

Minutes of Meeting
Planning and Environment Committee, Vancouver Park Board
2099 Beach Avenue, Vancouver

DATE OF MEETING: July 5, 2005

ATTENDEES: Park Board Commissioners
Commissioner Loretta Woodcock
Commissioner Eva Riccius
Commissioner Suzanne Anton
Commissioner Heather Deal

Park Board Staff

Piet Rutgers	Director of Planning and Operations
Jim Lowden	Director of Stanley District
Kate Davis-Johnson	Manager of Park Development
Bob Hindley	Recreation Programmer
Barbara Joughin	Recorder of Minutes

Delegations

Kim Perry	Perry and Associates
Carolyn Kennedy	Perry and Associates
Terry Lavender	Mole Hill Community Housing Society
Rowly Johnson	West End Citizens Action Network (WECAN)
Sharon de Souza	West End Residents Association (WERA)
Aaron Jasper	West End Residents Association
Michel Morin	resident
Rob Wynen	resident
George Stephenson	resident
Maxine Davis	Dr. Peter Centre
Peter Ritchie	Barclay Dog Owners
Laurie Lee	Lord Roberts Annex PAC
Charles Shane	resident
Linda Lawson	resident

The meeting was called to order at 7:25 pm, with the following Agenda:

1. Approval of the minutes of June 14, 2005 meeting
2. Nelson Park Concept Plan

1. Nelson Park Concept Plan:

Jim Lowden provided a brief history of the Nelson Park redevelopment process leading up to the public open house meetings in June 2005, and introduced consultants Kim Perry and Carolyn Kennedy, who presented the results of the recent design charette process.

Kim Perry told the Committee that two community design events were held on June 7 and June 18, 2005 to explore ideas and themes with the public and to develop program and design options for Nelson Park. At the design events, participants filled out questionnaires and sketched concept plans with designer illustrators. Kim Perry summarized the results of the sketches and questionnaire comments, showed examples of the sketches, and highlighted emerging themes:

replace undesirable behaviour; retain park green space, unprogrammed open space, and the farmers market; accommodate children and dogs; connect the park to Molehill; add a water feature, flowers, entry definition, lighting and seating; improve drainage; and calm traffic on Comox Street. The consultants translated these common themes into two design options based on a sense of community consensus and existing design considerations, including: the Lord Roberts School Annex, existing trees, Nelson Street's functionality, Comox Street greenway designation, and surrounding land uses. The options are similar, both retain the fieldhouse and school parking in the park, reduce or remove existing berms, and bring a water feature into the central "heart" area west of the proposed fenced dog area.

Delegations:

1. Terry Lavender described the impact of the park washroom closure on Mole Hill and said the housing society is concerned that having a police presence in the fieldhouse will have a similar effect and push the drug problem out into the community. He encouraged the Committee to plan for teen play space because the current neighbourhood demographic of young children will age.
2. Rowly Johnson observed that adults are the major park users, and that although most are simply walking through, the design concepts don't allow for traversing the park. He encouraged the Board to negotiate with the Vancouver School Board to try to resolve the existing barrier at the Bute/Nelson corner. He said there is strong consensus that the park needs a major shakeup, and he is concerned that redevelopment plans are focusing on cosmetic changes to existing park features.
3. Sharon de Souza told the Committee that the West End Residents Association (WERA) wants to keep the park open, active and inclusive. The group likes the farmers market and would like it to continue, and wants bike racks, benches, and tables, community access to the playground, and reduced speeds and traffic calming on the perimeter streets. She said free parking is an inappropriate use of park space, and spoke against the use of the fieldhouse for police equipment storage.
4. Aaron Jasper thanked the Park Board Commissioners and staff for the consultation process, especially the design charettes. He commented that the future of the fieldhouse is the most contentious feature in the park, that having a permanent police presence in park won't address the problems, and that there are ways to address the problems in Nelson Park through the larger community.
5. Michel Morin doesn't currently use the park because it is unsafe, but enjoyed participating in the consultation process. He sees this as a unique opportunity to make Nelson Park a jewel, and would like to see a connection created between the park and Molehill. He said labeling the corners is not inclusive, and suggested that parking could be recessed along Nelson Street and that an artists row on Comox Street at Christmas could extend the market season.
6. Rob Wynen said this is an exciting opportunity to turn the park into a West End green oasis and encouraged the Board to look at the surrounding area while designing the park, and to look at opportunities on the under-used exterior edges of the park. He observed that people avoid the edges and corners because they are noisy and uncomfortable, and usage inside the park will be affected by these issues. He wants activities for teens and does not want a police centre in the park.
7. George Stephenson said that the options presented do not provide a heart and that the process has not been visionary. He believes that a major objective should be to expand who uses the park and asked the Park Board to provide a park with heart in the West End. There is a unique chance for the park, and an opportunity to start with a blank slate, link to existing dynamic neighbourhood features, and create a heritage park and gardens.

8. Maxine Davis identified an opportunity for creating continuity with the ambience of Molehill and suggested creating a connection to the path access at Molehill. She said the park needs to be made more accessible to people in wheelchairs, and suggested that the fieldhouse be replaced with an anchoring community art piece.
9. Peter Ritchie spoke on behalf of dog owners who are currently unwilling to bring their dogs to Nelson Park for safety reasons. He said the dog offleash area in Nelson Park should be fenced to keep pets in bounds.
10. Laurie Lee told the Committee that the neighbourhood is a transition area for people moving to Canada, and noted that because the process has assumed a level of communication skills that many residents do not possess, many families' voices have not been heard. She said it is important that the park has space for children. She expressed support for the options that were presented given the financial limits, and encouraged the Park Board to make the hard decisions and create a safe, clean, beautiful park.
11. Charles Shane told the Committee that existing regulations should be properly enforced rather than using tax payers money to change the park. He said it is the Park Board's responsibility to notify residents surrounding Nelson Park of the process but they have had no input because there was insufficient notice of the June 2005 meetings.
12. Linda Lawson thanked all who were involved in the design process and said that she likes the circle areas, trees and community gardens. She no longer feels safe to use the park and thinks it should be made safer. She noted that the notice about the public consultation process did not reach many people, and would like the berms lowered and the fieldhouse removed.

Discussion:

- The group talked about alternatives to parking inside the park and about calming traffic on the streets around the park. There are currently 12 parking spaces in the park for school staff. The Committee suggested that there could be more dialog with the Vancouver School Board, the school, and City Engineering about relocating school staff parking onto one of the perimeter streets. Staff noted that Nelson Street is a significant traffic circulator in the area and an emergency response route, and that Bute Street may offer the only option for street parking. However, Bute Street between Robson and Davie is one of the most heavily used pedestrian pathways in the West End, and introducing parking may create conflicts. Comox Street is currently a two-way street but will be developed as a future greenway.
- Staff outlined the steps that were followed to notify the public about the recent Nelson Park consultation process. Ads were placed in the WestEnder and Courier newspapers notifying about the June 7 and June 18 open houses, about 2000 flyers were distributed within a two block radius of Nelson Park, pamphlets were sent out to families at Lord Roberts School Annex, emails were sent to a contact list, and volunteers placed notices in apartment building lobbies. A delegate said there were no notices in the newspapers and the Committee requested that staff review and report back on what was printed in the newspapers.
- A member of the Committee asked why an earlier idea of relocating the playground to the east side of the school was not included in the design options and staff reported that this was not supported by the school because there is more convenient access and better surveillance on the west side. It is important to include additional play space in the park because the school limits public access to the existing playground during school hours.
- Nelson Park is a designated offleash dog park and the group discussed where the fenced dog offleash area could best be located in the park. Many dog owners do not like to use the park due to safety concerns.
- The group discussed providing activities for teens in the park. The questionnaire responses

did not indicate support for a hard surface activity area for teen use due to reduced green space and increased noise. Several delegations requested that activities be planned for teens in the park, and the Committee noted the Board's mandate to expand youth involvement in Vancouver's parks.

- Both design options incorporate suggestions for community gardens which could be for flowers or herbs. A member of the Committee questioned the appropriateness of making a portion of the park less accessible. The group noted there was a consensus on bringing more flowers and gardens into the park and that there is a high demand for access to community gardens in the West End.
- Safety in the park is a primary issue and surveillance is impeded by blocked views. Both design options suggest the reduction or removal of some of the existing berms. A member of the Committee requested that a cross-section view of the berm profile be provided. Staff have reviewed alternate uses for the fieldhouse but concluded it is not big enough to provide programmable space. A majority of questionnaire respondents support and other members of the community oppose the use of the existing fieldhouse by police.
- Members of the Committee and the public said they would like to see a visionary design concept for the park that starts from a blank slate. The design of Nelson Park could be integrated with adjacent structures, and be revitalized from a central heart out to the edges of the park. Staff noted that there are existing elements that limit the degree to which the park can be redesigned, including the school and grounds, and mature trees. There is a total budget of \$750,000 allocated to the redevelopment of the park, and staff requested that the Board provide direction on how to proceed with the best possible visionary redevelopment of the park with the available funds.

Summary

The Committee received a report on the results of the recent public consultation on the redevelopment of Nelson Park, reviewed two suggested design options, and heard comments from 12 delegations. They asked staff and the project consultant to review the ideas and issues that were discussed, and refine the designs to bring in heart, address parking in the park, and explore the use of washrooms in the park, and the use of the fieldhouse, including the possibility of removing it.

Staff requested that the Board provide assistance engaging the Vancouver School Board and City Engineering in discussions about relocating the school parking lot, the future of Bute Street, and the Comox Street greenway development, and direction on how to design from a blank slate and whether the project budget would be altered. The Committee said that the process should continue to move forward and not be delayed by starting a new consultation.

2. Approval of June 14, 2005 meeting minutes:

The minutes of the June 14, 2005 meeting were approved as presented.

3. Next Meeting:

The meeting adjourned at 10:35 pm. The next Planning and Recreation Committee meeting is scheduled for September 13, 2005, at 7:00 pm.