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## 6.0 - Enhancing and Maintaining Park Land, Green Space, and Natural Areas

Park land, green space and natural areas are essential in creating complete liveable communities. Parks and open spaces can take on many forms and can serve a variety of functions such as sports fields, tot lots, wildlife viewing areas, hiking or walking trails, pedestrian linkages, and protected areas not intended for human disturbance. Parks and open spaces are an important component of the Plan Area as they help define the community, provide an opportunity for Plan Area residents to enjoy the natural beauty of the area, and encourage community recreation and social interaction.

Plan Area residents value the current amount of green space and outdoor recreational opportunities within Electoral Area 'G' and desire to maintain, enhance, and increase the current amount of green space. The following sections work towards maintaining, enhancing, and increasing park land, green space, and natural areas within the Plan Area in recognition of Plan Area residents' desires and the goals of the Regional Growth Strategy.

### 6.1 Parks, Trails, and Outdoor Recreational Opportunities

Approximately 20% of the Plan Area has currently been designated for a combination of parks, green space, trails, and conservation areas including 22 Regional District of Nanaimo community parks dispersed throughout the Plan Area that cover an area of about 55 hectares. There is also a Regional Park along the Englishman River and a Regional Conservation Area at the mouth of the Little Qualicum River that together are 210 hectares in area. In addition, there are significant The Nature Trust land holdings at the Englishman River estuary and along the East side of the Englishman River adjacent to the Rivers Edge subdivision. As well, there is a national wildlife area at the mouth of the Little Qualicum River estuary totalling 29.41 hectares in area.

It should be noted that Regional parks/trails and community parks/trails are administered under separate programs due to differences in mandates and funding sources. In general Community Parks and trails are intended to provide for the park and recreational needs of the local community and are not intended to attract or support use by the broader regional population. In addition, unlike regional parks and trails which are funded on a region-wide basis, community parks and trails are funded through taxes and development revenues (rezoning and subdivisions) collected specifically within each Electoral Area. Therefore, the Plan Area has its own community park and trail budget separate from the regional parks and trails budget and the community parks and trails budget for other Electoral Areas.

This section works towards the community's desire to maintain, enhance, and increase park land, trails, green space, and natural areas.

#### *Objectives:*

1. Maintain, enhance, and increase the amount of park land and green space in Electoral Area 'G' as part of a cohesive parks acquisition and development strategy to improve recreation opportunities and environmental protection in the Plan Area.

2. Work with public and private institutions to facilitate integration of schools, community halls and associated open space as an integral part of the community parks and open space system and where possible, have them available for public use.
3. Encourage private forests land owners to continue to make their lands available for public recreation.
4. Support the goals and priorities of the Regional District of Nanaimo Regional Parks and Trails Plan 2005-2015 as amended from time to time.
5. Support the protection of existing beach accesses.

***Policies:***

1. Lands designated Park lands, Green Space, and Natural Areas as well as existing and proposed park land and trail network are shown on Map No. 4.
2. Park land and trails shall be permitted and encouraged in all land use designations and no further subdivision of existing or future parks is supported.
3. Residents of Electoral Area 'G' have stated a need for additional park land to provide:
  - a. linear walking trails;
  - b. riparian area protection and access;
  - c. beach access;
  - d. protection of natural features;
  - e. outdoor recreational and leisure neighbourhood park opportunities;
  - f. sports fields; and,
  - g. access to water.
4. Although park land is supported for the protection of locally-significant environmentally sensitive features, protection of these features should be in addition to the minimum 5% park land dedication in the ***Local Government Act***.
5. Park land proposals must provide a benefit for the community and those lands with no benefit to the community should not be accepted.
6. It is strongly preferred that land being considered for park land be maintained in its natural state and should not be cleared. Cleared and disturbed lands should only be accepted where the proposed park land is to be used for recreational uses which require cleared lands.
7. In areas where park land is desired, developers are encouraged to dedicate greater than 5% park land.
8. The Regional District shall encourage and support volunteer assistance in the development and management of community parks and trails.
9. The Regional District recognizes that public involvement early in the planning process, during acquisition and development of Community Park, and in recreation commissions,

- volunteer groups or service organizations, is essential for the success of the Parks System.
10. This Plan supports the establishment of a Development Cost Charge Bylaw for community parks purposes.
  11. The Regional District shall evaluate the suitability of park land proposals and may also consider parks and publicly accessible open space provision through means other than subdivision approval in accordance with Section 6.4 of this Plan.
  12. Although not located in Electoral Area 'G', this Plan supports the protection of Hamilton and Dudley Marshes in Electoral Area 'F' as these areas are key seasonal water storage areas for Electoral Area 'G'.
  13. This Plan supports the retention of at least 20% green space in the urban area of Electoral Area 'G'.
  14. Participation by residents of Electoral Area 'G' in park acquisition, planning and development is encouraged.
  15. The Regional District of Nanaimo should consider zoning parks, green space, and natural areas for their intended use.
  16. All trails proposed on lands located within the Agricultural Land Reserve shall require approval from the Agricultural Land Commission and should be developed and used in accordance with the Ministry of Agriculture's publication titled "*A Guide to Using and Developing Trails in Farm and Ranch Areas*".

***Advocacy Policies:***

17. The City of Parksville and the Town of Qualicum Beach are encouraged to work with the Regional District of Nanaimo to create integrated parks and trail systems network that spans jurisdictional boundaries.

**6.2 Preserving Green Space**

Green Space is an integral component of the Plan Area in that it helps to define communities, provides opportunities for outdoor recreation in a natural setting, and preserves critical ecological functions. Green space also contributes towards creating complete liveable communities by providing opportunities for nature viewing and social interaction, and maintaining a healthy environment. Green space can take on many forms ranging from sports fields to environmentally sensitive natural areas and can be managed for a multitude of purposes that range from intensive recreational use such as baseball diamonds to more passive recreational uses such as wildlife viewing and berry picking.

It is recognized that green space is both publicly and privately owned, but regardless of ownership green space benefits the community as a whole. The following objectives and policies work towards the community's desire to preserve the amount and quality of green space in Electoral Area 'G'.

**Objectives:**

1. To encourage the retention of green space throughout the Plan Area in both public and private lands
2. To develop and establish a greenways network for Electoral Area 'G'.
3. To ensure that the use of green space is compatible with the needs of the community and does not have a detrimental affect on the environment.

**Policies:**

1. Support the retention of 20% of the land area for green space within the urban area of Electoral Area 'G'.
2. If access to lands in consideration for park land, green space, or natural areas dedication may result in negative impacts to an environmentally sensitive area and/or feature, the Regional District of Nanaimo should consider options for restricting public access.
3. In reviewing Zoning Amendment Applications the Regional District of Nanaimo shall consider the retention and enhancement of green space.
4. The Regional District of Nanaimo will encourage the retention of provincial and federal Crown lands within the Plan Area as substantial contributors to the over all amount of green space enjoyed by Plan Area residents.
5. Participation by residents of Electoral Area 'G' in green space preservation and planning is encouraged.

**Advocacy Policies:**

6. The province is encouraged to maintain its Crown land holdings within the Plan Area in recognition that these lands are valued by the residents of Electoral Area 'G' for resource and recreational use.
7. Private managed forest companies are encouraged to consider conducting forestry operations in a socially-responsible way that protects the environment and minimizes the aesthetic impact on the community.

**6.3 Protected Areas**

The Plan Area contains a provincial wildlife management area adjacent to the coast line and a national wildlife area at the mouth of the Little Qualicum River. The Nature Trust also holds conservation land holdings adjacent to the Rivers Edge subdivision, at the mouth of the Englishman River, and at the mouth of the Little Qualicum River. These lands comprise a significant portion of the green space within Electoral Area 'G'. The environmental sensitivity of these lands along with their contribution towards the green space network warrants protection to ensure that these resources are preserved for future generations.

The above-mentioned lands differ for the most part from community parks in that they have been designated for conservation and wildlife management in recognition of their environmental sensitivity and ecological value and therefore should be left in a natural state with the primary

focus on protection of environmentally sensitive features and ecosystems and little human disturbance. In order to meet conservation and wildlife management objectives, careful consideration must be given to the management of these areas including recreational uses.

The following objectives and polices have been identified in recognition of Plan Area residents' desire to protect the environment and preserve and increase the amount of green space within the Plan Area.

**Objectives:**

1. Ensure that development does not negatively impact conservation lands, the national wildlife area, or the provincial wildlife management area.
2. Recognize the importance of regionally significant parks and natural features.
3. Ensure that public access into these lands does not negatively affect environmentally sensitive features or ecosystems for which they were designated to protect
4. Support the acquisition of sensitive lands for conservation.
5. Encourage cooperation between senior agencies, the Regional District of Nanaimo and its partner municipalities, non-government organizations, and other stakeholders to work towards the identification and preservation of ecologically sensitive lands.

**Policy:**

1. Existing and desirable conservation lands and wildlife management areas are shown on Map No. 4 – Park land, Green Space, Natural Areas, Institutional, Schools. and Cultural Facilities.
2. The development of a protected areas strategy for the Plan Area is supported.
3. The Regional District of Nanaimo shall consider acquisition of conservation lands in accordance with Section 6.4 of this Plan.
4. Trails and other passive recreational uses may be permitted in conservation areas only where the proposed use does not adversely affect an environmentally sensitive feature and/or ecosystem.

**6.4 Acquisition of Park land, Green Space, and Natural Areas**

Park land, green space, and natural areas can be acquired through various means such as a requirement of rezoning, land dedication through subdivision, private donation, eco-gifting, or by purchase by the Regional District of Nanaimo or a private land holding entity such as a land trust or other conservation-based organization.

The following objectives and policies work towards the Plan Area resident's desire to maintain and enhance park land, green space, and natural areas within Electoral Area 'G'.

**Objectives:**

1. Support an innovative and multi-faceted approach to the acquisition of park land, green space, and natural areas.
2. Provide a framework for the consideration of proposals for the dedication of park land, green space, and natural areas.
3. Ensure that future park land, green space, and natural areas acquisition meets the objectives of Electoral Area 'G' residents.
4. Encourage the private sector and non-government organizations to participate in the designation of park lands, green space, and natural areas.

**Policies:**

1. Pursuant to the **Local Government Act**, at the time of subdivision, the Regional District shall determine whether the owner of land being subdivided shall:
  - a. Provide, without compensation, useable park land equivalent to 5% of the parcel size and in a location acceptable to the RDN; or
  - b. Pay to the Regional District an amount that equals 5% of the market value of all of the land being subdivided; or
  - c. Provide a combination of land and cash to the satisfaction of the Regional Board.
2. The Regional District of Nanaimo may consider accepting park land at the time of subdivision or rezoning on any lands within the Plan Area where there is an opportunity for park dedication to meet one or more of the following preferred park criteria:
  - a. The land improves access to water including the ocean and any other watercourse;
  - b. The land is identified for park land, trail, or conservation area by this Plan or any other Regional District of Nanaimo parks and trails plan;
  - c. The land connects parks and natural areas, contributing to an interconnected greenways network that links neighbourhoods to parks, schools and cultural resources;
  - d. The land includes areas for the protection of environmentally sensitive lands to be retained in a natural, undisturbed state or archaeological features to be protected, although, generally the protection of environmentally sensitive lands should be in addition to the minimum park land dedication requirements pursuant to the **Local Government Act**;
  - e. The land includes viewpoints and opportunities for nature appreciation and/or focal features such as a public square or community gathering space in village centres;

- f. Land that is a single contiguous parcel(s) is preferred where other park land acquisition criteria are not considered to offer a greater community benefit.
  - g. The subject property contains a locally or regionally significant feature or ecosystem that if preserved or managed would result in a net benefit to the community; and
  - h. Notwithstanding lands deemed appropriate for environmental protection by a qualified environmental professional, the land in question must be useable land that would be suitable for a multitude of recreational uses such as baseball diamonds, tennis courts, children's tot lots, and basketball courts; and,
  - i. Preference shall be given to the acquisition of those lands identified on Map No. 4 for future community and regional parks, trails and corridors, and natural areas. However, other lands may be considered in accordance with the criteria outlined in this policy.
3. The Englishman River, French Creek, and the Little Qualicum River and associated upland riparian areas have been specifically identified as 'Desired Park/Conservation Lands' on Map No. 4 (Park lands, Green spaces, Trails, Natural Areas, and Community Facilities) due to their environmental sensitivity, their importance to the Plan Area, and in order to preserve intact riparian corridors, which may also provide opportunities for low impact walking and/or multi-use trails.
4. This Plan recognizes that the residents of French Creek desire to consider options for the acquisition of additional park land adjacent to French Creek on the lands located on the corner of Highway 19A and Columbia Drive.
5. Other lands designated 'desired Park/Conservation Lands on Map No. 4 have been designated in order to preserve intact areas with mature forest and in order to ensure that the future park needs of Plan Area residents are met.
6. Proposed park land and conservation areas must meet the criteria outlined in 6.4(2) above.
7. The Regional District of Nanaimo shall when considering an amendment application, consider requiring dedication of land for the purpose of park land, green space, and/or natural areas as a condition of rezoning. Park land acceptance should be in accordance with Policy 2 above.
8. Innovative and multi-faceted approaches to the acquisition of park land, green space, and natural areas may be supported which may include, but are not limited to, eco-gifting, private public partnerships, private land donation, conservation covenants, and density transfer.

***Advocacy Policies:***

9. Non-government agencies and conservation-based organizations are encouraged to continue to work with the Regional District of Nanaimo and with the private sector to acquire and manage lands suitable for conservation.

10. Non-government agencies and conservation-based organizations are encouraged to hold and enforce conservation-based covenants on behalf of Plan Area residents and the Regional District of Nanaimo.