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(by email)

RE: Response to the Draft Cedar Hill Park Management Plan

Thank you, Saanich staff, for your efforts in developing the Draft Cedar Hill Park Management Plan (DMP) and also for the opportunity to comment on this draft. FCHPS sees this plan as a first step in a continuing dialogue and engagement with the community to deliver on the vision. This three-page document summarizes our comments on the Draft plan; also included is an Appendix providing further detail.

The Mission of Friends of Cedar Hill Park Society (FCHPS) is to advocate and work for the protection, restoration, and enhancement of Cedar Hill Park as a green and diverse natural environment that exists for the enjoyment and health of present and future generations. Our comments below are aligned with this mission.

We understand that **Cedar Hill Park** is many things to many different stakeholders. For this reason, we believe a more structured, ongoing, two-way communication process with the community as a whole will benefit both stakeholders and the Park and avoid the potential conflicts that may otherwise arise.

As our mission states, we don't see boundaries in nature. Both natural areas and green spaces are characterized by lack of infrastructure. For the purposes of these comments, we will use the term "natural/green" to encompass both, as both represent opportunities for preservation and restoration.

Although the DMP focusses on the periphery of the park, we see the whole park, including the golf course, as integrated. Indeed, the management plan seems to support this integrated view in describing Goal 4 (Obtain Audubon Sanctuary Certification for Cedar Hill Golf Course).

The DMP should focus on restoration and enhancement of natural and green areas in line with the environmental sustainability focus of many of Saanich's guiding documents: the Official Community Plan, Quadra's Local Area Plan, the new strategic plan, the Climate Action Plan and the upcoming biodiversity strategy.

The park has a rich bird, insect, animal, and plant life and provides important habitat and wildlife corridors. These values *must* be protected and *should* be central to the Park Management Plan. Saanich *must* show leadership with respect to the restoration and enhancement of the natural/green areas. We suggest that, before the implementation of any of the goals, Saanich undertake ecological assessments to ensure there will be no negative impact on the plant, insect and animal life in the park.

Below are our recommendations to the DMP Goals. The recommendations are further expanded upon in the attached Appendix.

Goal 1 BOWKER CREEK/REACH 17 This goal is of high priority because it enhances the ecology of the area. We encourage Saanich to implement this goal as their first priority as soon as possible (Appendix, page 4)

Goal 2 KINGS POND We suggest integration with Jenkins Pond, and the wetland north of Kings Pond, to enhance the wildlife corridor (Appendix, page 4).

Goal 3 NATURAL AREAS OF THE PARK This plan supports Saanich's OCP. It is important to establish this Natural Areas plan before the goals for expanding infrastructure are considered (Appendix, page 3).

Goal 4 GOLF COURSE AUDUBON SANCTUARY CERTIFICATION This goal underscores the importance of the DMP for the whole of CHP. The whole park benefits from this certification process and vice versa (Appendix, page 6).

Goal 5 SUSTAINABLE MEASURES FOR THE PARK These important goals are focused on human activities that impact the park and environment. We suggest that plans be further developed to encompass environmental sustainability to improve tree canopy, animal migration, biodiversity and watershed. These factors were not included in the DMP (Appendix, page 6).

Goal 6 PARKING LOTS Parking ratios required for building units in Saanich have decreased. Saanich should consider decreasing the number of parking spots by the recreation centre to use the area for other purposes.

Goal 7 a – DERBY CONNECTOR We agree that the Derby connector could be improved as long as ecological and safety factors are considered.

Goal 7 b - BICYCLE CONNECTION IN THE NORTH/EAST CORNER OF THE PARK We oppose a bicycle path in the N/E corner of the Park, since it would destroy valuable natural/green areas (Appendix, page 5).

Goal 8 OPPORTUNITIES IN THE PARK FOR USERS with LIMITED MOBILITY This is a desirable goal. However, we do have concerns about the impact on Reach 17. Walkers and joggers cherish the softer trail surfaces and we would not support an outcome that negatively affected these current users (Appendix, page 7).

Goal 9 UPGRADE THE OPEN SPACE/BALL DIAMONDS This goal should be subordinate to the restoration of Reach 17 wetlands.

Goal 10 ADDITIONAL PICNIC & SEATING The suggested picnic area close to the parking lot on the south side of the recreation centre is fine. However, the picnic area to the north may have a negative ecological impact.

Goal 11 YOUTH (AGES 13 TO 18) SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES. Further consultation to validate the need and the proposed activity is necessary. We are concerned about the negative ecological impact. Implementation of this goal should not impact the art installation (Appendix, page 7).

Goal 12 MODEL PLAYGROUND FOR CHILDREN (AGES 2 TO 12) We support further consultation on this goal that determines the need, type of activity and ecological impact.

Goal 13 OUTDOOR EXERCISE EQUIPMENT We support further consultation for this goal that determines the need, type of activity and ecological impact (Appendix, page 7).

Goal 14 WASHROOM ACCESS Improvement of signage will be helpful.

Goal 15 COMMUNITY ORCHARD We do not support a community orchard. We suggest extending the existing Garry Oak meadow to the west of the slope by planting young oaks. Such an implementation should consider the views up toward and down from the McRae house (Appendix, Page 7).

Goal 16 RECREATION CENTRE The expansion of the recreation centre is feasible provided it does not increase the current footprint for parking and the buildings. As mentioned previously, decreasing the overall parking area should be encouraged.

Goal 17 COMMUNICATIONS WITH THE COMMUNITY This goal is vital to achieve harmonious and constructive change. Saanich should develop policy and process to achieve engagement (Appendix, page 2).

We look forward to collaborating with you on maintaining and restoring this ecological gem within Saanich.

Sincerely,



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1: Overview

This document was prepared by the Friends of Cedar Hill Park (FCHPS) as an appendix to our March 9 letter of response to Saanich Park's Cedar Hill Park (CHP) Draft Management Plan (DMP) published in February 2020. FCHPS's comments and suggestions are made in the spirit of ensuring the future health of the park and well-being of our community.

We respectfully propose the following additions to the final version of the report before it is presented to Council for approval:

2. - Communications and collaboration
3. - Scope of the DMP - include the whole Park
4. - Preserve and restore CHP's Garry Oak and Douglas fir ecosystems
5. - Restoration of Bowker Creek and Colquitz watersheds
6. – A threat to CHP: Opening up a North to South cycling trail
7. – Responses to other Goals in the DMP

Cedar Hill Park (CHP) is one of the larger and most beautiful municipal parks in Saanich. It contains a unique expanse of rolling and rocky outcrops, beautiful woodlands and large green open fairways. CHP has a splendid landscape loved, preserved, and enjoyed by the whole community; has potential for a larger contribution to Saanich's climate response, tree canopy and biodiversity objectives; supports evolving recreational demands; requires balancing recreation and preserving the environment and landscape; and is home to the heritage-designated McRae farmhouse, open grassland and Garry Oak meadows.

We believe the CHP Draft Management Plan should align with the values of key Saanich documents which state:

"Saanich is a model steward working diligently to improve and balance the natural and built environments. Saanich restores and protects air, land, and water quality, the biodiversity of existing natural areas and eco-systems, the network of natural areas and open spaces, and urban forests. The challenges posed by climate change are responded to....."¹,

"Encourage protection and restoration of indigenous vegetation, wildlife habitat, and riparian environments within Quadra when considering applications for change in land use."²,

"Steward the natural environment – engage the community in recognizing and protecting our unique biodiversity and habitat"³, and

"Cedar Hill Park balances nature, community, and recreation in a harmonious way. People, place, and the environment share an intimate connection that fosters mutual

¹ Saanich's Official Community Plan

² Quadra Local Plan

³ Saanich's Strategic Plan

health and well-being. We are all stewards of the park, committed to its long-term preservation and enhancement.”⁴

Future generations will return to this document to gain insight and inspiration to preserve, respect and steward the park.

2: Communications and Collaboration

The DMP project was initiated by community groups desiring to be informed and participate in decision-making related to CHP. It is generally acknowledged that development of recreational infrastructure and preservation of the Park’s ecological values is challenging. The FCHPS and others encouraged Saanich Council and Saanich Parks to undertake the Management Plan and actively participated in the project.

In the past, our community encouraged Saanich to acquire the Park. The community protected the Park and continues to be active in the use and care of the Park. The DMP is a vital opportunity to develop policy, process and practice to avoid mistakes and build trust and community. The DMP must clearly recognize that the future of the Park is best assured by establishing a foundation for community stakeholders’ interest and engagement through active, structured, two-way communication and collaboration. For example, the community would have appreciated knowing that a large area on the east side of the Park north of Derby abutting part of the Garry Oak ecosystem was to be enclosed by a high chain-link fence and being offered the opportunity to comment.

3: Expand the Scope of the Management Plan

Prior to the initiation of this project, both QCHCA and FCHPS asked Saanich Council and staff to include the whole Park in the planning process as it is a continuous land area and encompasses two watersheds. The Park’s environmental health is a function of the whole park, not isolated to small fragments. Water, vegetation, wildlife and weather flow across the whole Park regardless of corporate boundaries. We ask that the plan address the whole Park and not just 25% of its area.

In consideration of the whole Park, the FCHPS recognize the existence of the golf course and the splendid landscape and natural areas were critical factors in Saanich’s decision to create the Park in 1966. These are the Park’s most remarkable and enduring attributes. We recognize that the Park anchors the golf course and vice versa. Golf at CHP has been a remarkable success as golfers enjoy playing this beautiful course. We also recognize the huge volume of walkers using the trail are attracted by the landscape and the quiet, safe, peaceful trails. It is self-evident that the community recognizes and values this landscape and we must avoid piecemeal development that would reduce these values. These are important considerations that must be incorporated in the final report.

⁴ Draft Management Plan, p 15

Furthermore, CHP is an integral part of the environment of the surrounding area including private properties and large municipal road allowances. These are part of a continuous and extended area of Garry Oak ecosystem on adjacent private and public land that are important to the survival and health of all wildlife life and two watersheds. Changes within and outside the park have significant impact on the health of wildlife, trees and flora.

4: Preserve and restore CHP's Garry Oak and Douglas Fir Ecosystems

Our concern with the report's content is the limited way in which the Plan links CHP to the broader objectives of the District of Saanich with respect to climate change, sustaining biodiversity, and restoring the health of the Coastal Douglas fir ecosystem, including the Garry Oak ecosystem. CHP provides an excellent opportunity to demonstrate how our municipal parks can support these objectives.

Trees and watershed are the foundation of most ecosystems in CHP. In the recent past, the area was covered by a woodland of Garry Oak, Fir, Cedar and Arbutus. Sadly, only isolated fragmented, dead and unhealthy Garry Oaks now remain in many parts of the Park and there is very limited regeneration. There has been a continuing loss of mature trees on the golf course and green/natural areas and replanting of indigenous trees has not been a priority. However, important remnants of Garry Oak ecosystem remain in areas around the Park's periphery and in fragmented areas within the golf course that can be the foundation for future restoration.

In Saanich, only 4% of the precontact Coastal Douglas Fir ecosystem remains. The vast majority of remaining Garry Oak and Douglas Fir ecosystems are on private land (almost 80% according to Thomas Munson, District of Saanich Senior Environmental Planner; p2; Our Backyard; Volume 20, Issue 3, Fall 2019). Saanich staff have stated that many species of trees including Grand Fir, Cedars and Garry Oak are under stress due to drier, hotter conditions. This is both a threat to the Park and an opportunity for Saanich to preserve biodiversity and to respond to climate change by planting trees.

The surveys in CHP Management Plan and the Saanich's Parks Master Plan (2012) show that our community values the woodland and natural areas that remain. They support efforts to preserve and restore these areas throughout Saanich. The municipality has initiatives and policy to preserve biodiversity, protect trees, enhance tree canopy and improve resilience in the face of climate change. CHP is the perfect location to initiate such a program.

In the DMP's section 3.6 – Environmental Characteristics, (page 9) the report makes an erroneous distinction between Green/Groomed Areas and Natural Areas “Natural areas in the park have been identified (also see the DMP's Figure 20 in Appendix 8.9) using this already previously determined definition.” It is wrong to imply that ‘those individuals...’ were in agreement with ‘using this already previously determined definition’. When one reads the surveys and listens to the community, one learns that the community is concerned about natural areas and green open spaces. Regrettably, this distinction between Natural and

Green/Groomed areas is used in the report to limit actions to preserve the Park's environment to those that are defined as 'Natural Areas' whereas, many participants in the Working Group and survey saw the opportunities in all 13.6 hectares, including Green/Groomed areas and the area dedicated to the golf course. It is important that these are not simply viewed as opportunities for further development as Youth, Outdoor Exercise and Picnic areas but also as areas with prime potential for restoration of native ecosystems.

Also, the reference to "natural areas (requiring) less intensive management" is wrong (see page 10 in the DNP). Regrettably much of the 13.6 hectares has been allowed to become overrun with invasive species in the absence of 'management'. Over the last 12 years, volunteers, supported by Pulling Together staff, have engaged in careful manual work to clean-up and restore these areas. It's widely recognized that mechanically mowing open grassy areas is not as labour intensive as the work required to restore a healthy resilient ecosystem whether through volunteer or paid labour.

FCHPS encourages Saanich to preserve and restore the woodland ecosystems through three initiatives to be added to Goal 3 in the DMP:

- Plan to join fragmented areas of Garry Oak ecosystem within and surrounding the park to create a more resilient ecosystem for the future. A tree-planting program throughout the Park, including the golf course, is required. FCHPS has offered funding for such initiatives and other sources are available through grants.
- Plan to include areas that are currently green, groomed, open space in the Park to be restored as future woodland. Indigenous tree species chosen for replanting will depend on the local ground conditions and species resilience.
- The three-meter buffer area around the perimeter of the golf course needs to be addressed. This area forms a significant proportion of the total and it is under the stewardship of the golf course staff. Unfortunately, Himalayan Blackberry and other invasive species have become dominant and used as buffer vegetation. This area is in dire need of restoration and replanting with indigenous shrubs and trees.

5: Restoration of Bowker Creek and Colquitz Watersheds

Many of those submitting survey responses recognize the importance of Bowker Creek, Kings Pond and associated wetlands as unique and attractive features of our Park and neighbourhood. These areas are a part of an extended wildlife corridor for resident and migrant ducks and about 110 species of birds. They provide important water retention and filtration functions to reduce the impact of storm water in flood conditions.

Bowker Creek: Reach 17 is a unique and accessible tributary and it has great potential to be incorporated as part of an attractive entrance to the Park. Bowker Creek and associated wetlands were filled and rerouted in the past to accommodate the ball diamond, the Rec Centre and parking.

Before any new infrastructure is built in the area, the needs of the creek and associated wetlands need to be addressed. In this area of Saanich there are few opportunities to restore natural areas. This area is one of the few places along the Creek with capacity for water storage in extreme rain events. It is much cheaper to create wetlands as water storage areas than build the infrastructure to contain extreme event water flows downstream. This initiative should be the top planning priority for the DMP and act as a cornerstone for all subsequent planning.

FCHPS supports the focus on the restoration of the lower stretch of the tributary per KWL's report. Option 1 is aligned with the Bowker Creek Initiative's 100 Year Blueprint. We recommend changing the very steeply sloped and unnatural west side of the creek between the two bridges. This steep area makes restoration work difficult and the transition to the gravel parking lot is quite unattractive. Remediation of this slope is recommended in the Blueprint. The DMP must assign the necessary Park area to accommodate the re-sloped portion of the creek's bank.

The location of the Outdoor exercise equipment per **Goal 13: Provide outdoor exercise equipment opportunities** to the west of the tennis building at the Rec Centre is a concern due to the potential for toxic particles and run-off from the 'safety surfacing' to enter Bowker Creek. Recent experience with Astroturf at Oak Bay High School is relevant to this plan. This area is a valuable green buffer between the imposing building and the creek riparian zone. It would be regrettable to squeeze even more infrastructure into this confined area.

The location of the trail and type of surface in **Goal 8: Provide opportunities in the park for those with limited mobility** should be sensitive to the riparian zone for the Creek, the root zones for the Garry Oaks on the slope and the SPEA requirements. It would be inappropriate to construct a hard, impervious surfaces close to the Creek and associated wetland.

Persimmon Pond on the northwest entrance to the Derby connector is deserving of attention. Shrub and tree plantings would help the area which is hardpacked mud most of the year.

Kings Pond: FCHPS supports Goal 2 in the draft CHP Management Plan. Kings Pond and the recently acquired Jenkins Pond, Kings Pond Park wetlands and the berms to the south are important habitats. The Management Plan should reflect a vision for *all* these areas as part of a *continuous* wetland ecosystem unaffected by any future ROW development.

6: Threats to CHP: Opening up a North to South cycling trail

Recognizing the safety issues associated with cycling on the popular chip trail around CHP, now used by 14,000 pedestrians a month, Council passed a motion in 2003 requiring cyclists to dismount on all trails with the exception of the Derby east-west connector. In addition to potential safety issues, FCHPS believe that the creation of new bike paths is the greatest threat to the Park's ESA-designated natural areas and green areas in the golf course.

Section 5.2 of the DMP - 'Connectivity and mobility in the Park', incorporates two goals. FCHPS supports goal 7A, improvements to the east-west Derby connector to alleviate 'conflict zones' and improve safety as long as ecological factors are considered. A shared use Derby connector would require the least disturbance to the golf course fairways and approaches. Leaving it as a gravel path would help reduce speed and thus contribute to the serenity and safety of all users.

Our concerns are with goal 7B, the proposal to allow cyclists to travel north/south between Queensbury/Epson/Ascot to Glacier. From the information published by Saanich, this will require construction of a new bike path of about 400m by approximately 3m wide (1200m²) through the green open areas by the golf course and a portion of the Garry Oak ecosystem on the Park's east side, one of the larger ESA areas in CHP.

We believe the safety and environmental impacts of a north/south cycle route are downplayed in the Plan. The survey results show considerable resistance to this initiative. The N to S bike path will entail unacceptable destruction of a large swath of green and natural areas identified by Saanich as ESA. It is reasonable to foresee the safety issues currently experienced on the E to W Derby connector (see Goal 7A) will be experienced on the proposed N to S connection. The costs of drainage, blasting, construction of road surfaces, lighting and signage will be significant. This area is very much darker in evening and nighttime, particularly in the winter, compared to the E to W connector. Saanich has no means to police this area. It's reasonable to believe the chip trail extending south of Derby will be exposed to more bike traffic, increasing safety hazards particularly on its steep sections.

To avoid having a potentially adversarial issue thrust on our community, we recommend that this initiative is removed from the DMP. If Saanich refuses to remove Goal 7B, we think it's vital that Saanich provides a complete assessment of costs, safety hazards, scale of development and other options. We know there are better solutions for a N to S biking route on existing streets that will preserve CHP's natural and green areas and avoid creating unnecessary safety risks and damage to the well-loved and heavily used chip trail.

To summarize FCHPS believes a N to S bike path, if adopted, will:

- lead to significant loss of open, green space and natural wooded areas along the very narrow, winding chip trail
- increase the risk of accidents between cyclists and pedestrians, dog walkers and runners on or close to the chip trail.
- increase the probability that cyclists will not dismount or exit the path at Glacier. This will create real safety concerns on the steep chip trail to the south east corner of the Park.
- increase noise and traffic for homeowners close to the chip trail.

7: Comments on select Draft Management Plan goals

Goal 4: Audubon Certification: Any initiative to improve the environment and sustainability throughout the whole Park is welcomed. Unfortunately, the objectives and benefits have not been widely publicized and it is entirely a staff undertaking. We support Audubon certification

for the whole park. This would make an excellent collaborative initiative between the golf course, parks and the community with golf course staff taking the lead.

Goal 5: Sustainability at Cedar Hill Park: FCHP agrees strongly that 'By adopting some sustainable measures in parks such as Cedar Hill, Saanich could contribute to meaningful changes in our region.' This report needs to incorporate this important conclusion into the management plan. CHP is impacted by sustainability issues including loss of mature trees and tree canopy; impact of irrigation and nutrients applied to the golf course; effects of climate change; loss of biodiversity (no inventory of wildlife, plants and trees, etc.); and impervious surfaces for parking, buildings and golf trails impacting storm water runoff. These factors need to be identified and addressed. Concerning 'Human Impact', housing development around the periphery of the Park including the threat of new home construction and subdivision applications should be included.

Goal 6: Parking Lots: Upgrading parking lots inevitably means more impervious surfaces, more runoff and more pollution. Every tonne of Portland Cement means another tonne of GHG's. Most drivers can figure out where to park in an open overflow lot, so it would be more advisable to plant shrubs and trees to make it more attractive and even help delineate the parking areas.

Goal 11: Youth Space: FCHPS believes locating such an area with undisclosed purpose or development is not in the best interest of the Park or other current Park users. If this is to be a skate park or bike circuit, it will bring noise and disruption to all the pedestrians using the chip trail, golfers on the adjacent course and neighbours. Such development will require bathroom facilities and lighting in all probability. This Goal is incompatible with natural area restoration opportunities, an attractive entrance to the park on North Dairy; plans for the restoration of Bowker Creek; and with the recent installation of the large 'Earth Drums' interactive art sculpture which could be subject to vandalism.

Goal 15: Orchard and McRae House: The primary opportunity in the area south of McRae house is to re-establish the Garry Oak meadow that once flourished here. This would create a larger and more sustainable forest ecosystem by joining fragmented areas and sustain the future of the ecosystem with new tree plantings. All that remains in some areas are damaged and dead trees. Furthermore, the McRae House is a much-loved, heritage-designated building. The surrounding area should be preserved and restored to complement the house.

Goal 16: Recreation Centre: The FCHPS wonder why this item is included in the DMP as the scope of the project excludes the Rec Centre. If this goal is included, why is the golf course excluded from scope? Let's be consistent and include the whole Park in DMP scope.

Goal 8: Provide opportunities in the park for those with limited mobility: Page 23 'Figure 12 – Open Space Master Plan' shows a 'New Rustic Trail Loop'. No explanation of this trail has been included in any Goal. How might this impact the Garry Oak meadow? How also will the extended trail around the ballfield area, traversing the hilly Garry Oak meadow and the McRae meadow impact future expansion and increase fragmentation of the Garry Oak ecosystem? The DMP also suggests moderating the grade of the trail on the two steepest parts, below McRae House and above Barwick Pond. Many users, including seniors, value these grades as they provide a short more strenuous workout to maintain conditioning. Improvements to the trails need to sensitive these considerations.

Goal 12: Model Playground for Children and Goal 11: Youth Space: Further consultation is required to validate these needs. The Park exists within Saanich and Victoria's parks 'systems' that offer many recreational facilities within a kilometer. When planning for children's play, outdoor exercise area, picnic areas, and youth area, etc. in CHP, it is essential to reference amenities that are available in Playfair, Browning, Oswald, Summit and Braefoot parks and local schools to better manage and justify financial investment and use of scarce land resources in more recreational facilities.

Goal 13: Provide outdoor exercise equipment opportunities: Please see comments under '**5: Restoration of Bowker Creek and Colquitz Watersheds**'. It seems that there was little support in the surveys for the 'outdoor exercise equipment' proposal.

General comments:

- Page 23 of the DMP shows an 'Open Space Masterplan' yet the open spaces shown are currently enjoyed for their natural values. The possible activities shown for many of these areas, are only that, possibilities; not part of an approved Open Space Masterplan (see fig. 12, page 23)
- Most of the focus of this DMP is on infrastructure, not the natural areas. Other than Kings Pond and Reach 17, all of the designated funding is targeted to hard-surface, un-natural additions to the park, of which 35% of is for enhancing the parking lots. How much operational funding is directed to restoration of natural areas?
- Other than Reach 17 (part of a larger long-term regional Bowker Creek initiative) 98% of the proposed budget is for recreational infrastructure.
- The "recreation" part of Parks and Recreation is where virtually all effort and money is focussed.
- We believe a greater focus on the value of natural and green areas and the considerable usage of the park by walkers and joggers of all ages, is necessary in the DMP.