



Town exploring ways to create a beach on the waterfront

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A beach is an integral part of Sylvan Lake's culture, said Councillor Sean McIntyre while urging fellow councillors to support a motion directing town staff do whatever is possible to restore sand in the beach area.

He noted the lake level was recorded at its highest level last year but rising lake levels over several years have covered the beach. McIntyre added the current depth of water at the seawall prevents enjoyment by some people. "It's immediately chest deep on a walking toddler so it can also be considered a safety issue."

At their April 10 meeting, David Helmer with Alberta Environment talked about the lake level and provided options for lowering it.

McIntyre said when Helmer was asked why the town couldn't grade the sand to create a beach he indicated the town should submit an application.

"My proposition is to direct staff to make an application to regrade sand in and around the swimming area," said McIntyre.

"We can't do it the way we did before," said Betty Osmond, the town's chief administrative officer. "We used to drive our equipment out. We're going to have to think about what the issues are."

She added that the town's senior staff had discussed the issue recently.

Besides getting approval from Alberta Environment, they'd also have to get approval from provincial parks representatives since the beach area is under their jurisdiction. Ron Lebsack, director of leisure and protective services, was tasked with talking to them.

Osmond said questions include whether the sand can be moved, where it could be put, and the possibility of bringing in clean playground sand.

Councillor Rick Grimson then asked if the parks department would be asked for money to do the work since they have paid for the work in the past.

"A beach in front of the seawall would prevent more damage to the seawall, putting sand in front would protect their investment too," said McIntyre who agreed they should request funding.

"Isn't the water going to take the sand out?" asked Councillor Ken MacVicar. He added, "I'd like to see a beach just as much as anyone else. But are we incrementally getting involved in taking that area over? If we are going to do this, continue to ask parks, should we not at some point, as a council, have the discussions what the future of that area looks like and what the benefits are for the town. We're seemingly getting more and more ownership. We better be careful or we're going to get all of it."

Councillor Laverne Asselstine agreed a discussion is needed. "Several years ago I would not be in favour. But I agree we should take the step down that road and weigh all the pros and cons. I think we should be taking a hard look."

Mayor Susan Samson reminded councillors a consultant's report years ago that did an analysis of the town taking over that area. "They did a business case and the only way it was feasible is if we got Jarvis Bay Provincial Park," she said.

Earlier in the meeting Asselstine had asked staff to prepare a report on the various revenues and expenses associated with the town's involvement in the provincial park for doing such things as maintenance and tourism promotion (with Beach Ambassadors).

Osmond said with that information and some other financial data staff should be able to prepare a report for councillors.

In the meantime, McIntyre's motion was unanimously passed directing staff to submit an application for regrading the sand and ask the government for money to do the work.

Then discussion moved to a short-term option suggested by Councillor Dale Plante to put sand on the area on top of the seawall.

"It might be a viable option to have some beach area," he said.

"Again that talks about doing something in the provincial park," said Samson. "What about enhanced square footage (of sand) near the playground (in Centennial Park)?" she suggested, since the town controls that park.

McIntyre pointed out the town maintenance crew has been tilling the sand in the access area immediately east of the pier. "Historically that's been a pretty hard surface."

Lebsack indicated when the town took on the maintenance contract for the provincial park they started tilling that area but it's become extremely popular and becomes hard packed quickly. "That's the most realistic spot," he said of an area for adding more sand.

The idea of adding sand onto the land near the water's edge was left with staff to bring back ideas on locations and cost for a council decision.

