

**Minutes of Meeting
Planning Committee, Vancouver Park Board**

DATE OF MEETING: March 6, 2007

ATTENDEES: Park Board Commissioners
Commissioner Heather Holden, Chair
Commissioner Spencer Herbert
Commissioner Allan De Genova
Commissioner Korina Houghton
Commissioner Ian Robertson

Park Board Staff

Susan Mundick	General Manager
Piet Rutgers	Director of Planning and Operations
Ron Caswell	Manager of Operations, Vancouver East District
Barbara Joughin	Committee Secretary

Delegations

John Norton	Observation Tower, Inc.
Richard Henriquez	Observation Tower, Inc.

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 pm, with the following Agenda:

1. Approval of minutes of February 20, 2007 meeting
2. McCleery Golf Course / Southlands Riding Club Update
3. Proposal – Queen Elizabeth Park

1. Approval of Minutes of February 20, 2007 meeting

The minutes of the February 20, 2007 meeting were approved as presented.

2. McCleery Golf Course / Southlands Riding Club Update

Ron Caswell presented information about the Southlands Riding Club use of McCleery Golf Course property. Southlands Riding Club (SRC) is located at McDonald and 53rd Avenue, directly north of McCleery Golf Course. It has been using a portion of the golf course as part of its equestrian centre for many years, and has three riding rings partially on or adjacent to the service yard and parking lot. The area of encroachment is about 40 x 800 feet in size, and while there is an existing agreement in place with the City of Vancouver Engineering Department for the use of the street right of way, there is no user agreement in place with the Park Board.

In 2005 the Board's Planning and Environment Committee requested staff to negotiate a user agreement with SRC and to explore the feasibility of a pedestrian pathway that connects Carnarvon Street with the McCleery Golf Course. Advantages to installing a public pathway along the south edge of the encroachment area are improved pedestrian traffic flow in the area and better community access to McCleery Golf Course and Clubhouse.

The SRC has submitted a survey of the encroachment area to Park Board staff and the City's legal department is drafting a license agreement for the use of the property by SRC. It will include a compensation formula based on the use of the 55th Avenue right-of-way as well as the ability to install a pathway. An annual lease payment would be about \$2500 / year. The cost of

constructing a new pathway is estimated to be \$7,000 – \$9,000, and a cost sharing arrangement is being discussed with the SRC.

Staff proposed that public access along an existing trail on SRC property be monitored during a trial period in 2007 and evaluated in the fall. SRC has expressed concern about bicycle traffic in close proximity to the horses and have requested that bicycles not be allowed on the connecting pathway. Signs would be posted on the pathway to inform the public that access is allowed across SRC property, and about pedestrian / equestrian etiquette to minimize potential conflicts. In addition, the SRC has requested that the pathway be closed 30 days a year in respect of their requirement that spectators remain a certain distance from horses during events that are held in the riding rings.

Discussion

- The Committee discussed whether to monitor the existing pathway or construct a new path. The group acknowledged the need to be cautious about the horses and noted that there would be less interaction between path users and horses on the proposed new path. A member of the Committee noted that the existing pathway has been used for 15 years and the Committee said it would be better to move forward on the proposed new path than monitor the old path.
- SRC management has communicated that horses are easily spooked by bicycles and they have requested that cyclists not be allowed on the connecting pathway. Members of the Committee discussed the issue and said that bicycle traffic is heavy in the area and access to the new path should not be restricted for cyclists, nor should cyclists be required to dismount to use the path. Signs can be posted to communicate the need for caution, and the path would be surfaced with bark mulch which does not allow fast biking.
- A Commissioner requested more information about the budget for the proposed pathway. Constructing a new path requires the installation of a culvert at Carnarvon Street, unless the access to the existing path is used and a parallel path constructed beside Carnarvon Street to join the old path with the new. The cost would be as noted above and staff propose that the costs be shared by the Park Board and the SRC.

Next Steps

1. The Planning Committee requested that staff prepare a license agreement with the Southlands Riding Club for their use of Park Board property and bring it to the Board for approval.
2. The Planning Committee directed staff to proceed with the construction of the proposed new path along the south edge of the encroachment area and the northern edge of the McCleery Golf Course property. The new pathway will accommodate pedestrians and bicycles and provide signage on cyclist/pedestrian/equestrian etiquette. Future lease payments to be applied to the cost of the path.

3. Proposal – Queen Elizabeth Park

Piet Rutgers introduced John Norton and Richard Henriquez to present a concept proposal to build a privately developed and operated observation tower adjacent to the Bloedel Conservatory and the Plaza at Queen Elizabeth Park. He told the Committee that the views have been progressively obscured by the natural growth of the trees on the site, and that the idea came forward several years ago when the Plaza was designed but was not pursued at that time due to the expense.

Delegations

1. John Norton told the Committee that the highest point in Vancouver is located in Queen Elizabeth Park at the top of Little Mountain, and the spectacular view it offered in the past is an asset to the Park Board that has been lost as the trees have grown. He told the Committee that he has reviewed the business case for building an observation tower and marketing it as Vancouver's "highest point", and believes that it is an economically viable proposal that could create a very popular attraction and draw large numbers of people, especially if it is completed by 2010. He would like the Park Board to ask for public input on the concept of an observation tower in Queen Elizabeth Park.
2. Richard Henriquez explained that the idea for an observation tower began when the Plaza in Queen Elizabeth Park was designed. He presented a concept plan that he recently expanded from earlier sketches, described its features, and noted that although the height in this concept is 150 feet, it will depend on projections of the tower's life span because trees grow several feet each year.

Piet Rutgers summarized the process that would be followed if the Park Board supports the concept. A Request for Proposals (RFP) will be sent out and responses reviewed and evaluated. Staff would prepare recommendations on the selection of a proposal for the Board's approval. He noted that the schedule is very tight for completion by 2010.

Discussion

- A member of the Committee asked about fees for entering the proposed tower. The delegation said comparable attractions in the USA charge \$10, and noted that many people will be attracted to the highest spot in Vancouver and tour bus business will increase significantly.
- The Committee discussed the integration of the proposed observation tower with the park and asked questions about much parkland would be displaced, shading from the tower, and views of the tower from the rest of the park. A Commissioner suggested that cutting down some trees is an alternative way to recover the view. The delegation noted that cutting trees will provide peek-a-boo views but not reclaim the spectacular views that this location used to offer.
- A Commissioner asked the delegation if a business plan identifying potential revenue opportunities for the Park Board has been developed. The delegation explained that when the Board approves the concept and sends out an RFP, they will include their business plan in their proposal. They expressed confidence that the concept is economical and will be beneficial for both parties.
- The Committee discussed the reduced use of this area of the park and loss of revenues due to recent GVRD, Park Board, and Canada Line construction projects, and acknowledged the need to find ways to encourage people to return to the park.
- A Commissioner identified the contrast between the contemplative nature of the tai chi arbors, the Plaza and the Bloedel Conservatory, and the activity levels of a busy tourist attraction, and asked if this is an appropriate use for the park. A member of the Committee recalled the diverse public response to the development of the Bloedel Conservatory and said that the tower concept should be put out to the public.
- The Committee discussed the integration of an observation tower with the Bloedel Conservatory and the Plaza. The delegation explained that there is not enough time before 2010 to assess and address the technical challenges of the Conservatory.

- Staff explained that a public process on the merits of an observation tower could include these elements: on site signage, a website, stakeholder and user outreach, and an open house. Staff would then report to the Board on the results of the process.

Next Steps

The Planning Committee requested that staff prepare a report on the concept of an observation tower at Queen Elizabeth Park to be submitted to the Board

4. Next Meeting

The meeting adjourned at 8:15 pm. The next meeting is scheduled for March 20, 2007.