

Bell Park Master Plan Update

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Report Summary

This report provides information regarding the status of projects originally identified in the Bell Park Master Plan (1999) as well as other Bell Park developments and potential opportunities to further enhance the park.

Relationship to the Strategic Plan, Health Impact Assessment and Community Energy & Emissions Plan (CEEP)

This report supports the City's strategic objective of Creating a Healthier and More Vibrant Community as projects identified in the Bell Park Master Plan represent Investments in Infrastructure to Support Community Recreation with Focus on Quality of Life (Goal 5.2 of the 2019-2027 Council Strategic Plan).

This report supports the Community Energy & Emissions Plan (CEEP) as the Bell Park Master Plan identifies initiatives to increase active transportation to and within Bell Park.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

Background

At the City Council meeting of August 15, 2023, the following resolution was passed:

WHEREAS the Bell Park Master Plan was developed in 1999 to guide future uses and developments of Bell Park;

AND WHEREAS there have been a number of developments in Bell Park since 1999, including but not limited to the construction of the Grace Hartman Amphitheatre and reclamation of the former St. Joseph's Parking Lot;

AND WHEREAS the Tourism Development Committee of the Greater Sudbury Development Corporation is exploring opportunities for tourism product development in waterfront areas including Bell Park as part of their mandate and in alignment with strategic tourism sector priorities and funding program guidelines;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that staff provide an information report to the November Community & Emergency Services Committee meeting that describes the status of projects originally identified in the Bell Park Master Plan, other Bell Park developments since 1999 and potential opportunities to further enhance/activate the park and surrounding area.

Bell Park Master Plan

The purpose of the Bell Park master Plan was to provide a long-term concept for the development of Bell Park with the flexibility to accommodate future needs. The Master Plan established the following broad themes as key catalysts for the future of the park:

- Recognition of the Bell family's original vision for the park.
- Ramsey Lake as a resource to be protected.
- The presence of northern physical features within the park.
- Representation of the diversity of our community.
- Commitment to stewardship.
- The promotion of biological regeneration.
- Enhancement as a major tourist attraction.
- The preservation of a place for one and all.

The Master Plan recommended improvements and enhancements for the park, categorized as essential, secondary, and long-term projects. Essential projects were to enhance the park's natural character and increase opportunities for access to the park. Secondary projects were improvements to capitalize on the unique characteristics of various areas of the park. Long-term projects were those items which promoted and reinforced linkages to areas outside the park.

Essential projects included:

- Identifying Paris Street from John Street to Ramsey Lake Road as 'Bell Parkway'.
- Enhancement and reinforcement of natural features of the park through the preservation of the water's edge and its ecosystem.
- Improvements to the Sudbury Canoe Club and Rowing Club Facility which was located at Elizabeth Street.
- Establishment of a boat launch at the Bell Grove area.
- Complete renovation of the amphitheatre.
- Establish a new park entrance at the York Street and Paris Street intersection.
- Improvements to parking lots located at York Street
- Development of a pedestrian boardwalk extension towards the yacht club peninsula.
- Creation of a millennium gardens at the York Street and amphitheatre locations.
- Creation of a distinct bicycle and roller blade path, separate from the park's pedestrian path.

Secondary projects included:

- The development of a Paris Street 'Bell Parkway' corridor including a bike path, new traffic bollards, lighting, and plantings.
- Development of watershed interpretation areas throughout the park.
- Development of a palliative care park.
- Reclamation of the St. Joseph's Health Centre parking lot.
- Improvements to the Bell Mansion / Art Gallery of Sudbury facility.
- Development of a walkway along Ramsey Lake adjacent to Paris Street.

Long-term projects included:

- Development of a gateway into the park at the Boland Street and Paris Street intersection.
- Development of a gateway into the park at the Ramsey Lake Road and Paris Street intersection.
- Enhancements to Lily Creek and extension of links to neighbourhoods to the south and west.
- Separate bicycle path developed along Bell Park Road, independent of pedestrian pathways.
- Establishment of a Bell Grove entrance to the park, including separate bicycle path.

- Improvements to John Street parkette.
- Interlocking stone surfaces connecting to Bell Mansion and Bell Park with the downtown core.
- Creation of lookout area at Crown Street hill.

The full Bell Park Master Plan document is included as 'Attachment 1'.

Bell Park Developments

There have been numerous developments that have addressed recommendations identified in the Bell Park Master Plan.

Grace Hartman Amphitheatre Redevelopment

In April 2009 Council approved the application to the Infrastructure Stimulus Fund for the redevelopment of the Grace Hartman Amphitheatre. In March 2010, Council further approved the design and construction of foundation / footings to be integrated into the amphitheatre design to accept a future canopy roof, additional grass seating in the amphitheatre bowl, and the consideration for additional hard seating, if the project budget had capacity.

The redeveloped amphitheatre opened in 2010 and has a capacity of 1,963 (563 fixed seats and 1,400 grass seating). The scope of work also included a new entrance to the park at the Paris Street / York Street intersection and some improvements to the York Street parking lots.

Grace Hartman Amphitheatre Business Plan Review

As part of the redevelopment of the Grace Hartman Amphitheatre a business plan was created for the facility which included guiding principles for operation of the amphitheatre, a market analysis, rationale for seating capacity, and recommended operational practices.

Following the first year of operating in 2011, a business plan review process was undertaken to address feedback received, identify needs for future capital investments as well as to review the mandate of the facility. The business plan review reinforced the facility's mandate to serve the community first, while still being welcoming to commercial and touring attractions. The review provided recommendations for facility improvements including in house presentation additions, installation of additional fixed seating and a roof area over fixed seating.

Bell Park Advisory Panel

The Grace Hartman Amphitheatre Business Plan recommended the establishment of an Advisory Panel to monitor fulfillment of Bell Park and the redeveloped amphitheater's mandates. Since its inception the Panel has had an active role in advising on Bell Park programming and developments. The Panel has also provided recommendations for improving the park experience for users, including accessibility, safety, and wayfinding enhancements.

Northern Water Sports Centre

Construction of the \$4.6 million Northern water Sports Centre was completed in 2014, which has since served as the new home of the Sudbury Canoe Club and Sudbury Rowing Club and provides additional community space.

Ramsey Lake Boat Launch

The Ramsey Lake Boat Launch (located in the area known as Bell Grove) serves as a public boat launch as called for in the Bell Park Master Plan. The building on Elizabeth Street which previously housed the Sudbury Canoe Club and Sudbury Rowing Club is now used to support Ramsey Lake Skate Path activities and serves as a reporting depot for Parks Services staff. The facility has incurred damage in recent years due to seasonal flooding and water infiltration. Mold remediation is underway.

Former St. Joseph's Parking Lot

The Bell Park Master Plan identified the reclamation of the St. Joseph's Health Centre parking lot as a secondary project. In 2016, City Council approved the redevelopment of this area to realize a combination of additional parking to support Bell Park and significant greening of the area. The work also included stormwater improvements and a new accessible pathway and stairs to connect to the Jim Gordon Boardwalk. Subsequent capital budget approvals addressed structural issues with the existing retaining walls, additional of site furnishings and further landscaping.

Pedestrian and Cycling Pathways within Bell Park

There have been several initiatives to improve walkways and cycling paths leading to, and within Bell Park, as called for in the Master Plan. Through the efforts of Rainbow Routes Association, a dedicated cycling path was created along Paris Street which connects to the park. With the development of the Grace Hartman Amphitheatre, additional cycling and pedestrian pathways were created.

In 2017, Council approved the reallocation of capital funds originally established for Bell Park site development towards the upgrading of lighting along the Jim Gordon Boardwalk and in other key areas of the park.

Further improvements to walkways and proper delineation of cycling routes will be completed through funds received through the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program (ICIP) COVID-19 Resilience Infrastructure Funding by the end of 2024.

Other Bell Park Developments and Initiatives

There have been a number of other park enhancements which support the themes established by the Bell Park Master Plan including:

- Improved accessibility at Main Beach and the addition of a Mobi-Chair to support individuals with disabilities to take part in water activities.
- Bell Park Main Beach has achieved Blu Flag Canada designation which is an international award given to beaches that meet high environmental, safety, accessibility, and cleanliness standards.
- Secured the services for an inflatable water park off the shores of Bell Park, further enhancing the park as a tourist destination.
- Development of a new outdoor exercise area through a donation received from New Metric Media.

Bell Park Opportunities

While most of the projects identified in the Bell Park Master Plan have been completed, there are a few recommendations that have not been realized.

Connecting to the downtown core was contemplated as part of the proposed Elgin Street Greenway. Phase One (Nelson Street Bridge to Minto) of the Elgin Street Greenway Project was included in the 2018 budget. The City continues to seek the additional funding for the project.

Extension of links to neighbourhoods to the south and west and the development of a pedestrian boardwalk extension towards the yacht club peninsula are other projects which have not advanced. Likewise, gateways into the park at Boland Street and Ramsey Lake Road have not progressed.

In line with enhancing Bell Park as a tourism destination, the Tourism Development Committee of the Greater Sudbury Development Corporation is exploring opportunities for tourism product development in waterfront areas. Economic Development staff are preparing a Request for Proposal to conduct a feasibility study on the former canoe club facility located at 506 Elizabeth Street. This work will include a site analysis, market analysis and public engagement. The study will provide options on how the facility may be repurposed and/or other waterfront improvements to further enhance tourism opportunities and park user experience. The RFP is to be issued in the coming two months.

Summary

The majority of essential projects called for in the Bell Park Master Plan have been completed including realizing a redeveloped amphitheatre, construction of the Northern Water Sports Centre, reclamation of the St. Joseph's Health Centre parking lot and improved pedestrian and cycling routes within the park.

Further opportunities for Bell Park enhancements to further advance the objectives of the Bell Park Master Plan will be explored by Economic Development staff.

Resources Cited

Grace Hartman Amphitheatre Conceptual Design, City Council (November 25, 2009)
<https://pub-greatersudbury.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?documentid=26298>

Grace Hartman Amphitheatre Business Plan
<https://pub-greatersudbury.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?documentid=25771>

Grace Hartman Amphitheatre – Post Business Plan Review, Community Services Committee (October 21, 2013)
<https://pub-greatersudbury.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?documentid=17688>

Bell Park Advisory Panel
<https://www.greatersudbury.ca/city-hall/get-involved/volunteerism/join-a-local-board-committee-or-advisory-panel/advisory-panels/bell-park-advisory-panel/>

Northern Water Sports Centre Lease Agreement, City Council (April 23, 2013)
<https://pub-greatersudbury.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?documentid=18713>

Former St. Joseph's Hospital Parking Redevelopment Options, Community Services Committee (February 29, 2016)
<https://pub-greatersudbury.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?documentid=11789>

Bell Park Unallocated Funds, Community Services Committee (April 3, 2017)
<https://pub-greatersudbury.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?documentid=9211>

Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program: COVID-19 Resilience Stream, Special City Council (December 21, 2020)
<https://pub-greatersudbury.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?documentid=38340>

Bell Park Floating Wheelchair
<https://www.greatersudbury.ca/play/beaches-and-lakes/floating-wheelchair/>

Two Municipal Beaches Awarded Blue Flags, News Release (June 16, 2023)
<https://www.greatersudbury.ca/city-hall/news-and-public-notice/2023/two-municipal-beaches-awarded-blue-flags/>

Requests Received to Operate an Inflatable Water Park, Community Services Committee (May 13, 2019)
<https://pub-greatersudbury.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?documentid=3286>

Bell Park Outdoor Exercise Equipment Donation, Community Services Committee (June 21, 2021)
<https://pub-greatersudbury.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=40266>

Elgin Street Greenway
<https://www.greatersudbury.ca/play/downtown-sudbury/elgin-street-greenway/>