

NO: R236

COUNCIL DATE: **NOVEMBER 25, 2013**

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## REGULAR COUNCIL

TO: **Mayor & Council** DATE: **November 18, 2013**  
FROM: **General Manager, Parks, Recreation and Culture** FILE: **6140 - 20/DH**  
SUBJECT: **Darts Hill Garden Park**

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## RECOMMENDATION

The Parks, Recreation and Culture Department recommends that Council:

1. receive this report as information; and
2. instruct the City Clerk to forward a copy of this report and the related Council resolution to the Darts Hill Garden Park Conservancy Trust as information.

## INTENT

The purpose of this report is to provide information regarding the resources that are applied to the on-going upkeep of Darts Hill Garden Park and to respond to requests by a delegation of the Darts Hill Garden Park Conservancy Trust Society who appeared before Council-in-Committee on September 23, 2013.

## BACKGROUND

Francisca and Edwin Darts purchased approximately 50 acres of property on the corner of Coast Meridian Road and 168<sup>th</sup> Street in 1943. Over the decades they developed the property first into orchards and hay fields, and later into a world-renowned garden. Over time, they sold off all but 7.5 acres of the land.

When Edwin's health began to fail in approximately 1992, Mr. and Mrs. Darts decided to bequeath their remaining 7.5 acre garden to the City. In 1994, they entered into a 999 year Trust Agreement with the City to allow the City to manage the gardens on behalf of all Surrey residents. Edwin passed away in the same year.

In 1996, the City acquired an extra 15 acres adjacent to the original site, bringing the total acreage for what is now known as the Darts Hill Garden Park to 22.5 acres. Working closely with Mrs. Darts, the City developed a Master Plan for the Park which included a parking lot, washroom building and accessible trails through the garden. These improvements have been in place for more than a decade. Throughout this time, Francisca continued to live on the property with a Lease for Life. Out of consideration for her privacy, Darts Hill Garden was opened to the public only on special occasions and by means of guided tours.

The City worked with Francisca, her close friends and her advisors to develop the Darts Hill Garden Policy, which was adopted by Council in 1998. The Policy established Francisca's vision for the Garden, and provides a framework for maintenance, operations and future development of the historical garden areas.

In 2000, the City worked with the Surrey Foundation (now SurreyCares) to set up the Darts Hill Garden Endowment Fund. Francisca contributed significantly to the fund over the years; much of the money flowed through to the City for special projects within the Garden.

As an article of the Policy adopted by Council, the City facilitated the forming of the *Darts Hill Garden Conservancy Trust Society* ("the Society"), which was incorporated in 2001. The Society's volunteers provide guided tours for visitors, raise funds for projects within the Garden, propagate plant material to ensure rare plants continue, educate school children, and research and label plant material in over 48 garden beds. The Society works with the Parks Division in hosting events such as *Arts at Darts* and *Sounds of Summer*. The City annually appoints a senior employee to the Board of the Society to assist in guiding the activities of the Society on the site.

The City-owned property to the north of the historical 7.5 acres (1680 - 168<sup>th</sup> Street) was a former nursery. The land was rented until 2012 when the City took possession and cleared several decrepit buildings from the site. A new parking area has been constructed at this location for staff and volunteers who work at the Garden. Francisca's vision for the future included this area as a location for an educational facility where the Society, the Master Gardeners, The BC Landscape and Nursery Association, BC Horticultural Trades Training and students of other post-secondary horticulture institutions such as Kwantlen Polytechnic University can gather to learn hands-on plant identification techniques facilitated by the extensive collection of rare plants located within Darts Hill Garden Park.

The Garden is currently open for pre-booked tours that are led by the Society and is open free of charge to residents on select weekends throughout the spring, summer and fall of each year.

### **Delegation from the Darts Hill Garden Conservancy Trust Society**

On September 23, 2013, Nancy Oike, Chair of the Darts Hill Garden Conservancy Trust Society appeared as a delegation before Council in Committee to provide an overview of the Society's work on behalf of Darts Hill Garden Park. During the delegation appearance, the Society also made two requests of Council:

1. The Society has a vision to re-develop the pond at the Garden, with the cost of the re-development estimated at \$140,000. The Society is working towards raising 50% of the funds for the project (\$70,000) and has requested that the City match the Society's contribution; and
2. The Society is mindful that the City has many parks and limited resources, but to maintain the Garden in a manner that meets both the City's standards and the requirements of the 999 Year Trust Agreement, holds the view that additional staffing is needed at the Garden. The Society has respectfully requested that on-going funding for an additional full-time Garden employee be made available by the City to fulfill a role of providing direction to the development and operation of the Garden and to provide hands-on horticulture work in the Garden.

The delegation informed Council that the Darts Hill Garden Conservancy Trust Society (“the Society”) is an active, enthusiastic organization with a passion for Darts Hill and its unique plants. It has a mandate to preserve the Garden in the spirit of Francisca and Edwin Darts and desires to increase public access to the Garden so that the Garden can be enjoyed by all.

## **DISCUSSION**

Staff values the many contributions of the Society as they relate to the operation and development of Darts Hill Garden Park. The Society has recently worked to develop new alpine flower beds, is in the process of purchasing an expensive laser machine for developing plant labels for all the plants in the garden, oversees the work of volunteers that weed the gardens and carry out a number of other important garden programs.

With the recent passing of Francisca Darts, the Society has taken over the house and sheds, where they have developed a reference library for horticulture volunteers, provide training for volunteer garden guides and where they carry out propagation of rare plants.

### **Pond Redevelopment Project**

There exists in the garden a utilitarian pond that was created by Mrs. Darts in an area of poor drainage. The pond serves to hold back run-off so that the garden downhill from the pond is not eroded. The sides of the pond are constructed with concrete blocks, and there are old wooden rails around the pond to prevent people from falling into the pond. The pond is a breeding ground for mosquitoes as it does not have an aeration system.

It was always an interest of Francisca’s to renovate the pond so that it functioned more effectively for storm water management, was aesthetically pleasing, and could be used to showcase aquatic plants. An interesting design has been developed for the pond, and the cost has been estimated at approximately \$140,000. Staff holds the view that this is an important project, as re-development of this feature will allow improved drainage in the Garden. Poor drainage has been a problem in the Garden for some years, and is leading to decline or mortality of many of the feature plants of the Garden. The new pond design will create an exciting feature in the Garden, and will further honour the legacy left by Francisca and Edwin Darts.

Staff have identified \$70,000 in funding in 2014 from the Park Development Capital Budget to match the contribution from the Society. It is anticipated that the Society will be able to raise the funds through a Pond Re-development Campaign, which will include individual philanthropic gifts and possible funding from the Darts Hill Endowment Fund of SurreyCares (the Surrey Foundation). If sufficient funds can be raised, City staff will manage the pond re-development project.

### **Additional Staffing**

For a number of years after Darts Hill was given to the City, Francisca Darts continued to work in the Garden each day, and directed the work of a contractor engaged by the City to assist her. Later, when she was no longer able to work in the Garden, the City increased the hours of contracted services, and provided supplemental horticulture labour in the Garden from within the ranks of existing staff. Through the 2008 Operating Budget process, funding was allocated for an additional horticulture position to be shared between Darts Hill Garden Park and The Glades. Presently, between full-time regular staff and seasonal help, the City allocates the equivalent of 1.6

full-time positions in support of the Garden, supplemented by some contracted services. There are no staff working full time at Darts Hill Garden Park but rather staff responsible for horticultural duties are shared across several parks and civic facilities in the south part of Surrey.

During its deliberations, Council suggested that a business plan should be developed for the operation of the Garden Park and that staff should investigate whether a tea house or some other similar facility could be developed in the park to assist in providing funding for the operation of the Garden. In this regard, in 2014 staff will work with the Society to Update the Master Plan for Park and will carry out a feasibility study related to the potential for a revenue-producing facility in the Park. Since some additional support at the Garden would be useful in the context of the City addressing its obligations under the Trust Agreement and to provide more consistency and expertise in operating and developing the Garden, staff will be guided by the updated Master Plan and the feasibility study once they are completed in relation to the development in 2014 of the 2015-2019 Five-Year Financial Plan, which will include consideration of additional resources for the Darts Hill Garden Park.

## **SUSTAINABILITY CONSIDERATIONS**

Improvements to the pond at Darts Hill Garden Park will assist the City in achieving Goal SC-9 of the Sustainability Charter, which is *“Incorporate high quality design and beauty...in the public realm and the built environment.”*

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the above discussion, it is recommended that Council:

- receive this report as information; and
- instruct the City Clerk to forward a copy of this report and the related Council resolution to the Darts Hill Garden Park Conservancy Trust as information.

Laurie Cavan  
General Manager,  
Parks, Recreation and Culture