

# REPORT

## *Parks & Recreation*

**To:** Mayor Johnstone and Members of Council  
**Date:** April 24, 2023

**From:** Dean Gibson,  
Director of Parks and Recreation  
**File:** 2261276

**Item #:** 2023-259

**Subject: Queen’s Park Farm Master Plan Adoption**

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### **RECOMMENDATION**

**THAT** Council adopt the Queen’s Park Farm Master Plan, as outlined in this report and included as Attachment A, and

**THAT** staff proceed with next steps as outlined in this report.

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### **PURPOSE**

This report presents the Queen’s Park Farm Master Plan (the “Plan”) as developed with a “habitat + grow” theme to support new, year-round programs and activities for the former petting farm space. Supported by a two-phase community engagement process, this report shares the preferred option and phased implementation of the Plan.

### **SUMMARY**

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the seasonally-operated Queen’s Park Farm (referred to as “the Farm”) closed to the public for the 2020 season. Prior to the pandemic, Parks & Recreation staff were in the process of developing an action plan to explore new opportunities for the farm space, with ideas such as urban agriculture, foraging, education, year-round uses and other unique programming into the Farm’s operations.

For the 2021 and 2022 seasons, staff reopened the Farm space to the public with alternative programming. In summer and early fall 2021, staff launched the first phase of community engagement (with over 300 active participants) to receive ideas for new uses of the Farm space. In fall 2022, staff launched the second phase of community

engagement (with over 300 active participants) and are now reporting back to City Council on the engagement results, the theme preferred by participants.

On March 27, 2023 City Council participated in a workshop session where they were presented with a draft copy of the Plan and opportunity to provide comment on the plan’s content and phased implementation strategy. The Plan has since been updated to reflect that feedback and is coming forward for consideration for final adoption.

**BACKGROUND**

Parks & Recreation staff provided a report to Council on [December 13, 2021](#) (included as Attachment B). This report summarized the results from the first phase of community engagement to transition the Queen’s Park Farm from livestock towards a reimagined future focused on urban agriculture systems, education, play and other elements identified through the community engagement process.

Council adopted the following recommendations:

*THAT the Farm in Queen’s Park transition from livestock towards a reimagined future as identified through the community engagement process; and*

*THAT staff proceed with next steps as outlined in the December 13, 2021, report, entitled "Queen's Park Farm Transition – Community Engagement Summary".*

In response to the proposed plans to transition away from the traditional petting farm operation, a number of key themes emerged from the first phase of community engagement:

Key Themes	Supporting Ideas
There is strong nostalgia and love for the farm amongst the community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many traditions and memories made at the farm</li> <li>• Intergenerational bonding took place in the space</li> <li>• Appreciation of the farm as a unique community space</li> </ul>
Future uses for the space should incorporate animals in some way.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Animals should be included in appropriate ways</li> <li>• Not necessarily livestock; community interest in exploring other animals, such as insects, chickens, etc.</li> </ul>
Future uses for the space should maintain or feature an educational component.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encouraging learning and exploring of the natural world</li> </ul>
Some members of the community would like to keep the farm the way it was.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Altering the use of the space would diminish its uniqueness</li> <li>• Space is not set up for alternate uses</li> </ul>
Some members of the community raised concerns about animal welfare with the operation of a petting farm.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discouraging the use of animals as entertainment</li> </ul>

While a wide variety of unique ideas were provided, the top-three mentioned themes for the future of the farm space included: 1) agriculture-related activities and education; 2) covered and/or enclosed play area; and 3) a community gathering space. Regardless of the future offerings at the Farm, the community was clear that the space should maintain a theme of urban agriculture, remain low or no-cost for users, be family friendly and operate on a year-round basis. Details on the Phase 1 Engagement Process and What We Heard, are included in Attachment C to this report.

The next steps, as outlined in the December 2021 report to Council, included engaging a consultant to develop a concept plan for the Farm based on the results from Phase 1 engagement, and to launch Phase 2 of the engagement process to receive feedback from the community and the Facilities, Infrastructure and Public Realm Advisory Committee (October 21, 2021) on the proposed Concept Plan for the future of the Farm.

Since the contract award in May of 2022, staff have been working with Motiv Architects to:

- Develop two (2) concept plans (based on input from Phase 1 of engagement);
- Launch Phase 2 of the engagement process;
- Develop a preferred concept plan (based on feedback from Phase 2 of engagement); and
- Create a Master Plan document for the future of the Farm.

**ANALYSIS**

Phase 2 Engagement Purpose

The purpose of Phase 2 of engagement on the future of the Farm was to provide the community two options for the future of the Farm (developed with input from Phase 1 engagement), to understand the community’s preference between the two concepts and to inform residents on next steps/ project timeline. [A description of the two concept options](#) are as follows with related illustrative panels included as Attachment D:

**Concept A: Habitat:** This concept option focuses on where plants or animals live and where they get food and water. The design includes three types of habitat that support a diversity of animals and plants – a pollinator meadow, smaller forest plantings, and a wetland.

**Concept B: Grow:** This concept option focuses on edible plants that will grow well in the shade in a forested area. The design encourages exploration and aims to educate visitors about plants grown for eating and medicine, and how to grow and harvest responsibly.

Engagement Process

Phase 2 of the engagement process was active from November 7 to December 6, 2022 with a variety of ways for the public to participate:

**November 19, 2022:** In-Person Drop-in Engagement (Queen’s Park greenhouse) with 150 participants

**December 6, 2022:** (rescheduled from November 22) Virtual Community Workshop with 4 participants

**Be Heard Project Webpage:** 1,652 unique visitors between November 7 and December 6, 2022 (total of more than 3,500 unique visitors to the page from Phase 1 engagement launch to present)

**Be Heard Survey:** 211 responses

**Be Heard Quick Poll:** 201 responses

**Be Heard Questions Tool:** 5 questions and 1 comment

Of more than 300 participants in the Phase 2 engagement, 99% said they are New Westminster residents.

Engagement Results

Option A (Habitat) was preferred by 47% of participants while Option B (Grow) was preferred by 23%. Approximately 20% of participants were not sure of their preference as they liked elements of both options, and 9% chose neither option. Participants were also asked to identify their favourite “playful”, “educational” and “gathering” features from each concept:

	<b>Option A- Habitat</b> (favoured features)	<b>Option B- Grow</b> (favoured features)
<b>Playful</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Boardwalk (58%)</li> <li>• Tall Tree Play (32%)</li> <li>• Nature Story Boards (6%)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plant Tunnel (45%)</li> <li>• Hill Slide &amp; Tunnel (36%)</li> <li>• Stump Steps (11%)</li> </ul>
<b>Educational</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bird &amp; bat Boxes (32%)</li> <li>• Nature Live Camera (28%)</li> <li>• Insect Walls &amp; Gallery (24%)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rain Garden (41%)</li> <li>• Art Shed (29%)</li> <li>• Mushroom Wall (20%)</li> </ul>
<b>Gathering</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Forest Classroom (46%)</li> <li>• Small Hill (24%)</li> <li>• Single Benches (21%)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Benches (32%)</li> <li>• Sky Canopy (27%)</li> <li>• Covered Seating (24%)</li> </ul>

Open-ended questions were also provided, asking respondents to tell us a little more about why they preferred one option over the other. The key themes from these comments are summarized as:

Response	Key Theme
Support for Habitat Concept	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Let's give back to nature and support wildlife habitat (16 mentions).</li> <li>• Support for educational opportunities and connection with animals in this concept (10).</li> <li>• The Habitat concept seems to be closely related to the former farm (9).</li> <li>• The Grow concept can be developed elsewhere (4).</li> </ul>
Support for Grow Concept	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support for educational opportunities on native/edible planting and indigenous food/ plant history (10).</li> <li>• Opportunity to encourage food growing and community involvement (7).</li> <li>• Educational opportunities on food security and biodiversity (6).</li> </ul>
Support for Both Concepts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support for program features from both concepts (11).</li> <li>• The Habitat and Grow approaches should not be mutually exclusive (9).</li> <li>• Both designs are great educational opportunities (5).</li> </ul>
Neither Concept is Preferred	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prefer former petting zoo model (9).</li> <li>• Both designs are not unique and duplicates existing park features (5).</li> </ul>
General Concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concerns about overall maintenance requirements and long-term viability of both designs (8).</li> <li>• Provide more kid-friendly, kid centric activities (8).</li> <li>• Concerns that people may have regarding harvest with the Grow concept (8)</li> <li>• Concerns that the designs may attract unwanted animals / insects - for example, bees / stinging insects (7).</li> <li>• Reserve space for nature (4).</li> </ul>

For the detailed results from Phase 2 engagement, refer to Attachment C of this report or see [What We Heard Engagement Summary Report Phase 2](#).

The Preferred Option

While the engagement results indicated a higher level of support for the Habitat concept, there were features from the Grow concept that were clearly favoured by the community. As a result, the preferred option is a revised version of the Habitat concept enriched with popular features from the Grow concept. Based on community feedback, the preferred concept (Refer to Attachment A of this report) aims to create a centralized location in Queen’s Park to:

1. Promote principles of **environmental stewardship** and **habitat restoration**: lessons that are particularly important in a time of climate change and biodiversity loss;

2. Encourage community members to recognize **food in nature** (holistic view of food systems and cycles within Queen’s Park);
3. Grow edible plants that will inherently **foster wildlife habitat** (food systems form the basis of habitat and healthy thriving ecosystems);
4. Provide resilient interventions and stewardship opportunities to withstand frequent use and help reduce need for intensive maintenance;
5. Offer interactive educational opportunities that engage with **Indigenous knowledge and traditions**<sup>1</sup>; and
6. Actively engage toddlers (ages 18 months to 4 years) and young children (ages 5-12 years+) with **play, exercise, and exploration**, including experiential features that do not require reading to have an element of learning.

To achieve these goals, the preferred option includes the supported features from both the Habitat and Grow concepts to provide opportunities for play, education and gathering in the following ways:

- **Amendments to existing structures** to facilitate community workshops, carving shed, sound immersion station and outdoor classroom/ gathering space.
- A variety of **new or enhanced plant communities** (wetland, meadow, shrub understory and existing tree canopy) to support habitat for a variety of birds, bats, insects and other micro-organisms.
- **Habitat infrastructure** to discover and explore such as bird and bat boxes, snag forest, insect wall, mushroom wall and nurse logs.
- Integration of **playful and sensory experiences** such as a tall timber playscape, interactive habitat sculpture, hill slide, plant tunnel, listening funnels and marsh microphone.
- Seating, accessible pathways, boardwalks, a grass hill and interpretive/ wayfinding signage are included to **guide visitors and to create inviting/ engaging edges** at the perimeter of the space.

The Master Plan

As included as Attachment A, the Master Plan provides an overview of the Preferred Option as well as a proposed implementation plan for transitioning the Queen’s Park Farm from livestock to habitat in three distinct phases:

**Phase 1** prioritizes the **amendment of existing structures** to facilitate new year-round community programs including retrofit of the long narrow building and both gazebo structures, as well as removal of six huts and feeder structures.

**Phase 2** prioritizes the **establishment of the three habitat zones of pollinator meadow, shrub/ understory and wetland habitat**. This includes removal of existing concrete pads and pond and construction of the infiltration / marsh area

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<sup>1</sup>Staff are currently working to engage an Indigenous advisor to guide the design and program development.

with boardwalk, build-up of the grass hill (to be located between the existing playground/ spray park and the Farm), regrading and planting.

**Phase 3** prioritizes **playful features and interpretive elements** including construction of play elements (i.e. hill slide and tall timber play features) interpretive signage and additional planting at the edges of the Farm.

#### Feedback from Council Workshop (March 27, 2023)

The March 27, 2023 workshop with Council included a wide range of feedback on the draft Plan and phased implementation strategy. The majority of Council supported the preferred concept and its development through the two-phased community engagement process. As a result of the workshop, the following feedback has been further integrated into the Plan:

- Integration of Indigenous knowledge to bridge language, stories and local traditions as a mandatory part of this project;
- Emphasis on the nature play elements/ features included in the Plan that contribute to physical literacy;
- Educational opportunities for children of all ages (including pre-reading ages) and also those who do not read in English; and
- Expanding on partnerships for year round use of the Farm (i.e. Arts Council of New Westminster, NW Farmers Market and Tourism New West).

Further to inquiries raised by Council, staff wish to clarify the level of participation, awareness of the engagement process, and demographics of participants across both phases of public engagement on the Farm transition project:

- As of March 30, 2023, there have been more than 3,500 unique visitors to the Be Heard “Reimagining the Queen’s Park Farm” project page. This demonstrates widespread awareness of the engagement opportunities.
- Across Phases 1 and 2 of engagement, approximately 800 participants have shared input through various online engagement activities on Be Heard, virtual workshops, and various in-person engagement activities such as drop-in engagement and intercept surveys in Queen’s Park. It’s important to note that some people may have participated in multiple engagement activities and this total may not constitute 800 unique participants. This total does not include additional participants on the City’s social media channels about the project. During Phase 1 engagement a total of 182 social media comments were received and are summarized in the Phase 1 Engagement Summary Report.
- Across both phases of engagement, 86% of participants said they live in New Westminster. In Phase 2 engagement, 99% of participants were residents. One engagement activity during Phase 1 in particular – intercept surveys in Queen’s Park, where staff approached people inside the park to seek their feedback – resulted in an unusually high proportion of non-resident participants (55% or 78 people). Again, these participants were physically present in Queen’s Park at the time and are considered stakeholders in the process.

## **NEXT STEPS**

Staff are currently developing a relationship with a Knowledge Keeper to share Indigenous perspectives to bridge culturally significant features and/or programs with the experience of the Farm. Pending adoption of the Master Plan by Council, staff will continue the work with the Knowledge Keeper and work towards design development and implementation of Phase 1 in spring/ summer 2023. Phase 1 implementation currently includes retrofit of the long narrow building and both gazebo structures, as well as removal of six huts and feeder structures, to facilitate new, year-round programming opportunities such as eco-art and ethnobotanical workshops (i.e. harvesting, weaving, dying, painting and carving), artist-in-residence and/or educational programs that may integrate complimentary activities in the greenhouse, tree nursery, forest and existing meadow (i.e. pollinators, food growing, medicinal and edible plants).

Staff are committed to opening the Farm for the 2023 season with new (pending status of Phase 1 implementation) or similar alternate programming as the 2022 and 2021 seasons, such as Parks & Recreation day camp offerings and collaborations with local service providers including the Purpose Society.

## **SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS**

The transition of the Farm from livestock to habitat represents a commitment to make stronger connections between people and the systems that sustain life in the city. As proposed, the Master Plan aims to encourage all residents, including parents, grandparents, schools, childcare centres and camps to play, learn and gather outdoors with programs and activities designed to develop lifelong understanding and concern for nature, wildlife and food systems. This Master Plan is underpinned by progressive principles outlined within the [Queen's Park Master Plan](#) (2013) and the [Biodiversity and Natural Areas Strategy](#) (2022).

While the Farm Master Plan is intended to be implemented over time, the phasing strategy includes opportunities for year-round programming that is interconnected with adjacent park programs (i.e. tree nursery, beekeeping, pollinator meadow, natural forest, greenhouses, art gallery, children's play areas, etc.). The phased approach also enables the City to pursue third party funding opportunities that may become available over time.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The 2023-2027 Proposed Capital Plan includes approximately \$160,000 in 2023 for planning, design and implementation of Master Plan – Phase 1 starting in June 2023 with completion scheduled by end of the year.

There is also a capital budget request proposed for \$350,000 in 2027 towards implementation of Phase 2. Pending Council's adoption of the Master Plan, staff plan to actively seek opportunities for grant funding to potentially implement Master Plan Phases 2 and 3 sooner than 2027.



The Queen's Park Farm operations pivoted during the COVID-19 pandemic from using livestock to providing substitute programs such as hosting community activities, performance and displays. The existing \$70,000 annual operating budget for the Queen's Park Farm will likely remain unchanged subsequent to Phase 1 completion, with programming based on new design and space. Staff will report back on the new programming and financial implications after the pilot period is completed.

### **INTERDEPARTMENTAL LIAISON**

Interdepartmental liaison has occurred between staff from Parks & Recreation, Engineering Services and the Office of the CAO. The Finance Department has reviewed the Financial Implications section of this report.

### **OPTIONS**

The following are options for Council's consideration:

1. To adopt the Queen's Park Farm Master Plan, as outlined in this report and included in Attachment A, and
2. To proceed with next steps as outlined in this report; or
3. Provide alternate direction to staff.

Options #1 and #2 are recommended.

### **CONCLUSION**

From the learnings through Phase 1 and Phase 2 of community engagement, the Farm Master Plan aims to offer a unique experience with ongoing nature and outdoor programming and activities to create a lasting base of environmental literacy, stewardship and connection.

### **ATTACHMENTS**

- Attachment A: Queen's Park Farm Master Plan
- Attachment B: Report to Council, December 13, 2021
- Attachment C: Summary of Engagement- Phase 1 and Phase 2
- Attachment D: Two Concept Options: Habitat and Grow

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