



March 15, 2002

**TO: Board Members - Parks and Recreation**  
**FROM: General Manager - Parks and Recreation**  
**SUBJECT: VanDusen Botanical Garden Concept Plan**

---

## **RECOMMENDATION**

**That the Board approve the VanDusen Botanical Garden Concept Plan for the purposes of guiding future development projects at the Garden.**

## **BACKGROUND**

At their meeting in September, 2000, the Board endorsed the vision and strategic document for VanDusen Botanical Garden entitled "A Clear Vision for a Bright Future". This plan laid out goals for accomplishment between 2000 and 2005. In particular it identified the need to increase visitors, provide good customer service, improve programming, increase funding potential and ensure sustainability. Vancouver Park Board (VPB) staff, together with their partners at the Garden, the VanDusen Botanical Garden Association (VBGA), identified a number of facility upgrades that are necessary to enable the Garden to realize the goals set out in the strategic plan. The architects Downs Archambault were engaged to conduct a site study and to produce a concept plan of potential improvements. The plan addresses ways to increase the Garden's visibility from the street and expand buildings and facilities to support visitor services and growth in revenue generating opportunities and programming. VPB staff and the architects, together with VBGA Board members, presented highlights from this plan to the Board Commissioners on February 4, 2002.

## **DISCUSSION**

Over the past 27 years VanDusen Botanical Garden has developed into a significant resource for City of Vancouver residents as well as visitors and tourists from out of town. Over 150,000 people visit VanDusen each year. The Garden is a 'living museum' of plants from around the world and, in an era of dwindling natural resources is an important educational resource for students of all ages. At the same time, it is also a place of beauty, tranquility and escape, much needed in an urban setting. Since its inception, the Garden has been operated with the assistance of the VBGA. With over 7,000 members and 1800 active volunteers, the VBGA supports many important programmes including youth and adult education, marketing, fund raising and special events.

The Garden has, however, reached capacity with the existing facilities to expand its potential for greater attendance, revenues and programming. Staff have developed a business rationale that identifies opportunities to expand revenue potential that will contribute to the continued financial viability of the Garden. The expanded shop and rental revenues, in addition to the anticipated increased gate, represent considerable growth in financial resources that would not be possible without the proposed changes.

This is a time when conservation and sustainability issues are paramount and the role of botanical gardens in providing access to information is more important than ever. The VPB's Strategic Plan recognizes conservation and the environment as important elements of park and recreation programme delivery. With the proposed changes to the current physical plant VanDusen would be well placed to perform this role.

In recognition of the financial investment required to complete the proposed capital project, the project has been broken down into phases as follows:

Phase 1A

- New Visitor Centre including New Gift Shop; Orientation Room; Arrival Hall and Plaza; Parking; Special Event Entry – Total Cost (including soft costs and contingency)  
\$3,588,000.00

Phase 1B

- New Main Entrance Garden including Entry Plaza; Water Features
- Renovated Garden Entrance including Great Hall; Garden Deck; Living Museum Gardens; New Washrooms  
Total Cost \$1,055,000.00

Phase 1C

- Garden Pavilion; Amphitheatre  
Total Cost \$1,215,000.00

Phase 1D

- Casual Dining including Cafe; Decks and Patios  
Total Cost \$470,000.00

Phase 1E

- Restaurant Addition including New Kitchen; Deck  
Total Cost \$602,000.00

Future Phases

- Expanded Floral Hall; New and Upgraded Meeting Rooms; New Library; Expanded Administration Building; Water Features; Connecting Bridge  
Total Cost \$7,203,000.00

The final concept plan, as described above, evolved out of a multi-stakeholder review process. The Steering Committee was composed of both VPB staff, (including staff representatives from Planning and Development) and VBGA Board members. The architects conducted technical reviews as well as planning workshops prior to making their recommendations. The Steering Committee conducted regular reviews of the architects' progress. The final Concept Plan was presented to the VBGA Board on November 28, 2001 where it received enthusiastic approval. In addition the plan has been presented to VPB Senior Management.

Approval in principle of this Concept Plan will allow it to move forward into the VPB Capital Budget process. It is proposed that Phase 1A only, be considered for inclusion in the Capital Budget 2003-2005. This phase includes a new and expanded, boldly designed Visitor Centre that would be highly visible from Oak Street. The adjacent Plaza would provide for passenger drop-off and easy access to the Centre. The Centre itself would include an Arrival Hall and adjacent Orientation Pod that would provide for visitor comfort, orientation and information and an expanded Gift Shop. It is projected that with the Gift Shop expansion alone revenues would increase from \$97,750.00 in 2001 to \$290,000 by 2008. Phase 1A would also include electrical and service upgrades to allow for future phases to proceed.

The viability of this project is greatly enhanced through partnership with the VBGA. As on-going partners at the Garden, the VBGA has been fully in support of this project from the outset. They were 50% partners in funding the development of the Concept Plan and they were active partners on the Steering Committee and in study workshops. Since approving the Plan, and as a result of their commitment to the project, the VBGA Board voted to proceed with a Planning and Implementation Study to provide a planning basis for a Capital Campaign. This study will be completed and presented to the VBGA Board on May 1, 2002.

This project builds on the VPB Strategic Plan in the following three critical areas:

- Strategic Alliances  
The VanDusen Botanical Garden has grown to its present stature directly as a result of the partnership between the VPB and the VBGA. The VBGA has successfully demonstrated its capacity to fund raise for the Garden since its inception.
- Financial Sustainability  
VanDusen has considerable untapped potential for revenue generation. This project will provide for exponential revenue growth. Furthermore, by increasing programming capacity the financial sustainability of our partner, the VBGA is greatly enhanced.
- Aging Infrastructure  
VanDusen's buildings and systems are 27 years old and have not received significant capital investment since their construction. The buildings are energy inefficient; the electrical system is maxed out and is unable to meet current needs; the heating system is in constant need of repair and maintenance on the building envelope is increasing.

## **SUMMARY**

Now is the time to move this proposal forward. This Concept Plan will guide development of the Garden over the long-term, foreseeable future. The support is in place from the botanical garden and horticultural community; the VBGA Board is renewed and passionately in support of the Garden's future; revenue projections indicate positive growth; this is an attractive project for donor support; and we have a partner in the VBGA ready to make a significant contribution through a capital campaign. With gardening representing the number one leisure activity in North America; and strong public concern for the environment and with the post-September 11<sup>th</sup> growing movement towards quality of life matters, VanDusen is well-positioned to fulfill its obvious potential to become a major public facility in the life of the City of Vancouver.

Prepared by:

Queen Elizabeth District  
Board of Parks & Recreation  
Vancouver, BC