COUNCIL REPORT

Date: September 14, 2017
File: 4.10.2.2
To: Mayor and Council
From: Warren Waycheshen, CAO
Re: Access options for District properties on east side of dike

Recommendation:

Motion:

THAT three gates be installed at: a) the entrance to the pollution control centre Kitimat River outflow access, b) on the access just west of the Giant Spruce Park, and c) at the pump houses just below the Haisla Bridge on the east bank of the Kitimat River, at a cost of $25,000. AND THAT the gates be closed until spring 2018 or as directed by Council.

THAT Hirsch Creek Park be closed to vehicular traffic until the regular opening in 2018, and that the estimated cost of $15,000 to fix the road and any site damage be referred to the 2018 budget process.

Background:
With the recent Kitimat River and Hirsch Creek flooding staff have reviewed access options to District properties located on the east side of the Kitimat River that are used for (or to access) informal camping. As 14 persons required evacuation that put themselves and first responders in considerable risk the current system should be amended or reaffirmed by Council.

The areas of focus for this report are the access open to vehicles at (map attached under Appendix B for reference):

1. The pollution control centre access down to the sewer outfall,
2. The riverbank beyond (west) the Giant Spruce Park, and
3. The access to the water pump houses just below the Haisla Bridge on the east bank.

Short Term Options:
Gate the areas: staff recommends the areas be gated this year, with the gates closed for the remainder of the fall and winter, or as directed by Council. The attached map indicates the three areas to be gated at an estimated total cost of $7,000 – 8,000 per gate (including signage). If the gates are closed the public can walk down to the riverbank.

The rationale for gating the pollution control access is securing the site and the area has had substantial waste and garbage left on site previously. There have been people staying for extended periods and leaving a mess. Currently, the access is barricaded and impassable due to a wash out at one of the culverts, which Public Works will be soon repairing.
With the pump house access, restricting vehicular traffic reduces the risk of fuel, oil and other contaminants (i.e. illegal dumping) occurring. This is the source water area for the city’s water supply, reducing access reduces contamination risks. We do have authority under the drinking water protection act to protect this area.

Regarding the access via the Giant Spruce route, staff recommends a gate be installed just beyond the entrance to the Giant Spruce parking lot. This will provide some parking and turnaround area when the gates are closed. The public would then walk into the Crown land at the riverbank. As shown on the attached map, the District lands in the vicinity of the Giant Spruce extend west towards, but do not reach, the riverbank.

The benefits of a gate in the short term are restricted access as the riverbank is soft in areas and some vehicles may have difficulty accessing the riverbank site at this time due to the conditions.

In the long term, the gates may be left open at times and can be closed if there are fires, flooding or other concerns where access needs to be restricted.

If Council wishes to install the gate and leave it open, signage will remain indicating the hazard and staff will develop a protocol for responding. The concerns with this approach are the riverbank conditions may cause larger vehicles to get stuck and as the camping is informal we may have issues contacting people if high water is forecast. For example, some people may have an RV parked on the riverbank and be at work or out of the community and we have no way of contacting them.

If Council wishes to adopt this approach the following is put forward for consideration:

THAT three gates be installed at: a) the entrance to the pollution control centre Kitimat River outflow access, b) on the access just west of the Giant Spruce Park, and c) at the pump houses just below the Haisla Bridge on the east bank of the Kitimat River, at a cost of $25,000. AND THAT the gates be closed until spring 2018 at the pollution control centre and pump house accesses. AND THAT the gate at the access just west of the Giant Spruce Park remain open at this time.

Hirsch Creek Park: The flooding damaged the roads and by the time the work could be completed this year the gates will be closed for the season. Staff recommends the road and site remediation work, estimated at $15,000 be included in the 2018 budget and the park be closed to vehicular traffic until spring 2018.

Photos attached under Appendix A for reference.

**Long Term Options:**

Retain current system: if the current informal system of camping is retained it is recommended new signage be installed to replace the existing ones with information regarding the flood risk. The informal camping occurs on Crown lands and this has been an established practice that has been in place for many years. The recent events highlighted no party is responsible for monitoring flows and the recent events may occur again.
Formalize the current system: Council could “lightly” formalize the current system by establishing protocols for regular patrols and monitoring while still having informal camping and continue to not charge any fees.

The District could also work with the Province on the riverbank lands (as we do not control them) to develop a formal system by charging a camping fee and develop proper water, sewer and garbage services. If the system is formalized there will be increased responsibility to ensure the sites are flat and solid enough for camping units (which may incur ongoing costs as area is prone to high water in the fall and winter), along with a higher duty to monitor the river levels. The area may also be costly to develop or unable to accommodate sewer facilities. Staff suggest this may be a long-term solution Council may wish to consider, but could not be done this year.

Alternative Options:

1. If Council wishes to pursue any of the other courses of action staff will prepare resolutions based on the direction.
2. Another course of action to be determined through discussion

Budget Implications:

The Accumulated Surplus would be used to fund the 2017 expenditures.

Submitted by:
Warren Waycheshen,
Chief Administrative Officer

Dir. of Finance Initials
Appendix 2. Photos of Hirsch Creek Park road