



November 3, 2017

TO: Park Board Chair and Commissioners
FROM: General Manager - Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation
SUBJECT: Park Ranger Funding and Safety - Report Back

RECOMMENDATION

- A. THAT the Vancouver Park Board receive the information outlined in this report in response to the referred motion titled “Park Ranger Funding and Safety”;
- B. THAT the Board direct staff to develop a comprehensive and sustainable Park Ranger Service Model, in consultation and collaboration with the Vancouver Police Department, City of Vancouver, and community partners, to address safety, security, cleanliness and maintenance concerns, particularly in relation to the increased use of injectable drugs in Vancouver parks;
- C. THAT staff continue to liaise with City of Vancouver and community partners to explore ways in which the Park Board can assist in efforts to locate appropriate housing and support for those struggling with mental health and addiction challenges; and
- D. THAT staff report back to the Board in 2018 with recommendations that include considerations for financial, legal, and cross-jurisdictional issues.

BOARD AUTHORITY / PREVIOUS DECISIONS

As per the [Vancouver Charter](#), the Park Board has exclusive jurisdiction and control over park land use in the City of Vancouver, including any structures, programs and activities, fees, and improvements that occur within designated parks.

At the Regular Board meeting held on October 11, 2017, the motion titled [Park Ranger Funding and Safety](#) was referred to staff to report back on the estimated costs to enable 24-hour-a-day Park Ranger patrols, and to provide clarification regarding whether the responsibilities of Park Rangers would be altered as a result of implementing overnight patrols of parks.

BACKGROUND

Vancouver’s current opioid crisis and homeless challenges have had significant impact on the safety and cleanliness of many urban parks. Injectable drug use in public spaces has led to mounting community concern regarding park safety and cleanliness, particularly around discarded used needles in areas where children play. As well, the increasing number of people seeking overnight shelter in parks, combined with higher demands on limited green space due to growing urban density, has made making park spaces safe and accessible for all users more complex. Responding to these concerns has required that additional attention and services be directed to some of the highest impacted areas, which has added stress to existing Park Board resources and systems.

DISCUSSION

Considerable collaborative efforts have been made over the past year to improve overall maintenance, safety, and security of all parks, with particular attention to those most impacted by increasing drug use and homeless encampments. In January 2017, a permanent satellite Park Ranger station was established in the Andy Livingstone Park fieldhouse to support enhanced presence in the neighborhood. This past summer, with the opening of Crosstown Elementary School and the increasing community concerns regarding the high number of discarded needles found in Andy Livingstone Park, particularly around the children's playgrounds, a dedicated Park Ranger patrol was assigned from dawn to dusk, seven days a week. As well, two security attendants were added to provide more frequent service to the playgrounds and public washrooms in Andy Livingstone and Creekside Parks five days per week.

Current Park Ranger Service Model

Park Rangers provide support and response to a broad range of park events, activities, and issues. In relation to the referred motion, Ranger resources are increasingly focussed on public safety concerns related to discarded needles in parks, enforcing parks control bylaws, which includes dealing with structures and encampments, and helping to connect individuals with the support services they need. The team currently removes around 40 discarded needles from parks on a daily basis and have responded to, investigated, and resolved 1945 homeless-related cases this year already.

In the 2017 budget, additional funding was approved to increase the number of Park Ranger regular positions from five (5) to twelve (12), with shift coverage from 7am to midnight, seven (7) days per week. Regular daily shifts include two truck patrols with two Rangers per truck, Lead Ranger support, and a dispatcher during the day shift. One truck is dedicated to Andy Livingstone Park from dawn to dusk, with the other patrolling and responding to 311 calls in the remaining 240 parks city wide. During the peak season and for special events, additional Rangers are scheduled.

The morning has been the most effective time for dealing with public safety concerns of abandoned needles and homeless activity in parks. On a daily basis, Park Rangers do two major "wake-up tours" to ensure that Stanley Park, Downtown parks, and Downtown Eastside (DTES) parks, are safe for public use.

To manage the rising number of encampments, a service agreement was reached with the City's Engineering Streets division to assist with six DTES parks five days per week. Both this agreement and the one for the two security attendants in Andy Livingstone and Creekside Parks expire at the end of 2017. These temporary additional services were funded through the Park Operations budget in 2017 -- pending review of the best approach moving forward, funds have not yet been committed for 2018. As well, the issue of homelessness and park impact is complex and has many related legal issues that require proper analysis.

24/7 Park Ranger Service Model

In order to add an overnight Ranger patrol shift (11pm–8am), funding would be required for the equivalent of six Regular Full Time (RFT) positions at a cost of approximately \$485,000 annually. This would ensure coverage for 2 patrol trucks with 2 rangers in each, 7 days per week, but does not include costs related to dispatch or supervision; these costs would need to be calculated once the required level of support was assessed (dependent upon clarified expectations of the overnight role). There also would not be 311 support.

Given the limited range of activities and interventions that can be safely executed at night, it is expected that primarily, overnight shifts would:

- gather intelligence on problematic areas to deliver to the morning crews;
- report criminal activity to the Vancouver Police Department;
- secure public bathroom facilities; and
- engage in low risk public interactions.

Although the above-noted duties are not as comprehensive as those for day shifts, they do fall within the regular job responsibilities of Park Rangers and align with current safety practices.

Other Considerations

If the goal of adding an overnight Park Ranger shift is to improve the safety and cleanliness of parks impacted by drug use and discarded needles, then consideration should be given to when extra staffing would be most effectively employed. Current operations suggest that additional morning service coverage would be beneficial, however a more thorough review and assessment of the initiatives introduced in 2017 is still required.

As well, the Board approved motion titled "[Security Plan for Vancouver Parks](#)" directed staff to develop a comprehensive security plan, in cooperation with City and community partners. The new Park Board Manager of Security Operations is currently working on the development of this plan, and any review of Park Ranger operations should occur in conjunction with this project. Additionally, due to the cross-jurisdictional nature of security, safety, and maintenance issues in parks, along with the complexities of homelessness, this work will require further consultation and collaboration with the VPD, City, and other community partners to explore related legal, risk, health, financial, and operational concerns.

SUMMARY

As outlined in this report, the increase of discarded drug paraphernalia and encampments in parks has required both additional and redirected resources to maintain reasonable service levels. Staff recommend a comprehensive review of the various temporary initiatives implemented this summer, in alignment with the overall Parks Security Plan, to determine the most effective and sustainable Park Ranger service model moving forward. This review would also identify how best to address the related maintenance and cleanliness concerns, through collaboration with community partners and other city departments, to ensure that Vancouver parks are safe and accessible spaces for all.

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