

Date: April 8, 2010



TO: Board Members – Vancouver Park Board
FROM: General Manager – Parks and Recreation
SUBJECT: No-Smoking Policy for Vancouver Parks and Beaches

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Board instruct the General Manager to consult with the Director of Legal Services to seek amendments to the City of Vancouver Health Bylaw and Parks Control Bylaw to prohibit smoking in all parks and beaches.

POLICY

The Vancouver Charter (Sec 488) gives the Park Board exclusive jurisdiction, possession, and control of parks. This authority includes the ability to pass bylaws for the control, regulation, protection and government of the parks, and of places within the jurisdiction of the Board. Smoking regulations in Vancouver fall within the jurisdiction of the Health Bylaw. The City of Vancouver Health Bylaw 9535, revised in 2007, bans smoking in all public buildings including an exterior perimeter of six (6) metres.

BACKGROUND

In addition to facilities, the Vancouver Park Board is responsible for more than 200 parks and nearly 18 kilometers of beaches in the city. These open spaces offer residents and visitors of all ages valuable opportunities for recreation and relaxation. Each year the parks and beaches are used by millions of people. For many, a visit to the park or beach may be improved substantially if the environment were to be designated a "smoke-free" area.

This report recommends designating parks and beaches "no-smoking" areas, on the basis of research, public feedback, as well as the Board's commitment to the promotion of a healthy urban environment and support for active living and wellness. The scope of this new regulation would include all parks, including the pathways, playgrounds, playing surfaces contained within each, as well as all city beaches.

In September 2009, staff provided the Park Board with an update on the status of research relating to a potential new "no-smoking" policy for parks in the city. The Board was provided with an outline of staff action items to be completed in advance of a final recommendation. In October 2009, staff invited input from the public via the internet and news media, in the form of an online survey. The survey focused on establishing "no-smoking" areas in beaches, playgrounds, playing fields, trails, and other undesignated park spaces. The results of this survey

were presented to the Board's Planning and Environment Committee on December 10, 2009. At that meeting members of the Board heard not only from staff, but also from public delegations on the matter. Based on the research and survey results that were presented, staff were asked to return to a future Board meeting with a recommendation.

DISCUSSION

According to Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH), smoking is the leading cause of death in British Columbia; exposure to second-hand smoke is the third leading cause of death. The medical evidence linking smoking to health issues is well-documented and smoking bans for public places are considered the most effective means of reducing exposure to second-hand smoke. With acceptance that no level of exposure to second-hand smoke can be considered safe, reducing such exposure remains a key component of health promotion by the World Health Organization, Health Canada, the Province of British Columbia, and VCH.

In British Columbia, regulations for smoke-free spaces began in the early 1980s. The City of Vancouver and others subsequently introduced bylaws that provided for smoking bans in workplaces and public spaces based on recommendations from Medical Health Officers with community support. The Park Board was among the first jurisdictions in Canada to ban the sale of cigarettes from its retail outlets (concessions, golf course clubhouses, gift shops).

In recent years, restrictions on smoking in outdoor public spaces have occurred throughout North America. In the majority of instances these jurisdictions cited medical and environmental rationale as the foundation for these actions.

Local examples of municipalities that have taken this approach include, White Rock, Richmond, Whistler, West Vancouver, and Kelowna. Each has enacted bylaws which prohibits smoking in one or more of the following areas; public parks, beaches, playgrounds, playing fields. In addition, many jurisdictions in the United States have taken similar actions in an attempt to promote healthier lifestyles and increase the quality of the local environment. Large cities such as Los Angeles and Chicago for example have had these bylaws in place for years. More recently the State of California moved closer to enacting a smoking ban for the entire inventory of state parks and beaches.

Park Board staff collected public feedback on this matter through an online survey conducted during the fall of 2009. The objective of the survey was to gauge the level of support for establishing a new policy on smoking in parks spaces. A total of 608 responses were received.

Summary of the responses:

- 75% indicated that they visit Vancouver's parks daily or weekly.
- 74% believed the Park Board should have a policy that takes a "leadership role to provide smoke-free air" outdoors.
- 49% indicated that they would use the city's parks more often if a smoking restriction existed. 44% did not expect this would affect the frequency of their visits.
- 75% favoured establishing beaches as "no-smoking" areas.

- 88% favoured establishing playgrounds as "no-smoking" areas.
- 81% favoured establishing playing fields as "no-smoking" areas.
- 79% favoured establishing trails as "no-smoking" areas.
- 65% favoured establishing other undesignated parks spaces "no-smoking" areas.

The percentage of the population that is identified as "non-smoking" in British Columbia is approximately 87% (highest among all the provinces). The ratio of respondents to our survey reflected a similar breakdown; 90% "non-smokers", 10% "smokers".

Vancouver's parks and beaches contain some of the most celebrated natural environments in the country. The Board's mandate is to protect these spaces from potential hazards. The beaches, playgrounds and playing fields have for years been affected by litter in the form of cigarette butts. This litter has proven to be a significant concern on beaches throughout the world. The equipment used to clean beaches is not able to retrieve items the size of cigarette butts. The result is that staff must take the time-consuming step of manually picking each piece from the sand. In parks, the risk of fire from carelessly discarded cigarettes is a threat that could have a devastating impact in a forest setting like Stanley Park. The Park Board has taken steps in previous years during the summer months to restrict smoking in Stanley Park due to this risk.

The experience of many other jurisdictions is that smoking regulations are less challenging to implement and enforce in areas where non-smokers are represented by a large percentage of population, as in the Lower Mainland. The Park Board implementation plan will consist of an initial education/awareness phase, which would include communications through local media, internet sources and signage with information about the new policy. During this period staff, including Park Rangers, Lifeguards, and others would advise visitors about this change. This initial phase would commence this summer in advance of an effective date for the new smoking regulation of September 1, 2010.

There may be some initial costs associated with the implementation of this policy relating to signage and communications materials. However, this will likely be minimal given commitments made by our partners at Vancouver Coastal Health and other supporting agencies who have offered to assist with the implementation efforts.

Often cited as a barrier to implementing such a policy, enforcement has been noted as an insignificant obstacle in practice. Verbal warnings from city staff generally deal with compliance issues. Enforcement is expected to occur in the same manner as other bylaws. In addition to highly visible signage and a public awareness campaign, the anticipated few non-compliant visitors would be addressed by the Park Rangers and bylaw officers, if necessary. Compliance will be achieved through continued awareness.

The parks, beaches, pathways, playgrounds and playing surfaces in Vancouver offer year-round outdoor recreation and leisure opportunities for residents and visitors. The recommendation in this report is based on research and public feedback which suggests that the experience of visiting city parks will be enhanced by attempting to provide a healthier environment. Moreover,

the recommendation is aligned with the Board's strategic priorities and with the Park Board mission.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommend that the Board instruct the General Manager to consult with the Director of Legal Services to seek amendments to the City of Vancouver Health Bylaw and Parks Control Bylaw to prohibit smoking in all parks and beaches, effective September 1, 2010.

Prepared by:
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