

FOR: COUNCIL MEETING

MEETING DATE: October 5, 2026

DEPARTMENT: COMMUNITY SERVICES

SUBJECT: **LINLEY VALLEY PARK PLAN - COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY**

OVERVIEW

Purpose of Report

To seek Council approval of the draft Linley Valley Park Plan Community Engagement Strategy and outline the timeline and process for public and partner consultation.

Recommendation

That Council approve the draft Linley Valley Park Plan Community Engagement Strategy and direct Staff to proceed with implementation of the strategy.

BACKGROUND

Linley Valley Park, which also includes Linley Valley Cottle Lake Park, is a 173-hectare wilderness park located in northern Nanaimo, northeast of Long Lake and west of the Rocky Point - Hammond Bay - Stephenson Point neighbourhood.

The park includes various parcels purchased between 2003 and 2018, as well as lands acquired through subdivision. In 2003, the City of Nanaimo acquired a large portion of the park, supported in part by the Nanaimo Area Land Trust (NALT). The lands are largely forested and undeveloped, with diverse vegetation, meadows, and water bodies including lakes, ponds, streams, and wetlands. Within the park, a single spine trail, complete with signage, is actively maintained by the City. The remainder of the park is managed as a natural area, and most maintenance needs are addressed on a reported issue basis. Access and safety were improved in 2024 with the installation of an aluminum boardwalk near Cottle Lake.

The proposed park plan would seek to significantly improve the long-term climate resiliency of the forested park, including a framework for protecting, restoring and managing the lands to better withstand the increasing pressures of climate change, including extreme weather events. The plan would also support the identification of strategies to address potential risks associated with the wildland-urban interface, where adjacent development and the forested lands meet.

Park Plan and Engagement Strategy

A comprehensive park plan is needed to establish a clear long-term vision for the park, guide future capital improvements desired by the community, and provide a coordinated approach to addressing ongoing challenges while expanding recreation opportunities in a thoughtful and environmentally responsible way. The planning process will consider both short and long-term strategies needed to thoughtfully expand recreation opportunities within the park, as well as seek to address ongoing issues in the park.

Funds have been allocated in the 2026 Project Plan to undertake a park planning process for Linley Valley Park, and completion of the Linley Valley Park Plan is identified in the Integrated Action Plan (#161).

A thorough community engagement strategy will enable the City to collaboratively identify and prioritize park improvements that reflect the needs and interests of park users and partner groups. The purpose of this report is to seek Council approval of the draft engagement strategy.

DISCUSSION

Current Uses of Linley Valley Park

As a destination park in the City, Linley Valley Park is critical to supporting active and passive recreation, environmental stewardship and opportunities for social interaction. Recreational activities include hiking, wildlife viewing, mountain biking, and rock climbing. The park is zoned PRC-1, which supports the conservation and enjoyment of natural spaces while allowing recreational and educational uses compatible with the park's natural features. The area is also designated as Park & Open Space in City Plan, intending for the lands to be used for respite, recreation, wellness, cultural use, environmental protection, and the enjoyment of residents.

Ongoing stewardship work in Linley Valley Park continues to prioritize environmental protection, habitat restoration, and visitor safety. Recent City grant-funded projects taking place in the park include water-quality monitoring, a beaver-dam assessment, and wetland studies. City Staff and volunteers regularly hold invasive species removal work parties to enhance native habitat. Extensive biophysical assessments of the park were completed in 2018, with key findings summarized in Attachment A.

Park Challenges

Linley Valley Park continues to experience several ongoing challenges related to public safety, environmental protection, visitor behaviour and park infrastructure.

Key issues include:

- Unclear park boundaries due to the park's size and terrain
- Unsanctioned trail development, these do not meet standards and are not formally maintained
- Storm-related hazards, including fallen trees, hanging branches, and blocked trails
- Ongoing off-road vehicle use
- Regular off-leash dog use
- Insufficient visitor infrastructure, including a lack of formal parking areas and washroom facilities
- Outdated signage that does not reflect the full extent of Linley Valley Park

Linley Valley Park Plan Community Engagement Strategy

The key component in developing the Linley Valley Park Plan is executing an inclusive, multi-phase community engagement strategy. Staff have structured the proposed process into four distinct phases:

Phase 1- Project Launch

Phase 2- Initial Engagement

Phase 3- Findings Review

Phase 4- Community Review and Adoption

Each step of the strategy will inform the development of a draft Linley Valley Park Plan. The goal of the engagement strategy is to capture robust community input, collaborate with key user groups, and refine

park options into a finalized draft plan for Council consideration. The draft Linley Valley Park Plan Community Engagement Strategy is detailed in Attachment B.

COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

This initiative does not require a statutory notification. Community engagement opportunities for the Linley Valley Park planning process will be promoted through the City's standard communication channels. Additional promotion will occur through on-site signage, media releases, and direct communication with community organizations and stewardship groups to ensure broad awareness and participation.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

There is a total of \$35,200 allocated in the 2026 Project Plan for the development of the Linley Valley Park Plan.

ALIGNMENT WITH CITY PLAN

The report is aligned with the following City goals:

- ☒ A Green Nanaimo: Resilient and Regenerative Ecosystems
 - C1.3 Urban Tree Canopy, Natural Areas, & Greenways
 - C1.4 Healthy Watersheds
 - C1.8 Artificial Lighting & Dark Skies
- ☒ A Connected Nanaimo: Equitable Access and Mobility
 - C2.3 Recreational Trails
- ☒ A Healthy Nanaimo: Community Wellbeing and Livability
 - C3.6 Recreation, Culture, & Wellness
- ☒ An Empowered Nanaimo: Reconciliation, Representation and Inclusion
 - C4.3 Access for All
 - C4.4 Political Voice & Engagement
 - C4.9 Parkland & Park Amenity Management
- ☒ A Prosperous Nanaimo: Thriving and Resilient Economy
 - C5.5 Place Making & Investment Attraction

ALIGNMENT WITH COUNCIL'S STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The report is aligned with the following Council Strategic Framework priorities:

- ☒ Implementing City Plan Action Plans and Key City Management Plans
- ☒ Social, Health and Public Safety Challenges
- ☐ Maintaining and Growing Current Services
- ☒ Capital Projects
- ☒ Communicating with the Community
- ☐ Governance and Corporate Excellence

NEXT STEPS

Should Council endorse the draft engagement strategy for Linley Valley Park planning process, staff will initiate the phased Public Engagement Plan as outlined above. Once the engagement strategy is completed staff will develop a draft park plan and bring the draft forward to Council for review and

consideration. Funds have been included starting in year three of the 2027–2031 Draft Project Plan to support implementation of the Park Plan following Council adoption.

OPTIONS

1. That Council approve the draft Linley Valley Park Plan Community Engagement Strategy and direct Staff to proceed with implementation of the strategy.
 - The advantages of this option: Enables staff to develop a long-term vision for the park that integrates, community priorities, environmental considerations and City goals and policies. Supports a coordinated approach to planning capital improvements and addressing ongoing operational and environmental challenges.
 - The disadvantages of this option: Requires considerable staff time to undertake engagement, develop the plan, and manage the process. Not all public requests or preferences will be feasible to implement, requiring careful expectation management throughout the engagement process. Future implementation of the Park Plan will require capital investment.
 - Financial implications: Funds have been allocated in the 2026 Project Plan for the Linley Valley Park planning process. Funding has also been included in the 2027–2031 Draft Project Plan to support implementation of the Park Plan following Council adoption. The new Development Cost Charge (DCC) Bylaw includes Linley Valley Park Improvements; therefore, a portion of certain future capital projects will be funded through Parks DCC revenues.
2. That Council provide alternate direction.

KEY MESSAGES

- Linley Valley Park is a 173-hectare destination park that is largely forested with many formal and informal recreation activities.
- A detailed biophysical assessment was conducted and reviewed aquatic and terrestrial habitat, forest cover, invasive species, vegetation and wildlife.
- A phased park planning and engagement strategy is proposed, including engagement with key interest groups and the broader community, and Committee and Council review.
- The proposed park planning and engagement strategy for Linley Valley Park will address a number of Integrated Action Plan priorities, in alignment with City Plan goals and Council's Strategy Framework.

ATTACHMENTS

- ATTACHMENT A: Biophysical Assessment Findings
ATTACHMENT B: Draft Linley Valley Park Plan Community Engagement Strategy

Authored by:

Payton Carter
Park & Open Spaces Planner

Concurrence by:

Charlotte Davis
Acting Director, Parks, Recreation & Culture

Lisa Bhopalsingh
General Manager, Community Services
Deputy CAO

Dale Lindsay
CAO

ATTACHMENT A

BIOPHYSICAL ASSESSMENT FINDINGS

Aquatic Habitat

Investigations of the Cottle Creek Watershed and McGregor Creek Watershed determined fish habitat are restricted to Cottle Lake, Cottle Creek (up to the west boundary of Linley Valley Cottle Lake Park), North Cottle Creek (up to and including Lost Lake) and the lower reaches of the Cottle Lake tributaries. All other watercourses and wetlands have been determined to be non-fish bearing due to the lack of appropriate habitat or known barriers located downstream. It was also evident that beaver activity throughout the park is impacting watercourses and drainage patterns, causing the creation of large ponds and pools that provide a wide range of aquatic habitats for a variety of wildlife such as amphibians and waterfowl.

Woodland/Terrestrial Habitat and Forest Cover

The woodlands and terrestrial ecosystems make up the majority of the park. This includes herbaceous rock outcrops and a dominant Douglas fir – Salal forest that makes up the majority of the park. A total of 23 unique woodland/terrestrial ecosystems were identified, including forests, wetlands, ponds, cliffs, and anthropogenic types. At the time of the assessment, it was determined that the majority of the park is young forest, and just 0.5% of the forested area is considered to be mature. However, nearly half of the park land is considered to form part of a sensitive ecosystems and is located within the City's Environmentally Sensitive Areas Development Permit Area 1.

Invasive Species

The assessment identified 38 invasive species within the park. All identified species were listed under the Invasive Alien Plant Program (IAPP) and/or the *BC Weed Control Act*. Four of these species are considered noxious weeds, including annual sow-thistle, Canada thistle, tansy ragwort, and yellow iris. The most frequently recorded invasive species are English Holly, Scotch Broom and Himalayan Blackberry.

Vegetation

296 unique plant species were recorded, including a variety of tree, shrub, herbaceous, and moss/lichen species. One provincially Blue-listed plant species, sand lacepod, was encountered on the southeast slopes of Cottle Hill.

Wildlife

Wildlife and habitat surveys were conducted across the numerous ecosystem types, including forests, woodlands, terrestrial herbaceous rock outcrops, riparian areas, wetlands and ponds. A total of 80 wildlife species were found in the park. This included six amphibian species, two reptile species, eight mammals, a fish, four invertebrate species, and 59 bird species.

ATTACHMENT B

DRAFT LINLEY VALLEY PARK PLAN

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

Phase 1 – Project Launch (Fall 2026)

- Establish a project webpage and a Get Involved page to gather broad community input on the park-user experience and to later, share findings.
- Host a Collaborators Meeting with applicable Neighbourhood Associations, Nanaimo Search and Rescue, relevant environmental / advocacy organizations, and recreation clubs to discuss findings of the biophysical assessment, land-use strategies and community desires.

Phase 2 – Initial Engagement (Early-Mid 2027)

- Collect park user data using trail counters and intercept surveys. Intercept surveys will be conducted on-site, asking visitors to complete a short questionnaire about their visit, activities, and desired improvements. Surveys will be conducted at various times and locations within the park to gather data from the various park entrances. This information will assist in better understanding volumes, frequent trail routes, and community concerns.
- An online survey, similar to the in-person intercept survey, will be conducted.
- Host an open-house event for the community to review the preliminary findings and discuss land-use strategies with Staff and project collaborators. This will be an additional opportunity for participants to complete the survey.
- Advertising the project and participation opportunities on Social Media, by media release and in the *My Nanaimo This Week Newsletter* and other printed and online City publications.

Phase 3 – Review Findings & Develop Draft (Late 2027)

- Assess and review input from all survey submissions and development of an engagement summary.
- Update the project webpage and get involved page and share findings using City channels.
- Develop land-use plan options and recommendations based on data gathered, discussions with key interest groups, and site opportunities and constraints.

Phase 4 – Community Review & Adoption (Early-Mid 2028)

- Host an open-house to share findings, review the park vision, land-use plan options and gather public feedback.
- Present a draft plan to the relevant City committee(s) and implement appropriate feedback and suggestions.
- Bring forward the Linley Valley Park Plan for Council consideration.