efforts over the last years have been successful, with 26% fewer unsanctioned trails in Knox West 2021 than in 2011. Improvements such as delineation of sensitive areas have seen a recovery of those ecosystems. That said, when looking at the whole of the park, 46% of trails remain unsanctioned. This presents a significant impact to the ecological functioning of the park, particularly considering our dry climate where the recovery of ecosystems is slow. Given the anticipated increase in use over the next ten years, the assessment recommends significant effort should be invested into access management throughout the park.

Works Completed from 2011 to 2022

The last ten years saw twenty projects completed in the park. This included the addition of 1777 Crosby Road (43 acres/17.6 hectares), trail upgrades, expansion of the dog park, and wildfire mitigation measures through the park. A full list of the projects is included in Section 4.0 of the attached KMPMP Update.

Current Issues

Current issues today focus on the increased use of the park, and the anticipated increase through population growth over the next ten years. The bio-physical inventory outlines the current issues of trail proliferation as well as human/wildlife conflicts, including impacts from off-leash dogs. While over 7600 metres of rogue trails have been rehabilitated, there still remains over 34,000 metres, or 34 kilometres, of unsanctioned trails currently in the park. This remains one of the key impacts on the natural systems in the park today. The other primary issue of concern in the park is human/wildlife conflicts. This can result from vehicle impacts on wildlife, direct human/wildlife conflicts, and those from pets, including outdoor cats and off-leash dogs.

Vision and Strategic Goals

The vision and strategic goals have been brought forward from 2011 to the current update. These establish the basis for the work plan for the next ten years. The strategic goals outline how Knox Mountain Park is for nature, for people and for stewardship. The vision states:

Knox Mountain Park reveals the wonder and diversity of the Okanagan landscape. It is a symbol of Kelowna, a place of unique and remarkable natural beauty within our city's park system, a place where nature is able to flourish and evolve. Residents and visitors participate in the life of the park, establishing healthy and sustainable relationships between themselves and the natural environment.

Both the vision and goals provide important perspectives as we consider our role in taking care of Knox Mountain Park. For context many ecosystems within the Okanagan Basin are rare and of concern. The Biophysical Inventory cites 13 ecosystems within the park listed by the Conservation Data Centre of BC as being endangered, threatened, or of special concern. It notes twenty-eight species that are listed as endangered or of concern either provincially or federally, that potentially frequent or inhabit the park.

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Moreover, while Knox Mountain Park, at 385 hectares, is our largest park, it represents less than 0.2% of Kelowna's landmass. This underlies the importance of the park as a refuge for sensitive ecosystems and a habitat for wildlife. Additionally, with our dry climate, the rate of rehabilitation is slow, resulting in a very fragile ecosystem that is vulnerable to damage. At this time of increased use, the importance of stewardship and respectful care is underlined.

Works included in the next ten-year plan

The strategy aims to address the primary issues facing the park, those of increased use and human/wildlife conflicts. The emphasis will be on creating functional key nodes of activity, redirecting some of the use to Knox Mountain Park East, access management, and engendering a culture of stewardship among all users. Twenty capital projects are included in the plan, Priority projects include:

- First Lookout Improvements
- Knox East Staging Area Improvements (parking/signage)
- Trail Maintenance and Decommissioning Rogue Trails
- Signage Renewal – Interpretive / Wayfinding
- Off-leash Dog Strategy
- Engendering Stewardship

A full list of the twenty capital projects is included in Section 6.3 of the attached KMPMP Update. Eight operational items are included in the plan. There have been significant wildfire mitigation measures undertaken in the park over the last few years. This is an ongoing activity and a priority. General day-to-day maintenance of the park, as well as implementing sustainable urban forest measures and trail maintenance are also key items. The full list of operations and maintenance action items are included in Section 6.4 of the attached KMPMP Update.

The plan outlines \$1.96 million in capital projects, in present-day value, over the next ten years and an operating budget of \$1.49 million, for a total for all components of \$3.45 million over 10 years. The plan underlines that funding is reviewed annually through the City's standard budget process.

Conclusion:

The next step is to include the capital work plan items into the Ten-year Capital Plan for Council's consideration, and subsequent bringing forward the annual operating and capital budget requests for the items within the Knox Mountain Management Plan 2022 Update.

Internal Circulation:

Parks Services
Transportation Engineering
Utility Planning
Financial Services
Active Living & Culture
Infrastructure Delivery
Community Communications
Partnerships Office
Policy and Planning

Considerations applicable to this report:

Existing Policy:

- *Knox Mountain Management Plan (2011)*

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Financial/Budgetary Considerations:

The plan outlines \$1.96 million in capital projects over the next ten years to be included in the Ten-year Capital Plan. The plan also identifies an operating budget of \$1.49 million, for a total for all components of \$3.45 million over 10 years. These will be brought forward as subsequent budget requests in the annual budget process.

Communications Comments:

Engagement Survey Summary included as Schedule 1.

Considerations not applicable to this report:

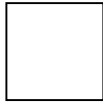
Legal/Statutory Authority:

Legal/Statutory Procedural Requirements:

External Agency/Public Comments:

Submitted by: M. Steppuhn, Parks Planner

Approved for inclusion:



D. Edstrom, Divisional Director, Partnerships & Investments

Schedule 1 – Engagement Survey Summary 2022

Schedule 2 – Knox Mountain Park Management Plan Update 2022

Schedule 3 – Biophysical Inventory / Environmental Overview – Knox Mountain Park 2021

Schedule 4 – Knox Mountain Management Plan Update Presentation

cc: Manager, Parks Operations