



MUSTEL GROUP

Public Opinion on Use of City Parks for Special Events Summary

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Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation

Vancouver, BC

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Interpretive Highlights

Introduction

The Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation is reviewing policies and guidelines for special events held in the City of Vancouver parks. As input to the planning process, the Park Board has commissioned a poll of City residents to determine public sentiment on special events in general and on key issues under review.

A random telephone survey of 434 residents, 18 years of age and over, was conducted June 18-23, 2003. Up to five calls were made to each selected household/respondent to minimize potential bias due to non-response. The sample is representative of the population across the City and was matched to 2001 Census statistics on the basis of age, gender and area (East and West of Main Street). In addition, the questionnaire was translated into Chinese to ensure representation of Vancouver's largest English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) group. A copy of the questionnaire is appended.

Key Findings

Park Event Participation

- Most City residents, regardless of age, gender, family composition or area, have past experience with park events. The large majority (77%) has been to a City park at some time in the past when an event was taking place.
- While most people across the City have been to a park during an event, residents west of Main Street are slightly more likely than those east of Main Street (82% and 72%, respectively).
- Park events are popular with Vancouver residents, as over half of adults have attended an event in the past year (56%). Among the many types of park events people report attending, fireworks are the most popular (16%), followed by sport tournaments in general, Illuminares at Trout Lake, picnics, Bard on the Beach, Folk Festival and Children's Festival (5-9%).
- Attendance levels are generally similar across all demographic segments of the population examined (approximately 55-65%), indicating the broad appeal of the variety of events offered.

Impact on Park Visitors

- Park events clearly do not deter park visitation and in fact, generally have a favourable impact on park visitors overall. The majority of City residents say that if an event is taking place in a park they are visiting or planning to visit, it has a positive impact on them (67%).
- Of the remainder, most say park events do not affect them (24% “no impact on me”). Only a tiny fraction (3%) is bothered by park events, and when asked why they primarily comment on the crowds and related difficulty of moving around with noise, traffic/parking and restricted access as secondary issues.
- Although older residents are less likely than their younger and middle-aged cohorts to regard the impact as “positive,” (53% versus 71-74%), they are clearly not bothered by park events, since the remainder largely says events have no impact on them (41%).

Appropriate Types of Park Events

- The public expects parks to be used to host events and generally regards the main types of events currently taking place as acceptable.
- Some types of events are nearly universally accepted as appropriate for park venues, perhaps indicating the degree to which these are entrenched as desired recreational activities. These include:
 - Community events (99%)
 - Running and walking events primarily for fundraising (98%)
 - Festivals – free or paid admission (97%)
 - Picnics – private events in designated areas organized by families, companies, etc. (95%)
 - Sports tournaments (94%)
 - Music concerts – free or paid admission (92%)
- Other events that a majority of the public also regards as appropriate, but with a sizable opposition include:
 - Commercial events (64% appropriate, 32% not appropriate)
 - Public demonstrations and rallies (60% appropriate, 35% not appropriate)
 - Religious ceremonies (54% appropriate, 40% not appropriate)

Opinion levels tend to be quite similar across demographics, but there is slightly more opposition to commercial events and public demonstrations from the older age segment.

Variety of Park Events

- Opinion on the variety of different types of events currently being offered is split. Among those with an opinion, about half feel there is sufficient variety offered now, while the other half would like to see greater variety (41% and 42% of residents in total, respectively).
- When asked to suggest events they would like to see, more outdoor concerts and music events top the list. Also mentioned are more ethnic and multicultural events and festivals, more sporting events, children/family events and outdoor plays/cultural events.

Size and Focus of Park Events

- In terms of event size and focus, residents generally want more events – both small neighbourhood events and larger ‘city wide’ events.
- On the whole, City of Vancouver residents (89%) agree that they would like to see more small events with a neighbourhood focus.
- Nevertheless, a majority also desire a greater number of larger events with a ‘city wide’ focus (67% agree, 21% disagree, balance undecided). Larger, ‘city wide’ events have broadest support among those under 35 years of age (81%), but most who hold an opinion across all age segments tend to agree by a ratio of at least two to one.

Commercial to Non-Profit Event Ratio

- The public supports the Park Board’s current practice of having most park events run by non-profit organizations. Just over half (52%) favour continuation of this guideline. The remainder is largely split between allowing more commercial events (22%) and reducing the number of commercial events (20%).
- Only slightly greater support for allowing more commercial events is seen among the young and middle-aged segments and those with children in the home (25-30% in favour).

Sale of Food and Merchandise at Park Events

- Food and event-related merchandise sales at park events is acceptable to most City residents (78% and 75%, respectively).
- While there is little opposition to food sales (6%) or event-related merchandise sales (12%), the public tends to disapprove of non-event-related merchandise sales at park events (59% in total).
- While the under 35 year old segment is divided in opinion, their middle-aged and older counterparts tend to oppose non-event related merchandise sales (68%).

Event Sponsor Signage and Displays

- Recognition of event sponsorship is acceptable to the large majority of residents in the form of a thank-you board without logo or a single sign with a corporate logo (86% and 77%, respectively).
- Corporate logos on all event signage are not a problem for the majority, but about one-third do not approve. While half say this is acceptable (49%) and another 13% say it makes no difference to them, about 35% do not support corporate logos on all event signage.
- Opinions are similar for display of products or merchandise at the event site. While not a problem for the majority, there is sizable opposition.
 - 35% disapprove of display of any products or merchandise (49% acceptable, 13% makes no difference).
 - 42% disapprove of display of a large item, such as a vehicle (44% acceptable, 11% makes no difference).

Alcohol Sales at Park Events

- There is considerable resistance to sale of alcohol at park events, but a majority are not opposed if the event is 'adult only'.
- A majority of residents say that alcohol sales at 'adult only' park events is acceptable or that it makes no difference to them (57% acceptable, 6% makes no difference). On the other hand, about one-third (35%) consider the idea unacceptable.
- Opposition to alcohol sales grows when asked about other specific types of events, in particular events held at neighbourhood parks, as follows:
 - At neighbourhood parks (68% not acceptable)
 - At beach events (54% not acceptable)
 - In larger 'city wide' parks (53% not acceptable)
 - At sporting tournaments (51% not acceptable)

Paid Admission (Gated) Events

- The idea of paid admission events in public parks is acceptable to a majority (57%), but again about one-third do not agree (35%).
- Residents of the East side (east of Main Street) are more likely to say that paid events are not acceptable (40% not acceptable, 53% acceptable), compared to those who live on the West side of the City (30% not acceptable, 62% acceptable).

There are no other demographic differences in opinion.

- Parks where paid events would be appropriate for the most part include Stanley Park, Jericho Beach/Park and Queen Elizabeth Park.

Effect of Increasing the Number of Park Events

- Increasing the number of park events would have a positive impact on park usage.
- About 4-in-10 residents say that they would be more likely to use the parks if there were more events.

Most of the others (49%) say it would not affect their use of the parks.

Conclusions

In sum, the public endorses park use for special events. There is virtually universal acceptance of many types of park events. The level of resistance is consistently about 35-40% for certain events, in particular those that may be perceived as not “recreational” and have a more limited interest, such as demonstrations, commercial events and religious ceremonies.

Residents of Vancouver offer their support for or have no issue with the idea of **more** events being held in parks, both small neighbourhood events and large ‘city wide’ events. In fact, events tend to have a positive impact on park visitors and would encourage greater use.

The public is supportive of the Park Board current guideline of having more events run by non-profit groups, as opposed to commercial events. They consider sale of food and event-related merchandise as acceptable. Residents also support the identification of corporate sponsorship. Most do not object to displays of corporate products or merchandise at events, but again there is resistance by about 35-40%. Paid admission events and alcohol sales at ‘adult only’ park events are acceptable to a majority, but a sizable minority regard these activities as inappropriate in a park venue. Alcohol sales at park events meet with greatest opposition, especially alcohol sale in neighbourhood parks.

On the whole, the public is interested in having more events in public parks and these events are generally seen to enhance the park visitor’s experience.

For a complete copy of the Survey, please contact the Park Board at 257-8486.

