



MEDIA RELEASE - AMENDED

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Schematic design for revitalized Strathcona Gardens approved: Staff to pursue required grant funding

Campbell River, BC – More details of the proposed design for the REC-REATE Strathcona Gardens facility revitalization project were approved by the Strathcona Regional District (SRD) Board this week – allowing the project to move onto its next important step: funding.

The SRD, which owns and operates the Strathcona Gardens facility, has kept up progress on this project in order to compete for a rare round of recreation infrastructure funding. In September this year, the \$134M Canada-British Columbia Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program was announced which provides 73.33% funding for eligible projects. The Board today directed that an application be made to this program for the redevelopment of Strathcona Gardens.

“Strathcona Gardens is a well-loved community hub. We have heard from the public that they want to see major improvements to this facility, not just another band-aid solution, and we know from our technical studies that there are expensive items beyond their useful life and in need of repair or replacement.” said SRD board chair Michele Babchuk. “The Strathcona Gardens Commission first started planning for the future of Strathcona Gardens back in 2014 and in anticipation of the large capital cost, we started saving and looking for external funding sources. If we can attract the grant funding we are hoping for, then we may be able to finance these upgrades without increasing annual costs to the taxpayer.”

A schematic design developed by HCMA Architecture + Design fleshes out the preferred plan that was developed through public consultation and approved by the board in April 2018. This design includes a new aquatic, fitness and wellness centre, with improvements and upgrades to the ice facilities, changerooms, storage areas and public spaces.

Expanded geotechnical standards, the need to relocate a service line and slight expansions to the change rooms and fitness areas has seen the project cost estimate rise. External market conditions, such as the increasingly high costs of construction being felt on Vancouver Island and new tariffs, particularly on steel, are likely to have a significant impact on the final project cost which would bring it to 62.1M in today's dollars. As part of the grant application, the SRD must include a forecast cost to the mid-point of construction. Should tariffs remain in place and construction prices continue to trend higher, it is possible that the project may come in closer to \$77.5M. While this is a significant cost, a major renovation project is still far cheaper than an entirely new build which was an option considered by the Regional District in previous studies. The Regional District was advised that to build a new recreation complex similar to what is being proposed through the REC-REATE project would likely cost closer to \$180M.

Staff are now preparing an application for the funding program based on the full schematic design. Should the Board be successful in obtaining the target funding amount, the remaining balance would be supplemented by Strathcona Gardens reserve funds that are already being collected from taxpayers and set aside for this project. If the Regional District is not successful in obtaining external funding, the Board will need to reconsider how to proceed with the required upgrades, particularly replacement of the original 40-year-old pool basin, estimated to cost close to \$18M.

“We could not have reached this stage without the critical feedback and ideas from stakeholder groups who have provided their thoughts in the last few years,” said Victoria Smith, Manager of Strategic Initiatives. “We are planning information sessions for early 2019 to share detailed updates and say thanks for all the valuable work by the community so far.”

Funding is expected to be announced in late 2019, with the goal of starting construction at the end of 2020 and completion in 2023. One of the key elements in the design is the option for keeping portions of the facility open and available for public use, while other areas are under construction.

For information about the REC-REATE project, visit www.recreatesq.ca.

The Strathcona Regional District is a partnership of four electoral areas and five municipalities providing services to approximately 43,000 residents.

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