

NO: **R184**

COUNCIL DATE: **OCTOBER 20, 2014**

REGULAR COUNCIL

TO: **Mayor & Council**

DATE: **October 16, 2014**

FROM: **General Manager, Parks, Recreation and Culture** FILE: **0640-01**

SUBJECT: **Vancouver Whitecaps FC: Proposal to Establish a USL Pro League Team**

RECOMMENDATION

The Parks, Recreation and Culture Department recommends that Council:

1. Receive this report as information;
2. Authorize staff to negotiate an Operating Agreement with the Whitecaps USL PRO team for the use of the Newton Athletic Park Field No. 1 for the 2015 and 2016 seasons, as more fully outlined in this report;
3. Recommend to the Finance Committee that \$214,000 be included in the 2015 Capital Budget to purchase 3 tow-behind mobile bleachers and to develop new concrete surfaces and fencing at Newton Athletic Park, as generally described in this report; and
4. Direct staff to conduct feasibility study for a permanent stadium that could serve the needs of professional soccer, other sports and events, and report back to Council with the results.

INTENT

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with information regarding a proposal from the Vancouver Whitecaps FC (“the Whitecaps”) to locate a United Soccer League (USL) Pro league franchise in the City of Surrey, and to secure Council’s authorization to negotiate an Operating Agreement with Whitecaps for the 2015 and 2016 season. The report will also outline steps to proceed with a feasibility study for the future development of stadium.

BACKGROUND

Surrey staff met with representatives of the Whitecaps to explore the opportunity of finding a home park for a Whitecaps’ USL Pro team in the City of Surrey.

The USL Pro league is a North American men’s professional soccer league below the Major League Soccer (MLS), essentially supplying farm teams for the MLS. The USL Pro league has 20 clubs and is growing rapidly. The Whitecaps would be the second major league team with a USL Pro franchise, after the LA Galaxy launched their program this season. USL Pro teams play 28 matches from March through September, of which 14 matches will be played at home. It is anticipated that the majority of the games will be held on weekend afternoons and early evenings.

The Whitecaps vision is to be a champion club on and off the soccer pitch. They hope to build a successful USL team with the goal of playing by the Spring of 2015. The Whitecaps believe that this will allow for the growth in the sport of soccer in the local community and lower mainland. This proposed team will act as a bridge between Whitecaps youth programming and the major league soccer team. The Whitecaps have suggested that it will be a significant community asset that residents, businesses and visitors can be proud of for years to come. Currently the Whitecaps are looking for a long term partnership with a community that can offer:

- Minimum of 3,500 seat stadium, with ability to expand to 5,000 seats, with the majority of the seating to be covered;
- Facility with controlled access;
- Broadcast-level lighting;
- Video board and control room;
- Public address system and scoreboard;
- Minimum of two team dressing rooms and permanent Whitecaps storage area; and
- 500 parking stalls.

Sport Tourism Strategy Considerations

This initiative is in alignment with Surrey's Sport Tourism Strategy, developed to advance Surrey as a leader in the sport tourism industry, maximizing both economic benefits and sport development opportunities. The goal of the strategy is to:

- *initiate the long term planning for stadium development in Surrey during 2013/14; which will advocate for larger and better sport facilities benefitting both residents and sport tourism; and*
- *implement the Build Surrey Program to deliver sport facilities that provide more hosting opportunities.*

In addition to the Sport Tourism Strategy, one of the recommendations from the 2008-2017 Parks, Recreation and Culture Strategic Plan states the following:

- *SW-6: the City of Surrey should work with different organizations to develop other facilities and spaces (e.g. Stadium, Performing Arts Centre)*

Surrey staff is currently exploring the benefits, impacts and feasibility of allocating a home park for the launching of a USL Pro franchise in Surrey. This exploration will review the costs of a two-phase implementation of the program. This will allow for a temporary location for the team for the next two years while working toward developing a permanent location for future years.

DISCUSSION

Temporary Location

Due to the compressed timeline, with the start of the season in March of 2015, staff evaluated the feasibility and costs associated with using Newton Athletic Park (NAP) as a temporary site for the USL's 2015 and 2016 seasons.

NAP Field #1 (KPU Synthetic Turf Field) is being recommended as a potential temporary site. This field was co-developed with Kwantlen Polytechnic University (KPU) at a cost of \$3.5 million,

with the City investing \$2.5 million in the field, and KPU contributing an additional \$1.0 million. Further, the City has invested several million dollars in other upgrades in the park, such as doubling of the parking capacity to approximately 500 stalls, developing concourse areas between the fields, constructing a new washroom building, developing non-sport recreational amenities and building both additional artificial turf fields & natural grass fields that have enhanced the Park's reputation as the best soccer park in British Columbia.

The KPU field is operated in such a way as to allow practice and games for KPU's varsity men's and women's soccer teams that are members of the PacWest University League. The existing premium soccer field, announcer's broadcast booth, broadcast lighting levels, parking, change rooms and score boards at this facility meet a large number of the Whitecap requirements outlined above, owing to the suitability of the field for use by KPU's in the PacWest league. The remaining issue is the provision of sufficient covered spectator seating.

The Whitecaps have requested a minimum of 3,500 spectator seats. At NAP Field #1 there are currently 620 permanent seats, including 500 that have recently been covered with a new roof. The City currently owns six (6) tow-behind bleachers that will accommodate 900 spectators that can be used to augment seating at the field, bringing the seating capacity to 1,520 without additional cost.

Temporary Location

The temporary option will accommodate 1,970 spectators, with the ability to increase the capacity up to 3,020 spectators if the White Caps require additional seating. The City would utilize the existing supply of six (6) tow-behind bleachers and acquire another three (3) sets of tow-behind bleachers at a cost of \$142,500. These new bleachers, together with the existing ones, would be deployed regularly at other sporting venues throughout the city, facilitating tournaments being hosted by community sport associations. The City would also convert the grass area north of Field #1 to a paved surface and reinstall fencing to improve sight lines to the field. A site plan showing the seating arrangement is attached as **Appendix I** to this report. The estimated costs to the City are in the table below:

Item	Units	Cost
Tow-behind bleachers (\$47,500/set)	3	\$142,500
Concrete paving (\$125/m ²) of the area north of KPU field	380 m ²	\$47,500
3 meter high black chain link fencing (\$90/lm)	76 lm	\$6,500
Other Project Costs		\$17,500
Total Cost		\$214,000

This option not only meets almost all of the Whitecaps requirements, but it also provides significant additional capacity for temporary seating at large tournaments being held at multiple locations in Surrey parks. For example, these bleachers would likely be deployed at the Canadian Open Fastpitch tournament, the 2016 World Cup of Women's Softball, at large field hockey events hosted at Tamanawis Park, at the Mayor's Cup soccer tournament, and numerous other large sporting events held annually in Surrey.

Impact on Current KPU Field Use

The KPU field is currently being used by more than 29 sport association groups throughout the year. The field has been booked 766 times in the year with more than 2,308 hours of usage. Although the majority of the bookings take place in the fall, in 2014 more than 26 groups, including soccer associations, school teams and private groups booked the field between March and September for 987 hours of usage.

While this premium field is heavily used, staff believe that community use can be accommodated elsewhere on the City's other artificial turf field during the 14 days on which USL Pro League games would be played.

Stakeholder Feedback

Staff has engaged in preliminary consultation with the key stakeholders.

Representatives of KPU have advised that they have no concerns with the proposed professional use of the KPU field, provided that the conditions of the Agreement between the City and KPU are observed, and that there are no impacts to KPU's practice and game schedule through the overlap months of August and September.

Staff also contacted representatives of the Central City Breakers FC, Surrey FC, and a spokesperson for three summer tournament groups, all of which are key community soccer user groups in Newton Athletic Park. The representatives have advised that a USL Pro League team playing out of Newton Athletic Park would help to raise the profile of soccer in the community, and would be welcomed, provided that there was not undue disruption of the operation of summer tournaments and other key soccer events carried out within the park.

Economic Benefits

Studies of the anticipated economic benefits accruing to cities that would like to host a USL Pro team have been carried out in the cities of New Westminster and Port Coquitlam. These studies indicate that there would be significant gross economic benefit to communities hosting one of these teams. To determine the benefit to Surrey should a USL Pro Team be established here, GP Rollo and Associates, Land Use Economists, have been engaged to provide a high level estimate of the anticipated net benefits. This work was not complete at the time of the writing of this report, but will be brought to Council when complete.

Feasibility Study on Partnership for a Permanent Stadium

Staff will undertake a feasibility study for a partnership with the industry for a permanent stadium. The study will evaluate a number of factors including: size, location, cost, potential professional sport tenants, potential community uses, naming rights, transportation links and potential development partners.

Staff will report back to Council at the completion of the study.

Development of an Operating Agreement

The City has many operating agreement with other parties. Examples include: a) Fairgrounds Operating Agreement; b) Wards Marina Boathouse Facility Agreement; and c) South Surrey Baseball Training Facility Agreement. The agreements generally describe:

- Term of agreement and renewals (if any);
- Types and locations of facilities to be used by the third party;
- Conditions for use;
- Times of use;
- Operation and maintenance responsibilities;
- Rental costs; and
- Insurance and indemnity clauses.

If authorized by Council, staff would collaborate to develop an Operating Agreement that meets the needs of both the City and the Whitecaps.

SUSTAINABILITY CONSIDERATIONS

This partnership will assist in achieving the following Sustainability Charter goal:

Socio-Cultural Goal #1: Provide a range of accessible and affordable recreation, cultural and library services that respond to the needs and interests of the City's diverse population, including children, youth, seniors, multi-cultural groups, families and those with special needs.

CONCLUSION

The Parks, Recreation and Culture Department recommends that Council:

1. Receive this report as information;
2. Authorized staff to negotiate an Operating Agreement with the Whitecaps USL PRO team for the use of the Newton Athletic Park Field No. 1 for the 2015 and 2016 seasons, as more fully outlined in in this report;
3. Recommend to the Finance Committee that \$214,000 be included in the 2015 Capital Budget to purchase 10 tow-behind mobile bleachers and to develop concrete surfaces and fencing at Newton Athletic Park, as generally described in this report; and
4. Direct staff to conduct feasibility study for a permanent stadium that could serve the needs of professional soccer, other sports and events, and report back to Council with the results.

Laurie Cavan
General Manager
Parks, Recreation and Culture

Appendix I – Newton Athletic Park Temporary Field Layout 1(1,970 Seating Capacity)

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