

Date: January 5, 2006



**TO: Board Members – Vancouver Park Board**  
**FROM: General Manager – Parks and Recreation**  
**SUBJECT: Marketing at VanDusen Botanical Garden**

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

- A. THAT the Board approve in principle the transfer of responsibility for marketing the VanDusen Botanical Garden from the VanDusen Botanical Garden Association (VBGA) to the Park Board, and*
- B. That staff report back on the actions required for implementing the proposal.*

## BACKGROUND

Over the past 30 years VanDusen Botanical Garden has become a significant City-owned cultural and educational resource for the residents of Vancouver and the Lower Mainland and for visitors to our city. Over 150,000 people visit the Garden each year and there are over 9,000 members and there are 1800 active volunteers. VanDusen is owned and operated by the Vancouver Park Board (VPB) in collaboration with its non-profit partner the VanDusen Botanical Garden Association (VBGA). As a result of the success of the VBGA's first ever capital campaign and through Park Board capital plan allocations from 2003 – 2005 and from 2006 – 2008, the Garden is about to embark in capital construction for upgraded facilities. The new buildings and gardens will significantly enhance the Garden's capacity to deliver expanded educational programmes and special events.

The Joint Operating Agreement (JOA) between the VPB and the VBGA originally signed in 1994, has expired and is being renegotiated at this time. Over the years there have been adjustments made to the respective responsibilities of the Garden partners in response to changing priorities. As the Garden has developed, staff resources on both sides have expanded and the VBGA as an organization has grown. In its early stages there were few resources available for marketing, however, as the Garden has grown in scope the demand has increased. Originally, a portion of the annual membership fees for the VBGA was transferred to the VPB in recognition for facilities and services provided. During an earlier JOA negotiation it was decided to grant the VBGA the total funds from the membership fees in return for the VBGA taking on the marketing.

## DISCUSSION

There has been a long-standing concern expressed by the VBGA that while a small portion of the marketing is allocated to strictly VBGA programs, the majority of the

budget is in fact spent on marketing the Garden itself for which the VBGA sees limited return since the VPB retains all gate revenues. It is therefore difficult for the VBGA board of governors to rationalize these expenditures. While it is understood that this situation arose as a result of earlier negotiations, it still provokes tension between the partners. During our discussions of a new JOA this proposal to shift responsibility for marketing was identified as a creative way to address this concern and to address ongoing marketing pressures at the Garden.

The profile and continued success of VanDusen Garden depends on a number of factors: the visitors' experience of the garden and associated visitor services, the quality of the garden and its programs, and their marketing. The VPB gate revenues are directly associated with a successful marketing program. With the projected capital improvements and improved programs, the need for quality marketing will only increase over the coming years.

This proposal would shift the balance of responsibility for marketing to the Park Board from the VBGA and ensure that staff are in a position to direct the marketing product, focusing on increasing revenues. Further, there will be efficiencies created through the marketing department of VanDusen being better able to liaise with Park Board communications colleagues. This proposal foresees the transfer of contributions from the VBGA to the VPB for staff time and advertising budget relating to promotional activities undertaken solely for the VBGA. Although a new staff resource and additional marketing dollars are required, the contribution from the VBGA and increased revenues will offset these costs and ensure that this proposal is cost neutral.

Marketing will continue within a context of collaboration between the partners and planning will take place on an annual basis. While the VPB is taking on these additional responsibilities, the VBGA will be able to focus their resources more intensively on fund raising for the Garden and on education. The VBGA board of governors voted at their November 30<sup>th</sup> meeting to accept this proposal in principle.

The reasons for this proposal coming forward at this time rather than waiting for the conclusion of the JOA negotiations is because both groups agree that it is a good proposal that will assist with the negotiations and staff would like the Board's approval in principle in order to spend the necessary time for planning and implementing this shift which is proposed to take place in June 2006.

The VBGA and the VPB will continue to discuss the implementation plan for the new arrangements and staff will come back to the Board with a further report requesting approval for staffing as well as detailing how this and additional advertising costs will be accommodated within the VanDusen Garden budget.

## **SUMMARY**

The VBGA has marketed VanDusen over the preceding years of the Garden's development. It is timely in VanDusen's history that this responsibility be transferred to the VPB, given the direct impact that marketing has on the VPB revenues. This proposal will enable the VPB to effectively leverage its corporate communications strength, explore efficiencies and promote VanDusen Botanical Garden in accordance with the shared vision of the VBGA and VPB and will be cost neutral.

Staff will provide a further report to the Board on the actions required to implement this proposal.

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