

Date: February 14, 2007



TO: Board Members – Vancouver Park Board
FROM: General Manager – Parks and Recreation
SUBJECT: Downtown Skateboard Plaza – Trial Period Review

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Board endorse the ongoing retention of the Downtown Skateboard Plaza on the terms described in the companion Council report.

POLICY

On February 24, 2003 the Park Board approved the development of a “street- style” skateboard facility on a trial basis, subject to Council approval, on a portion of the road allowance under the Dunsmuir/Georgia viaduct at the intersection of Quebec Street, Union Street and Expo Boulevard North.

BACKGROUND

The Downtown Skateboard Plaza opened in September 2004 on a site under the Georgia/Dunsmuir viaduct, adjacent to Andy Livingstone Park. The first facility in North America dedicated exclusively for street-style skateboarding, the Plaza was one of a number of recent Park Board initiatives to improve skateboarding and related services for youth and young adults. The Board has also developed and approved a skateboard strategy as a guide for future programming and capital allocation. Small recreational skateboard areas have been installed in Strathcona and Quilchena Parks. Several community centres now offer skateboarding programs and instruction on a seasonal basis.

City Police, Planning and Engineering Services supported the Park Board in the development of the Plaza. The objective was in part to expand recreational opportunities for youth and in part to address the problem of skateboarding taking place in inappropriate and/or unsafe locales, in the downtown and elsewhere.

The Plaza is on road allowance, over which Engineering Services has jurisdiction. Engineering Services originally gave Park Board permission to use what was a small parking lot for the purposes of building and maintaining the skateboard plaza. Council initially approved the installation of the Plaza on a trial basis, subject to an evaluation and report back after two years of operation.

DISCUSSION

The attached Council report summarizes the evaluation of the Downtown Skateboard Plaza, and recommends its ongoing retention for an indefinite period, under the conditions originally agreed to with Engineering Services for the site. These conditions are referenced in the 'Background' section of the Council report.

The review finds that the Plaza is heavily used, much appreciated by its users and supported by a majority in the community. Information from the Police confirms that the Plaza has been effective in drawing street skateboarding away from problem locales in the downtown core, and thereby assisting their bylaw enforcement. On this basis, the ongoing retention of the Plaza after its two-year trial period is recommended.

Some points of friction are identified which, albeit a minority concern, need ongoing attention. Chief amongst these is the need to reduce skateboarding traffic to and from the Plaza along the Quebec Street east sidewalk and instead to reroute this traffic onto a designated path that has been established through Creekside Park. As the Council report notes, this issue is being addressed with the support of the local Neighbourhood Integrated Services Team (NIST) and with skateboarder and neighbourhood input.

Assessment of the Plaza was ongoing from its inception, conducted mainly by staff based at the Roundhouse Community Centre, who have been assigned responsibility for its operation. These staff have worked to encourage stewardship amongst users, and to build positive relations with the surrounding community. It is recommended that these staff resources be maintained at their current level to ensure that the Plaza continues to be a success.

The Plaza was originally built on a limited budget and with the understanding that it might be a temporary installation. Given Council approval of the ongoing retention of the Plaza, there will be a need for some capital investment to harden the facility surface and improve the wearability of some of its components. As well, in the future, should the Plaza have to be removed from its current location because of other requirements for the street space it occupies, the development of a comparable or larger facility serving the downtown core should be a priority.

The experience of the Plaza reinforces the importance of the Park Board's Skateboard Strategy as a guide to program and facility development in support of this recreational activity. To this end, there is funding allocated in the Park Board 2006 – 2008 Capital Plan for at least one new installation, with a preferred location south of 41st Avenue, where no such facilities currently exist.

SUMMARY

The Board is asked to endorse the ongoing retention of the downtown skateboard Plaza on the basis of findings of an evaluation at the end of a stipulated two-year trial period, summarized in the attached Council report.

Prepared by:

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