

Date: January 9, 2009



TO: Board Members – Vancouver Park Board
FROM: General Manager – Parks and Recreation
SUBJECT: BMX/Mountain Bike Jump Park

RECOMMENDATION

THAT staff conduct a consultation process with the public, the BMX/mountain biking community and other stakeholders with respect to a proposed BMX/mountain bike jump park in a section of Vanier Park, as shown in Appendix A to this report.

POLICY

On June 13, 2005, the Board directed staff “to work with the BMX/mountain biking community to find an appropriate location for development of a youth park facility suitable to their needs”, as a replacement for a user-built dirt jump course eliminated through the development of the Oak & 37th park site (now Oak Meadows Park).

Park Board approved a Skateboard Strategy for Vancouver on October 31, 2005.

In May 2008, Park Board and Council approved “Vancouver Sport for Life,” the Vancouver Sport Strategy (VSS) as a guide to future initiatives and engagement with sport programs, facilities and events. The Strategy (p. 14) references BMX cycling as an “individual” special sport.

BACKGROUND

Many municipalities in Metro Vancouver have developed special park terrains for youth oriented activities. There are now 35 skate parks in the region, only a few of which also accommodate BMX and/or mountain bike use. At least eight bike “jump” parks and more elaborate bicycle skills parks have recently been created in outlying municipalities. Some images are provided in Appendix C to this report to illustrate the nature of the installation discussed in this report.

The Park Board has responded to skate park demand in Vancouver, adding five new facilities in the last 10 years, for a total of six skate parks. None of these Vancouver skateboard parks were designed for joint use by skaters and bikers and, other than a small, pre-teen oriented area in West Point Grey Park, there are currently no sanctioned

BMX/mountain bike terrains in Vancouver parks. However, as is the case with skateboarding, BMX and mountain biking continue to be a popular recreation and fitness activity attractive to many youth and young adults.

Some years ago, an informal dirt jump terrain was developed by BMX/mountain bike enthusiasts in the Oak & 37th park site (now Oak Meadows Park). Unfortunately, the course layout was under a mature stand of fir trees, which were negatively affected by the removal of turf, movement of soil and soil compaction. Retention of these trees as the centre piece in the development of the park required the termination of biking activities and subsequent restorative work in the affected area.

A number of BMX/mountain bikers attended the 37th and Oak park planning open houses in 2005 to promote their continuing use of the park, and there was general support from other park stakeholder groups for biking activities and dirt jumping. Examination of options for park development revealed potential incompatibilities which could arise from some combinations of uses. It was concluded that BMX/mountain biking activities needed a dedicated area which could not be accommodated in Oak Meadows in harmony with the existing and new uses (dog off-leash, children unstructured play, sport field, habitat conservation) as reflected in the adopted concept plan for the park.

The BMX/Mountain Bike jump parks developed in outlying municipalities (see illustrations in Appendix C) are, in most instances, relatively modest in scale and budget. The primary building material used is dirt that is high in clay content. The installation can be maintained quite simply, and removed at low cost should circumstances warrant.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this report is to seek public input on an alternate site for the now disbanded Oak and 37th facility.

Preliminary discussions have taken place between staff and BMX/mountain biking enthusiasts, including those that had built and maintained the Oak and 37th jump terrain. Based on the following criteria:

- Catchment area of potential users
- Accessibility by bike
- Compatibility with current park uses and/or park quality
- Visibility from a public road
- Distance to residences

that the number of viable sites in the city is limited, especially relative to the location of the displaced user group.

Staff have, with proponent input, identified a site within Vanier Park (see Appendices A and B) as the best available west of Main, and propose a broader consultation process to solicit feedback on a possible installation. Among the positive attributes of this location are:

- The area is currently vacant, having been previously cleared of brush and alder trees in connection with utilities work conducted by Metro Vancouver. It is immediately adjacent to a small dirt parking lot created for the same project.
- There is a history of BMX/mountain bike use of the trails in the surrounding wooded area and underneath the Burrard Street Bridge. Site development would consolidate this activity in an appropriate setting.
- The site is readily accessible by bicycle, via the waterfront pathway bordering False Creek and English Bay. The site development can also be reached by vehicle, via the Vanier Park access road.
- The site is removed from residences, but is visible from the road. Site development would animate a section of the park, contributing to its overall safety.

The following guiding principles with respect to the proposed installation have been established:

- **User and spectator safety:** the layout and positioning of the jump elements will be designed by an expert in the field, consistent with the standards adopted for similar installations in other municipalities. The installation will accommodate progressive skill levels and be open to viewing/supervision without risk to either spectators or participants.
- **Environmental Sensitivity:** The installation will respect the environment and habitat values of the surrounding woodland. Healthy trees in the construction area will be retained and not compromised by the site development.
- **Compatibility with other uses:** The installation will allow for and facilitate access to the walking trails in the wooded area.

It is anticipated that these principles will likely be refined and added to by input received through the course of the consultation.

Proposed Consultation Process

The concept for the BMX/mountain bike jump park at Vanier Park will be subject to review and input from potential users, other park stakeholders, City and Park Board staff and the general public. The consultation process will entail the following:

- *Project notification:* Interested parties will be advised via signage on site, media advisory and advertising, direct e-mail to identified park and activity stakeholders, and surrounding residents.
- *Open House:* An open house will be held at a convenient location near the subject site, with background information on display and staff in attendance to answer questions and record feedback.
- *Park Board website:* The Open House presentation will be supplemented by the interactive use of the Park Board website. Interested parties will be able to view the Open House materials on-line and record their input.

Following the public process, staff intend to report back with consultation findings and a more detailed design concept for consideration by the Board. Funding for this project is available in the 2006-2008 Capital Plan.

Future Bicycle Skills Park Development

The jump park discussed in this report is advanced to follow up on a commitment to replace what was previously available at Oak Meadows Park. Further demand has been demonstrated for the same or similar kind of installations in other areas of the City, and the proposed Vanier Park site offers the opportunity to develop a pilot project that might become the basis for additional Park Board sanctioned BMX parks.

Staff will continue to assess types and levels of demand for cycling facilities, refine site selection criteria, and evaluate potential sites, in preparation for the next Capital Plan or other capital funding opportunity which may arise. It is envisioned that this planning work be conducted within the broader context of Vancouver Sport Strategy implementation, in order that service provision in this area be reconciled and coordinated with Park Board investment in and support of sport activity more generally.

SUMMARY

The Board is asked to approve public consultation on a potential BMX/mountain bike jump park within Vanier Park, as a replacement facility for an installation at Oak Meadows Park that was removed through a park renewal process. Staff will report back after the consultation with a summary of inputs received and with a recommendation for Board consideration. Staff will further explore bicycle skills park opportunities and needs, in the context of the Vancouver Sport Strategy, to inform future capital investment in this area.

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