

DATE: May 13, 1997

SUBJECT: PARK BOARD JOINT OPERATING AGREEMENT WITH THE  
STANLEY PARK ECOLOGY SOCIETY

## RECOMMENDATION

***THAT the Board approve entering into an agreement with the Stanley Park Ecology Society as per the conditions set out in Appendix A, and subject to the Director of Legal Services.***

## POLICY

***The Strategic Plan of the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation, "Vision for the Future", states under Policies that "Community Centres will be jointly operated by the Board and Community Associations." and "The Board will enter into agreements with other organizations to operate recreation facilities where it can be demonstrated that such arrangements are beneficial to the public good."***

***The Board entered into an operating agreement with the Stanley Park Zoological Society in 1988 and signed an operating agreement with the VanDusen Botanical Garden Association in 1994.***

## BACKGROUND

On December 1, 1988 the Park Board entered into an agreement with the Stanley Park Zoological Society to permit the Society to act as a fund raising arm for the redevelopment of the Zoo as well as to partner in program delivery. The Zoological Society provided education based programs in Stanley Park for school groups until 1994. In 1993 there was a referendum on the Zoo which did not pass. Following the decision of the City and the Board not to proceed with the redevelopment of the Zoo almost all the Zoological Board members left the Society.

In order to save the Society as a vehicle to continue the school programming, two of the Society Board members stayed on, recruited a few more dedicated people and operated as the Interim Board for the next year. At the time the Society voted to change its name to the Stanley Park Ecology Society. The school programs took on a forest based theme, "Nature Experience", and continued with the aid of grants. In 1995 a new Stanley Park Ecology Society Board was elected. This Board developed a business plan and a new mission statement.

As a part of this plan and in order to better realize their goals, the Society Board restructured its resources, redefined staffing requirements and hired an Executive Director to do developmental work in both fundraising and

programming.

During this whole process of redefinition and reorganization the leaders in this Society have worked closely with the Park Board and have, in turn, been supported by Board staff and resources.

The Society was originally housed in the Rose Garden Cottage but in a switch with Income Operations they have now moved to the Pavilion. The Wildlife Services Division has also moved into the Pavilion and the two services work closely together, particularly in relation to the conservation programmes and programmes connected to the Children's Farmyard. The Recreation Division provides the support for program and Board development. The Society continues to make a very important contribution through the provision of nature and interpretative educational activities for school children from all over the Lower Mainland. As well they continue to support the expansion of conservation activities, run summer programs and maintain the animal therapy program for nursing homes, Ark From the Park.

As the Ecology Society proceeded in this new direction, the Stanley Park Nature House on Lost Lagoon was being developed. The Society has been a partner in this operation enriching the program offerings and services from this facility and in the Park. In order to proceed with the further development of program and fundraising, the Society will be in a stronger position to assist the Park Board if its relationship with the Board is officially recognized. The purpose of this report is to recommend an agreement which defines the nature of the joint operating relationship between the Society and the Board.

## DISCUSSION

The Stanley Park Ecology Society is dedicated to developing awareness about conservation, habitat, and ecological issues through creating a focus on the natural and cultural world in B.C. They are engaged in the development of interpretation, education and conservation activities related to the above issues. They are also dedicated to creating opportunities for volunteers and members to develop leadership skills and gain experience as stewards in the natural world.

The proposed agreement is based on the assumption that the delivery of education programmes about natural and cultural history and environment and conservation issues is an important and essential service. The Board has within its resources the opportunity to use its major parks as laboratories to help the public develop a greater awareness of conservation, habitat and stewardship issues. The Stanley Park Ecology Society is a capable and willing partner who has demonstrated a strong commitment to this goal.

This agreement is also based on the same principles of mutual cooperation and consultation as the Park Board joint operating agreement with the community centre associations, that is, the Board supports the operation of the facilities and the Society operates the programmes.

Unlike other park Board operations, the Ecology Society is also supporting the

joint operation with the services of an Executive Director. This Executive Director is required to raise funds for the general operation and secure operating grants for the major program services and activities, in addition to managing the activities of the Society. The Society receives the major portion of their funding through grants, in 1996-97 a minimum of 35,000. Other sources of funds include the store operation-20,000 net, users fees-11,000, 10,000-membership fees, and 15,000-casino. The major expenditures go to support programming, store inventory and administration.

Given the need to maximize both Park Board and Society resources and to build a cohesive unit of operation, this agreement is proposing that the long term planning, goal setting and problem solving be accomplished through the formation of a management team comprised of the Society Executive Director, the Wildlife Manager and the Central Recreation Services Manager. This triumvirate will manage the joint operation and be accountable to their respective Boards for the implementation of the Joint Agreement. As a part of this joint operation, the agreement is also proposing that the Executive Director over see the day to day operation of programmes and Park Board staff at the Nature House.

In an agreement developed in 1988 with the Zoological Society, the Board agreed to assist the Society by permitting it to operate the little gift shop and popcorn stand adjacent to the Train. This revenue helps to support the Society's overhead. At this time the Board also gave the Society a \$25,000 interest free loan for start up costs and the gift store inventory. It was later agreed that the Society would pay down on the loan by giving the Park Board 10% of the annual net profit from the pop corn stand each year until the loan was paid off. The current balance is approximately \$19,000. The proposed new agreement will set out a continuation of this arrangement.

In 1988, the Park Board agreed to provide the members of Zoological Society with free admission to the Train and Children's Farmyard. With this benefit the Society attracts a membership of about 300. This membership revenue provides further support for the overhead and the development and promotion of new activities. This report is recommending that the operating agreement contain provisions to continue these arrangements but only until December 31, 1998. The Society will need some time to replace the approximate \$10,000 in annual revenue accruing from this arrangement as well as communicate with the members to prepare them for the changes.

The Society is committed to attract a membership that is more interested in supporting the new goals of the Society.

However, this report recommends that the Park Board still continue the practice of allowing Society members free admission to the annual Children's Christmas Lights Show on the Train on **one only** designated evening, usually the preview night prior to the sessions. This event would be used as the focus for a membership social.

Given the investment of the Society in this joint operation, the agreement also commits the Board to consult with the Society on the development, provision or regulation of any new educational or interpretative activities in Stanley Park

including the planning and operation of the proposed new Interpretative/ Visitor Centre in the Pavilion.

This agreement will set out a statement of Common Goals with a description of what each party will do to support the operation. There will also be a section to describe the Society' s responsibilities and, respectively, those of the Park Board. The term will be one year with an automatic renewal unless either party wants to terminate it. All of the other conditions listed in Appendix A are typical of Park Board joint operating agreements.

## CONCLUSION

By approving this agreement the Park Board will secure a partnership with a Society dedicated to conservation and education activities in major Vancouver parks thereby ensuring that an important public service is continually developed and enhanced.

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**FOR A COPY OF APPENDIX A PLEASE CONTACT**

**RECREATION DIVISION AT 257-8486**

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