

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

Date: October 7, 1996
TO: Vancouver City Council
FROM: General Manager, Park Board
SUBJECT: **POSSIBLE CLOSURE OF COAST GUARD AT KITSILANO**

INFORMATION

The General Manager of the Vancouver Board of Parks & Recreation submits this report for information.

POLICY

There are no applicable policies.

DISCUSSION

At a meeting of City Council on August 1st, Councillor Chiavario referred to the proposed federal cost saving measure to cut rescue services at the Kitsilano Coast Guard base. Councillor Chiavario requested staff to provide further information on the status of the proposed cut and to discuss the implications of the cut with the Vancouver Police Department, the Park Board and the Vancouver Life-Saving Society. The Park Board agreed to coordinate this response and prepare a report for Council

COMMENTS FROM THE ASSISTANT CHIEF OPERATION, FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES

The potential impacts on Fire & Rescue services if the Kitsilano Coast Guard Base should close are as follows:

- Fireboats may be requested to attend vessel in distress calls
- Fireboats may be requested for on the water incidents (not fire related)
- New Surface Firefighting Dive Team may be requested to attend rescue calls
- Fire Crews may be requested to attend water related incidents currently handled by Coast Guard
- Additional difficulty for rescue crews attending incidents at Wreck Beach (cliff rescue). The Fire & Rescue Services currently rely on the Coast Guard Hovercraft to attend for assistance to remove patient.
- A general increase in requests for Vancouver Fire & Rescue staff to attend water born incidents will result in additional costs in staff time, additional training and wear and tear on equipment.

**COMMENTS FROM THE DIRECTOR OF RECREATION SERVICES,
VANCOUVER PARK BOARD**

The proposed budget cuts for the Coast Guard would reduce coverage from a 24 hour per day operation to 12 hours or so per day. If the 12 hour coverage coincides with the normal operating hours of beach supervision, there should be no adverse affect on the level of service. However, if this were not the case this would certainly compromise the level of service that one could expect the Coast Guard staff to provide to the general public and to beach lifeguards in maintaining safety.

Our primary focus of the lifeguards, using the Vancouver Lifeguard Society's "Rescue One" water craft is to provide safety and back up to the supervised beaches and swimming areas that are under the jurisdiction of the Park Board. This is a seasonal and weather dependent operation. Rescue One is not dispatched on the days that the weather is marginal or inclement. The crew only respond to calls outside of the bay area at the request of the Coast Guard, Ambulance, Police or on an emergency basis.

Rescue One is maintained and financed by volunteers, corporate sponsorship, donations and independent fundraising. The Coast Guard has a larger scale operation and a more comprehensive support system that cannot be readily duplicated by volunteers operating one safety boat in a smaller geographic area.

The lifeguards rely on the Coast Guard and the Marine Police to enforce boating regulations which include drinking, speeding and dealing with jet ski boaters. The Coast Guard has a larger vessel and the Burrard Bridge base monitors the entrance to False Creek which is a busy waterway. Also, the Coast Guard has a rescue scuba dive team, a service that is not able to be provided through the Lifeguarding services.

"Rescue One" complements and supplements the services of the Coast Guard. It is not a public boating safety/rescue vessel, and has no mandate to be so. It cannot increase its services in response to any reduction in Coast Guard services.

**COMMENTS FROM THE STRATEGIC RESEARCH AND POLICY MANAGER,
VANCOUVER POLICE DEPARTMENT**

There will be a definite impact on the current levels of safety and service for Vancouver citizens if the Federal Government's proposed reduction of Canadian Coast Guard services is approved.

At the present time the Canadian Coast Guard provides 24 hour emergency response to distress or request for assistance situations. The proposed plan affects the Kitsilano base by reducing services to a 12 hour daytime shift and on call overnight as of April 1997.

The Vancouver Police Department Marine Squad provides services that complements the Coast Guard and Ports Canada Police. The VPD Marine Squad provides water patrol coverage for 10 hours per day, seven days a week in Vancouver.

During the winter months (first week of October to mid-April), the Marine Squad patrols the water from 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., and in the summer (mid-April to first week of October), it patrols from 2:00 p.m. to midnight.

The proposed reduction of the Coast Guard, combined with the potential elimination of the Ports Canada Police, imposes severe hardship on the VPD Marine Squad's ability to meet the needs of Vancouver citizens for emergency assistance on the water. A key responsibility of the Coast Guard is to provide search and rescue services. The Marine Squad is currently not equipped or trained to provide those services. In addition, the Marine Squad is not always on duty. Thus, if the proposed reduction of Coast Guard services is approved, citizens will face inadequate emergency assistance on the water.

A key issue is whether the City of Vancouver or the Police Department has the responsibility for providing emergency service on the water in place of the Canadian Coast Guard and Ports Canada Police.

If the Vancouver Police Department is compelled to assume the responsibility of providing emergency assistance on the water, then at a minimum, there will be an increase in costs to the Department. More specifically, the Marine Squad would require additional personnel, equipment, training and facilities.

At a minimum the Marine Squad would require 8 additional police officers at an estimated cost of \$535,000 per year for salary and benefits. The estimated cost for a second 30-foot patrol vessel and a 19-foot inflatable craft is \$315,000. This does not include the cost for additional safety and rescue equipment (e.g. stretcher, ambulance jump kit, oxygen, suction equipment, etc.) needed for the vessel. The estimated cost for search and rescue training to a similar level as the Coast Guard is \$50,000. The total estimated cost for personnel, equipment and training is \$900,000 at a minimum. This does not include other costs that would be required to support the increased personnel and equipment; for example, maintenance and operating costs of the vessels, the cost of facilities such as administrative office, boat house and dock facilities, etc.

Until more information is available, it is not possible to provide a detailed report on the implications of the proposed budget cutback of the Canadian Coast Guard operations on the Vancouver Police Department.

Report Dated: October 7, 1996

Author: Allan Argent

Phone: 257-8487