

# FRIENDS OF CEDAR HILL PARK SOCIETY

Presentation to the Parks Trails and  
Recreation Advisory Committee re  
The CHP Management Plan Draft



**Cedar Hill Park – Did you know?**

**Friends of Cedar Hill Park**

**Cedar Hill Park Management Plan**

**FCHPS Values**

**Connectivity and mobility in the Park**

**Thank You and Questions**





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## **Friends of Cedar Hill Park – Draft Presentation to PTR Advisory Committee**

### **1. Cedar Hill Park – Did you know?**

Historically, this 54-hectare park was once part of the McRae family farm, including a private golf course. Prior to that, it was the ancestors of the Lekwungen (Songhees & Esquimalt) and Saanich (WSANEC') First Nations who used and cared for these lands for countless generations.

Purchased by Saanich in 1967 in perpetuity, the Park also includes a Community Rec Centre, golf clubhouse, and Chip trail.

The Park is loved for its natural areas and green spaces, including areas within the golf course, contains prime examples of Garry Oak ecosystem, designated Environmentally Significant Areas (ESAs), rich biodiversity and wildlife habitat. The Park is also home to 110 species of birds and many other wildlife species. It includes both the Colquitz and Bowker Creek watersheds, three ponds and Reach 17 of Bowker Creek. This regional urban park and green space is a critical natural resource as Saanich becomes increasingly densified.

40,000 rounds of golf are played a year and 170,000 walkers and joggers use the Chip trail, including nature lovers, bird watchers, photographers, picnickers and volunteers. The Park is loved for its tranquility, safety, natural beauty, recreation and accessibility.

### **2. Friends of Cedar Hill Park**

For over 50 years, the community has loved and cared for the Park by working to restore natural areas and green space and protect adjacent land from development. (Examples are the restoration of Kings Pond and Bowker Creek, and the acquisition of Jenkins Pond Park.)

Volunteers have worked in the park removing invasive species, removing dumped garden waste and garbage, and replanting with indigenous trees and shrubs. This work has focussed on the approximately 13.5 hectares of park outside the golf course.

The Friends of Cedar Hill Park Society was formed in 2014 to support and expand community volunteer efforts. Since then, Friends of Cedar Hill Park have done about 1000 hours of volunteer effort annually in support of the Pulling Together program, written a history of the park, conducted bi-annual Bowker Creek and Kings Pond clean-ups, hosted guided walks and talks, held a 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary event in the park, conducted inventories of birds and the state of the natural areas within the park, done counts of trail users, created and maintained a website, attracted over 200 members, raised funds and engaged the community in all this work.

Together with Saanich Parks and the wider community, we are committed to preserving and restoring Cedar Hill Park's natural environment and unique ecosystems.



### **3. Cedar Hill Park Management Plan**

Friends of Cedar Hill Park, with the Quadra Cedar Hill Community Association, pushed for a planning process for the park and both organizations contributed many hours of work to the draft management plan through the 'Working Group' committee.

FCHPS supports the Plan's vision for the Park:

*"Cedar Hill Park balances nature, community, and recreation in a harmonious way. People, place, and the environment share an intimate connection that fosters mutual health and well-being. We are all stewards of the park, committed to its long-term preservation and enhancement."*

We also support many of the plan's stated goals and actions, including:

- Goals 1 and 2, "move the Bowker Creek Blueprint forward (Reach 17)" and "restore Kings Pond". These areas are part of an extended wildlife corridor supporting numerous species of birds, reptiles and mammals. The watersheds provide important water retention and filtration functions that reduce the impact of storm water in flood conditions.
- Goal 17, "communications with community". We recognize that the future of the Park is best assured by establishing policies, processes and practices for ongoing communication and collaboration with Saanich and the wider community.
- Goals 3, 4 and 6 "Provide a clear plan for the protection and enhancement for the natural areas in the park", "Obtain Audubon Sanctuary Certification for the golf course" and "Make parking lots more inviting, efficient and attractive".

In particular, with respect to Goal 3 (Protection and enhancement for natural areas), only 4% of the precontact Coastal Douglas Fir ecosystem (including Garry Oak) remains and most of this ecosystem is on private land. In Saanich, old trees are disappearing rapidly due to lot subdivisions and densification.

- Many tree species are under threat due to drier, hotter conditions. There has been a continuing loss of mature trees on the CH golf course and surrounding green/natural areas. Replanting of native trees has not kept pace with the losses. Restoration of native trees throughout the park can contribute to Saanich's efforts to address climate change, sustain biodiversity, increase our tree canopy and restore the health of the Coastal Douglas Fir ecosystem.
- FCHPS are hopeful that continuing public consultation on the detailed plan for Goal 3 concerning natural areas and green open spaces will result in a comprehensive plan to protect and restore such areas by joining fragmented ecosystems throughout the park.

### **4. FCHPS Values**

A number of the Plan's goals imply development that could impact the Park's green and natural areas, especially in the 13.5 hectares of the park outside of the golf course. As a general rule, FCHPS proposes that Saanich only allow development where it can be clearly demonstrated that it doesn't negatively impact the ecological values of the park (biodiversity, watersheds, green and natural areas). Current park users and survey and

open house attendees ranked the park's natural beauty highest and most deserving of protection. There is concern that these values could be lost through incremental development in the near and longer term.

*The Goals FCHPS believes require further assessment are those that may negatively affect the ecological value of the park. The accumulated impact of these Goals on the natural environment must form part of the decision-making processes. These are:*

Goals 5.3 and 8 through 16, "Providing for those with limited mobility", "Recreation, Play and Gathering Places for all ages and abilities", "Ball diamond upgrades", "Picnic and seating opportunities", "Opportunities for youth-specific activities", "Provide a Model 1 Playground for children", "Outdoor Exercise equipment", "Adequate washrooms", and "Expansion of CH Rec Centre".

## **5. Connectivity and mobility in the Park**

We support active transportation in the region. However, we believe there are many circumstances where construction of new bike trails may have unforeseen negative impacts. In 2003, Saanich engaged in public consultation and research to determine the need, safety risks and suitability of the trails in CHP for biking. Council concluded that biking through the park would be limited to the Derby E to W corridor. On all other trails (i.e. the Chip Trail around the park), cyclists are required to dismount.

With increasing population density, and now the COVID-19 distancing requirements, the Chip trail is even more heavily used. Many sections are steep, narrow, dark and unregulated, with blind corners and numerous hazards. Children, people with dogs, the elderly and mobility-challenged individuals are regular users of the trail.

The draft management plan proposes a bike trail through the very narrow margin of the park from Epson toward Derby. "Goal 7b of the Management Plan is to "Assess the possibility of having a safe bicycle connection in the north/east corner of the park (to be finalized via further public engagement)".

FCHPS believes that cycling on the Chip trail around the park is unsafe and will have negative impacts on the use of the trail by the community. Conflict already occurs between cyclists, golfers and pedestrians on the Derby east to west trail through the park. Furthermore, we believe that construction of the proposed new bike trail will significantly impact the large Garry oak ecosystem environment on the east side of the park and adjacent natural areas and green spaces. We urge consideration of the costs and benefits of all possible alternatives for north/south travel in the surrounding area and the creation of bike priority lanes on streets such as Cedar Hill and Blenkinsop Roads.

## **6. Thank You and Questions**

Questions?

Thank you for your time and this opportunity for Friends of Cedar Hill Park to speak to you about the Park and plans for its future. We are excited to work with Parks, Saanich and the

wider community in pursuit of our common vision. We would love to have you come and walk the trail with us at any time. Also, please have a look at our website . . .  
[Friendsofcedarhillpark.com](http://Friendsofcedarhillpark.com)