

REPORT FROM THE DIRECTOR OF RECREATION AND CULTURE

Re: Fire Tower Playground Replacement

RECOMMENDATION

That Council reallocate the funds for the Fire Tower Lookout Playground (\$101, 760) from the Capital Reserves in the 2024 Budget to the Westview Park Pavilion Project during the 2025 Budget process.

BACKGROUND

On May 3rd, 2024, staff presented a report to the Recreation and Culture Standing Committee regarding the aging and unsafe conditions of the playground at the Fire Tower Lookout. This report was a result of a recommendation from staff to close the playground due to it receiving 'unsatisfactory' grades in past safety inspections. Following the meeting, and in line with operational procedures, staff received internal direction to remove the playground for health and safety concerns.

Following the Parks and Recreation Standing Committee meeting, staff worked to receive park options from a designer and supplier with a wait time of 4-6 weeks, instead of the 12+ weeks that other suppliers had. To ensure accessibility compliance, staff presented two options for assessment by the Accessibility Advisory Committee on May 23rd, 2024. Given the urgency expressed at the May Recreation and Culture Standing Committee meeting regarding the lack of a playground at the Fire Tower Lookout for the 2024 season, staff presented an option approved by the Accessibility Advisory Committee to Council. This option aimed to meet a timeline for playground installation by the end of July, subject to Council approval of the contract; however, the report was deferred at the Council meeting on May 25th, 2024. The deferred report included a contract proposal for a playground costing \$102,425.20, covering the playground equipment, surfacing, and installation.

At the July 8th Council meeting, staff presented 5 options for council to consider and decide on what they want installed to replace the playground that was removed. The options that were presented were as follows:

Option 1 – Playground that offers accessible features, including more of a ramp design, wider steps and parallel play, all features that are not offered at a playground within the community. Upon approval, the estimated wait time is 4-6 weeks, with the installation scheduled to take place within 1-2 weeks upon arrival. The cost of this playground is valued at 102,425.20 plus HST.



Figure 1. Larger play structure with accessible ramps and features

Option 2 – Rube Goldberg Miracle Machines. These sensory type play structures are features that focus on sensory friendly play that benefit all ages. The installation of these pieces will require accessible surfacing. This piece of equipment was really well received by the Accessibility Advisory Committee on May 23rd, 2024. Each piece costs approximately \$10,500 plus HST, with an estimated \$5000 for the purchase of accessible surfacing (surfacing cost will depend on the number of Miracle Machines purchased and amount required to cover the appropriate surface area).



Figure 2. Rube Goldberg Miracle Machines

Option 3 – Ninja Ropes Course or smaller playground structure with Miracle Machine. The Ninja Ropes Course offers a cheaper play structure option. The ropes course alone is not accessible so additional

accessible features will be required. A smaller playground structure has a smaller footprint than the design in Option 1. Adding Miracle Machines to the park will offer features for all to participate at the playground. Designing a Ninja Ropes Course or smaller playground structure, with the installation of a Miracle Machine, plus appropriate surfacing would cost approximately \$50,000 - \$60,000 plus HST.



or



Figure 3. Smaller Play Structure

Figure 4. Ninja Ropes Course – (something similar to this, with a few less features to meet our budget)

Option 4 – Interactive Art. Similar to the art pieces installed around the community in 2023, staff would work with the local arts community to design and install interactive art in the location previously occupied by the playground structure. Depending on the size, style and material, staff would work with the local arts community to keep this project under \$20,000.



Figure 5. Example of interactive art project

Option 5 – No replacement. This option has no replacement playground at the Fire Tower Lookout.

During the Council meeting on July 8th, 2024, Option 4 was defeated. A resolution was passed that states “That Council defer this item to the September 2024 Recreation and Culture Committee meeting with more details on how to use the budgeted amount for the park more effectively”.

ANALYSIS

Following the meeting, staff initiated data collection using traffic counters in July. This data revealed an average of 70 vehicles per day visiting the Fire Tower Lookout. With the 2024 visiting season for the Fire Tower Lookout nearing its end, staff propose reallocating the funds originally designated for the playground replacement to the Westview Park Pavilion replacement instead during the 2025 budget process. Additionally, staff will continue to maintain and upgrade (i.e. increase picnic tables and seating areas) the Fire Tower Lookout grounds to enhance the visitor experience.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There is \$101,760 currently allocated in the 2024 Capital Budget for the Fire Tower Playground replacement. It is recommended these funds be allocated towards the Westview Park Pavilion replacement during 2025 budget process.

LINKS TO STRATEGIC PLAN

This project links to the strategic through providing services for the community.

SUMMARY

As the 2024 season concludes, staff recommend redirecting funds from the playground replacement to the Westview Park Pavilion upgrade. This shift will not only address the needs at Westview Park but also staff will focus on ongoing enhancements at the Fire Tower Lookout, ensuring an exceptional experience for all visitors.