

October 24, 1996

**SUBJECT: VANCOUVER SCHOOL BOARD/VANCOUVER PARK BOARD  
JOINT VENTURE - OUTDOOR EDUCATION IN STANLEY PARK**

**RECOMMENDATION:**

- A. THAT a program for school children in outdoor education including overnight camping be initiated in Stanley Park in Spring 1997.**
- B. THAT this program be run as a joint venture with the Vancouver School Board.**
- C. THAT a further report be prepared after the end of the first season to evaluate its success.**

**BACKGROUND**

In 1996, representatives of the Vancouver School Board and Vancouver Park Board jointly proposed the development of an outdoor education program involving overnight camping designed for the needs of inner city school students. A pilot project was developed to determine the feasibility of using the old zoo site in the miniature railway/children's farmyard area of Stanley Park. The program was designed to accommodate small groups of students from community centres or schools that would be transported to Stanley Park for the program.

**DISCUSSION**

The first pilot program took place on August 22/23, 1996. Three students, ages 12 through 14 years, participated in the trial with the guidance and supervision of recreation staff from the Hastings Community Centre. The pilot project used the miniature railway picnic site for food preparation and storage of camping material. Vehicle access was provided via the existing service access road.

**Pilot Program Itinerary**

**Thursday August 22, 1996**

- 1:00 PM Arrival
- Orientation
- 2:00 PM Nature Walk (Stanley Park Ecology Society)

- Forest Ecology
- 3:30 PM Swim at Second Beach Pool
- 5:00 PM Dinner - Set Up Camp
- 7:30 PM Evening Interpretation - Check of Bat Boxes/Owl Calling
- Endangered Species
- 8:30 PM Evening Games
- 9:30 PM Night Snack/Stories

### **Friday August 23, 1996**

- 8:30 AM Wakeup and Breakfast
- Break Camp
- 10:30 AM Second Beach - Swim
- 12:00 PM Depart

The program elements were handled by staff of the Park Board and a member of the Stanley Park Ecology Society.

The security of the students during the project was a primary consideration. The entire area is surrounded by a ten foot high perimeter fence which was closed after the train finished for the day (approximately 6:00 PM). Park security staff made regular hourly patrols of the area. The Vancouver City Police were notified of the activities and maintained peripheral contact with the group over the course of the evening. The recreation staff that supervised the entire project also carried a cellular phone in the event that immediate assistance was needed.

The camping area was located to the west of the miniature railway area in an open rolling grassy meadow which was formerly the site of the California Bighorn Sheep display. Tall Douglas Fir and cedar trees dominate the landscape and a small stream runs through from the train pond to Beaver Lake. Park staff prepared the site in advance by clearing away woody debris, preparing grassy areas for tents and cleaning up the stream bed.

Services such as water access and toilet facilities were not modified for the purpose of the trial. Members of the group were required to import their water to the site from the miniature railway picnic shelter. Washroom facilities were located in the same area. These amenities could be inexpensively improved if the program were to be considered on a long term basis. Campfires were not permitted. All cooking was done on natural gas stoves at the picnic shelter. Meal preparation could also be arranged as part of the camping site through the use of back-country stoves.

Staff reviewed the pilot project at the conclusion of the event and provided the following comments:

#### **General**

A close liaison between Park Board and School Board staff is essential for the programs to run smoothly. If the program were formalized, the Park Board could provide the physical facilities while the School Board developed and provided the program components.

## **Programming**

The development of educational/interpretive modules for use with a range of age groups will be the primary responsibility of the School Board with input from Park Board staff. The Stanley Park Ecology Society currently runs a series of environmental education programs that have been developed in conjunction with the Ministry of Education curriculum. These programs have been tested and evaluated over time and therefore reduce the need for additional research and development. They are already available at reasonable cost to the school system.

## **Protection**

Maintaining the integrity of the park habitats is a priority. the maximum size of camping groups that can be accommodated at the present site is estimated at 25-30 students. A minimum of 5 supervisory staff would likely be needed for this number. the adult component could include teachers and parents. Guidelines should be jointly developed in order to minimize impacts on the park and to formally establish camping procedures.

## **Amenities**

Restroom facilities for larger groups will be required closer to the camping site. A well concealed and secured portable toilet could be placed nearby with a minimum of environmental disturbance. Water access is available at the site and can be hooked up easily and at low cost. Cooking facilities could remain at the picnic shelter but the use of portable stoves under appropriate supervision would be acceptable, especially as this could be part of wilderness camping training. Tent platforms could be placed in the meadow for use by camping groups with little visual or environmental impact. Storage of materials for the program needs to be seriously considered. Options at present include use of space at the service yard, a trailer, or storage at a community centre. Slide presentations, etc. can be done at the classroom facilities in the Training Centre on the upper floor of the Pavilion under arrangement with the Ecology Society.

## **Security**

Protocols, emergency planning must be developed to deal with accidents or incidents that may require evacuation, police support, fire or ambulance.

## **Finances**

A fee structure, based on service provision and programming should be established and regularly reviewed. A review of funding options, grants, sponsorships, etc. which could be applied to the programming and operation of the project should be initiated.

## **CONCLUSION**

The outdoor education program was conceived as a joint proposal by the

Vancouver School Board and the Vancouver Park Board. A pilot project was run in August involving Hastings Community Centre students. The initial program was developed by park operations and recreation staff. The program was received well by the participants. The site lends itself well to small low impact camping activities. The Vancouver School Board program development staff are primarily responsible for developing program. However, the Stanley Park Ecology Society already has many of the necessary elements, Ministry approved, in place, which will help to reduce development and operational costs. A number of small items relating to the procedures and materials need to be resolved. However most logistical problems are inexpensive and could be resolved quickly. The program has been enthusiastically reviewed by all educational and park staff so far. The next step is to consider a sustained program for the site.

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