Park Land Acquisition Strategy for Vancouver

DRAFT FOR DISCUSSION



Vancouver Park Board January 23, 2006



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Executive Summary

Vancouver's livability is closely associated with the quantity and quality of our park system. We face important challenges in the upcoming decades: steady population growth and rising costs to acquire new land for parks. This report proposes a strategy that is rooted in a vision of Vancouver as green, healthy and livable city – a strategy that builds on our successful history and leaves an even greater legacy to future generations.

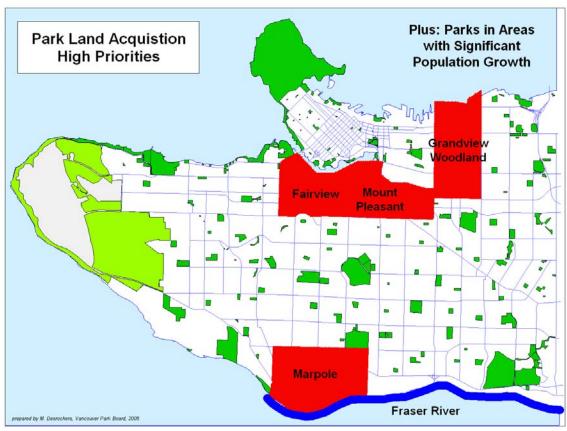
RECOMMENDATIONS

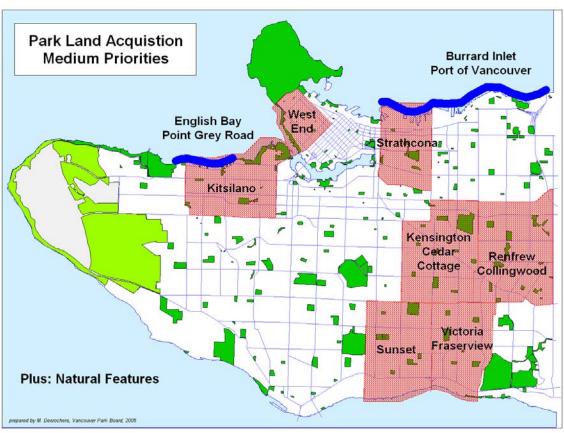
- 1) Maintain the 'neighbourhood park' ratio at 1.1 hectares (2.75 acres) per new 1,000 residents.
- 2) High priority park acquisitions (see map on page 5):
 - a) acquire new parks in areas experiencing significant population growth, using the guidelines in the table on page 4;
 - b) acquire new parks in neighbourhoods with major park-deficiencies (Fairview, Grandview-Woodland, Marpole and Mount Pleasant);
 - c) acquire linear waterfront access rights and new parks along the Fraser River.
- 3) Moderate priority park acquisitions (see map on page 5):
 - a) acquire new parks in areas with moderate park-deficiencies, with emphasis on new parks that meet at least one other park acquisition objective, such as expanding an existing small park, a new park along a greenway, or a new park in a moderately-dense 'neighbourhood centre';
 - b) acquire new parks along Point Grey and Burrard Inlet waterfronts;
 - c) acquire new parks that protect, preserve, enhance or restore important natural features.

Recommended guidelines for acquisition of new parks in areas experiencing significant population growth

	Neighbourhoods with LESS than 1.1 hectares of 'neighbourhood park' per 1,000 residents	Neighbourhoods with MORE than 1.1 hectares of 'neighbourhood park' per 1,000 residents
Large-scale residential developments on sites greater than 4 hectares	seek a dedication of 1.1 hectares of park per 1,000 residents	seek a dedication of up to 1.1 hectares of park per 1,000 residents AND/OR a payment-in-lieu of providing park land
Large-scale residential developments on sites between 2 and 4 hectares	seek a dedication of up to 1.1 hectares of park per 1,000 residents AND/OR a payment-in-lieu of providing park land	seek a payment-in-lieu of providing park land
Large-scale residential developments on sites smaller than 2 hectares	seek a payment-in-lieu of providing park land	seek a payment-in-lieu of providing park land
Areas with high- density housing on small parcels of land	seek the creation of "area- specific" DCL zones and an allocation for park acquisition	seek the creation of "area- specific" DCL zones and an allocation for park acquisition
Areas with medium-density housing on small parcels of land	seek the creation of "area- specific" DCL zones and an allocation for park acquisition OR use other available funding to pay for park acquisitions	no action is proposed

In the case of major rezonings involving commercial or institutional uses, seek public open space to be provided on site or, if insufficient to meet the anticipated demand, seek a payment to acquire park land in the vicinity or to upgrade an existing park in the vicinity.





Introduction

Parks are an essential component of any city and Vancouver is no exception. In fact, we pride ourselves on our ability to interact with nature within our urban area, to exercise outdoors within blocks of our front door, and to enjoy mountain views, water views and sunsets all summer long. Our park system is a key element that elevates Vancouver as a world leader in terms of urban livability.

Our park system faces important challenges: steady population growth and rising costs to acquire new land for parks. This report will lead a discussion about how much park should be acquired in the foreseeable future in order to foster a livable city and the specific acquisition priorities for the next generation of Vancouverites.



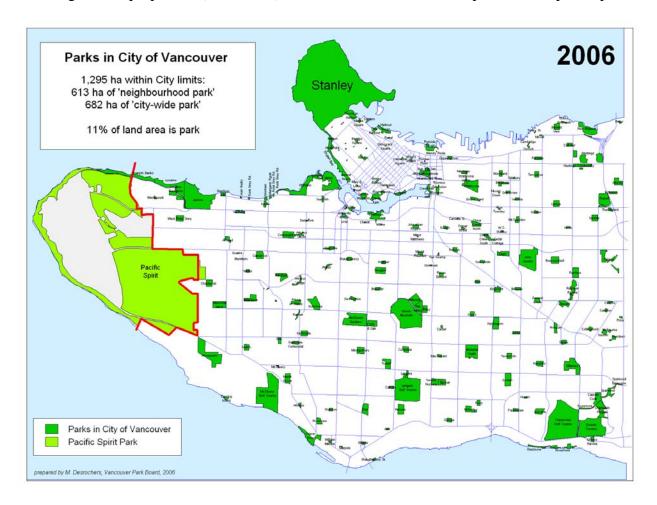
Vancouver's Park System Today

As of January 2006:

- There are 221 parks in Vancouver;
- These parks total 1,295 hectares (3,200 acres) of land;
- Parks account for 11% of the land within our municipal boundaries;
- The largest park is Stanley Park (391 hectares or 967 acres);
- The smallest park is an un-named mini-park at Mackenzie Street and Quesnel Drive (0.03 hectares or 0.07 acres); and
- 130 parks are larger than 1 hectare (2.5 acres) in size (i.e. the size of a typical city block).

Two features distinguish our park system from other metropolitan areas:

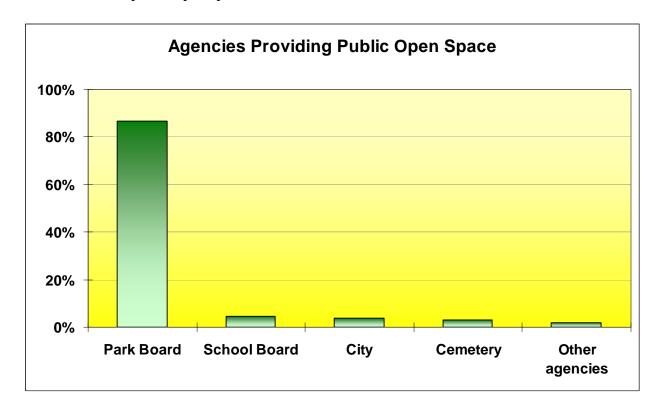
- Vancouver has a very large, natural park within walking distance of the city's core (Stanley Park); and
- A significant proportion (about 40%) of Vancouver's waterfront is preserved as public park.



Parks in Vancouver include a vast array of features and facilities:

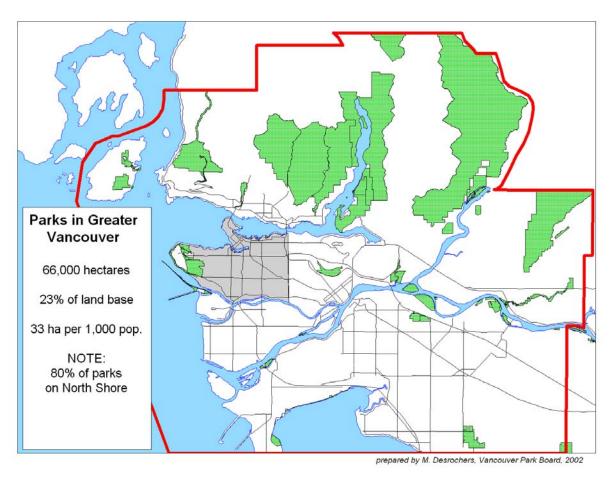
- Natural areas (forests, woodlands, wetlands, lakes, ponds, streams, etc.);
- Outdoor recreation (sport fields, ball diamonds, sport courts, skateboard facilities, golf courses, bicycle paths, etc.);
- Outdoor leisure (children's playgrounds, beaches, community gardens, picnic areas, taichi areas, etc.);
- Indoor recreation (community centres, pools, rinks, etc.);
- Gardens and floral displays;
- Places for gatherings and celebration;
- Performance venues; and
- Commemorations and public art.

The Park Board is the main provider of public open space in Vancouver, with parks comprising about 85% of all public open space available to residents.



Vancouver residents benefit from many parks beyond its municipal boundaries. A portion of Spanish Bank Park (8 hectares or 20 acres) is located beyond the city boundary but maintained by the Park Board. Pacific Spirit Regional Park, located between Vancouver and UBC, is a nature park of 809 hectares (2,000 acres) – more than twice the size of Stanley Park. Central Park, which was once co-managed by Burnaby and Vancouver and located on the east side of Boundary Road in Burnaby, is 88 hectares (217 acres).

There are also numerous nature parks managed by the Greater Vancouver Regional District and B.C. Parks on the North Shore (e.g. Cypress Provincial Park, Lynn Headwaters Regional Park, Lower Seymour Conservation Reserve). A total of 23% of the land within Greater Vancouver is park land.



The 'Neighbourhood Park' Ratio

The Park Board divides its parks into 2 categories: 'city-wide' parks and 'neighbourhood' parks. The former includes parks and portions of parks that serve residents from a city-wide and even region-wide perspective. The latter includes all other parks and portions of parks, which primarily focus on providing parks and facilities for residents of a specific neighbourhood. The table below explains how each park or type of park is counted.

Park(s)	% of Park Counted as 'City-Wide' Park	% of Park Counted as 'Neighbourhood' Park
Golf Courses	100% *	0%
VanDusen Botanical Garden	100% *	0%
Nat Bailey Stadium Park	100% *	0%
Service/Maintenance Yards	100% **	0%
Stanley Park	90%	10%
Queen Elizabeth Park	75%	25%
Waterfront parks with beaches	50%	50%
Hastings Park	50%	50%
Rupert Park	47% *	53%
Sun Yat-Sen Park	36% *	64%
All other parks	0%	100%

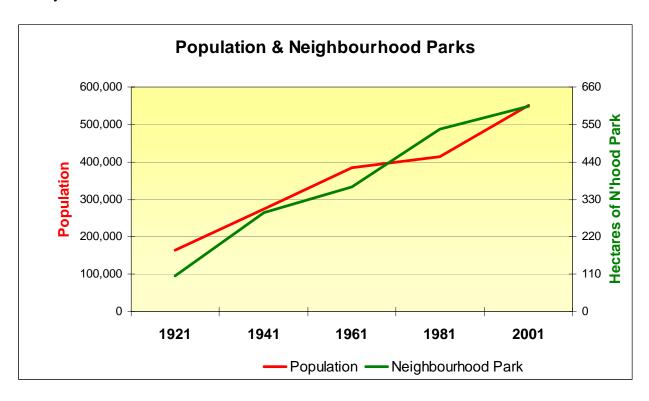
^{*} denotes admission fee is required

Based on these categories, Vancouver has 682 hectares (1,685 acres) of 'city-wide' park, and 613 hectares (1,515 acres) of 'neighbourhood' park.

^{**} denotes no public access

In the early 1980s, the Park Board developed a tool to measure the provision of 'neighbourhood' park based on the size of the city's or an area's population. It calculates a ratio based on the amount of 'neighbourhood' park divided by the total population, and is expressed as 'x' hectares ('y' acres) per 1,000 residents. The 'neighbourhood park' ratio is rooted in a historical 'level of service', i.e. the 'neighbourhood park' system grew as Vancouver's population increased decade by decade.

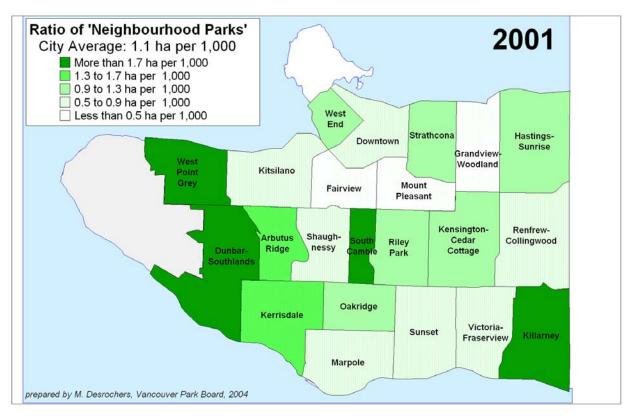
This historical review (see chart below) has led to the 'neighbourhood park' ratio being established at 1.1 hectares (2.75 acres) per 1,000 residents (roughly the size of a typical city block for every 1,000 residents). The ratio is a helpful tool when tracking the evolution of the park system through time, and in comparing 'neighbourhood park' provision in various parts of the city.



There is no similar planning tool for 'city-wide' parks because the acquisition of 'city-wide' parks (primarily large tracts of land) is unpredictable, more often the result of unique historical circumstances.

'Neighbourhood parks' are not evenly distributed across Vancouver (see map and table below, both based on the latest census information available from 2001).

Three neighbourhoods (Fairview, Grandview-Woodland and Mount Pleasant) have less than half of the target ratio of 1.1 hectares (2.75 acres) per 1,000 residents. They are referred to as 'park-deficient' neighbourhoods. Even though the ratio for Marpole is 0.74 hectares per 1,000 residents, it is included in the 'park-deficient' category because its apartment area located south of 70th Avenue is highly deficient (about a quarter of the target ratio).



Neighbourhood	Ratio (ha per 1,000)	Neighbourhood	Ratio (ha per 1,000)
Fairview	0.43	Riley Park	1.15
Mount Pleasant	0.44	West End	1.16
Grandview-Woodland	0.46	Oakridge	1.19
Victoria-Fraserview	0.68	Strathcona	1.24
Marpole	0.74	Hastings-Sunrise	1.27
Sunset	0.74	Kerrisdale	1.40
Shaughnessy	0.77	Arbutus Ridge	1.53
Renfrew-Collingwood	0.81	South Cambie	1.76
Kitsilano	0.82	Dunbar-Southlands	1.93
Downtown	0.87	Killarney	2.95
Kensington-Cedar Cottage	1.10	West Point Grey	3.30

How are parks acquired?

Parks can be acquired in a variety of ways:

Acquisition method:	Examples:
Land donated or bequeathed to the Park Board	- Hadden Park- Hastings Park- Jonathan Rogers Park
Land leased on a long-term basis to the Park Board	- CRAB Park at Portside- Stanley Park- Victory Square
Land transferred to the Park Board as a condition of rezoning a large tract of land	- Coal Harbour Park - David Lam Park - Gaston Park
Land purchased by the Park Board with 'park acquisition funds' collected from developers (either a 'community amenity contribution' or a 'development cost levy')	- Emery Barnes Park - Granville Bridge Loop Park
Land purchased by the Park Board with 'park acquisition funds' from the Park Board's Capital Plan budget	- Mosaic Creek Park- Sahalli Park- Tea Swamp Park

There has been an increasing reliance on using funds collected from developers, with a corresponding decrease in emphasis on using funds from the Park Board's Capital Plan. There is an underlying principle that new residents to the city should shoulder the cost for additional services such as parks. (For more detail on this topic, refer to the City of Vancouver's study entitled "Financing Growth", available from the City's Planning Department or on the City's website (www.vancouver.ca/commsvcs/cityplans/fg/index.htm).

An important source of funding for park land acquisition comes from 'development cost levies' (DCLs). Since 2000, DCLs are collected across the city (prior to that, they were only collected in specific development zones). The current rate is \$6.00 per square foot of new development. 41% of the total collected is allocated to park land acquisition while the remaining 59% is allocated to childcare, replacement housing and transportation.

Another important source comes from 'community amenity contributions' (CACs), which are collected when a land owner successfully rezones a parcel of land for higher use. Somes CACs are allocated to park land acquisition.

How 'green' is Vancouver?

A commonly held perception is that Vancouver is a 'green' city with abundant park space. The reality is that we are not as 'green' as we think we are.

Vancouver was compared to four other Canadian jurisdictions (Calgary, Montreal, Ottawa and Toronto) and four American jurisdictions (New York [Manhattan], Portland, San Francisco and Seattle). Four of these cities are in eastern North America, and four in western North America.

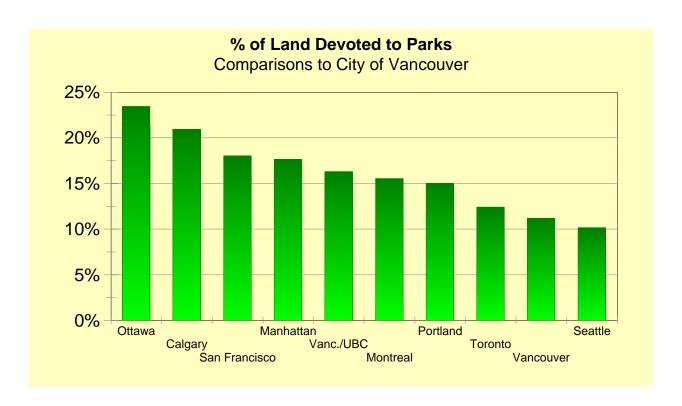


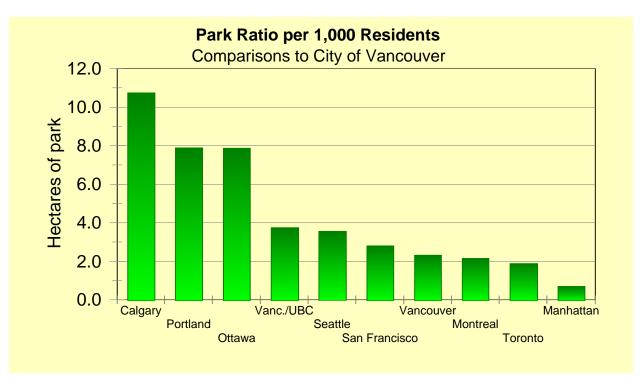
In order to make fair comparisons, a geographic area similar to Vancouver's size (about 115 square kilometers) was analyzed in these eight jurisdictions. Park and population totals were collected for each, using data from municipal parks departments, the 2001 Canadian census and the 2000 American census. Two measures were analyzed: the percentage of land area that is devoted to parks, and the ratio of park area per 1,000 residents (see charts on the next page).

The City of Vancouver did not rate highly using either measure. It was 8th out of 9 with regards to percentage of land devoted to parks, and 6th out of 9 with regards to the ratio of park per 1,000 residents.

If Pacific Spirit Regional Park and UBC are included in Vancouver's totals, they combine to improve Vancouver's ranking but still in the middle ranks, increasing to 5th out of 9 with regards to percentage of land devoted to parks, and to 4th out of 9 with regards to the ratio of park per 1,000 residents.

As pointed out earlier, Greater Vancouver has an abundance of parks and open spaces. Perhaps we believe the city is so green because we see the region as being so green, with its dramatic forested backdrop of the North Shore mountains?





How much more park land do we need?

Park Board policy is to provide the 'neighbourhood park' ratio of 1.1 hectares (2.75 acres) per 1,000 new residents. It has been suggested that this target is too costly to achieve as a society, that it favours parks over other important services such as the provision of childcare and affordable housing. Given the high land costs involved in park land acquisition, it has been suggested that the 'neighbourhood park' ratio be lowered.

Overall, Vancouver is a young city when compared to agglomerations in eastern North America and Europe. Our city is currently in its second generation of urban development, one in which we are witnessing the replacement of many small, older homes with new, larger homes, duplexes, townhouses or apartment buildings. The acquisition and assembly of land for small to medium sized parks can still be accomplished in this context.

There will be a time in the future when new park land will become prohibitively expensive to buy and increasingly challenging to assemble, probably when Vancouver's second generation of urban development nears completion. But this is several decades away, perhaps fifty years from now. The next couple of decades remain a good time to expand the park system.

There are solid rationales that support maintaining the 'neighbourhood park' ratio as a target for the foreseeable future:

- Vancouver's population increased by 130,000 between 1981 and 2001, from 415,000 to 545,000 residents. Projections suggest that another 90,000 new residents are expected between 2001 and 2021, bringing the city's population to about 635,000 residents by 2021. Increased population means increased pressure on Vancouver's park system.
- Vancouver is gradually densifying with more people living in apartments and townhouses.
 This means that fewer residents have access to private open space (e.g. backyards or patios)
 found typically with single family homes. Therefore, a growing number of residents will
 increasingly rely on public parks for their outdoor recreational needs. The demands placed on
 the park system will increase markedly as the city becomes denser.
- Vancouver's increasingly diverse population is placing new demands on our park system: for example, more natural areas in parks, more community gardens, more areas dedicated for dogs, more areas for linear recreation such as jogging, in-line skating and cycling, and more areas for activities such as skateboarding, disc golf and taichi. This trend for new and more facilities will continue in the future.
- An increasing number of companies and workers are choosing to locate in highly livable settings – Vancouver's rapid growth in the last couple of decades attests to this. Parks can be seen as long-term civic investments, helping to secure a solid base for strengthening the city's economy.

For all the above reasons, it is therefore proposed that the policy to provide the 'neighbourhood park' ratio of 1.1 hectares (2.75 acres) per 1,000 new residents be maintained.

Park Acquisitions during 2001-2021

Between 2001 and 2021, the city's population is expected to increase by about 90,000 residents. Applying the 'neighbourhood park' ratio suggests supplying an additional 100 hectares (250 acres) of 'neighbourhood park'.

As illustrated in the table below, over 70 hectares (175 acres) has been built, secured or is anticipated through purchase or major developments. Only a small proportion (about 15%) of this park land has been or is expected to be acquired through purchase by the City.

This leaves a gap of approximately 30 hectares (75 acres) in park land acquisition. Unless additional funding is allocated, the desired acquisition target will be short by about 25%.

Parks built during 2001-2005	13.0 hectares	32.0 acres
Parks secured but not yet built	15.5 hectares	38.3 acres
Parks expected through major projects	32.9 hectares	81.3 acres
Parks expected to be acquired through purchase	10.0 hectares	24.7 acres
(using funds from 'development cost levies' and		
'community amenity contributions')		
SUB-TOTAL	71.4 HECTARES	176.4 ACRES

Park Land Acquisition Choices

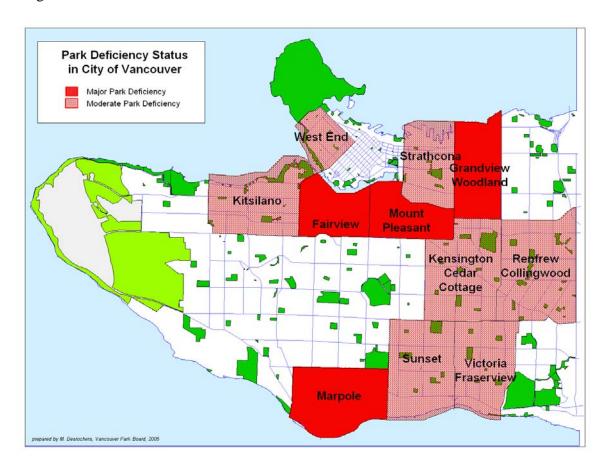
There are important choices to be made with regards to the priorities for park land acquisition due to budget limitations.

Below is a list of possible park land acquisition choices, each of which will be detailed in the following pages.

- CHOICE #1) Acquire park land in park-deficient areas:
 - a. in neighbourhoods with park-deficiencies;
 - b. in precincts without a park or school yard;
- CHOICE #2) Acquire park land to keep up with population growth:
- CHOICE #3) Acquire park land where the land is considered of 'special merit':
 - a. on the waterfront;
 - b. significant natural features;
- CHOICE #4) Acquire park land for linear parks and along greenways;
- CHOICE #5) Acquire park land to expand existing small parks or to provide more logical boundaries to existing parks.

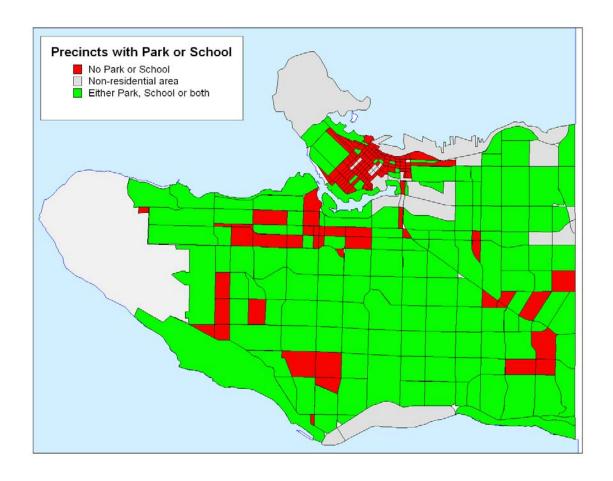
CHOICE #1a) Acquire park land in park-deficient neighbourhoods

Four neighbourhoods are considered to have major deficiencies and seven have moderate deficiencies (see map below). For the last two decades, priority has been placed on adding new parks to the neighbourhoods with major deficiencies, with little emphasis on neighbourhoods with moderate deficiencies.



CHOICE #1b) Acquire park land in precincts without a park or school yard

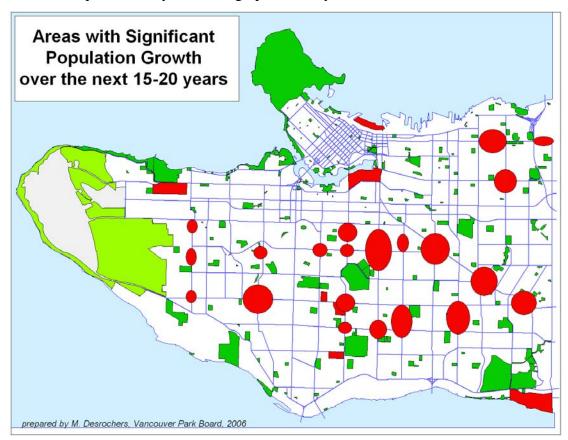
There are 147 precincts in the city that have no park or school yard within their boundaries (see map below). These precincts are bounded by arterial streets, which can be psychological and/or physical barriers when residents want to access parks. The vast majority of these precincts are so small in size that it is challenging to provide a park or school yard within their boundaries. There are, however, 30 precincts which are relatively large in size (greater than 10 hectares or 25 acres) which have neither park nor school yard. Ten of these precincts have more than 2,000 residents – the largest with 5,500 residents.



CHOICE #2a) Acquire park land to keep up with population growth

At least half of Vancouver's future population growth is likely to occur in the development zones described and illustrated below:

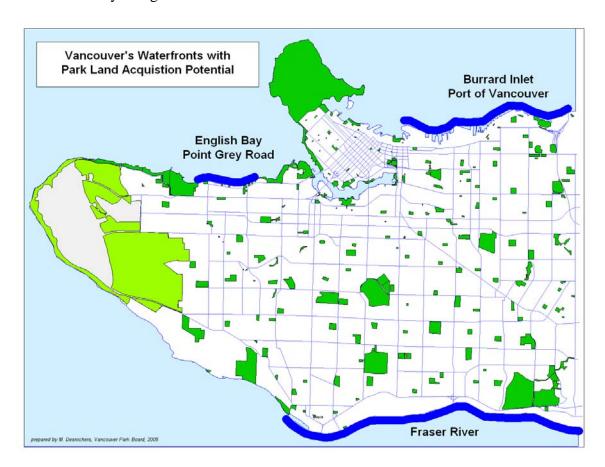
- There are large-scale residential development projects where the land is owned by a single or small group of owners. Recent examples include Coal Harbour, Collingwood Village and False Creek North. These projects are underway or in the planning stage: Southeast False Creek, East Fraserlands, and the redevelopment of Oakridge Centre. These projects may occur in the foreseeable future: Central Waterfront Port Lands, Jericho Lands, Oakridge bus barn site, RCMP lands in Oakridge, and Pearson and Dogwood hospitals in Langara. Park acquisitions in these projects will be negotiated through the required rezoning processes.
- There are other growth areas, such as 'neighbourhood centres' and areas surrounding rapid transit stations, where new development is anticipated to occur on smaller parcels of land, often with multiple owners. Development is typically smaller scale (duplexes, townhouses, low-rise apartment buildings) and spread incrementally over 10 to 20 years. There is often no opportunity to negotiate park acquisitions as part of these rezonings when they proceed as a City-initiated rezoning. Parks in these areas can be acquired site-by-site through purchase by the Park Board.



CHOICE #3a) Acquire park land on the waterfront

Vancouver is a waterfront city and significant progress has been made to secure public access along and to provide parks on the waterfront. Many of our most beloved parks are on the waterfront. Today, almost all of the waterfront downtown and on the south side of False Creek is in public hands, much of it as park land. Three portions of our waterfront have few parks and significant gaps in public access (see map below): the Burrard Inlet waterfront (Main Street to Boundary Road), the Point Grey waterfront (Kitsilano Park to Jericho Park), and the Fraser River waterfront (Angus Drive to Boundary Road).

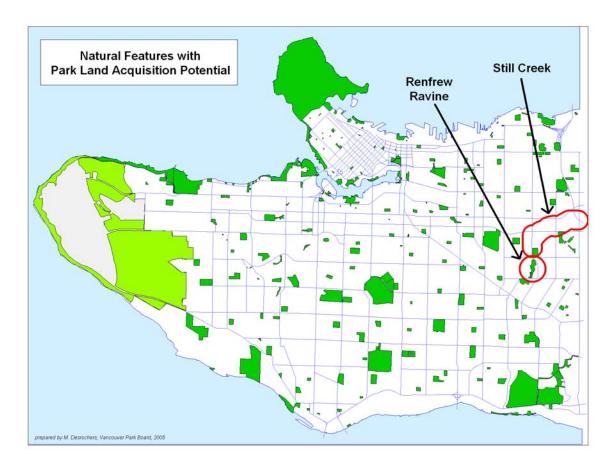
A long-term goal is to secure a series of parks along the water's edge, linked by a continuous waterfront walkway and bikeway. This can occur in both residential and industrial contexts. In cases where individual industries need direct access to the water, the walkway/bikeway can be routed away from the water's edge. In cases where a continuous set of industries need direct access to the water (e.g. the Port of Vancouver along Burrard Inlet), parks and the waterfront walkway/bikeway may be provided away from the water's edge (e.g. along Wall Street). Policies supporting this vision are already in place, for example the Fraser River policies, which state: "at the time of rezoning or subdivision, developers (will) be required to construct (...) a 25-foot-wide [7.6 m] public access walkway along the river."



CHOICE #3b) Acquire park land where there are significant natural features

Over the years, important natural features have been preserved and as parks, such as forests (e.g. Stanley Park), woodlands (e.g. Captain Cook and Malkin Parks), ravines (e.g. Kinross and Renfrew Ravine Parks), stream corridors (e.g. Musqueam and Tatlow Parks), and lakes (e.g. Trout Lake at John Hendry Park).

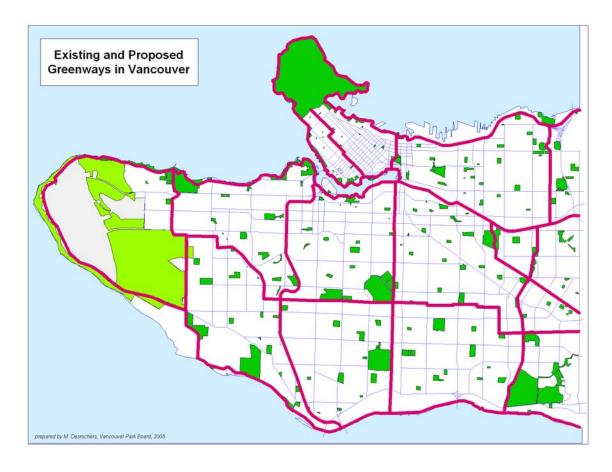
The objectives are either preservation of existing natural features or restoration of natural features that have been disturbed or destroyed in the past. Renfrew Ravine (some of which is still privately owned) is an example of the former, while enhancements to Still Creek, some of which involve land acquisition, is an example of the latter.



CHOICE #4a) Acquire park land for linear parks and along greenways

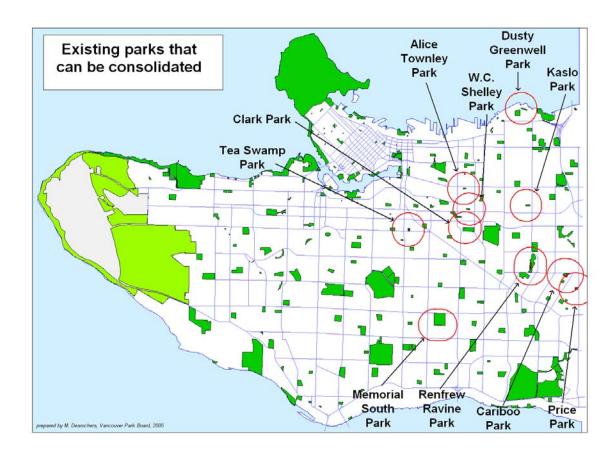
Linear recreation (walking, jogging, in-line skating, cycling) has become a very popular activity for many Vancouver residents. What started decades ago with the seawall around Stanley Park and along English Bay has been expanded to include seawalls in Coal Harbour and False Creek, waterfront pathways/bikeways along the West Side beaches and portions of the Fraser River, and, more recently, greenways along City streets and former railway corridors.

The continuity of linear parks or greenways is occasionally interrupted by privately-owned parcels. There are also locations along linear parks or greenways where it may be desirable to create a 'node' – a place to pause and relax – but land acquisition would needed to make the place of sufficient size.



CHOICE #5a) Acquire park land to expand existing small parks or to provide more logical boundaries to existing parks

A number of very small parks would benefit if they could be expanded. Many of these parks are located in denser neighbourhoods. There are also some parks whose boundaries are not logical (e.g. gaps, irregular geometry) and whose functionality would benefit immensely from incremental additions. Some of these parks are shown on the map below.



Recommendations

This report contains three recommendations pertaining to park land acquisition. The intent is to discuss these recommendations as part of a public consultation process to be organized between February and April 2006.

- 1) Maintain the 'neighbourhood park' ratio at 1.1 hectares (2.75 acres) per new 1,000 residents.
- 2) High priority park acquisitions (see map on page 28):
 - a) acquire new parks in areas experiencing significant population growth, using the guidelines in the table on page 27;
 - b) acquire new parks in neighbourhoods with major park-deficiencies (Fairview, Grandview-Woodland, Marpole and Mount Pleasant);
 - c) acquire linear waterfront access rights and new parks along the Fraser River.
- 3) Moderate priority park acquisitions (see map on page 28):
 - a) acquire new parks in areas with moderate park-deficiencies, with emphasis on new parks
 that meet at least one other park acquisition objective, such as expanding an existing
 small park, a new park along a greenway, or a new park in a moderately-dense
 'neighbourhood centre';
 - b) acquire new parks along Point Grey and Burrard Inlet waterfronts;
 - c) acquire new parks that protect, preserve, enhance or restore important natural features.

Recommended guidelines for acquisition of new parks in areas experiencing significant population growth

	Neighbourhoods with LESS than 1.1 hectares of 'neighbourhood park' per 1,000 residents	Neighbourhoods with MORE than 1.1 hectares of 'neighbourhood park' per 1,000 residents
Large-scale residential developments on sites greater than 4 hectares	seek a dedication of 1.1 hectares of park per 1,000 residents	seek a dedication of up to 1.1 hectares of park per 1,000 residents AND/OR a payment-in-lieu of providing park land
Large-scale residential developments on sites between 2 and 4 hectares	seek a dedication of up to 1.1 hectares of park per 1,000 residents AND/OR a payment-in-lieu of providing park land	seek a payment-in-lieu of providing park land
Large-scale residential developments on sites smaller than 2 hectares	seek a payment-in-lieu of providing park land	seek a payment-in-lieu of providing park land
Areas with high- density housing on small parcels of land	seek the creation of "area- specific" DCL zones and an allocation for park acquisition	seek the creation of "area- specific" DCL zones and an allocation for park acquisition
Areas with medium-density housing on small parcels of land	seek the creation of "area- specific" DCL zones and an allocation for park acquisition OR use other available funding to pay for park acquisitions	no action is proposed

In the case of major rezonings involving commercial or institutional uses, seek public open space to be provided on site or, if insufficient to meet the anticipated demand, seek a payment to acquire park land in the vicinity or to upgrade an existing park in the vicinity.

