



Date: September 5, 2003

**TO: Board Members - Parks and Recreation**  
**FROM: General Manager - Parks and Recreation**

**SUBJECT: Report on the Donation of Public Art to Harbour Green Park -  
Addendum**

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## **BACKGROUND**

This Addendum is to inform the Board of developments in relation to public response to this proposal since the report dated August 20, 2003.

Since the Open House on August 7, 2003 at Coal Harbour (detailed in the April 20, 2003 report), the Board has received a number of comments about the proposal. In addition, the Park Board, in conjunction with the City of Vancouver Office of Cultural Affairs, hosted a public forum at Coal Harbour Community Centre on September 3, 2003, to which both the general public and those who submitted comments were invited.

Twenty e-mails and two phone calls were received by September 3, 2003. Of these, five were in support and seventeen were opposed. The positive comments referred to the aesthetics, the calibre of the artist and the historical nature of the work. Three primary reasons were given by those opposed: aesthetics (14), view obstruction (8) and safety issues including shelter for “vagrants” (2) (some cited more than one concern).

The public forum of September 3, 2003 was advertised in the community through distribution of posters and flyers in the neighbourhood by city staff. Thirty members of the public attended the forum. The session began with an orientation to the Public Art Program, a presentation on the future public art sites for Coal Harbour which are part of the planned public amenities for the area, and an overview of artworks already installed in the neighbourhood. The artist then presented information about the concept and nature of her proposed work.

During the discussion which followed four people spoke in support of the work, citing the need to create a sense of ‘place’ for the neighbourhood and the importance of the reference to the history of the site and the relationship with existing freight sheds immediately across Coal Harbour.

Eleven people responded with objections to the installation, some quite forcefully. Some prefaced their comments with the qualifier that they didn’t object to the art work but to its placement on this site and the sense that it would block the view. There were also concerns about the work providing shelter to ‘vagrants’. Some concern was expressed about the consultation process and that residents had not heard about the specific proposal until after the August 7, 2003 preview.

Following the meeting, an additional five e-mails were received, some from those attending the meeting. All expressed objections similar to the above.

## **DISCUSSION**

Some of the comments appear to be in response to a bulletin distributed by the “Concerned Neighbours of Coal Harbour” which asked for help in voicing opposition to the work. It is possible that the image on this bulletin as well as an image that appears on the initial proposal by the artist (posted on the web site) may have given a poor representation of the scale of the proposal.

The scale of the work and the view obstruction are relatively modest in the context of the overall bullnose plaza and some of the boats moored in the adjacent marina. While the artist is currently working on the final design, the footprint of the work will not exceed 4m x 9m (or 36m<sup>2</sup>) and may be closer to 3m x 6.5m (or 19.5m<sup>2</sup>). The diameter of the bullnose is 22m (or 380m<sup>2</sup>) and the inner circle of pavers 3m (28m<sup>2</sup>). The work would occupy less than 10% of the plaza. The overall height would not exceed 6.7m. Benches on the bullnose are aligned facing outward and the work would not affect these. It might also be noted that, for the public walking on the seawall, views are minimally disrupted as the work sits on 3m high pilings which may, in fact, frame the views. In addition, the artist has indicated that she will consider how the orientation of the art work might minimize view impacts.

As a consequence of the height of the work, the space beneath the shed will provide poor long term shelter considering the wind and rain angles on this site. In the experience of Park Board staff, public art on the seawall does not attract the homeless as the seawall is too heavily used and too exposed to public view. The work might, however, provide some short-term relief from sun and downpours for people walking on the seawall. In addition, all public art proposals are reviewed by the City of Vancouver Engineering Department to ensure that safety, structural integrity and maintenance plans will meet performance standards and this proposed artwork met the engineer’s technical criteria.

In regard to the aesthetic response, the City’s process and that accepted by the Park Board recognizes that there will always be a range of subjective responses to public art. To address this, the City developed a process which delegated the decision to a selection panel composed of art and design professionals and neighbourhood representatives. The artist selected for this commission has received considerable national and international acclaim.

In terms of comparable processes elsewhere in Vancouver, the Office of Cultural Affairs notes that controversy often accompanies the introduction of major new public artworks. However - and this was the experience at False Creek, where the public art program began several years before Coal Harbour's - the public's ultimate reception of controversial artworks characteristically turns around, sometimes to the point where the most controversial work is ultimately the most appreciated. Additionally, artworks which reference the history of Vancouver, as the Grosvenor proposal does, have proved overwhelmingly popular with City-wide residents, a majority of whom have sharp memories of False Creek and Coal Harbour before their present transformation.

The Park Board Guidelines for consultation on public art are as follows:

*City-wide Parks*

*Signage will be posted on the site for a three week period.*

*Notice will be placed in the nearest public facility at the same time as the signs are posted.*

*Appropriate stakeholders will be notified.*

*Depending on the nature of the proposal and the site chosen, a public meeting and/or a random survey as well as leafleting in the neighbourhood may be required. Ads may be taken in newspapers.*

*All proposals for Stanley and Queen Elizabeth Parks and waterfront parks will require a more extensive process than for other parks.*

The following is the process followed for this proposal:

Sign was posted on site for several months (still there)

As soon as the art work was selected, information material was developed. Pamphlets were distributed in the neighbourhood. 400 copies were distributed primarily north of Georgia, and east of Denman to Bute. Some were taken by residents to Coal Harbour Co-op and left with the manager of Seaside. Staff tried to contact concierges to leave posters and pamphlets. Most managers wanted the posters and not the flyers. Two buildings refused to take in flyers or posters, indicating that it was strata council policy. Staff in error did not leave flyers or posters at the neighbouring marina for the August 7, 2003 Open House. They did, however, deliver notices there advising of the September 3, 2003 meeting.

50 Posters were put up in public locations including the West End and Coal Harbour community centres, one on the sign on-site, on an access point on the east side of Harbour Green and in Bo-Jangles Restaurant. In buildings where there was no concierge, posters were put up on the outside. Some posters were posted in elevators of the complex.

Displays have been ongoing at Coal Harbour Community Centre.

There was discussion of a more extensive process such as media notice. The process was felt to be adequate as the site in Harbour Green was conceived of and designed in the area plan to hold public art and the donor agreed to follow a public art selection process which included neighbourhood input.

## **SUMMARY**

The process followed for this proposed donation met all Park Board requirements. While there has been some negative response from neighbouring residents, staff continue to recommend acceptance of this work based on previous public art experience and the potential significance of this art work for both residents and visitors to Vancouver.

Prepared by:

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