



Date: September 20, 2001

TO: Board Members - Parks and Recreation
FROM: General Manager - Parks and Recreation
SUBJECT: VANDUSEN BOTANICAL GARDENS, FLOWER AND GARDEN SHOW

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Board receive this report for information.

BACKGROUND

Since its inception in 1994, the VanDusen Flower and Garden Show has grown to become one of the premier annual events in Vancouver. The Show is produced through a collaboration between Vancouver Park Board staff, VanDusen Botanical Garden Association staff, and volunteers. However, Show coordination and implementation has always been primarily volunteer driven. Revenues from the Show are important components of VanDusen's budget, both VPB and VBGA. Furthermore, the Show is not only a major event in itself but also provides significant benefits to the VanDusen Botanical Garden through increased audience exposure.

As the Show has developed, it has become evident that depending on volunteer coordination is unrealistic and beyond what can be reasonably expected of volunteers, and that more support must be provided. In addition, the expenses to produce the Show have escalated and since 2000 there has been a rapidly diminishing net revenue available to the Garden. Also, attendance levels appear to have reached a plateau and may be in decline. As a result, in July 2001, the two partners (VPB and VBGA) embarked on a strategic planning process, engaging the participation of key stakeholders, which culminated in a strategic plan for the next five years. (Attachment #1). This plan sets forth the intention to operate the Show as a business, adopting the practices and tools of responsible business management. It also lays the groundwork for expanding the Show to its full potential.

Consultation Process:

While the VPB and VBGA are the partners who bear the primary responsibility for a successful Show, numerous stakeholders also make significant investments in terms of time, energy and finances. These include volunteers, exhibitors, the horticultural trade and other contributors. In

addition, there are former participants in the Show who, for varying reasons, have dropped their involvement. A workshop was held that brought together all of these key stakeholders to participate in a visioning and planning exercise that recognized the expertise and interests of all those who are instrumental in creating the outcome of the Show. Following the workshop, the Strategic Planning Committee worked to produce the final document that will guide our future efforts, from 2002 to 2006.

DISCUSSION

The VanDusen Flower and Garden Show was started as a VBGA initiative in 1994, consequently, from the beginning, it was produced entirely by volunteer labour. The VBGA established a committee, known as the Flower and Garden Show Council, who contracted with exhibitors, organized the Preview Party, implemented show installation, signage, transportation, food and beverage and the full range of activities associated with the Show. The VPB staff at the Garden supported the event by preparing, cleaning up and repairing the site, providing for cashiers and ticket sales, liaising with Show organizers and a variety of other supports. In more recent years the Garden's shop has participated and the gardeners' talents have been showcased in a display garden. Shortly after the Show began, it was agreed that operating profits would stay with the VBGA, including monies raised at the Preview Party but that the gate revenue would be split 50:50. The Show has proved to be a resounding success, answering a need to provide an exciting flower and garden event for the enjoyment of Lower Mainland residents as well as tourists to Vancouver.

The reputation of the Show and that of the Garden have become inextricably linked. In the public mind the Show is the Garden and therefore the Show must be perceived to be of the highest quality. Over the years, for various reasons, the horticultural trade has gradually reduced its participation with only a core group of local firms installing display gardens. The show is no longer the novelty it was in its earlier years, and because it is an outdoor show, weather can affect attendance. From its early boom years attendance levels have dropped, although they appear to have stabilized at between 20 and 25, 000. And costs to mount the Show have escalated so that in the years 2000 and 2001 there have been shortfalls that have negatively affected the bottom line, resulting in reduced revenues to the Garden's budgets. Given the importance of the Show to VanDusen, it has become evident that more involvement and support from the garden partners is essential. Both the VBGA Board and the VPB management of the Garden have realized that the Show has grown too large to be organized by volunteers alone, and that it must be run as a business, with all the decision making processes and controls that this would imply.

The Strategic Plan calls for the establishment of an Advisory Board composed of representatives of the VPB and VBGA partners, exhibitors, the Show Council and trade associations such as the British Columbia Landscape & Nursery Association (BCLNA). This Board will provide advice to the partners concerning policy and future directions, in line with the Vision for the Show.

A professional event management firm to act as the Show Producer will be engaged by the partners. The Show Producer will manage the coordination and implementation of the event, working closely with the volunteer Show Council and their contingent of over 400 volunteers as well as Garden paid staff. They will be expected to produce and follow an annual management plan and budget and report regularly. All expenditures will be tightly monitored. Revenues and costs will be managed as a total entity, according to sound accounting practices and net revenues will be split evenly between the partners. The Show Producer will also provide the communication framework to ensure that all participants in the event are kept fully informed prior to and during the Show itself.

The Show Producer will also be responsible for revitalizing the design of the Show to improve all aspects of the visitors' experience. All elements, from the entrance, physical layout, facilities for visitor comfort, visitor information, way-finding signage, entertainment and overall 'wow' factors and opportunities will be evaluated, updated and creatively revamped. The perception will be of a new and improved Show, significantly different from before—a 'must see' event for the public and an essential venue for exhibitors.

The Strategic Plan also provides goals and strategies for expanded marketing and sponsorship opportunities.

The intent is to 'grow' the Show—to expand on the success and potential of the Show as developed over the years by so many committed individuals, and take it to a new level of excellence. The target for audience growth has been set at 20% per year by 2006. Also by year 2006, we anticipate net revenues of between \$250,000 and \$300,000 that would be shared by the partners. Providing the infrastructure for this kind of growth will require that both the VPB and VBGA accept lower revenues from the Show in the short run, however, the long-term gains are expected to more than compensate for this. It is proposed that the VPB budget for VanDusen will adjust for these reduced revenues by reducing expenditures in materials and services as well as temporary labour. We do not anticipate that there will be any perceptible visitor impact.

SUMMARY

The VanDusen Flower and Garden Show is an important annual event for Vancouver and the Lower Mainland. In order to provide a sound foundation for continued success and audience and revenue growth a business approach must be taken. VanDusen's partners, the VPB and the

VBGA, have undertaken a strategic planning exercise resulting in a 5 year plan. The plan recommends moving to professional event coordination with continued volunteer support as well as the establishment of an Advisory Board composed of the Show stakeholders.

Prepared by:

Queen Elizabeth District
Board of Parks & Recreation
Vancouver, BC
BM/ci