



River Access Strategy 17 Avenue/Cushing Bridge Launch Site December 19, 2016

Background

The boating community would like to be able to use this site, as it provides access immediately after the weir. Otherwise the next available access is at Graves Bridge, which would result in the inability to access a stretch of the river that is deemed to be 'world class' fishing.

This site was never built or intended to be a public access point. In fact, public use may not be in accordance with original Provincial approval of this site. In the past, some boats have accessed this site, without realizing it was not intended or approved for public use.

It is critical for Fire to have exclusive unrestricted access to this site as it is a primary launch to respond to emergencies. There is a heightened concern about this access as it is expected Fire will need this site more frequently because of the opening of Harvie Passage, which introduces higher risk water activities to the public.

Concerns with Granting Public Access

Calgary Fire Department with Calgary Parks has carefully considered the possibility of opening this site to the public, and have identified numerous issues.

The road leading to the launch site narrows from 8 metres to less than 4 metres in front of the Sobow condominium building. This would make it impossible for a fire truck and trailer to pass other boats on that road, who may be waiting to access the launch. While signage could be used to indicate that vehicles of any kind would not be permitted to stop on the narrow stretch of the road, past experiences has shows that the public do not always obey signage or direction from Fire. For example:

- At Shouldice Park, despite signage, users continually park in front of the launch access road and block the entrance to it.
- At 17 Ave launch site, on occasion groups have asked for just "one more minute" to finish their launch.
- The urgency for Fire to quickly leave a station is often undermined at Fire Station #1, where Starbucks customers tend to block the exit route

While the boating community may be compliant for such signage, it is very likely that the area would experience illegal parking by general users of Pearce Estates Park, who are unable to park at the Fish Hatchery parking lot.

Previous access to this site has been done without approval and therefore only some boats were using the site. However, if the site is made public, it is expected there could be a very large number of boats and trailers trying to access this site. This would create congestion in the area and nearby traffic circle, which would prevent Fire from accessing the site.

River Watch has been granted access to the site only because of their relative infrequent use of the site, along with a written agreement that outlines several conditions of access such as leaving keys in the ignition, no rafts on the ramps, no stopping on the road, no parking etc. Implementing these restrictions on general public would not be feasible as there would be too much traffic in the area.

Finally, granting any access to this site would limit Fire's access to the river, impeding their ability to fulfill their service delivery. If an incident was to occur, The City could potentially be liable because a decision which allowed limited access for Fire services was made.

Proposed Alternative

An alternate site has been identified approximately 3km downstream from 17 Avenue SE at Refinery Park and would still allow boats to access prime fishing areas. Refinery Park is currently undergoing cleanup of contaminated areas, but the proposed launch area is on the northern tip of the park where clean up is not occurring. A fence would ensure people do not enter the southern portion of the park.

The site already has a paved path to the river, which was installed by Water Resources in order to complete flood mitigation work. The site would require only the creation of a driving surface (gravel) and a concrete mat. Portable toilets could be used, and there is likely room for a small amount of parking. Approximate class 5 budget estimate to complete this work is expected to be approximately \$100,000. Calgary Parks will attempt to fund this in 2017.

This work would require Provincial and Federal approvals which are expected to be at least 6 months. It is hoped that work could be completed in the "fish window" between July 16 and September 15.

Consideration was given to open the 17 Avenue site until this work is completed, however the risk assessment does not make this a favourable option. Further, opening the site temporarily could create confusion and may raise expectations that this site is available even after the Refinery Park site becomes functional.

The 17 Avenue site is still considered as a long term option as a launch site, when funding becomes available to widen the road and implement other improvements that would make this a safe site for the Calgary Fire Department and the public to share.