

Date: February 11, 2025

To: **Mayor and Council.**

Name and title: Blake McIntosh, Director of Civic Operations

Subject: Lheidli T'enneh Memorial Park Playground Renewal Update

Attachment(s): LTMP Playground Support Letter – From Lheidli T'enneh

Recommendation(s):

1. That Council APPROVE the addition of the capital project “Lheidli T'enneh Memorial Park Playground Renewal” to the financial plan for a budget of \$3,000,000 with funding from the Endowment Fund Reserve as detailed in the report dated February 11, 2025 from the Director of Civic Operations titled “Lheidli T'enneh Memorial Park Playground Renewal Update”.

Purpose:

To present Council with new information on the capital renewal project to replace the existing playground at Lheidli T'enneh Memorial Park (LTMP).

Strategic Priorities:

The proposed Lheidli T'enneh Memorial Park Playground Renewal capital project supports the myPG goals of Sustainable Infrastructure and Organizational excellence.

Background:

Lheidli T'enneh Memorial Park is the premiere park and public gathering space in Prince George, attracting tens of thousands of residents and tourists annually. A playground safety audit in 2021 recommended that reinvestment is necessary and should be a top priority for the City of Prince George. The playground at LTMP was installed in 2000 and unfortunately had reached the end of its useful life and was removed by Park staff late October 2024.

In April of 2024 Park staff began phase one of the LTMP Playground Renewal Project by selecting a playground manufacturer to work with. City staff have partnered with Canadian Recreation Solutions to design a playground that is 100% representative of the unique geography and diverse culture of Prince George.

Phase two of the LTMP Playground Renewal Project is now being presented for funding consideration with the installation of the new equipment scheduled for this summer.

Discussion:

The entirety of the Lheidli T'enneh Memorial Park is a protected archaeological site that requires archaeological monitoring and site mitigation obligations under the Heritage Conservation Act. Considering the high archaeological sensitivity and cultural value of the area, innovative construction techniques will be employed to minimize earthwork and unnecessary disturbances.

Following the removal of the old playground equipment in late October, Stantec Consulting used electromagnetic (EM) and ground penetrating radar (GPR) to complete a geophysical survey of the playground area. The results of that assessment did not identify areas with characteristics consistent with cemetery burials in terms of orientation and sizing, but did identify eight areas of interest with archaeological evidence of past human occupation and activity. Stantec Consulting explained the results of this assessment to both City staff and band members from the Lheidli T'enneh Nation during a meeting February 11th. Attached to this report is a support letter from Chief Logan fully endorsing this new playground project at Lheidli T'enneh Memorial Park.

Financial Considerations:

The updated budget estimate for the new playground at Lheidli T'enneh Memorial Park is set at \$3,000,000. This figure includes all design, archaeological monitoring, site preparation, supply/ installation of play equipment and fall protection surfacing as well as a contingency for unexpected expenses. Council can consider a few options for funding:

1. Fund as internal debt through the Endowment Fund. It is the goal of the Parks Division to have the new playground in place for the summer of 2025. The advantage this option has over external debt is it allows the work to start immediately without having to wait for the usual processes surrounding MFA External Debt. Monies borrowed from the Endowment Fund are repaid with interest from the General Operating Fund for the Endowment Fund to maintain the same purchasing power over time. Annual repayments over 20 years including 3% interest are estimated at \$201,647, or 0.13% to the 2026 tax levy.
2. Fund through the Lease-In-Lease-Out Legacy Reserve Fund. This reserve is for the lease proceeds from Fortis BC for the operation of the natural gas distribution system within Prince George as part of a 35-year agreement. Fortis BC executed their purchase option halfway through the agreement which resulted in a legacy amount. There is currently a resolution from Council that requests public consultation be done before committing these funds so Council would have to waive that prior resolution to fund this project. There would be no direct impact on future tax levies if this option is selected.
3. Fund through MFA External Debt. Elector assent is required for this option, which would delay the project from starting by at least four months. Annual debt servicing costs for 20 years on this option would be approximately \$241,683 or 0.16% to future tax year levies,

Administration recommends the first option through the Endowment Fund to avoid Council needing to waive a previous resolution or delaying the project past the summer of 2025 but can execute any option chosen by Council.

Summary and conclusion:

The playground at Lheidli T'enneh Memorial Park was in poor condition and no longer met the CSA safety standard requirements or expectations for the City of Prince George's premiere destination park/playground. A new custom design has been created that will deliver an engaging and inclusive playground experience while honouring the many icons, relationships and landmarks that have shaped Prince George.

Respectfully submitted:

Blake McIntosh, Director of Civic Operations

Prepared by S. LeBrun, Manager Parks and Solid Waste

Approved:

Andy Beesley, Acting City Manager/Director of Civic Facilities and Events

Meeting date: 2025/02/24