

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

Date: January 25, 2002
Author/Local: Piet Rutgers 8463
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TO: Planning and Environment Committee
Vancouver Park Board

FROM: General Manager, Board of Parks and Recreation

SUBJECT: Impact of the Noise By-law Amendment on Park Board Operations

INFORMATION

- A. ***THAT the 2002 Park Board operations budget will need to be increased by \$49,000 and a one time expenditure of \$55,500 for the purchase of sweepers and lift gates, to deal with the new by-law amendment and that these items be referred to the 2002 Operating Budget review for consideration. This assumes that recommendations will be approved.***

RECOMMENDATIONS

- B. ***THAT public and private Golf Courses be exempted from the proposed noise by-law.***

City Manager Comments:

This report has outlined in some detail the financial impact and/or service standards which result from the proposed Noise By-law amendment on Park Board operations. The City has also been advised by the BC Nursery and Trades Association about the financial consequences on private landscape companies.

During the last few months Park Board staff have analyzed the impact on their operations, and the BC Landscape Nursery Association have asked for modifications to policy.

There continue to be technological changes to leaf blower equipment related to reduced noise and air pollution. Apparently there are gas powered models manufactured now which meet the 65dba noise rating. In addition, hand held equipment manufacturers must reduce hydrocarbon emissions by 30% now and by 70% by 2005 to meet US EPA standards. Apparently this also covers imports into Canada.

In July 2001, Council recommended the prohibition of gas-powered leaf blowers throughout the City by February 2004. Because of technology changes and the economic impacts of a total ban, Council may wish to consider a review of this issue in mid-2003 prior to implementing a full ban.

Therefore, the City Manager RECOMMENDS that A be RECEIVED for information, that B be APPROVED and C and D be CONSIDERED.

- C. THAT staff be instructed to report back in July 2003 on the noise levels and emission standards of gas powered leaf blowers, and the economic impact of implementing a total ban, in order to confirm whether or not to implement a total ban in February 2004.*
- D. THAT the noise bylaw amendments include any recommendations approved by Council this day.*

COUNCIL POLICY

On July 12, 2001 Council adopted the following policies:

- A THAT the Noise By-law be amended to prohibit the use of gas-powered leaf blowers throughout the City of Vancouver, within 50 metres of any residential premises, except for the appropriate use during October through January, when the vast majority of leaves are in need of collecting: and*

FURTHER THAT effective February 2, 2004 the Noise By-law be amended to prohibit the use of gas-powered leaf blowers throughout the City of Vancouver at all times.

B THAT staff report back on the effects of other noise producing machines including weed eaters and lawn mowers.

PURPOSE

This report outlines the consequences of this by-law amendment on Park Board operations, and describes alternate equipment and operating procedures that are required to deal with leaf and debris removal.

BACKGROUND

At the time that Council considered the June 15th report “Noise By-law Amendment - Leaf blowers”, Park Board staff reported that the outright prohibition of gas powered leaf blowers and the complete replacement of this work by manual means would require about \$1.5 million per annum.

The manual replacement costs associated with a prohibition of leaf blowers within 50 meters of any residential premises, except for the months of October through January were reported to be \$200,000 - \$250,000 per annum.

DISCUSSION

This report outlines the proposed Park Board response to the by-law amendment. The approach is a mixture of service reductions, acquisition of less noisy equipment and manual substitution of work previously carried out with gas powered leaf blowers..

By way of background the Park Board has 72 backpack blowers and 12 push blowers in its inventory. This equipment was introduced as a labour saving device and is used extensively throughout the year. Leaf removal represents 60% of their year-round use. In addition to leaf removal, leaf blowers are used for removing debris from paths, tennis courts, sports courts and plazas, and the collection of grass clippings in parks and golf courses. A further use involves debris and garbage removal after special events. The period October through January represents about 50% of their use, and coincides with that time of year when people tend to spend more time indoors.

Restricting the use of leaf blowers will result in either reduction in the standard of maintenance and/or higher operating costs associated with having to work manually. Lowering the standard of maintenance will affect the usability and public safety in parks.

Leaves on grass areas for prolonged periods of time can smother it, requiring turf replacement and increased maintenance. It can also stimulate a variety of diseases, particularly on golf greens and tees, making it necessary for the increased use of fungicides. Leaves and debris that end up blocking drains, can easily create significant and costly water damage to both public and private property. Debris and leaves on tennis courts, paths, and plazas will create slipping hazards and public liability issues. The increased requirement for manual maintenance could increase the occurrence of injuries to staff, particularly in the area of repetitive strain injuries.

Special event clean-up would be lengthier, with a real possibility that some areas of parks and beaches cannot be used by the public immediately following a special event. This has the potential to be a health and safety hazard to the public.

Leaf blowers are a labour saving device, while substitution from mechanical to manual leaf collection (and related activities) varies with the task, time of year and other factors, it is estimated that, on average, it takes three times as long to carry out a task manually than it does with the aid of a back pack leaf blower.

2002 RESPONSE

In order to respond to the proposed bylaw staff have reviewed affected areas of the operation and concluded that some equipment purchases are an effective way to maintain service standards.

The Park Board has approximately 780,000 sq. meters of hard surface areas in the inventory. These areas include paths, tennis courts, basketball courts, playgrounds, sport courts, bike paths, walkways, seawall and sidewalks. Blowers are used extensively to keep these areas clean. To deal with the debris and leaf removal from hard surface areas within 50m of residential buildings during the period February through October in 2002 and 2003, it is proposed that to maintain service standards, 3 small sweepers will be purchased at a total cost of \$37,950 and an increased annual operating cost of \$16,389; 3 lift gates will be purchased at a total cost of \$8,595 and an increased annual operating cost of \$2,874; 10 small manual sweepers will be purchased at a total cost of \$8,950 and an increased annual operating cost of \$3,087.

Total purchase cost of equipment in 2002 is \$55,500. Total annual operating costs will be \$22,350.

In the following areas manual leaf and debris removal will be undertaken during the period February through September:

- West End mini parks
- Flower and shrub beds
- Stairways and other inaccessible areas such as around play structures, backstops, fences, etc.
- Lawn areas that are not accessible to mulching mowers, vacuums or tractor mounted blowers.

In 2002 to 2004, the additional labour costs of manual work will be \$26,650 per annum.

2004 RESPONSE

The second phase of implementation of the bylaw will involve a complete ban on the use of gas powered leafblowers and staff believe that much can be gained from the experience in the period 2002 to 2004 in formulating a response that will combine additional equipment purchases, manual substitution and service cuts. A general overview has been done at this time and more specific proposals will be brought forward in 2003. The order of magnitude costs for future equipment purchases and associated operating costs and manual substitution are estimated to be several hundreds of thousands of dollars plus an annual increase in the Park Board budget of well over one hundred thousand dollars. These estimates exclude the impacts of golf courses, which are discussed below. Service reductions might also have to be considered and these may include:

- regular removal of dirt and debris from tennis courts, basketball courts and playgrounds
- removal of grass clippings from sidewalks

GOLF COURSES

There are four private and three public golf courses that will be affected by the noise by law amendment. The vast majority of golf course lands are well away from residential areas although some have housing on or near their edges.

Vancouver's municipal golf courses will be affected by increased operating costs and reductions in revenue. In 2001, golf generated over \$6 million in green fee revenue. There is an expectation from the golfing public that the courses will be maintained to a high

standard. Leaves and debris must be removed from the tees and greens before mowing . Gas powered blowers are the most efficient way to perform this task. Less efficient alternatives such as electric blowers or manual labour will result in a delay in opening the courses each morning. This in turn will have an effect on revenue.

Vancouver's municipal golf courses contribute around \$1.4 million to the Park Board bottom line and any additional annual costs associated with manual removal of debris and operation of additional equipment will reduce this amount. Gross revenues will also be affected. Daily opening of the courses will be delayed so debris can be removed from greens prior to cutting. An average 30 minute delay would result in over \$380,000 in lost revenue. To replace gas powered leaf blowers, equipment purchases in the order of \$100,000 would be necessary by 2004. The potential negative financial impact on public golf courses is therefore estimated to be in the order of \$500,000 annually.

Given the relative isolation of the golf courses and the public expectation of high quality greens, it is advised that Noise By-law be amended to allow the continued use of gas-powered leaf blowers on golf courses.

CONCLUSION

This report details the Park Board financial and service level impacts resulting from the Noise by-law amendment aimed at the elimination of leaf blowers. The City Manager also suggests a noise monitoring program to be undertaken in 2003 to permit the implementation of the by-law to be finalized.

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General Mgr./Dept. Head:

Report dated: January 25, 2002

Author: Piet Rutgers

Date:

Phone: 604-257-8481

Concurring Departments

This report has been prepared in consultation with the departments listed to the right, and they concur with its contents
