

October 1st, 2008 - Unique park for seniors coming to area

By Joei Warm

DAWSON CREEK - Dawson Creek is among 18 BC communities that received funding for equipment for seniors' community parks last week.

"This gives us the opportunity to promote healthy and wellness for our seniors," said Measuring Up the North (MUTN) municipal liaison Duncan Redfearn. The ActNow BC Seniors Community Park Program fits with the mandate of MUTN and will enable improved inclusivity and accessibility for seniors.

The city applied for the funding earlier this year and will be receiving up to \$100,000 toward the purchase and installation of specialized recreational equipment designed to improve co-ordination, balance and mobility. The park will also provide opportunities for social interaction - a critical healthy living component for older people.

The actual dollar amount turned over to the city will be determined after the site is chosen and a better idea of what work will need to be done there is submitted to the province.

"We have a few locations in mind," said Redfearn. No decision could be made until confirmation of this funding was announced. Now that it has been, the city will look at its options and make that determination and they will be looking for some specific.

One of those things is "a location that will promote social, cultural and intergenerational activities," said Redfearn.

While they want somewhere close to existing seniors' resources, they do not want a location that will further isolate or segregate seniors.

The park is intended to be part of the community, and as such, the location will integrate seniors further into the community - one of the goals of both the ActNow BC Seniors Community Parks program and MUTN.

"These parks are a great way to support older British Columbians in exercising and improving their health," said Healthy Living and Sport Minister Mary Polak who made the announcement during last week's Union of BC Municipalities conference.

"We know that a significant demographic shift is on the horizon and we're giving local governments the tools to develop more age-friendly, accessible communities."

Like the rest of the province, Dawson Creek is dealing with an increasingly aging population, said Redfearn. One in seven Canadians is over 65 and that number is expected to double by 2031. The growth in the population of older seniors will be even faster, with the number of those 80 years old or more growing 112 per cent between 2006 and 2031.

The ActNow BC Seniors Community Parks are a priority action in the recently launched Seniors in BC: A Healthy Living Framework action plan for seniors - BC's framework to support older British Columbians to live healthy active lives. The Province has provided a total of \$1.8 million to this initiative and will be awarding grants to other communities in the future.

The communities receiving funding were selected based on regional representation and seniors' population. Other communities to be funded in this first round are Cranbrook, Kamloops, Surrey, District of North Vancouver, Courtenay, Nelson, Abbotsford, Richmond, Sidney, Terrace, North Cowichan, Kelowna, Burnaby, Vancouver, Nanaimo, Prince George and Oak Bay.

To read about other initiatives in the Seniors in BC: A Healthy Living Framework, visit:
www.cd.gov.bc.ca/seniors/PDFs/seniors_framework_web.pdf

MUTN program assists over 40 Northern BC communities and regional districts to develop livable, senior-friendly, disability-friendly, universally designed, inclusive communities for all residents and visitors.