



# REPORT

To: Chair and Directors

Report Number: CS-BRD-390

From: Community Services

Date: April 10, 2025

**Subject: North Peace Regional Park – Operating Model and Funding Options**

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## **RECOMMENDATION: *[Corporate Unweighted]***

That the Regional Board authorize that the North Peace Regional Park’s classification be transitioned from a Regional Park to a Community Park, and that the costs for development, maintenance, and operations be paid for through the Area ‘B’ Community Parks Function; further, that the Regional Board authorize that an updated Use and Occupancy Agreement be drafted for a one-year term formalizing that the North Peace Fall Fair Society continue to operate the North Peace Regional Park.

## **BACKGROUND/RATIONALE:**

The purpose of this report is to outline considerations for decision making related to the operating and funding models for the North Peace Regional Park, also known as the North Peace Fall Fairgrounds (the Park). Previous Board discussion has centered around how best to fund, operate, and manage the grounds to ensure the continued safe use and enjoyment of the grounds for park users.

The Park is at a critical stage in its development. Based on public and stakeholder engagement completed in 2024, there is a desire to see facility and grounds improvements and increased public access to the grounds, both of which will require annual capital and operating funds. As such, there are important funding and operating model decisions required by the Board, as the owner, to ensure long-term success and sustainability of the Park.

A Master Plan was commissioned in 2024 to assess the current state of the Park’s facilities and operations and provide high-level guidance related to facility development, program development, and service delivery enhancements. The Master Plan was presented to the Board on November 7, 2024. At the time, the Board requested additional information on the costs required to implement the recommendations outlined. These high-level costs were presented on [January 23, 2025](#). At this meeting, the Board resolved that prior to an implementation plan being supported for the development of the Park, that the operating model and funding options be brought forward for decision.

Details regarding the status of the Park, an analysis of available funding and operating models, and four options for future development, are outlined below for consideration by the Regional Board.

## **Current Status, Operating Model, and Funding**

The Park is a beloved community asset and the home of the North Peace Fall Fair. The Park is owned by the Regional District and currently operated by the North Peace Fall Fair Society (the Society) through a Use and Occupancy Agreement (expired as of March 2025).

The Use and Occupancy Agreement describes the intended use of the Park as being for the annual North Peace Fall Fair event and that it may be rented for private or community gatherings, such as weddings and reunions. The agreement also specifies that the Society is responsible for maintaining and preserving the grounds in good order, and ensuring facilities are kept in a safe, clean, and sanitary condition. The Society must comply with all legislation and regulations, as well as obtain prior written consent from the Regional District for any alterations, renovations, or construction to the grounds.

The 43-acre parcel of land was dedicated as a Regional Park by the Board in 1979 for continued use as the home of the North Peace Fall Fair and a picnic site for residents of the area.

The Society has a long history of the use and stewardship of the Park, as evidenced by the annual Fall Fair, as well as other private rentals and public events. The Society invests a considerable amount of volunteer resources each year towards maintaining and programming the site. The Society accepts donations and in-kind support from the community that help to offset the costs of ongoing maintenance and operations.

Regional District costs are budgeted from Function 200 - Regional Parks and considerable capital and operating funds have been allocated through Electoral Area B grant funding sources. The Regional District holds both liability and property insurance for the grounds, provides an annual tent rental in lieu of the Adeline Kelly building, and contracts danger tree removal and invasive plant treatment on site. Grant funding from Electoral Area B has been most recently used by the Regional District to upgrade the Adeline Kelly Building to an F-2 standard, repair and upgrade the bleachers, improve accessibility and safety, and by the Society to evaluate the feasibility of repair of the Pineview Hall.

### **Regional vs. Community Park Classification Distinctions**

The important distinction between classifications of either a community-funded park or a regionally funded park is from which areas the investments in operations, maintenance and/or capital improvements are funded. It is necessary to determine whether the Park is more appropriately funded through the PRRD Regional Parks function or a Community Parks function.

A "community park" is typically a smaller park, primarily serving the residents of a local neighborhood or community, while a "regional park" is a larger park designed to serve a wider geographic area, often encompassing multiple communities and featuring more extensive natural features or recreational amenities, with a focus on regional significance rather than local needs. Because each community has different needs, what constitutes a community park can vary greatly; however, the primary role of a community park is to serve the recreational needs of the surrounding residents.

The 2014 Parks and Trails Master Plan defines regional parks as *'a "set aside" property or area that is significant to all people within the entire regional district in both urban and rural areas. Furthermore, a regional park within the PRRD provides opportunities for a variety of outdoor recreational activities-including camping (where appropriate)-and plays a role, where possible, in environmental and heritage preservation'*.

It is possible to transition the classification (and source of funding) of the Park from Regional Park to Community Park by way of a resolution of the Regional Board. Should the Board choose to consider these grounds as a Community Park, funding would then be requisitioned from Area B, and not through

a Region-wide service as is currently the case. The only established Community Park in the Regional District is Iver Johnson Community Park, located in Area E.

Costs for implementation of the Master Plan were presented at the January 23, 2025 Regional Board meeting. While providing estimates for capital and operating costs was challenging, due to the undefined nature of the projects, requirements for study, and collaboration with stakeholders, costs for all capital upgrades *may* cost upwards of \$7.5 million dollars.

Should the Regional District adopt a phased approach for implementation of the recommendations in the Master Plan, at a high-level estimated average investment of \$750,000 per year over a 10-year implementation period, the impact to taxpayers in both ‘Community Park (Area B)’, as well as ‘Regional Park’ classifications is outlined below. It is important to note that these figures represent the 2025 assessments, increased investment in staff time, combined with capital and operating investments over a projected 10-year period. Additional staffing may be required if all improvements are made.

	Tax Rate per \$1,000 of Requisition	Tax amount paid per year per \$250,000 assessed value
Area B – Community Park	\$0.1253	\$18.80
Regional Park	\$0.0220	\$3.30

**Operating Model Background and Considerations**

There are two operating models that can be considered for the continued operations of the Park. One is Regional District operation, such as the case for Blackfoot, Montney, Spencer Tuck and Iver Johnson. The other option is Society operation, such is the case for other community facilities, such as Kelly Lake Community Centre, and Goodlow Recreation Grounds. Any operating model adopted for the Park would see the PRRD as the continued owner of the Park, with responsibilities being allocated through agreement with the Society or PRRD staff. In either case, the PRRD reserves the decision-making authority for any infrastructure, development or capital and maintenance at the Park.

**Regional District Operation**

Regional District operation would entail maintaining the Park’s status as a Regional Park and transitioning operational responsibility completely to the Regional District. Regional District staff would be responsible for (either directly or through contracted means) all maintenance, regular, remedial and preventative maintenance, capital planning, and improvements for the property and facilities, programming and rental coordination, ensuring health and safety regulations are adhered to, ensuring public access to the Park, and inspections. Additional fleet resources would be necessary to support this service. The ability to expand fleet and staff is limited by the lack of available facilities to administer these resources in Fort St. John. Increased servicing would also be cost-prohibitive as resource sharing is not as readily available in the North Peace.

**Society Operation**

Should the Society continue to operate the facility, their scope could include:

- Ensuring ongoing access;
- Expanding public programming and event delivery, as well as passive and active use;
- Rentals coordination;
- Events;

- Fundraising;
- Promotion;
- Managing visitor safety;
- Maintenance of the grounds and facilities;
- Capital planning;
- Adhering to regulatory requirements (e.g., safety and health);
- Provision of input to the Regional District for capital plan development; and
- General contributions towards the implementation, and funding of the Board’s direction.

The Society is well positioned to respond quickly to local needs and preferences, while securing private funding and donations.

### **Options**

There are 4 options that define the future of the North Peace Regional Park that are included in the Master Plan and outlined below for further consideration. Determining the most appropriate option will define rights, roles, and responsibilities of the PRRD and park operator, provide clarity for future funding, and lead to the development of performance metrics to assess service delivery, quality and effectiveness at the Park moving forward.

#### **Option 1: Community Park, Society Operated**

The lead recommendation in the Master Plan is that the park is operated by the Society and funded through the Community Parks function (through Area B). This model reflects community preference, aligns with current service delivery, and serves to promote continued Society stewardship of the Park. The Park would be transitioned from the current classification of Regional to Community Park (i.e. Area B funded) and maintain the Society as the operator under agreement. Regional District staff will continue to manage the operating agreement with the Society.

The Master Plan includes results from extensive public engagement that evidenced resounding support from the public, particularly Area B residents, for the Society to continue to operate the grounds. The engagement also reiterated that the greater community appreciated the level of direct community volunteer involvement in the operations of the Park.

The recommendation for community park designation is further validated as, for most of the year, park use is focused on the needs of the local community (during seasonal open/operating periods). Further, the heritage elements and assets at the park are all representative of the local community and its agricultural history. As such, the Park decidedly focuses on the local community it primarily serves. Intensive Society involvement in the Park’s operations serves to create a sense of ownership and community pride, while also promoting local stewardship and contributing to the sustainability of services and the Park itself. The Society can attract private funding, donations, and partnerships and reduce costs.

As highlighted in the Master Plan, if the Society continues to operate there is need for the Regional District to provide support to the Society and to manage the Use and Occupancy Agreement. Regional District staff can work with the Society to support increased public access, programming, rentals, fundraising, marketing, volunteer recruitment, and community-engagement initiatives to leverage

passion, fundraising, and their position to work towards common goals. At a minimum, moving forward staff may spend approximately 50 hrs. additionally per year, or about \$3,000 annually on administrative support for the Society. Alternatively, should more support be required, a contracted Caretaker/Administration position may be considered.

**This is the recommended option for funding and operations of the Park and reflects the status quo operating scenario. As identified above, the transition to a community park would present a change of funding model and have increased taxation implications for Area B residents.**

Per the attached letter, the Society is in favour of transitioning the Park from a Regionally funded to a Community (Area B) Funded Park, as stated at a meeting on October 15, 2024, and in a letter presented to the Board on November 7, 2024.

### **Option 2: Regional Park, Regional District Operated**

This scenario would entail maintaining the Park's status as a Regional Park, but transitioning operational responsibility completely to the Regional District, and not renewing the current Use and Occupancy Agreement with the Society. The Park would be able to remain available for use as the site of the North Peace Fall Fair and any other public events would continue to be coordinated utilizing additionally approved staff time and resources.

It should be noted that the only period when the Park is currently utilized regionally occurs at each year's annual fall fair event.

If classified as a regional park, the Park would continue to be funded at a regional level, meaning that all property classes would contribute to funding the Park in the entire regional district. Should the Board pursue Regional District operations of the Park, there are several significant staffing and resource impacts to consider. Likely, Environmental Services would require 1-2 additional full-time staff positions to administer regular maintenance for the property, and Community Services would require an additional FTE position, or contracted position, to maintain service level delivery and offer public events and programming services. There are requirements for regular safety inspections, as well as staff oversight and servicing while the park is open, at least seasonally. Both direct and indirect costs of operating the facility would increase.

There would also be organizational wide impacts to taking on the operations, including the purchase of additional fleet vehicles, and increased space requirements for staffing. For consideration however, expanding fleet and staff is limited by the lack of available facilities to administer these resources in Fort St. John. This option could also be cost-prohibitive as resource sharing is not as readily available in Fort St. John and Area B as it is in Dawson Creek.

### **Option 3: Disposition of the Park**

This scenario would entail pursuing disposition of the Park. If deemed an appropriate course of action, the Board could pursue the donation or sale of the property to the current operating Society (or other entity) and divest full operational and management responsibility for the grounds to the new owner. It is important to highlight that the land is dedicated as Regional Parkland, and per legislation, to dispose of this land, region-wide assent of the electors would have to be approved before the land could be transferred. If this option was the preferred direction, the Regional District would no longer provide

oversight in the operation or management of the facility. The operator would still be responsible for all regulatory requirements, public safety, and upgrades to facilities as well as all costs to improve facilities. It is assumed that the operator would be able to apply for grants to support operations or events through the Regional District or other sources. The operator would continue to be held to all Local Government, Provincial, and Federal legislation (e.g., permitting, health requirements, BC Building Code, etc.).

It should be noted that there could be significant negative aspects associated to the disposition of such a well-loved and familiar park, as well as the increased financial and operating pressure put upon the Society. As well, the cost to dispose of parkland through elector assent is currently not considered in the 2025 budget, or 5-year financial plan. Should a referendum be pursued, costs could also result in a public decision to retain the park property under Regional District ownership, which would result in expenditure of public assent process costs to determine status quo. If this was to happen, staff would again be approaching the Board for a decision on the remaining options for operating scenarios outlined in this report.

#### **Option 4: Regional Park, Society Operated**

This park operating scenario describes a regional approach to funding the operations at the Park and would include Society operations of the grounds. If classified as a regional park, the Park would be funded on a regional level, meaning that all property classes would contribute to funding the Park in the entire regional district. The Park's current lack of availability for public drop-in/spontaneous use sets it apart from the Regional District's other regional parks. If the Park continues to be a Regional Park, there will be an expectation that it becomes more available for public drop-in/spontaneous use.

As noted above, a "community park" is typically a smaller park, primarily serving the residents of a local neighborhood or community, while a "regional park" is a larger park designed to serve a wider geographic area, often encompassing multiple communities and featuring more extensive natural features or recreational amenities, with a focus on regional significance rather than local needs. Should the park continue to be classified as Regional, efforts to increase public access, and improve active and passive recreational opportunities would need to be pursued.

#### **ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS:**

**Alternative Option 1: (Regional Park, Regional District Operated)** – That the Regional Board authorize that the North Peace Regional Park continue to be classified as a Regional Park, and that costs for development, maintenance, and operations be paid for through Function 200 – Regional Parks; and further that the Regional Board approve the Regional District taking on operations of the Park and coordinating the use of the park for the benefit of the public and for rentals and events.

**Alternative Option 2: (Park Disposition)** – That the Regional Board authorize staff to pursue the disposition by way of public assent the land known as the North Peace Regional Park.

**Alternative Option 3: (Regional Park, Society Operated)** – That the Regional Board authorize that the North Peace Regional Park continue to be classified as a Regional Park; and further, that the Regional Board authorize that an updated Use and Occupancy Agreement be drafted for a one year term formalizing that the North Peace Fall Fair Society continue to operate the North Peace Regional Park.

**Alternative Option 4:** – That the Regional Board provide further direction.

**STRATEGIC PLAN RELEVANCE:**

- Asset and Infrastructure Management
- Determine Service Expectations for all Assets

**FINANCIAL CONSIDERATION(S):**

Any new services that the Board chooses to provide will change service levels and will require additional funding for capital and ongoing operational expenses. As an additional consideration, completing many of the recommendations will affect other departments within the Regional District, which are not factored into current 2025 work plans.

**COMMUNICATIONS CONSIDERATION(S):**

Public, stakeholder, and Society communications will be undertaken once the Board has chosen a preferred direction.

**OTHER CONSIDERATION(S):**

A Master Plan was completed for the North Peace Regional Park (also known as the North Peace Fall Fairgrounds) over the spring and summer of 2024.

Once the Master Plan was drafted, a meeting was held with the Society, Area B Director, Area ‘B’ Alternate Director, and Board Chair on October 15, 2024, to receive the presentation, and to discuss the implementation of the plan. This meeting resulted in consensus from the attendees that:

- It would be beneficial for the Park to be transitioned from a regionally funded park to an Area B-funded community park to reflect the special importance of the facility to Area B residents;
- It would be beneficial for the Park to continue to be operated by the North Peace Fall Fair Society and that the Society’s scope should include ensuring access, public programming, rentals, events, maintenance, adherence to regulatory requirements, provision of input to the PRRD for capital development and contribute generally towards the implementation of the plan.
- It would be beneficial for the existing Use and Occupancy Agreement to be updated to reflect the commitments of each party to the Park and;
- That implementation of the plan be developed in association with the North Peace Fall Fair Society to clearly identify the annual priorities, funding strategy, operations, and site-wide capital plan.

Following the meeting on October 15, 2024, the Society provided the attached letter stating their initial preferences and support for the plan, which includes in summary:

- Support to transition to a Community Park (Area B-Funded), and continue to have the property Society operated;
- Capital Priority #1 - Adeline Kelly building upgraded with a kitchen;
- Capital Priority #2 - Potable water;
- Concern #1 – Logistics of public access, as recommended in the report;
- Request to the Regional District to consider a position (staff or contracted) to work with the Society to manage the Park; and
- Request to create a 3–5-year plan.

The Master Plan was presented to the Board on November 7, 2024. Following the presentation, a report was brought forward that recommended the Board review the plan and support an implementation plan being prepared based on the recommendations in the Master Plan. This report also recommended that the implementation plan was to be presented to the Regional Parks Committee, who will recommend action on a project-by-project basis to the Regional Board.

At this meeting, the Board requested that additional costing details be developed to improve understanding of the financial implications of supporting the plan. Further high-level costing details were provided to the Board on January 23, 2025.

On January 23, 2025, the Regional Board passed the following resolutions:

*MOVED, SECONDED and CARRIED,*

*That the Regional Board receive and authorize the “North Peace Regional Park Master Plan” as a reference and guidance document which provides recommendations for future decisions related to facility development, program development and service delivery enhancements of the North Peace Regional Park.*

And:

*MOVED, SECONDED and CARRIED,*

*That once the Regional Board has approved one of the four options that the Regional Board approve that an implementation plan be created and presented to the Regional Parks Committee for recommendation to the Regional Board that lays out by project, anticipated priorities, resources required (internal and external), timelines, project scopes and estimated annual budget based on the recommendations presented in the North Peace Regional Park Master Plan; further, that each project be considered and approved by the Board on a project-by-project basis as part of the annual budget process.*

Historically, the Lieutenant Governor in Council provided common service authorities such as water, community parks, or recreation, to regional districts by letters patent (often referred to as supplementary letters patent if enacted at some date after incorporation). Current authorization to provide a Regional District Community Park service is currently granted through such a Supplementary Letters Patent, which needs to be revised and updated to a formal Community Park Establishment Bylaw. This may happen before or after the Park is funded through Area B, if approved.

Attachments:

1. NPFFS letter to PRRD dated October 22, 2024

External Links:

1. [Expedition Consulting Re: North Peace Regional Park Master Plan](#) – See Item 4.1 on the Committee of the Whole Meeting Agenda dated November 7, 2024.
2. [North Peace Regional Park – Feasibility Study Recommendations, CS-BRD-352](#) – See Item 9.4 on the Regional Board Agenda dated November 7, 2024
3. [North Peace Regional Park – Additional Resource Information Related to Strategic Investment outlined within Draft North Peace Regional Park Master Plan, CS-BRD-375](#) – See Item 8.6 on the Regional Board Agenda dated January 23, 2025.