

Date: January 9, 2007



TO: Board Members – Parks and Recreation
FROM: General Manager – Parks and Recreation
SUBJECT: Stanley Park Forest:
Preparation of Restoration Plan

RECOMMENDATION

That the Board approve the preparation of a restoration plan for the Stanley Park forest, as outlined in this report.

POLICY

The Board approves major work initiatives, such as the preparation of long-term plans.

In 2005, the Board approved the Strategic Plan for 2005-2010, which includes the following relevant statements:

- “We (the Park Board) will develop sustainable policies and practices that achieve environmental objectives while meeting the needs of the community.”
- “A broader public process is needed when issues are more complex or controversial, when the trade-offs are bigger, or when an issue is of particular interest to the public”.

In 2004, the Board adopted the Stanley Park Commemorative Integrity Statement, as an acknowledgment of the park’s status as a National Historic Site and as a reference for future decision-making. The Statement notes that Stanley Park is “a park whose magnificent setting symbolizes the interface of forest, mountains, and ocean”, and represents “an enclave of B.C. coastal forest in the midst of a large urban area”.

In 1989, the Board approved the Stanley Park Forest Management Plan, a long-term strategy to ensure that Stanley Park stays a mature coniferous coastal forest while maintaining or enhancing wildlife, interpretive and scenic values. It aimed to re-establish the balance between coniferous and deciduous trees over the long run.

BACKGROUND

Stanley Park is Vancouver’s oldest (established in 1888), largest (391 hectares or 967 acres), and most popular (about 8 million visitors annually) park. Stanley Park’s vast forest (about 250 hectares or 620 acres) is one of its central features. It is estimated that there are more than 500,000 trees in Stanley Park.



Stanley Park's forest performs a number of key functions, including:

- it is one of Vancouver's central symbols, here at home, across Canada and abroad;
- it is valuable ecological habitat in an urban environment;
- it is an important environmental education resource for Vancouverites and tourists; and
- it offers recreational and leisure opportunities for Vancouverites and tourists to enjoy walks, jogs, bike rides and drives through the forest.

DISCUSSION

On December 15, 2006 a major windstorm struck Stanley Park. The result was a level of forest damage not seen since the Freida storm of 1962. As well as random knockdowns throughout the park, eight areas totalling approximately 41 hectares were severely impacted. (See attached map, Appendix 1)

Two areas, comprising more than half the damaged area, lie between Third Beach and Prospect Point. They present special problems as the cliffs and steep embankments above the seawall have many downed and hung up trees and rootballs. Their instability makes seawall use unsafe and their removal will be a slow, delicate operation. Most park trails remain blocked with tree trunks and limbs. All park roads have been reopened but there remain damaged trees close to the roads and the trails which will also require assessment and removal. As well as being blocked by fallen trees and debris, the seawall has incurred damage from the high waves, which will also require repair prior to reopening.

Major blowdowns are a fairly common natural phenomenon on the coastal forests of British Columbia. What separates Stanley Park from these events is that it is a managed forest which plays host to hundreds of thousands of people every year. The "do absolutely nothing" option is not a reasonable choice. The public must be protected from dangerous tree and slope conditions, and the forest must be protected from the public (fires; understorey damage).

Stanley Park holds a special place in the community's self image. Many residents spent time here during their childhood and those memories are reflected in their desire to keep the park as

the same happy place in their lives. Damage of this scale is deeply felt and the community is providing an outpouring of support and advice.

PROPOSED PLANNING PROCESS

The strategy for developing a recovery plan is outlined below. There are two interrelated aspects to the plan:

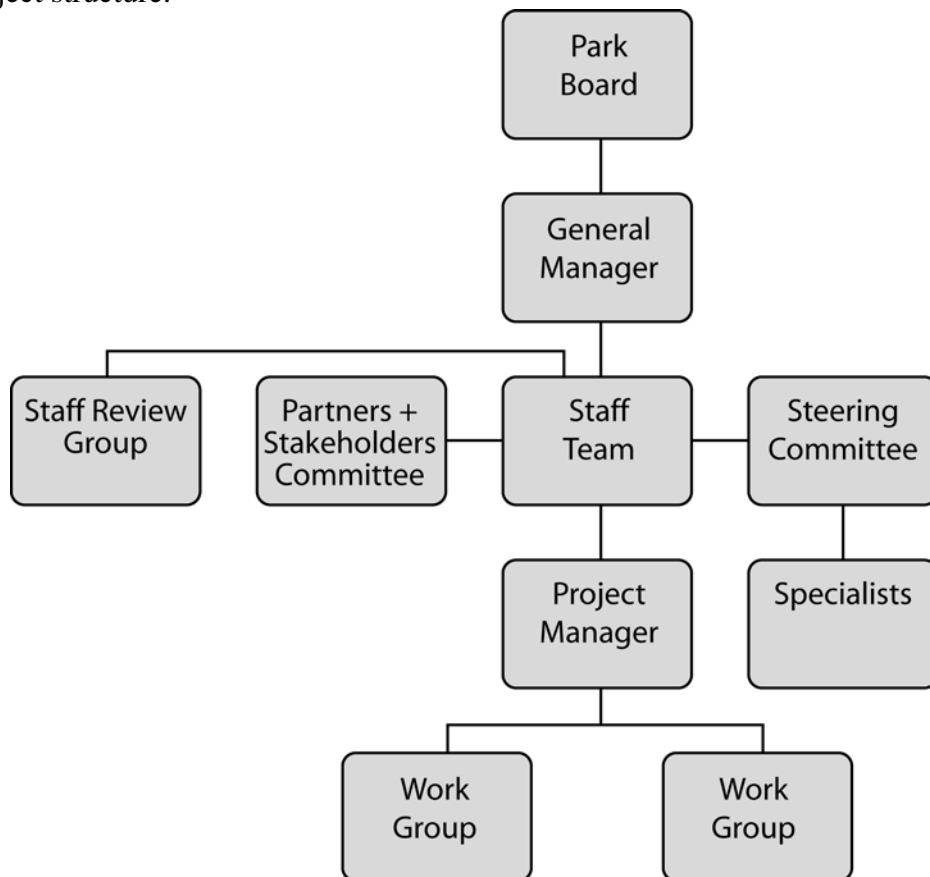
- 1) Re-establishing safe public access to all of the park as soon as possible;
- 2) Creating a recovery plan for the park that sets out the community vision for the recovery and presents the methods for achieving it.

Both of the above phases of the plan will be developed through a multidisciplinary approach to solutions which will include:

- a) forestry expertise;
- b) geotechnical expertise;
- c) environmental expertise.

This will be reflected in the composition of both the project Steering Committee and the working group.

Overall project structure:



The Steering Committee will be composed of forestry experts, geotechnical engineering experts and ecological experts drawn from both industry and consulting fields. They will advise the staff team. They will also call upon specialized expertise as required to join the Steering Committee.

The Partners and Stakeholders Committee will include the Stanley Park Ecology Society, the three First Nations representatives and representatives of environmental stakeholder groups.

The goals underlying the plan include the following:

1. the minimization of further forest damage;
2. the removal of future risks to park users and to the forest itself;
3. the addressing of the long term future of the forest including issues of drainage, slope stability, the forest mix and the understorey recovery;
4. the recognition of the provenance of Stanley Park timber and its social value to the community in terms of future use of the downed trees.

The safety and recovery objectives will involve the following steps. The priorities will be the resolution of safety issues related to re-opening the seawall, followed by the removal of dangerous trees on the trail system.

1. Compilation of a dangerous tree assessment for:
 - a) Prospect Point areas;
 - b) Forest trails;
 - c) Remaining six blowdown areas.
2. Geotechnical assessment of slope stability in the Prospect Point areas;
3. Dangerous tree removal plan for Prospect Point areas including extraction options and geotech and environmental implications of each option;
4. Community visioning for the restoration of the damaged areas. This will involve choices on the nature and rate of restoration, possible demonstration and interpretative initiatives and fire hazard management.
5. Disposition of the downed timber. This will draw many suggestions, from leaving it on the forest floor to milling it for use in Olympic, cultural or tourist venues.
6. Resource identification and allocation. This will include specialized personnel and equipment requirements as well as donation offers of in kind supplies and services.

Significant waypoints in the above noted processes will include the following, including best case timelines;

1. Approval by the Board of a safety and stabilization plan for the Prospect Point area and the selection of resources to carry it out – April 2007
2. Seawall reopening subject to the recommendations of the above noted plan
3. Approval of a community visioning report – May 2007 with implementation to follow
4. Park forest trail reopening will be done on a priority basis with most trails east of Park Drive at Prospect Point open by June.

FUNDRAISING AND FINANCING

The cleanup costs incurred to date are in excess of \$150,000. The estimated cost for the total restoration process will be determined based on the assessment process.

The costs related to the storm clean up were unexpected and not part of the budget. In view of the overwhelming damage to Stanley Park and the need for significant resources to restore the park, the Park Board is in the process of seeking assistance from a variety of organizations, stakeholders, partners, the public, and all levels of government.

Through the Park Board's fundraising program, \$1.3 million has been received through private and corporate donations. The Park Board has also received a number of inquiries from groups who wish to put on fundraising events within the community to support the restoration projects. As with all other private and corporate donations, the support received from donors will be designated specifically to the Stanley Park Restoration Project.

CONCLUSION

The restoration plan will not be a quick fix. Professional advice to date is to take the time required to amass the required information and to process it prior to making action decisions. The choices will be multi faceted and interrelated. For example, safety phase choices will affect restoration choices and vice versa. At the same time, staff recognize the community interest in rapidly re-establishing safe access to the trails and particularly the seawall. The success of the restoration plan will be in balancing these two pressures.

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Appendix 1

UPDATE:
Stanley Park Storm Clean-up (Jan 4, 2007)

