

March 21, 2011

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**Parks improvements respond to local needs**

The City's recent parks upgrades and initiatives carry out community wishes and provide an economic and quality of life boost for Campbell River, according to a report presented to Council at its Mar. 15 Strategic Committee Meeting.

Public surveys in 2005 and 2006 revealed such strong support for quality parks that a Strategic Parks Plan was developed and approved by Council in late 2006. To support the plan, the City added a \$50 Parks Parcel Tax to local property tax bills for 10 years beginning in 2007, with funds earmarked for parks improvements.

*"The real success is the way we have been able to carry out the direction given by the community through the Parks Strategic Plan public consultation process,"* says Mayor Charlie Cornfield. *"The Council of the day listened to the community and had the vision to initiate the strategic planning process, and that initiative has enabled future Councils to respond to the desires of the community for a quality parks system."*

Parks Parcel Tax funding has also bolstered grant applications to federal, provincial and regional granting programs, winning the City external revenue to the tune of nearly \$2 million, explains Ross Milnthorp, the City's general manager of parks, recreation and culture. And money from external sources means projects, and the return on investment, happen faster.

*"When we use that combined funding to upgrade our facilities, we can welcome more tournaments and visitors to our community, which in turn generates economic activity. Facilities improvements also create jobs, and, of course, the efficiencies in new materials and technologies help us reduce long-term operating and maintenance costs, saving the taxpayers costs related to future upkeep of these facilities,"* Milnthorp says.

The numerous projects achieved to date came from a community wish-list that confirmed comfort and safety in parks as a high priority. *"Items that ranked highest on the list included the replacement of old playgrounds, improved playing field quality, washrooms in parks, and park amenities such as bleachers, garbage cans, benches, picnic tables and signs as well as community support for the completion of undeveloped parks,"* Milnthorp says.

A number of the projects were successes built on community partnerships. *"Working with organizations like Crush on the sand volleyball court and CR Minor Baseball and Minor Lacrosse to improve facilities for these sports teams builds capacity in our community and generates even more community support for these projects,"* Milnthorp adds. He cites the Baikie Island restoration project as an initiative where *"business and individual contributions to this project demonstrated tremendous community support for enhanced green spaces in our community."*

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