

Report 11.569
Date 28 September 2011
File PK/14/01/02

Committee Social and Cultural Wellbeing
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Marines' 70th anniversary celebration - Queen Elizabeth Park

1. Purpose

To seek the Committee's endorsement of activities proposed to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the US Marines occupation of Queen Elizabeth Park

2. The decision-making process and significance

The matter requiring decision in this report has been considered by officers against the requirements of Part 6 of the Local Government Act 2002.

2.1 Significance of the decision

Officers have considered the significance of the matter, taking the Council's significance policy and decision-making guidelines into account. Officers recommend that the matter be considered to have low significance.

Officers do not consider that a formal record outlining consideration of the decision-making process is required in this instance.

3. Background

Following presentations from representatives of the Kapiti US Marines Trust (the Trust) and The Bike Trust (Kapiti) at the Social & Cultural Wellbeing Committee on 7 September, councillors requested that staff meet with members of the respective organisations to develop a plan of what might be done to commemorate the 70th anniversary celebrations due to take place in May 2012.

A meeting of officers and community representatives was subsequently held at Queen Elizabeth Park. It became clear that the Kapiti US Marines Trust is preparing for a high profile event next year, and is liaising with central government, the US Marines, the American Association and other community groups to make this happen. The Trust is keen to work with us on a plan for the event, and is prepared to contribute funds once such a plan is agreed.

The history of the Marines occupation is recognised in the Parks Network Plan, in promotional material and on park signage. The “Yankee Trail” was once a route that linked the historic Camp Paekakariki to Camp Russell at MacKay’s Crossing, and Camp MacKay on Whareroa Farm and the named trail was approved as a “projected future change” in the Parks Network Plan. While the camps themselves have disappeared, the more recent development of the MacKay’s Crossing area and Whareroa Farm mean that the Yankee Trail’s value as a link remains high, and that its reinstatement would be a living usable memorial to the US Marines.

4. Comment

There is a general consensus between the Trust and GW Parks that the anniversary presents an excellent opportunity to showcase the history and development of the park, including its unique role as a World War II US Marines’ Camp. While there is a deadline of Memorial Day 2012 (28 May) there is also scope to continue the partnership between GW and the Trust beyond that, to make the park “come to life” for visitors through improving its heritage and recreation values.

Since the meeting, we have been working with the Trust on several aspects of the project:

1. Yankee Trail improvement

The existing alignment enables a very basic level of service for walkers and riders. However, the route requires an upgrade if it is to meet the required standard to be used by a wide range of people for cycling and walking, protect the environment eg mitigate sand blowouts and involve low maintenance costs over its lifetime. This includes stretches where grade easing and surfacing improvements are needed. Staff and volunteers have mapped the route outlined in the map appended (**Attachment 1**).

Places of interest include the start/finish points, which are to be at the Marines Memorial on Whareroa Road and near the main picnic area on Wellington Road, at the Paekakariki park entrance, and the Marines Wetland.

Estimates of cost for the track improvement project come to \$72,480. This includes the cost of directional signage and interpretation, but excludes the input of GW staff and equipment. The main cost elements are the metal, fencing and equipment hire.

2. Marines Memorial

It is not widely known that a number of US Navy seamen drowned during exercises off the beach during the occupation. Plans for a new “Sailors Memorial” integrated with the current Marines Memorial site on Whareroa Road have been drawn up so that their contribution can also be recognised.

The group agreed that the current “huts” interpretation site should be tidied up prior to the event. Vegetation at the rear has been removed to give the site more prominence and the surrounding area will be re-grassed. Depending on funding, the site may feature a “mess hall” backdrop and new interpretation panels.

As most of the celebrations will be held in this vicinity next year, we plan to move the fence to provide more space.

3. Sailors Lookout

We are fortunate that a member of the Trust (John Porter) was a small boy in Paekakariki during WWII and is able to identify the site of the actual incident, around midway between the park’s southern entrance and Whareroa Beach. We plan to install a seat and an interpretation post closer to Whareroa Beach, which will look south towards the site of the incident and will have good access from the road. The lookout will be signposted from Whareroa Road and the tram terminus.

4. Memorial Tree planting

The Trust is keen to identify sites in the park that may be used for memorial tree planting activity, for the 2012 event and beyond. All agreed this is desirable, noting that shelter planting is needed at the park before “commemorative” species are planted because of the risk of wind damage.

For 2012, the suggestion is to plant trees in or near the Marines Wetland, to commemorate those Marines who were killed in the Battle of Tarawa.

5. Memorial Day celebration

The plan for the day is yet to be finalised but is expected to include:

- A powhiri involving local iwi
- Attendance by the New Zealand and US armed services, the RSA, visiting US Marines and their families, national and local politicians, tangata whenua, community and youth groups
- Music from the RNZAF Band
- An address from the Governor General
- The opening of a new memorial to the US sailors who died in our waters during World War II (including Frank Zallott – one of the survivors)
- The launch of the Yankee Trail and the Memorial tree planting
- A marquee providing lunch in the park and an exhibition space.

Greater Wellington expects to combine this occasion with our planned Arbor Day event, which will involve local schools and enable better use of our available resources. Approximately 600 people would be expected to attend.

Interpretation themes

Interpretation by way of signage or other structures will be a key part of this project. Several Trust members are researching the artefacts remaining from the Marines occupation of what are now QEP and Whareroa Farm, and which should be featured in interpretation. They have discussed this project with the Department of Conservation in relation to Whareroa Farm and secured DoC's agreement to continue an interpretation "theme" to relevant sites there. GW will be involved in discussions with the graphic designer to ensure the concepts work well within QEP.

6. Budget

The Trust has requested that GW provide staff resources to manage the project, develop concept plans and a budget, and coordinate implementation of the various tasks. GW agrees that this is an appropriate role and is proceeding on that basis.

GW has agreed to contribute \$3,000 towards the running of the event on 28 May. This funding comes from our current Arbor Day budget.

The Kapiti US Marines Trust has \$20,000 available to spend on the project, and is applying for more funds from community trusts and other sources. Once the results of funding applications are known and the various elements costed, we will determine priorities to be completed by 28 May and those to be introduced at a later stage.

Discussions to date indicate that tasks such as interpretation at the start/finish points for the Yankee Trail and directional signage, developing the Sailors Memorial and upgrading the Marines Memorial, creating the Sailors Lookout, planning the tree planting and the event itself will all be high on the priority list. Each of these projects will help "tell the story" on Memorial Day and raise further funds for the Yankee Trail upgrade.

7. Next steps

A detailed plan will be developed for the project implementation, confirming the funding sources and the various tasks to be carried out over the next six months before the deadline of 28 May.

5. Communication

A full communication plan will be developed as part of the project, identifying target audiences, key messages etc. Upon endorsement we will formally confirm our intentions with the Trust and advise other park stakeholders of our general intentions.

6. Recommendations

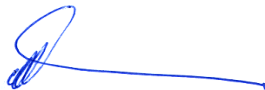
That the Committee

1. *Receives the report.*
2. *Notes the content of the report.*
3. *Endorses the activities proposed to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the US Marines occupation of Queen Elizabeth Park, in line with the available budget.*

Report prepared by:

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Report approved by:



Nigel Corry
General Manager,
Environment

Attachment 1: Map of route