



Date: February 13, 2003

**TO: Board Members - Parks and Recreation**  
**FROM: General Manager of Parks and Recreation**  
**SUBJECT: DEVELOPMENT OF A DOWNTOWN SKATEBOARD FACILITY - QUEBEC & UNION STREETS**

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

- A. *THAT the development of a “street- style” skateboard facility (Map Appendix c) be approved on a trial basis, subject to Council endorsement, on a portion of the road allowance under the Dunsmuir/Georgia viaducts at the intersection of Quebec Street, Union Street and Expo Boulevard North (Map Appendix A), with the source of funds to be the ‘skateboard facility’ allocation in the 2000-2002 Capital Plan.*
- B. *THAT staff be directed to conduct a public consultation process to ensure a well functioning design and successful operation of the skateboard facility, and a net positive impact on downtown neighbourhoods.*
- C. *THAT staff be further directed to develop and report back on a comprehensive strategy for the city-wide implementation of youth oriented parks and active recreation programming.*

## POLICY

**The Parks Control By-law prohibits skateboarding in parks, except in areas where such activity may be designated or permitted. Designated skateboarding facilities currently exist in two parks: China Creek South Park and Hastings Park.**

## BACKGROUND

The Board’s 2000-2002 Capital Plan included an allocation of \$223,250 to develop a street- style skateboard ‘plaza’ in or near the downtown core. The creation of such a facility was proposed partly in response to a growing demand for this kind of recreational opportunity and partly to mitigate an emerging problem situation.

Since the 1960s, skateboarding has undergone rapid growth throughout North America as a recreational activity, a recognized sport, and a significant component of youth culture. In fact, Vancouver has emerged as an internationally recognized centre of skateboarding, and is the host city for the annual “Slam City Jam” professional skateboard competition, which attracts about 200 world-class professionals and close to 20,000 spectators.

In the late 1970s, Vancouver built one of the first skateboard bowls in Greater Vancouver at China Creek Park, which today it is considered very small and dated in design. Since then, and primarily over the past decade, skateboard parks have been developed in Burnaby, Delta, Langley, North Vancouver, Surrey and West Vancouver, with several of these municipalities working on or considering second or third locations. There are now over thirty skateparks in the Greater Vancouver region.

In 2001, Vancouver opened its second skateboard bowl at Hastings Park, which quickly became a very popular facility. The organizers of “Slam City Jam,” a major skateboard competition taking place annually at the Pacific Coliseum, have stated that “Slam City Jam is blessed to be located within ollie [i.e. a ‘skateboard jump’ or short] distance of the now world famous Hastings Skate Park.”

A junior skateboard bowl — designed mainly for pre-teen users — will be included in the Strathcona Park redevelopment currently underway. Existing demand could easily warrant the further construction of bowl-type skateboard facilities in other parks, particularly in the south and west sides of Vancouver. In the opinion of staff, however, the more immediate priority is to provide a facility suited to the emerging ‘street’ style of skateboarding, in which participants attempt to negotiate various obstacles of the sort found in highly urban environments - e.g. ledges, benches and staircases.

Although not formally sanctioned, street style skateboarding takes place — and is tolerated to a greater or lesser degree — in sections of Coopers Park, Cathedral Square, and Andy Livingstone Park. An additional small installation has been proposed as a component of the Victory Square redevelopment. However, in all these parks, skateboarding is acceptable only to the extent that it does not displace other established uses, or put other users at risk. Demand far exceeds capacity. As a result, many youth skateboard illegally in inappropriate locales and, in the process, cause damage to public and private property.

This report proposes the development of a dedicated skateboard ‘plaza’ similar in form and function to other downtown locations where skateboarding takes place, but is in conflict with other established uses. Such a facility will support more effective and consistent enforcement by City Police of the skateboard control by-laws and provide a highly desired amenity for city youth.

## DISCUSSION

### Site Selection Criteria

The proposal to develop a street style skateboarding plaza at the intersection of Quebec and Union Streets (see Appendices A & C) is the outcome of a lengthy investigation and analysis involving several candidate sites. A number of key criteria to determine an appropriate location were refined in the process of conducting this search:

- C Site immediately available for use, either on a temporary or permanent basis
- C adequate size for proposed use (minimum of about 10,000 square feet)
- C served by public transit — on or near Skytrain and/or major bus route(s)
- C ready access to public washrooms, telephone and drinking water
- C does not result in displacing a valuable use or group of users
- C visible from nearby streets and buildings in order to minimize illegal activity or nuisance behaviour at the facility
- C not situated too close to housing, so that residents are not negatively impacted by noise created by skateboarding.

This last criterion effectively limits the site search to a small number of areas in or near downtown which are buffered from existing or potential residential uses. These areas, and the conclusions of staff evaluations pertaining to the feasibility of each, are as follows:

- C *the Southeast Shore of False Creek*: A number of sites were examined on city-owned lands in South East False Creek, but these proved to be either in conflict with the track layout for the Molson Indy or just too remote from the downtown core and critical amenities such as washrooms, water, and telephone.
- C *the False Creek Flats*: At the present time and for the foreseeable future, no publicly-owned sites are available for a skateboard plaza in the False Creek Flats, although staff may reexamine this area once some of the planned parks and public open spaces are closer to being developed.
- C *the heart of the Central Business District* (bounded by Thurlow, Robson, Seymour and Burrard Inlet): Only a handful of publicly-owned sites are available in the heart of the Central Business District: the Hornby Plaza (between Hastings and Cordova Streets), Portal Park (Thurlow and Hastings Streets), Discovery Square (at Burrard SkyTrain Station), Centennial Square (Georgia and Howe Streets) and Robson Square. The first three sites mentioned are too small and the latter two are prime open spaces for public gatherings and events, and therefore all are unsuitable for accommodating a dedicated skateboarding installation.
- C *the area near GM Place and Andy Livingstone Park*: The proposed site is located in this area on City street under the viaducts near the southeast corner of Andy Livingstone Park. It is well removed from the closest existing residential units (the CityGate towers to the southeast) and, even if future development occurs up to Prior Street, any noise and visual impacts of the facility would be screened by the viaducts.

## Site Analysis

The proposed site (Appendices A & B) is a triangular section of road allowance under the Dunsmuir and Georgia Viaducts bounded by Expo Boulevard, Quebec Street and Union Streets. As this area is on road allowance, Engineering Services has jurisdiction over it. Engineering Services has agreed to give Park Board permission to use land inside the sidewalks for the purposes of building and maintaining a skateboard plaza, subject to the following conditions:

- C Engineering to review and approve all works prior to commencement; Park Board would be responsible for obtaining any necessary permits for site development and construction;
- C Engineering would be guaranteed immediate access to all underground services, viaduct columns, and the area in general for viaduct related maintenance;
- C Park Board will be responsible for any costs associated with their occupation of the site for recreation use, including garbage cleaning, graffiti removal, and site supervision;
- C Engineering may reclaim all or part of the assigned property to provide for future development of the Viaduct Right of Ways, potential alignment of the Downtown Historic Railway or any other Engineering requirement that may in future arise and, under such circumstances, may terminate the agreement at any time upon 30 days written notice, with the site being returned to previous condition or a condition acceptable to the City Engineer within 60 days of termination.
- C Formal terms of the use agreement will be drawn up to the satisfaction of the General Manager of the Park Board, the General Manager of Engineering Services and the Director of Legal Services.

The site is currently used as a pay-parking lot administered by Easy Park and has a capacity of 56 vehicles. The parking lot reaches capacity only a handful of times each year; usually the parking lot is half-full or less. Engineering Services notes that there is both short-term and monthly parking available at the nearby Chinatown parkade (south-east corner of Quebec and Keefer Streets) should Council agree with the conversion of the subject parking lot to a skateboard plaza.

In 2001, the parking lot generated \$38,000 in net revenue to the City (gross revenue was \$56,000). Staff note that, even if the surface parking lot is closed, some of the revenue would continue to accrue to the City because some who currently park at the surface parking lot will relocate to the Chinatown parkade or to nearby on-street parking meters.

In terms of the siting criteria listed in the previous section, the subject site scores very well. It is of more than adequate size (over 40,000 ft<sup>2</sup>) and, as City land, can be made available immediately. The terrain can be monitored by Parks staff and Police on a 'drive-by' basis from all sides. Public washrooms, telephone and drinking water are close at hand (the Andy Livingstone Park fieldhouse is located directly across Quebec Street). The location is easily accessed from the #3 (Main Street) bus and from the Expo Skytrain line.

The Quebec and Union intersection is roughly equidistant to two Skytrain Stations: Main Street and Stadium. In terms of impact on residential neighbourhoods, it would be far more preferable that the dominant access route to the site be from the latter station. From the Main Street Station, a skateboarder would have to pass by several residential towers, and over sections of pavers which generate higher noise levels than asphalt or untextured concrete surfaces. From Stadium Station, the logical route runs mainly along the south edge of Andy Livingstone Park, and is far removed from existing or potential residential units (see Appendix A).

There is already considerable skateboarder use of the ledges, ramps and rails in the park along this route. The ledges on either side of the Carrall Street overpass are, for example, very attractive from a practitioner's perspective. However, to create a clearly defined, safe and attractive route between the Stadium Station and the proposed skateboard facility, some reconfiguration of benches, play apparatus and pathways in the park may be necessary. 'Skateable' surfaces and edges will have to be hardened appropriately to withstand skateboarding use without aesthetic or functional deterioration. The design imperative with respect to the access route will be to ensure that skateboarding activity meshes well with other established park uses, including basketball, children's playgrounds, pedestrian and cycle through-traffic, and casual relaxation.

### **Trial installation**

This report proposes the installation of a downtown skateboard facility on a trial basis, subject to review and evaluation after two years. This review would consider such factors as usage statistics, number of police calls (if any), and possibly reduction of skateboard-related complaints elsewhere in the downtown. Further criteria for the review will be developed in the context of the public consultation described in the next section.

If this project does not have a positive impact, both in terms of service provision and problem reduction, the service can be terminated and the installation dismantled with relative ease. To be successful, the skateboard facility should be well used and well regarded by skateboarders. Neighbours should experience the facility as an asset to the community, or certainly not a detriment. There should be a reduction of skateboarding in inappropriate locations elsewhere in the downtown core. The Police should find that the facility assists their enforcement of skateboard by-laws.

It is also possible that — given the prospect of significant land uses changes to come in and around the downtown core — a superior location with respect to the siting criteria discussed above may become available. The review may prompt the relocation of the facility with — if possible and if seen as desirable — more features and an expanded footprint.

Since the installation may be temporary, the component elements should lend themselves to be disassembled and moved, or be of sufficiently low cost to be written off at the end of the trial period. It is envisioned that a number of these components could be 'recycled' structures, street

furniture and fixtures of the sort already found — and skated on — in the urban environment. Appendix C shows the concept for site development as currently envisaged. All elements would be mounted on the existing asphalt surface, which may need to be recoated in whole or in part.

The site will be operated with a ‘zero tolerance’ policy on graffiti. Such a policy has been used with success in other jurisdictions, most notably the Shaw Millennium Skateboard Park in Calgary. Key to success is daily monitoring and immediate removal of any graffiti or ‘tagging’ which does occur on the site or nearby.

To summarize: the proposal is to create a temporary skateboarding facility while continuing the search for a long term solution, either at the subject site or elsewhere. A temporary amenity will address the immediate needs of downtown skateboarders, and at the same time help build public awareness and acceptance of this kind of facility.

### **Consultation Process**

Park Board staff have initiated consultations with a number of groups and individuals potentially affected by the proposed development of the skateboard plaza. These include:

- C Neighbourhood residents, most notably residents of the CityGate community;
- C Chinatown Merchants, via the Chinatown Revitalization Committee;
- C Downtown business community interests, via the Downtown Business Improvement Association;
- C Other users of Andy Livingstone Park;
- C Skateboarders, via the Vancouver Skate Park Coalition;
- C City staff working in the Downtown East Side, via the DTES Core Staff Committee.

The immediate objectives of this consultation are as follows:

- C to identify and secure agreement on management policies and operating practices;
- C to identify and secure agreement upon criteria of success, and methods for measuring same;
- C to anticipate and mitigate any downsides to the design and operation of the facility;
- C to maximize the potential benefit of the facility for users, spectators and the community at large; and
- C to ensure public oversight of the project through its planning, construction and operation phases.

The consultation process also has a longer term objective of building and sustaining a communication bridge between skateboarders and the rest of the local community. Of the more than thirty skateboard facilities which now exist in the Region, none appears to have been built without some initial degree of opposition. However, park and recreation planners from other jurisdictions who have confirmed this fact also note that once such a facility is in operation, public support tends to build. Critical to project success is that both the end users and the broader community are engaged with design and operating decisions so that the end result is a facility which is attractive, fun and safe.

A number of technical decisions and operating protocols remain to be finalized in the context of the project design and construction phases. Staff will involve other departments and the public in these decisions where appropriate. Specifically, monitoring arrangements, operating hours and a graffiti response strategy will be finalized based upon inputs from the public consultation, and with advice from Police, Community Services and Engineering Services. Planning to protect City liability and ensure participant safety will be developed with reference to the documented experience from other jurisdictions, and with guidance from the City's Risk Management Division.

The consultations proposed with regard to the identified site will be, in effect, a continuation of an ongoing dialogue staff have held with proponent groups and others over the past two years on the topic of a downtown skateboard amenity. The Vancouver Skateboard Coalition, which is the organized voice of skateboarders in the City, has been very enthusiastic and patient in its support of this initiative.

Representatives of the downtown business community have at various times expressed support for the development of a dedicated skateboard facility at a self-contained site. In part, this support is explicitly linked to a desire to remove skateboarding away from business locales. However, there is also recognition that skateboarding is a legitimate recreational activity which should be served by amenity provision.

Some residents of the nearby CityGate development attended a site meeting in July 2001, when it was proposed to locate the skateboard facility on City-owned land at the south of Science World at the edge of Creekside Park. While some support was expressed for the principle of establishing a downtown skatepark, there was general opposition to such a facility at the site then proposed, or any other location where there would be a direct visual or noise impact from the facility, or from skateboarders going to or from the site. Skateboarding at the proposed site would be effectively screened from CityGate towers by the viaducts. The 'skateable' connection from the site to the Stadium Skytrain Station is proposed to mitigate the possibility of transient skateboarding affecting CityGate.

### **Youth 'active recreation' strategy development**

The protracted search for a suitable site for one skateboard facility points to a need for more comprehensive planning to address growing skateboarding demand, and more generally to respond to a whole emerging spectrum of youth-oriented active recreation and sport demands.

Such a strategy would include consideration of the following:

- C Identification of specific activities, trends associated with each and an inventory of existing service and facilities provision in relation to demand;
- C Equitable geographic distribution of new services and facilities;
- C Participation constraints and means of overcoming same;
- C Adaptive re-use of existing amenities such as rinks and hard surface playing courts;
- C Requirements/opportunities for supervision, instruction, programs and events;
- C Capital and operating cost estimates; and
- C Implementation timeline.

Upon Board approval, a more detail terms of reference would be drawn up, including provisions to ensure that youth have adequate input into the development of this strategy.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Board is asked to endorse the development, on a trial basis, of a street-style skateboarding facility at the southwest corner of Quebec and Union Streets. The installation will include adding and designating 'skateable' elements in Andy Livingstone Park, in order to create a desirable route for skateboarder access from the Stadium Skytrain Station to the facility.

As well, staff will be directed to work in consultation with the wider downtown community to ensure that the proposed facility has a net positive impact on local neighbourhoods. Staff are further directed to prepared a long term and comprehensive strategy to provide youth-oriented parks and active recreation programming — including skateboarding — on a city-wide basis.

### ***Prepared by:***

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