



Date: February 16, 2001

TO: Board Members - Parks and Recreation
FROM: General Manager - Parks and Recreation
SUBJECT: Park Ranger Program 2001

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Board approve the continuation of the Park Ranger Program

BACKGROUND

On May 1, 2000 the Vancouver Park Board approved the initiation of the Park Ranger Program with the objective to manage both structured and unstructured park activities. Structured activities include organized/permitted activities such as field sports, picnics, special events and filming. Unstructured activities are generally unorganized and occur on the seawall, pathways and open park spaces. In previous years, the Board funded auxiliary staff to monitor, regulate and control various park activities. The monitoring of activities was "function" based and focused on the seawall (bike patrol), Lumberman's Arch water park, filming, special events and play field activities. The plan for 2000 was to reorganize the various monitoring tasks and personnel with the intent of providing a coordinated "single voice" approach for park management. It was believed that through this coordinated approach, the Ranger Program would provide the Board with better customer support in terms of information and education as well as a broader coverage for conflict resolution.

DISCUSSION

2000 Season

The Rangers served as ambassadors of the Board in parks. Their role was to increase the public's awareness of the Board's park use by-laws, rules and regulations, direct queries where appropriate and act as a liaison with other City departments, partners and stakeholders. The Rangers did not have the authority to enforce City or Park Board by-laws and referred such issues to the appropriate agency (Police, Health Department, Pound, etc.).

While the Ranger Program primarily focused on Stanley District parks, the Program also had the responsibility for monitoring special events and field sports on a city-wide level. In addition, both the Queen Elizabeth and Vancouver East Districts funded Park Ranger positions whose primary responsibility was to monitor "dogs off leash" issues in these Districts.

The Ranger Program operated seven days a week from late May to the first weekend of September. For the remainder of the year, the Program assumed the duties for monitoring special events and sport fields only. During the summer, the scheduling of staff reflected when most people used parks or when problems or complaints occurred. Staffing was highest mid-day to early evening although coverage was provided from 6:30 a.m. to 10:15 p.m.

The staff compliment consisted a Recreation Programmer and 14 auxiliary staff. The program was supervised by the Recreation Coordinator for Sports and Fitness. The budget for the 2000 Ranger Program was \$145,000 although the actual expenditure was \$162,400. Funding for the 2000 Program was from existing operating budgets within the Districts.

The job duties performed by Rangers were a product of previous tasks performed by monitoring staff as well as new issues identified by staff and/or the public. Appendix A outlines the various job duties, examples of work, hot spots and commitment of resources for the summer of 2000.

Evaluation of the 2000 Park Ranger Program

The 2000 Park Ranger Program had success in providing the Park Board with better customer support in terms of information and education and a broader coverage for conflict resolution. The Program did experience the growing pains of any first year program and there was a significant learning curve for staff. Most importantly, the Program demonstrated that it has the potential to better manage both structured and unstructured park activities in the future.

The 2000 Ranger Program was able to provide monitoring of park activities on a broader level while maintaining past services. The monitoring of the Seawall and Waterpark serve as good examples where monitoring staff were deployed for other duties but still provided back up and support to these areas if required. Lumberman's Arch Water Park was monitored with coordinated efforts from Bike Patrol and a designated ranger. There was better customer support in the areas of information and education as cross training resulted in a more knowledgeable staff team. Working relationships with partners also improved during 2000. Dealing with the homeless (City Housing, Police), buskers (By-law, Police), dogs off leash (City Pound) are examples of improvement in the working relationship between the Park Board and various agencies.

Two areas which significantly improved due to the efforts of the Ranger Program were the handling of public complaints and the management of busking in English Bay. For the first time, the Park Board was able to respond to problems as they occurred. The Rangers met with the public in person, on site and often the Rangers were able to either resolve the concern or forward the issue to the appropriate staff group or agency.

Busking in English Bay was better managed during the summer of 2000. This can be attributed to having a staff presence in English Bay during the summer months. Although not all issues were resolved, positive comments with regards to the Program's management of busking were received from both buskers and local residents.

Other key learnings from the 2000 Ranger Program include:

- having to perform previous monitoring duties combined with the new tasks stretched resources;
- expectations of the Program varied significantly between the public, other Park Board staff and the individual Park Rangers;
- while the public expects enforcement of Park Board by-laws, the City's enforcement officers (Police, Pound, By-law) are reluctant to charge Park by-law violators;
- there is a perception that the Ranger Program can solve all problems which occur in parks.

Focus for 2001 Park Ranger Program

It is recommended that the Park Ranger Program be continued in 2001. This includes the monitoring of activities in Stanley District parks, special event and field monitoring on a city wide level as well as those park issues identified by staff in the Q.E. and Van East Districts. However, it is important that the Park Ranger Program re-focus on the objectives for the Program by clearly defining the role Park Rangers will fulfill in managing park activity. The Program's success is dependent on the public, Park Board staff, stakeholders and partners having a clear understanding of the Program's role and priorities in managing park activities and park patrons behavior.

The 2001 Park Ranger Program will focus on the monitoring and/or controlling of recreation activities in parks as its first priority. Park Rangers will primarily deal with issues which can be resolved through information, education and/or conflict resolution. Issues which cannot be resolved through these methods or require a long term or alternate solution (e.g., enforcement, maintenance responsibility, safety issue) will be referred to the appropriate department or agency.

The 2001 Park Ranger Program will maintain its ambassador philosophy of informing and educating the public rather than focusing on the enforcement of Park by-laws. Enforcement of by-laws will be left to the those departments which have the skills and resources to prosecute by-law violators. For this to be successful, it is recognized that a strong working relationship between the Park Ranger Program and the various support agencies is required; especially with the Police, By-law Enforcement, Pound, etc. Being able to clearly define the Park Ranger Program's role in managing park activity to these enforcement agencies is critical to the Program's success. It is important that all those involved in managing park behavior work

together towards an agreed upon course of action.

The Park Board should also take the lead in improving conditions for enforcement by ensuring that its by-laws reflect enforcement concerns and can withstand legal challenges. In addition, the Board should work with the various enforcement departments to ensure that enforcement personnel are made available to enforce park by-laws.

SUMMARY

It is recommended that the Park Ranger Program continue for the 2001 season. A long term commitment to the Program is important to foster positive working relationships with the public, park stakeholders as well as the various support agencies.

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APPENDIX A

2000 Job Duties for Park Rangers

Job Duties	Description or Examples of Work	Hot Spots	Commitment of Resources
Monitoring of park activities	Seawall - roller blading and cycling, restricted areas, speed infractions, etc.	English Bay, Lumberman's Arch	55%
	Busking - issues relating to noise and congestion of pathways	English Bay	
	Water Park - monitoring of use, first aid	Lumberman's Arch	
	Special Events - assistance to Special Event monitors: park closures, signage, event set-up	As required	
	Dogs in parks	David Lam Park, Sunset Beach, Nelson Park	
Assisting other Park Board Departments	Moving transients from parks so other employees can perform work, responding to requests when other staff are not available, maintenance of picnic shelters.	Beaches, picnic sites, washrooms	10%
Social Issues	Transients, campers in parks	Alexander Band Stand, Nelson Park, Ceperley Park	15%
Vending in parks	unauthorized vending	Nelson Park	10%
Vehicle Parking		parking lots	5%
Work with various partners in the District	ICBC Parking Lot Patrol; Skate Patrol; Police, Health and By-law Enforcement Departments		5%

In addition, the Ranger Program was also responsible for monitoring special events and field sports on a city-wide level. Approximately 10% of the overall Park Ranger budget was allocated to the monitoring of city-wide park activities.