

Hartwell Way community park not likely to be complete by end of the year

An expansive community park planned for Hartwell Way will not likely see completion this year, following some financial snarls.

Council last week delayed an increase to the park's budget of \$923,500 ? bringing the total cost of the park to an estimated \$2,423,500, which will be fully funded from the Town's Cash-in-Lieu of Parkland reserves, paid for by developers.

The future of the park, which is intended to be non-programmed and more naturalized than similar parks throughout the Aurora community, has been up in the air since earlier this spring when it was found money allocated for the project in previous years' budgets fell well short of total costs.

?The budget for the park design/constriction approved in 2018 was established based upon a traditional neighbourhood park design with standard playground equipment and open green space to accommodate free play/small sports fields and trails,? said Parks Manager Sara Tienkamp in a report to Council.

The project evolved from the traditional model through community input, which resulted in a playground concept built out of more natural materials, as well as through the ongoing development of the Town's new Parks and Recreation Master Plan, priorities for which identified this park as a prime location for a community garden

But inflation has caused the final price tag for the park to balloon, particularly with supply chain issues, the increased costs and shortage of labour, increased fuel costs, and increased demand for materials in the face of reduced availability.

?The natural-themed park playground and community garden are the park amenities that have the largest associated construction costs,? she continued. ?The Council-approved park design includes amenities, including a natural-themed playground, community garden, shade shelter, small amphitheatre, and welcoming centre/trail head to the David Tomlinson Nature Reserve. Both the playground, and the community garden represent a large portion of the construction costs for the park and are two amenities that could potentially be reduced in scope, redesigned, or constructed in a phased approach in future years.

?The total bid price for the natural-themed wood playground (including all infrastructure) is \$514,000 versus the consultant's estimate of \$218,000. Installation of a typical park playground like other playgrounds in Aurora has historically cost \$200,000 - \$250,000.?

Yet, the report notes, going down a natural route for the playground, could result in materials that, while more expensive, would likely prove more durable in the long-run.

When Council first considered the cost increases last month, several options were put on the table to try and reduce the final price tag including going back out to tender and phasing in portions of the plan, but Council agreed that phasing in components of the park could result in higher costs down the road.

Removing select amenities from the equation were also considered but Councillors couldn't pinpoint one to meet the chopping block.

The matter last week was duly referred back to staff for further options.

In doing so, however, Councillor John Gallo questioned how long it would take for a new report to come back to Council and whether a decision would be left in the hands of the 2022-2026 Council.

?Most likely, yes,? was the answer from CAO Doug Nadorozny.

?We're not quite sure,? he said of the timing of the report. ?There's a range of options in how we might deal with this. It most likely wouldn't come back this term as we're not sure we're going to end up with a successful bid that is within a decent price range.?

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter