



The Corporation of the City of Courtenay

Staff Report

To: Council

File No.: 6120-20

From: Director of Recreation, Culture and Community Services

Date: June 24, 2026

Subject: Harmston Park Plan Project Update

PURPOSE:

To seek Council approval to proceed with the development of a preferred concept plan and detailed design for Harmston Park, in accordance with the process outlined in this staff report.

BACKGROUND:

At the November 19, 2025, Council Meeting, Council adopted the following resolution:

"THAT Council receive the November 19 Staff Report "Downtown Vitalization Local Area Plan Phase 2 – What We Heard Report" and "Harmston Park Plan – What We Heard Report" for information and direct staff to proceed with the next phase of public and interest-holder engagement."

The What We Heard report for Harmston Park (Attachment 1) included the following park vision statement:

"Design and develop Harmston Park as a dynamic community hub with opportunities for gathering and recreation, while enhancing the park's natural and green spaces. As an important green space, Harmston Park will support a growing community with additional amenities and infrastructure, such as potential street closures, to accommodate local events and programming."

The park vision statement was developed from feedback received on two concepts presented through the project community engagement process that included two surveys (Downtown Vitalization Local Area Plan phase 1 survey and the Harmston Park Plan survey), focus groups, and a pop up in the park event. The first concept proposed closing Harmston Avenue to vehicles (except emergency vehicles), a civic plaza for markets and events, a playground, community gardens, and open lawn area. The second concept proposed a smaller plaza, passive park, gathering space, a playground, dog park, and open lawn area.

As summarized in the What We Heard report, the following key themes were revealed:

- Equitable and accessible access and inclusive park features
 - Improve accessible transportation (walking paths, transit, parking)
 - Design inclusive infrastructure (seating, play areas, washrooms)
 - Support unhoused individuals using the park
 - Expand playgrounds,
 - Especially develop youth-focused and inclusive spaces (e.g., 2SLGBTQIA+)
 - Provide multigenerational programming opportunities
- Cultural and community gathering spaces
 - Create spaces for events, performances, and social interaction
 - Include features like stages, food trucks, cafés, and gathering areas
 - Support Indigenous cultural expression and land-based practices

- Provide infrastructure (power, water, parking) for events
 - Consider closing Harmston Avenue for community use
 - Maintain and protect the community garden
 - Enhance safety (lighting, traffic calming)
- Green and natural spaces
 - Preserve trees, natural areas, and shaded spaces
 - Limit hardscape; prioritize permeable, green surfaces
 - Integrate nature-based play and unstructured recreation
 - Reduce noise and light impacts through natural design
- Integration with a growing neighbourhood
 - Ensure equitable access as population grows
 - Balance new development with existing neighbourhood character
 - Address impacts on nearby residents (e.g., noise)
 - Confirm infrastructure capacity (e.g., water systems)
 - Reflect local culture and identity in public spaces

DISCUSSION:

With the initial community engagement phase of the Harmston Park Plan completed, the next step is to utilize the feedback to inform a preferred concept plan, leading to a detailed design planning process for Harmston Park. It was expected that the next phase of work to develop a preferred concept plan and proceed to detailed design would occur this year, following the completion of the Downtown Vitalization Local Area Planning (DVLAP).

As Council was informed through an earlier briefing note from Development Services, although currently delayed, the DVLAP project will be entering into its third and final phase in 2027.

Considering the extensive community feedback utilized to develop the City strategic plans identified in the policy section of this staff report and the feedback received to date to develop a vision for Harmston Park, there is reasoning to move forward with the development of the Harmston park plan and diverge from the DVLAP process. As such, staff are recommending that the Harmston Park Plan process continue separately from the DVLAP process. This is further demonstrated through the proposed scope and methodology of developing the Harmston Park Plan as outline below.

Scope of Harmston Park Plan

Staff will engage a consultant to develop the preferred Harmston Park concept plan that will include:

- Review of the City's background strategic documents to ensure the proposed preferred concept plan is in alignment with City policy including but not limited to the Official Community Plan (OCP), Parks and Recreation Master Plan (PRMP), *Let's Play, Courtenay!* Park Playground Design Standards, and the draft DVLAP to date.
- Consideration of feedback received through the DVLAP / Harmston Park Plan engagement process from 2025 captured in the What We Heard summaries.
- A public open house event and a check-in survey with the community after a draft preferred concept plan has been developed to ensure that the proposed plan reflects the emerging directions received through the earlier engagement process.

- Several online check-in focus group sessions with interest holders including food security, Comox Valley Farmers' Market, arts and culture, and equity priority support organizations.
- The feedback received from the check-in public survey, public open house, and focus group sessions, as well as how the proposed preferred concept plan aligns with community feedback, will be summarized in a What We Heard report.
- A phased approach to the implementation of the proposed Harmston Park Plan that includes class D cost estimates to inform the 2027-2031 capital financial plan.

The above proposed scope of the project aligns with the park planning recommendations outlined in the PRMP for developing a community park plan.

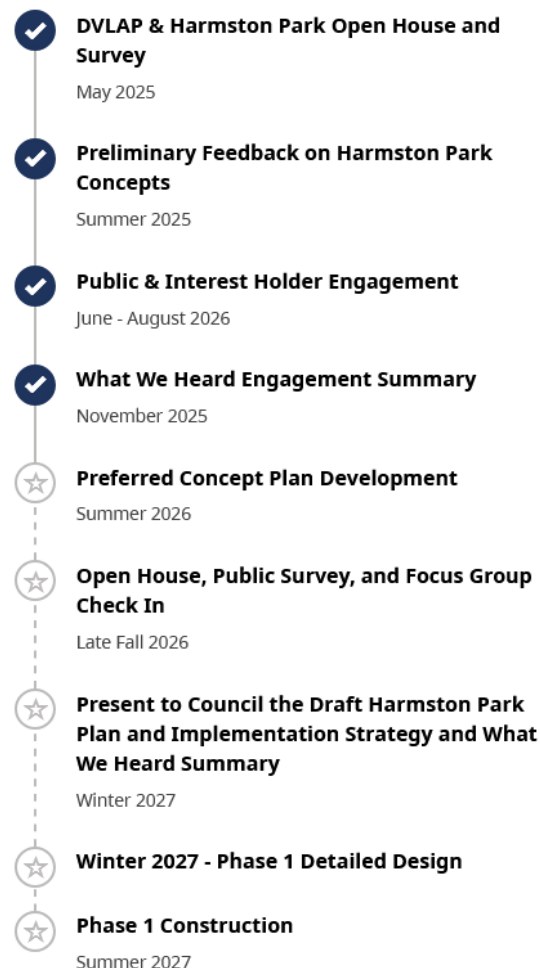
It is important to note that although the Harmston Park Plan project will proceed ahead of the DVLAP Phase 3, staff will ensure that the draft preferred concept plan aligns with the most up to date draft DVLAP by consulting with the DVLAP project staff and ensuring that the alignment is captured and presented in a future staff report to Council before the final plan is recommended for adoption.

Project Timeline:

The proposed timeline for this project is summarized below in Figure 1:

Figure1: Harmston Park Project Timeline

Timeline



Next Steps:

Should Council direct staff to proceed with the Harmston Park Project, staff will proceed with a procurement process to engage a qualified consultant to lead this work. Staff anticipate a preferred concept plan will be developed in fall 2026 and check in consultation will occur late fall 2026. Staff will return to Council to present the draft preferred concept plan and What We Heard report by early 2027. Detail design would proceed after the adoption of a preferred concept plan.

POLICY ANALYSIS:

Official Community Plan Bylaw No. 3206, 2026

- There is OCP policy support for the vision and programmatic themes identified for the Harmston Park Plan in the following chapters: Building and Landscapes, Parks and Recreation, and Social Infrastructure.

Parks and Recreation Masterplan (PRMP), 2019

- The proposed concept plans and proposed park programmatic themes align with design guidelines identified in section 3.2.1 and 3.2.2 of the PRMP.
- The development of Harmston Park is identified in the PRMP as a strategy to help meet parkland needs in areas of increasing density and listed in section 3.2.5 as a capital community park development project.

Let's Play Courtenay! Park Playground Design Standards, 2024 (PPDS)

- Recommendations for standard elements and special elements to be considered in community parks are supported by identified key themes
- Community engagement process for this park plan is supported by the PPDS

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

The following project budget has been included in the 2026-2030 Capital Financial Plan. The current \$1.2 million dollar budget is a placeholder as a Class D cost estimate is determined through the park planning process. The implementation of the park plan will likely require a phased implementation that is subject to funding availability. Otherwise, it is anticipated there will be a significant capital cost to construct all proposed phases at once.

Table 1: Capital Budget for the Harmston Park Plan

Project Stage	Description	Budget Amount	Funding Source
Phase 1	Harmston Park Plan – Preferred Concept Plan and Detail Design	\$125,000 (2026)	Growing Communities Reserve
	Phase 1: Harmston Park Development Construction of playground and youth amenities	\$700,000 (2027) <u>\$500,000 (2027) New Playground</u> \$1,200,000 Total	\$200,000 Park Amenity Reserve \$500,000 Growing Communities Reserve <u>\$500,000 General Taxation</u> \$1.2M (Phase 1: Park Development)

Future Phases	Detailed Design and Construction of Future Phases of Harmston Park Plan	TBD	TBD
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ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS:

The Harmston Park Plan is being led by the Recreation, Culture and Community Services Department with input from other internal departments with overlapping service areas.

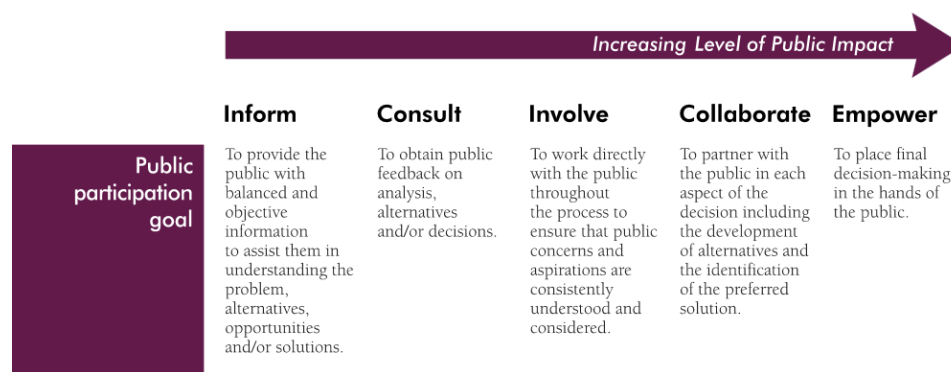
STRATEGIC PRIORITIES REFERENCE:

This initiative addresses the following strategic priorities:

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

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT:

The community engagement activities for the Harmston Park Plan project will fall on the consult level of the public participation based on the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation.



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OPTIONS:

1. THAT Council direct staff to proceed with the Harmston Park Plan project ahead of the final Downtown Vitalization Local Area Plan as detailed in the staff report "Harmston Park Plan Project Update," dated June 24, 2026.
2. THAT Council provide alternative direction to staff.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Harmston Park Plan – What We Heard Report November 19, 2025

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