



An Urgent Park Board Response to Oppenheimer Park Safety Concerns

Excerpted from In Camera Minutes 2019-07-15

Released 2019-09-05

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

MOVED by Commissioner Coupar
SECONDED by Commissioner Barker

WHEREAS:

1. Oppenheimer Park, which is bounded by Jackson Ave., Dunlevy Ave., Powell St., and East Cordova St., was opened in 1902 as the Powell Street Grounds by Vancouver's second mayor, David Oppenheimer;
2. The Powell Street Grounds were later renamed "Oppenheimer Park" in honour of the Mayor Oppenheimer;
3. Oppenheimer Park was the home field for the famed and historically significant Asahi baseball team prior to World War II, and the park not only holds important cultural and historical significance for the people of Vancouver generally, but has special importance and significance for the Japanese-Canadian community;
4. Since 2004, initiatives by the Vancouver Police Department (VPD) and the Strathcona Business Improvement Association have attempted to return the park to its original state as a safe place for community recreation with some degree of success;
5. In 2010, the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation upgraded Oppenheimer Park with reconfigured pathways and the addition of a playground, basketball hoop, and a new field house, including bathrooms, meeting space, and public computer access, thereby enhancing the park's public facilities, which also includes a softball field;
6. In recent months, there has been a sharp increase in the level of violence in and around the encampment that has grown at Oppenheimer Park, an increase which has been noted publicly by the Vancouver Police and widely reported through the media;
7. On a recent Police patrol in the area of Oppenheimer Park, VPD officers heard gunshots in the park, and upon investigation discovered a 31-year-old Vancouver man with a gunshot wound;
8. Approximately a week ago, a VPD officer was assaulted in Oppenheimer Park as she tried to assist City of Vancouver crews working to keep the park clean;
9. In the month of June 2019 alone there were 92 emergency calls for a police response to the park, and in the month of May 2019 there were 87 calls, representing a significant year-over-year increase from 2018 when there were 56 calls for service in the month of June and 56 calls in the month of May;
10. The Vancouver Police Department (VPD) is currently responding to several 911 calls at Oppenheimer Park every day and the force has publicly articulated grave



concern for the safety of the people camping in the park and for the safety of VPD officers, first responders, firefighters, and City of Vancouver staff;

11. The Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation employs two full-time activity coordinators and several part-time staff at Oppenheimer Park;
12. The people of Vancouver, the VPD, the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation, and many others want to ensure that all those who wish to access the park for leisure and recreation are safe and secure;
13. The current environment at Oppenheimer Park is clearly not safe and secure, not even for VPD officers, as recent events and VPD statements in the media attest;
14. The mission of the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation is to provide, preserve, and advocate for parks and recreation services to benefit all people, communities, and the environment, and as per the Vancouver Charter, the Park Board has exclusive jurisdiction and control over parkland in the City of Vancouver, including any structures, programs and activities;
15. It is the duty of the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation and its respective elected Park Board Commissioners to ensure the excellence of park and recreation experiences in the city of Vancouver and to ensure the safety and security of all persons accessing the city's park.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

- A. THAT the Commissioners of the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation direct the Chair, on behalf of the Board, to communicate in writing to all relevant agencies, including (but not limited to) the Vancouver Police Department (VPD), Vancouver Fire and Rescue Services (VFRS), the City of Vancouver, and the City's legal department, to advise all and everyone that the present dire situation in Oppenheimer Park has served to create an overwhelming number of clear and serious safety issues for Oppenheimer park users as well as those who work in the park and/or those who are required to attend the park to respond to emergency situations; and

CARRIED

- B. FURTHER THAT Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation direct that all necessary Park Board staff and resources be engaged toward the goal of rendering Oppenheimer Park safe and secure for all park users given the dire situation apparent in the park, and that the Chair of the Park Board, on behalf of Park Board Commissioners and the Park Board, formally request in writing that all the relevant agencies and departments noted above allocate and deploy, on an urgent basis, all necessary staff and resources at their disposal, and within their respective jurisdiction and purview, toward the goal of rendering Oppenheimer Park safe and secure for all park users and for those who work in the park or are called upon to respond to emergency situations.

DEFEATED