



June 20, 2016

TO: Park Board Chair and Commissioners
FROM: General Manager - Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation
SUBJECT: "Survivor's Pole" Community Public Art - Pigeon Park

RECOMMENDATION

- A. **THAT** the Vancouver Park Board respond to a unique community initiative by accepting the "Survivor's Pole", an artistically and culturally significant tribute to all those impacted by racism and other forms of exclusion; and
- B. **FURTHER THAT** the Board approve a contribution of up to \$50,000 from the Corporate Sponsorship Fund toward the installation of the "Survivor's Pole" in Pigeon Park (Pioneer Place), with all arrangements to the satisfaction of the General Manager of the Vancouver Park Board.

POLICY / PREVIOUS DECISIONS

The Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation's Arts Policy states that:

- The Park Board provides a vibrant public realm and supports the experience of public art and cultural events in parks.
- The Board contributes to the health of communities through community cultural development processes linking artists and community members addressing issues of shared interest.

On January 11, 2016, the Board adopted eleven (11) strategies in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's "Call to Action", including directing staff to review the donation of monuments, memorials, and public art processes and policies to ensure integration of Indigenous history, heritage values, and memory practices.

The Board's policy on the approved use of Corporate Sponsorship funds contains the following criteria:

- To fund one-time expenditures, over and above the existing funding level in the operating budget, which are beneficial to the overall Parks and Recreation system.
- All expenditures require Board Approval

BACKGROUND

In 2013, the Downtown Eastside Sacred Circle Society was established to support the vision of a community-led "Survivor's Totem Pole" in the Downtown Eastside (DTES). The Society's Board is uniquely diverse; members include Squamish Hereditary Chief Bill Williams, Elder Woody Morrison, Elder Wilfred Price, Tomiye Ishida, Sid Chow Tan, Audrey Siegl, and Wendy Pedersen.

On June 28, 2014, an open-house event at 33 Cordova Street welcomed community members to meet the lead carver and her apprentices. The event was well attended by diverse members of the local community.



On June 5, 2015, the Sacred Circle Society and Vancouver Moving Theatre approached the Park Board on installation of the pole in Pigeon Park (Pioneer Place). They requested this as a relationship of “walking together”.

By March 20, 2016, official letters of support had been received from the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Nations.

On May 16, 2016, the Park Board referred a motion to staff that included a recommendation for staff to “review community art installation opportunities” in Pigeon Park.

DISCUSSION

The “Survivor’s Pole” is a project which arose from the desire and imagination of people in the DTES. It is a 27 foot totem created by well-respected Indigenous artist, Skundaal (Bernie Williams), who has also been a long-time member of the DTES community. The pole is dedicated to the dignity and strength of survivors of all forms of injustice. Many local individuals and diverse community organizations have come together in the support of this project.

This project is unique in its relationship to both the current moment in history and to the proposed location. The DTES is undergoing change and the long-time residents are finding themselves joined by many new community members. This project provides an opportunity for the long-time residents to express the importance of honouring the many people who have arrived and lived in this community as survivors, and also allows newcomers to reflect on the beauty and poignancy of that survival.

This project is also unique in that it meets specific objectives of the Park Board’s Reconciliation Strategies and provides an opportunity to ‘walk together’ with the Urban Aboriginal Advisory Committee and with the leadership of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh, who have all endorsed the project.



Even when unique opportunities arise, best practices for the location of new public art on park land need to be considered. Park Board standard practices consider community engagement, technical and risk management reviews and aesthetic merit. These considerations have been applied to the “Survivor’s Pole” project.

Community Engagement

The “Survivor’s Pole” project is an initiative led by representatives of diverse cultural groups in the DTES. Community members have been involved in the project since its inception. Street-involved youth from the neighbourhood will be involved in the completion of the carving and representatives from the heritage communities (Japanese, Chinese, and First Nations amongst others) will assist with painting the pole. Local organizations including Vancouver Moving Theatre and Portland Hotel Society will facilitate and support the celebration event planned for November 5, 2016, which will be a featured element of the annual Heart of the City Festival. These activities meet Park Board standards for engagement for community art projects that are community initiated, community led, and community engaged in their content and production.

Artistic Merit

The project lead artist is Haida and Coast Salish Nations master carver Skundaal (Bernie Williams), a long-time DTES resident and the only female apprentice of the late master Haida carver, Bill Reid. Skundaal will work with her Haida family and representatives of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh on protocol and event preparation for the potlatch which will accompany the pole raising.

Technical Review

Initial Park Board staff assessment indicates appropriate siting has been identified in the park. Underground utilities, Indigenous protocols and community use of the park will be accommodated and respected.

Fiscal Review

The Sacred Circle Society and Vancouver Moving Theatre have raised significant funds and received many in-kind donations and commitments of services to support the project. The City of Vancouver has committed \$30,000 from the City of Reconciliation program fund for the completion of the pole and the celebration event. While the exact amount required for the raising of the pole cannot be determined, allocating up to \$50,000 from the Park Board's Corporate Sponsorship Fund would ensure all costs were covered.

SUMMARY

The Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation has made commitments to art in the public realm, support of community cultural development and to movement forward in the spirit of Reconciliation. Additionally the Board has expressed a desire to identify opportunities to work with the local community on improvements to Pigeon Park. The "Survivor's Pole" offers the opportunity to "walk together" with both the Indigenous and local DTES communities on a path that supports these commitments and principles.

The "Survivor's Pole" project meets the review criteria for new public art on park land, including community engagement, artistic merit, and technical feasibility. The request for funds from Corporate Sponsorship complies with the policy for the use of Corporate Sponsorship funds, and sufficient funds are available in the reserve to provide for this request. Staff recommend that the Board accept this opportunity with all arrangements made to the satisfaction of the General Manager.

General Manager's Office
Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation
Vancouver, BC

Prepared by:
jil weaving - Arts, Culture and Engagement

jw/sw/jk