

REPORT

Parks & Recreation

To: Mayor Cote and Members of Council **Date:** December 13, 2021

From: Dean Gibson,
Director of Parks and Recreation **File:** 1970706

Item #: 2021-630

Subject: **Queen's Park Farm Transition - Community Engagement Summary**

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Farm in Queen's Park transition from livestock towards a re-imagined future as identified through the community engagement process; *and*

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

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to share the summary of the feedback received from the 2021 community engagement process and outline proposed next steps to transition the Queen's Park Farm in from livestock towards a re-imagined future focused on urban agriculture, education, and other elements identified through the community engagement process.

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, food production, education, year-round uses and other unique programming into the Farm's operations. A broader food sustainability focus for this space has become more relevant since COVID-19, and the August 30th, 2021 motion from Council focused on urban farming has given cause to reevaluate the importance of a local, resilient food supply.

For the 2021 season, staff reopened the Farm to the public with alternative programming. Summer and early fall 2021 also included the first phase of community engagement about the future of this unique space in Queen's Park. Public engagement activities included a community workshop, in-person intercept surveys around Queen's Park, online discussion forums, and a survey on the Be Heard New West engagement website. With more than 300 active participants in the community engagement, staff are now reporting back to City Council on the engagement results and proposed next steps.

BACKGROUND

The original Queen's Park Zoo was opened in 1905 and featured a variety of exotic animals. The petting farm program has been in place from 1960 and has served as a popular destination for families throughout the Lower Mainland. The [Queen's Park Masterplan](#) (2013) highlights that the petting farm is a well-used and loved component of Queen's Park; however, mixed feedback was received for the petting farm while developing the Masterplan:

While some input suggested eliminating this use, the majority of input supported retaining the petting farm. It is recommended that the petting farm buildings and facilities receive ongoing upgrades. As buildings are upgraded, it is recommended that they be reorganized to maximize efficiency and animal comfort. Design and programming for the farm should conform to contemporary animal welfare practices.

On October 1, 2018, New Westminster City Council endorsed the [Food Security Action Plan](#) (the Plan). The Plan was a response to increasing levels of food insecurity and a number of barriers related to food security efforts in New Westminster, including awareness, limited access to food, and food delivery coordination challenges.

On April 26, 2021 staff provided a report for information to Council that outlined a pilot Farm transition project proposed to be implemented in partnership with the third party non-profit organization in 2021/2022. Although the proposal was not successful in receiving grant funding from the Province of British Columbia, staff reopened the Farm to the public for the 2021 season with alternate programming which included:

- 1) Hosting indoor city run programs in this outdoor space from Parks & Recreation, Anvil Centre and the Library;
- 2) Programs by other organizations such as the Arts Council and Purpose Society & Family Place of New Westminster (i.e. outdoor art gallery and community performances); and
- 3) Day camp programs for children.

In addition to repurposing the space, city staff also launched the first phase of the community engagement strategy to seek input on a re-imagined future for the space.

On August 30, 2021 Council passed the following motion:

THAT the City of New Westminster create and implement policy to support and encourage the climate crisis equivalent of victory gardens; and

THAT these gardens be understood to include forest gardens and orchards, pollinator pastures/bee hotels, compost systems, foraging opportunities, and rainwater harvesting so that we are considering complete and interconnected systems; and

THAT this work creatively considers underutilized space such as boulevards, industrial rooftops, multi-family common areas, and conversion of street space;

THAT the City create policy on and explore ways to incentivize front yard and boulevard gardens, with special consideration for condo and apartment buildings in high density neighbourhoods, where appropriate and in consideration of other needs such as accessibility and tree planting; and

THAT the City explore ways to support and incentivize container gardening in areas where it is not possible to garden at street level such as offering a starter plant sale for multi-family housing similar to the tree sale; and

THAT the City engage the community and provide learning opportunities through new and existing programs such as the hanging basket classes and Queens Park petting farm transition; and

THAT these plans incorporate Indigenous plant knowledge and principles of Indigenous land stewardship; and

THAT these plans include an equity lens.

Within the context of the feedback provided by the community, the ongoing evolution of petting farms, and the City’s Food Security priorities overlaid against the backdrop of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the City is in a unique position in 2022 to plan for repurposing the Queen’s Park Farm from livestock towards a rich mix of year-round educational programming that emphasizes sustainable urban living (i.e. urban farming practices, foraging, compost systems, micro-organisms, plant education, etc.).

EXISTING POLICY AND PRACTICE

The City’s public engagement practices are guided by the Public Engagement Strategy (2016) and Public Engagement Policy (2021). Public engagement is based on the principle that those impacted by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process. Staff from the Public Engagement Team (Office of the CAO) worked closely with Parks & Recreation staff to plan, implement and report on Phase 1 of engagement on the future of the Queen’s Park Farm.

ANALYSIS

Phase 1 of engagement on the future of the Farm was about including the community in brainstorming potential future uses for this unique space. The Reimagining the Queen’s Park Farm Engagement process started in July 2021 with an online discussion forum and idea jam wall at the Farm. In August, an online community survey was launched on [Be Heard New West](#), and intercept surveys were conducted by City staff on site at Queen’s Park. Following the launch of the online survey, all community members were invited to join a virtual workshop on September 23. In total, 350 individuals participated in the engagement and 950 individuals visited the project page on Be Heard New West.

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

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

Across the engagement activities, questions and prompts encouraged participants to focus on new future uses of the Farm space. While a wide variety of unique ideas were provided, the top-three mentioned ideas for the future of the farm space included: agriculture-related activities and education, covered and/or enclosed play area, and 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.

For a more fulsome analysis of community feedback, please see Attachment B, the Engagement Summary Report.

NEXT STEPS

Based on what we heard through the first phase of the engagement process, staff propose the following next steps:

- 1) **Winter 2021/2022-** Staff engage a consultant to develop a Concept Plan for the Farm based on the results from Phase 1 engagement.
- 2) **Spring/ Summer 2022-** Launch Phase 2 of the engagement process to receive feedback from the community on the Concept Plan for the future of the Farm.

Staff will report back to Council at the end of Phase 2 for feedback on the Concept Plan and to discuss proposed next steps for phased implementation of that plan. In addition to the proposed engagement plan, staff are committed to opening the Farm to the public for the 2022 season with alternate programming similar to the 2021 season.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

Transitioning the Queen's Park Farm towards programming that demonstrate ways for residents to lead a more sustainable, self-sufficient life in the city is important for fostering social, cultural and environmental connections in this prominent location. The transition also offers potential 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.)

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The City's Financial Plan includes \$25,000 carry forward from 2021, and a \$65,000 capital funding proposal in 2022 and \$85,000 in 2023. These funds will be allocated towards working with the community to develop a Concept Plan for the Farm in 2022 and begin the phased implementation of that plan in 2022/2023. Concurrent with the final consideration of the Farm Concept Plan, staff will bring forward information regarding potential operational impacts and associated budget implications.

INTERDEPARTMENTAL LIAISON

Interdepartmental liaison has occurred with staff from Parks & Recreation and the Office of the CAO.

OPTIONS

The following are options for Council's consideration:

1. Transitioning the Farm in Queen's Park from livestock towards a re-imagined future as identified through Phase 1 of community engagement process; *and*
2. 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 engagement, staff understand the importance of creating a Concept Plan for the Farm that balances a unique experience, creating joy and memories, with educational programs that empower and promote lifelong learning. The future phase of engagement is intended to further develop a Concept Plan for the Farm that strengthens social ties, connections to nature and grows our collective understanding of the interconnected systems that support urban living.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A- Queen's Park Farm Snapshot

Attachment B- Queen's Park Farm Engagement Summary Report

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