



Date: October 19, 2001

TO: Board Members - Parks and Recreation
FROM: General Manager - Parks and Recreation
SUBJECT: Vancouver General Hospital - Rezoning

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Park Board endorse the referral of the proposed rezoning of Vancouver General Hospital, as detailed in the attached Council Report, to Public Hearing.

POLICY

In 1984, the Board endorsed an agreement between the City of Vancouver and Vancouver General Hospital (VGH) for the creation of a public open space with four tennis courts on the hospital site.

In 1989, the Board endorsed the Open Space Agreement with VGH for the creation of 5.12 acres of public open space on the hospital site.

On March 12, 1999, the Board reaffirmed its support for the VGH Precinct Policy Statement which offered alternatives in configuration and size of the public open space.

BACKGROUND

In the last two years, Vancouver General Hospital and the City of Vancouver have conducted a planning process to accommodate

- the hospital's ambitious building program including bio-tech, retail, service-commercial, residential and traditional hospital uses,
- restoration of the heritage portion of the Heather Pavilion, and the
- creation of one large public open space north of 12th Avenue in addition to a smaller one south of 12th Avenue.

Attached for information is the council report recommending referral of the proposed rezoning to public hearing. The referral report is scheduled for the regular meeting of the Planning and Environment Committee of November 6, 2001. The highlights of this report from a park and recreation perspective are described below.

DISCUSSION

DELIVERY OF OPEN SPACE - TIMETABLE

When the Open Space Agreement was signed in 1989, the general expectation was that the promised five acres of public green space be created on the hospital grounds within a few years. That has not happened. VGH explains the delay as a consequence of less than expected provincial funding to complete occupation of the Laurel Tower, and changed operational priorities. Even though tower completion is now on the horizon, that in itself will not free up the land needed for the greenspace, contrary to the original intention. Instead, the proposed timetable will push completion of the green space further into the future.

Under the existing legal agreement (valid unless replaced with a new legal agreement as part of the proposed rezoning) the public open space would have to be delivered no later than July 13, 2003 (24 months after the City issued building permits for at least 70% of the tower). VGH now proposes to deliver 75% of the open space by 2005, and the remainder by 2006. These dates should be understood as a best-case scenario, contingent on continued and timely provincial funding for the extensive building program, particularly a new ambulatory care centre, but also on VGH's adherence to the operational and financial priorities which form the basis of the proposed timetable.

There are other variables that may threaten timely delivery of the greenspace, such as the need to obtain private-sector funding for the restoration of the heritage portions of the Heather Pavilion. Since the building lies just north of the centre of the future green space, it would be preferable to complete the re-construction in advance of the green space, however no secure source of funding for the pavilion has been found yet.

Staff have been unable to secure a commitment from VGH to deliver the public greenspace at an earlier date. Furthermore, staff note that, given the above variables, timely delivery of the public open space is not secure. The attached Council Report lists a number of rezoning conditions including legal agreements intended to provide greater security that the intended public benefits are delivered on time according to a timetable to be approved by the Board. Staff propose to negotiate an agreement that makes certain phases of future hospital development conditional on delivery of the open space.

TEMPORARY GREENSPACE

Both Council and the Park Board endorsed recommendations in 2000 that asked for no loss of existing open space until an equivalent amount of new open space had been landscaped. The phasing plan proposed by VGH does not adhere to this no net loss policy, but instead proposes to replace existing green space that is targeted for development with temporary green space of lesser size.

Programming, design, construction and maintenance of the temporary greenspaces remain to be detailed. It is the position of Park Board staff that all costs associated with the temporary greenspaces are to be borne by VGH because the need for them arises from the proposed changes to the existing legal agreements.

QUANTITY AND QUALITY OF GREENSPACE

The proposed greenspace at 6.1 acres (not counting the footprint of the Heather Pavilion) is larger than the open space secured under the existing legal agreement at 5.12 acres. In terms of configuration, relationship to buildings, urban design and public accessibility, the new open space is superior. The restored Heather Pavilion will take away from the greenspace (most notably land) but also add character and active uses that will enhance the future greenspace. Overall, staff feel that in quantity and quality the proposed greenspace surpasses the open space secured in the existing legal agreement.

An additional proposed greenspace of about one acre to be located along 13th Avenue replaces an existing greenspace secured under the Parkade Open Space Agreement of 1981. Details regarding programming, design, construction and maintenance still need to be determined. Park Board and City staff are asking that the existing open space in this location not be developed until the replacement open space has been completed. The existing legal agreement will need to be amended or replaced.

RECREATIONAL INDOOR SPACE

The proposed rezoning also delivers about 2,500 sq.ft. of indoor space that will be available for programming through the Douglas Park Community Association, located either in the existing Nurses' Residence or in a future residential development on the same site. Details remain to be negotiated. The recreation space will be secured in a legal agreement to the satisfaction of the General Manager Parks and Recreation.

Prepared by:

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TCD