



The Corporation of the City of Courtenay

Briefing Note

To: Council

File No.: 5335-20

From: Director of Infrastructure and Environmental Engineering

Date: June 11, 2025

Subject: McPhee Meadows – Project Update

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with an update on the project status, including the park access design, proposed theming and signage approach.

BACKGROUND:

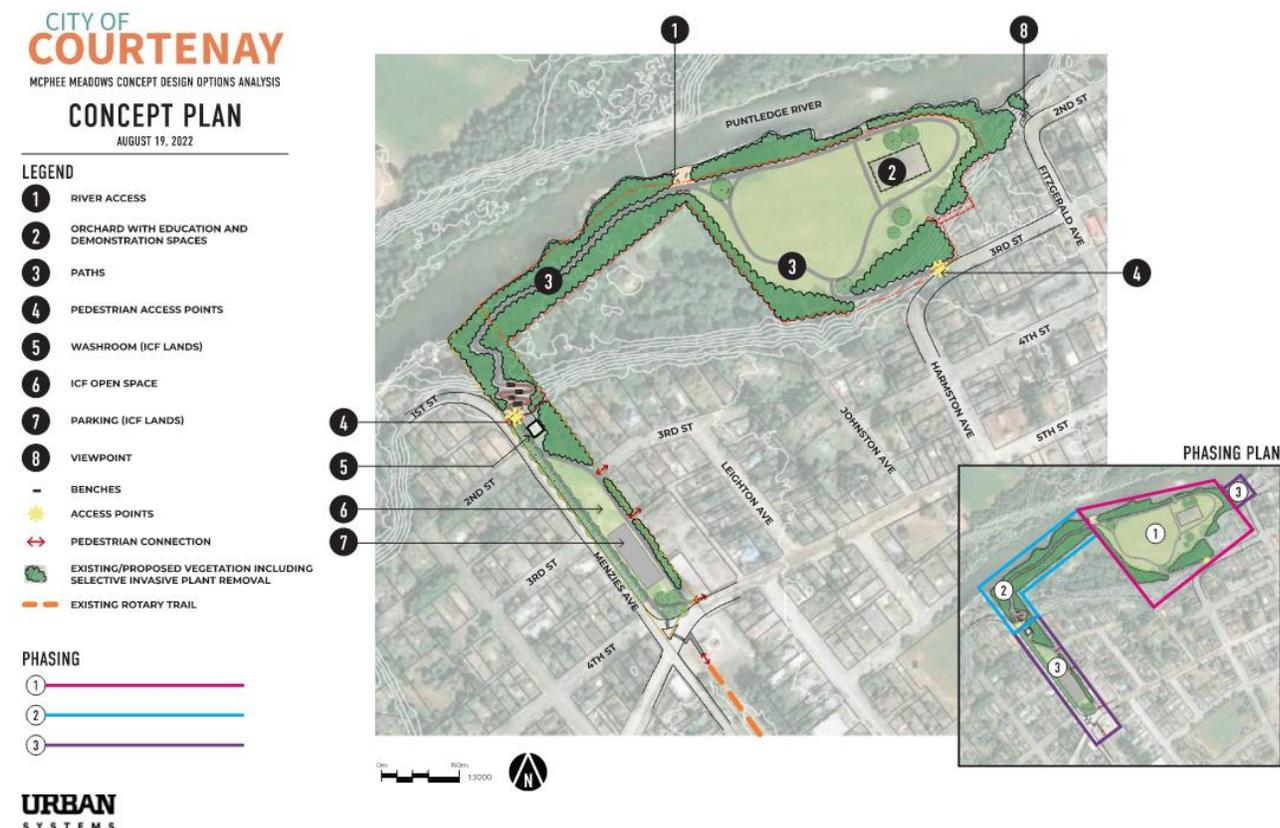
In 2011, the City of Courtenay and Nature Trust BC (NTBC) jointly received an 11.8-acre (4.78 hectare) land donation, through the Federal Ecological Gifts Program, from Robert McPhee, now referred to as McPhee Meadows.

The late donor, Robert McPhee, wanted to ensure this property would be maintained by the City as a public wetland park. The current conditions of the site do not allow for safe public use and therefore the site has remained closed since 2011.

At the August 29, 2022 Council Meeting, Council approved the following resolution:

THAT based on the August 29, 2022 staff report “McPhee Meadows Nature Park Final Concept Plan”, Council approve OPTION 1, and:

- 1. Approve the final McPhee Meadows Nature Park Concept Plan as appended in the McPhee Meadows Concept Plan Report (Attachment 1); and*
- 2. Direct staff to proceed with detailed design within the approved budget allocation in the 2022 capital budget; and*
- 3. Include a provision for a Class D detailed design and construction budget cost of \$3,350,000 for consideration in the 2023 Capital Budget and 2023-2027 Financial Plan to support potential construction in 2024, subject to a successful UBCM SPF grant funding application.*



At the July 31, 2024 Council meeting, Council approved the following resolution:

THAT Council direct staff to proceed with detailed design of Option 2, request a change in use for park from Environment Canada, notify the McPhee Family, the Comox Valley Social Planning/Accessibility Committee, Environment Canada, Nature Trust BC as well as the public of the decision and begin construction as soon as possible; and

THAT in the event the required approval from Environment Canada and other related regulatory bodies is denied, staff be authorized to proceed with detailed design of Option 1, notify the McPhee Family, the Comox Valley Social Planning/Accessibility Committee, Environment Canada, Nature Trust BC as well as the public of the decision and begin construction as soon as possible.

DISCUSSION:

Following Council’s direction, staff proceeded with the detailed design work and began preparations for the Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) Change in Use (CIU) application. The detailed design process commenced with several in-depth assessments of the ground conditions along the steep entrance slope and the surrounding area adjacent to the park access path.

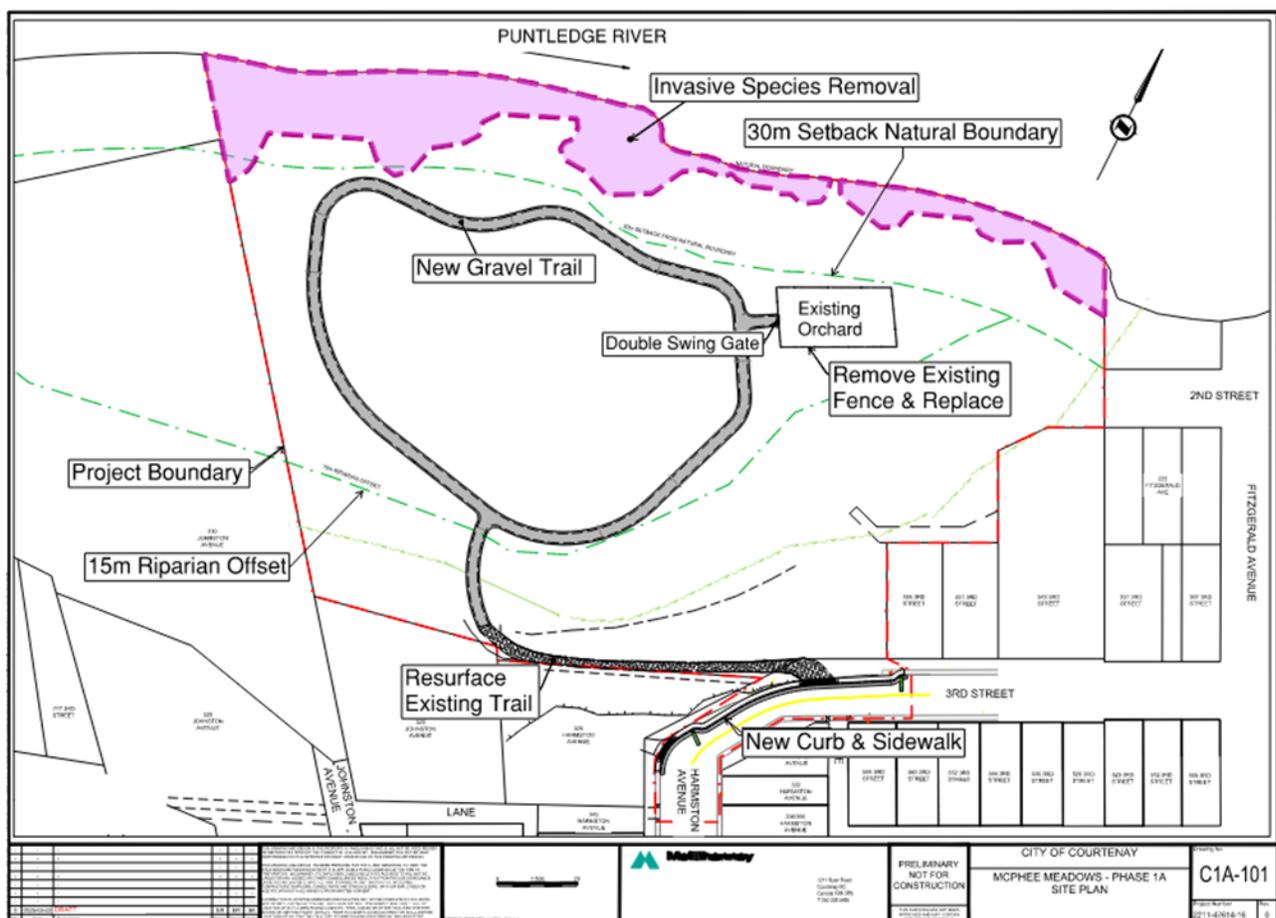
To construct the accessible path, a retaining wall was required to support the additional fill needed to achieve a more moderate grade. A geotechnical assessment was necessary to inform the detailed design of the wall. The investigation identified existing slope instability concerns that could potentially lead to slope failures, posing risks to both existing buildings along the slope crest and to park users below. Based on this

analysis, the geotechnical engineer advised against modifying the existing slope, as doing so would significantly increase the risk of slope failure, endangering public safety and nearby infrastructure.

In addition to the geotechnical assessment, environmental impact assessments were required as part of the CIU application process. A tree assessment was conducted within the proposed construction footprint to determine the number of trees requiring removal. The report concluded that, out of 71 trees assessed, 35 would need to be removed, 23 could potentially be retained, and 13 would remain untouched. The backchannel along the base of the slope was also evaluated for potential fish habitat, and it was determined that salmon use this area as a refuge during the spawning season.

Based on the information provided in the assessments, along with several meetings and correspondence with senior staff at NTBC and the ECCC program coordinator, it was determined that the accessible path design would not be endorsed by NTBC nor approved by ECCC. As a result, staff pivoted to Option 1 (15% grade, existing slope resurfacing), updated the CIU request and received endorsement from NTBC.

Project Scope



The Phase 1 scope of the project consists of:

- Project signage
- Connect the sidewalk and install 12m of steel guardrail fencing along road edge to the park access.
- Resurface 465m² of access path with gravel.

- Install 100m of concrete split rail fence along access path edge.
- Construct 4m wide by 395m long Meadow Loop gravel path.
- Install 150mm culverts within path footprint at low points throughout the path.
- Install post foundations for signage.
- Replace orchard fence.

Included in the project scope is the removal of approximately 8,000m² of invasive species removal such as:

- Himalayan Blackberry ~6,030m²
- English Ivy ~1,325m²
- Scotch Broom ~60m²
- Spurge Laurel ~750m²

The project scope also includes the planting of ~4,340m² of native species planting such as:

- Trees: Douglas-fir, western red cedar & hemlock)
- Shrubs: Salmon berry, Thimbleberry & Salal
- Herbs: Sword fern, bunchberry & honey suckle

ECCC has officially authorised the above changes to the property through the ecological gift program as of May 22, 2025. Staff understand the increase of public use can result in damaging the local ecosystem if it is not managed correctly and are committed to managing McPhee Meadows through existing bylaws and best practices to ensure the park remains a safe and well-maintained space. Measures such as designated trails, fencing, clear signage and enforcement of park regulations including restrictions on off-leash dogs, shelter / camping, and unsanctioned trail creation will help mitigate these potential ecological impacts.

Beach access has been reviewed and discussed as part of the project planning; however, it is not considered acceptable at this time. The proposed access falls within the riparian setback, where any work requires additional permitting which does not align with the current park construction window. This area has also been reserved for native vegetation planting as part of the environmental offset program. Additionally, the Province has raised concerns about the potential impacts of increased human activity on the fragile shoreline ecosystem, further supporting the decision to exclude formalized beach access from the current design.

Project Schedule

Construction tender is out now with a planned three-week tender period. Construction is expected to occur through the summer months with the park opening planned for the fall 2025.

Park Theme & Sign Selection

The project is currently named McPhee Meadows in recognition of Robert McPhee's donation of the property to the City and Nature Trust BC. However, the Puntledge River and its surrounding area are also of cultural significance to the K'ómoks First Nation (KFN), with Pentledge IR No. 2 located directly across the river from the site.

In recognition of this shared history, staff are proposing a signage and theming approach that respectfully acknowledges both the donor and the cultural importance of the area. The proposed approach includes a

primary sign displaying the park's name, McPhee Meadows, alongside an interpretive sign that shares the historical and cultural significance of the site to the K'ómoks First Nation.

To support this initiative, staff sent a letter to KFN requesting their involvement in the development of the interpretive signage. A sample of the proposed signage concept, inspired by the signage at Puntledge Park, is shown below.



Notifications to Interest Holders

In accordance with Council's resolution to notify key interest holders following the decision to proceed with Phase 1 of the McPhee Meadows project, staff have provided updates to the Comox Valley Accessibility Committee, the McPhee family, and the McPhee Meadows neighbourhood contact list. The Accessibility Committee responded positively, with appreciation for staff efforts but noting desires for more accessible parks and spaces in the future. Staff have also discussed the updates with members of the McPhee family and noted no concerns with the project as it proceeds other than discussions focused on maintaining the size of the orchard and replacing the existing fence—both of which are being addressed.

Phase 2 and Phase 3 Considerations

Phase 2 includes a trail through the panhandle (Fisherman's Trail) and a switchback connection between Phases 1 and 3. This phase is more challenging than Phase 1 due to limited access, required tree removals, and the trail's location near the river. These factors increase the environmental complexity of the work, and public feedback has highlighted concerns about impacts to this sensitive area. At this time, it is expected that Phase 2 and 3 are less likely to proceed but additional study needs to be considered by Staff. Staff will return to Council with an update on Phase 2 and 3 at a later date.

Phase 3 focuses on amenities such as washrooms, parking upgrades, and a viewpoint at 2nd Street and Fitzgerald Avenue. The primary focus is the property along Menzies Ave which is owned by the Island Corridor Foundation (ICF), and any work requires their approval. While not constructing Phase 2 could impact connectivity, the ICF lands still hold potential value for alternative park uses, especially within the context of the Harmston Local Area Plan.

POLICY ANALYSIS:

This project is supported by the Official Community Plan, Parks and Recreation Master Plan, and the Regional Growth Strategy. This project will achieve the following policies and objectives of the OCP:

Parks and Recreation

1. Parkland in the form of natural areas, open spaces, and outdoor recreation is of sufficient amounts, is well-connected, equitably distributed, and is of high quality to enhance liveability throughout the city.
2. Recreation amenities, services, and programming are expanded and enhanced to support increased health, wellness, and social connections for all residents.
3. Parks, greenways, and streets are better integrated to create a seamless and enjoyable active transportation system.
4. The parks and recreation system exemplifies leadership in reconciliation, climate action, equity, and community well-being through its services, programs, and partnerships.
5. Partnerships are in place to achieve parks and recreation objectives.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

The budget for all phases of the project from the current 5-year Capital Plan are shown below including the reallocation of \$400,000 from the Phase 1 budget to the 6th Street Bridge project.

Project Description	2025 Budget	2026 Budget	2027 Budget	2028 Budget	2029 Budget
Park Design and Development McPhee Meadows - Phase 1	\$1,475,100				
Park Design and Development McPhee Meadows - Phase 2 & 3		\$298,500	\$2,806,000		

Cost estimates for the construction of the park are currently being estimated at approximately \$1,400,000.

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS:

This project is led by the Infrastructure and Environmental Engineering Department who is working closely with Recreation, Culture, & Community Services and Operational Services. Consultants with technical knowledge specific to this work have been utilized in developing the detailed designs and cost estimates.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES REFERENCE:

This initiative addresses the following strategic priorities:

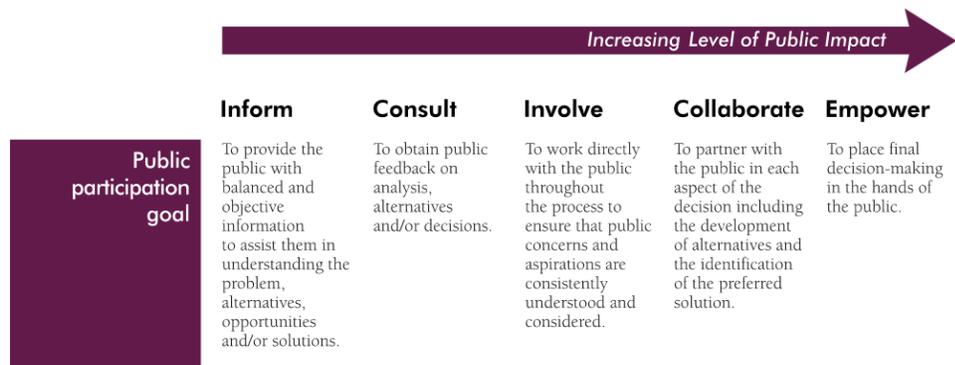
- Parks and Recreation - Optimize active public spaces to respond to density increases and increased park use
- Buildings and Landscape - Develop a local area plan for Harmston Avenue Civic Precinct

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT:

The foundation for the McPhee Meadows project was informed in part by public feedback gathered during the development of the City’s Parks and Recreation Master Plan. Through surveys, open houses, and stakeholder meetings, residents expressed strong support for increased access to natural areas, improved park connectivity, and the preservation of culturally and environmentally significant spaces. These community priorities have helped shape the vision for McPhee Meadows as a nature focused park space.

Community engagement efforts in 2022 included direct outreach to residents, a public open house, and the creation of an email distribution list for ongoing project updates. Feedback collected during this phase focused on desired park features, accessibility, safety concerns at the 3rd and Harmston corner, and interest in preserving the ecological integrity of the area. Community input played a key role in shaping the early design concepts and informed the City’s approach to park access and amenities.

Throughout the planning and design process, staff have maintained regular communication with the public. Project updates have been posted to the City’s website. Updates are also shared with a dedicated distribution list of community members who expressed interest during the initial engagement. This approach has ensured ongoing transparency and continued community involvement in the development of McPhee Meadows.



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RECOMMENDATION: THAT Council receive the McPhee Meadows – Project Update

Prepared by: Greg Talbot, ASCT, Engineering Technologist

Reviewed by: Adam Pitcher, ASCT, PMP, Manager of Capital Projects

Chris Davidson, P.Eng, PMP, Director of Infrastructure and Environmental Engineering

Susie Saunders, Director of Recreation, Culture, and Community Services

Concurrence: Geoff Garbutt, M.PI., MCIP, RPP, City Manager (CAO)