



Date: June 27, 2003

TO: Board Members - Parks and Recreation
FROM: General Manager - Parks and Recreation
**SUBJECT: YALETOWN PARK PROPOSAL AT
901 MAINLAND STREET**

RECOMMENDATION

- A) *THAT the Park Board endorse the acceptance of an Air Space Parcel for a public park of 18,000 ft² as part of a development proposal for 901 Mainland Street, subject to legal arrangements for ownership to the satisfaction of the Director of Legal Services and the General Manager of Parks and Recreation. The terms and conditions of the agreement are to be drawn to the satisfaction of the Director of Legal Services and that the Director of Legal Services be authorized to execute the agreement and any plans, it being noted that no legal right or obligation will arise or be created until execution of the agreement;***
- B) *THAT the Park Board endorse the proposed design concept for the park in principle; and***
- C) *THAT the Park Board request Council to authorize the expenditure of \$460,000 from the Downtown South Development Cost Levy Reserve for park construction.***

BACKGROUND

Downtown South is a neighbourhood of rapidly increasing population and slowly increasing park land. There is currently no park in Downtown South, but the first park is under construction at the corner of Davie and Richards Streets, and is expected to open shortly. Due to the very high land values and the shortage of funding, further expansion of the park system has been difficult.

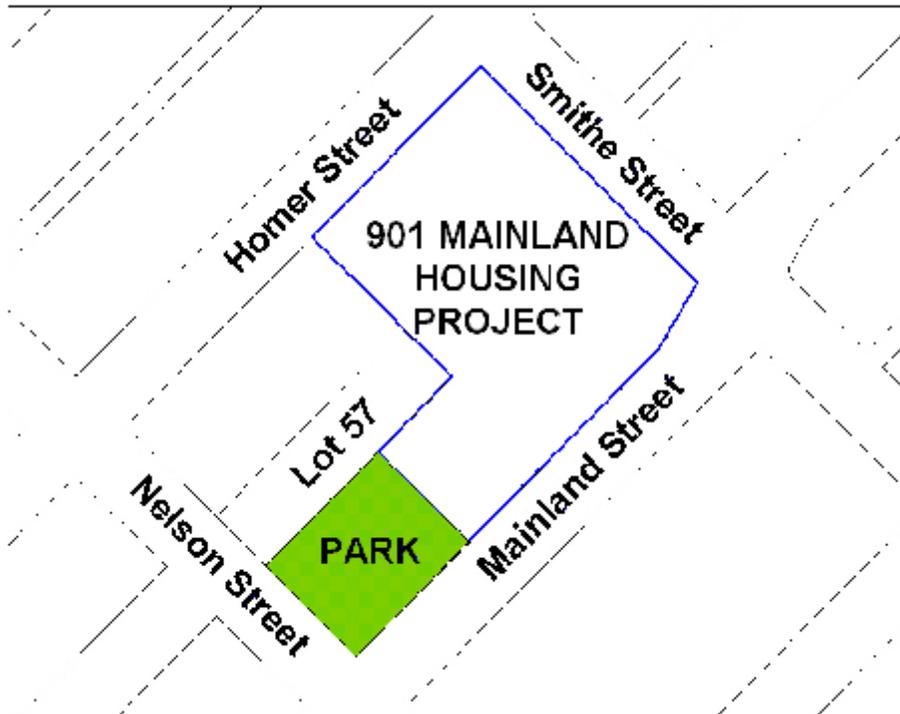
Slightly more than a year ago, Wall Financial Corporation approached the City with a development proposal that included the conveyance of an air space parcel¹ for a public park on top of a public underground parking garage. Staff worked with the proponent on the details of the proposal; and the development proposal has undergone the typical development permit process including public notification. The development has since achieved a preliminary development permit, which was appealed by neighbours to the Board of Variance; however, the appeal was recently rejected. Now the proposal is going to the Park Board for endorsement prior to going to Council for approval. A separate report will be presented to Council shortly, addressing both the park and public parking proposal.

DISCUSSION

Downtown South Context

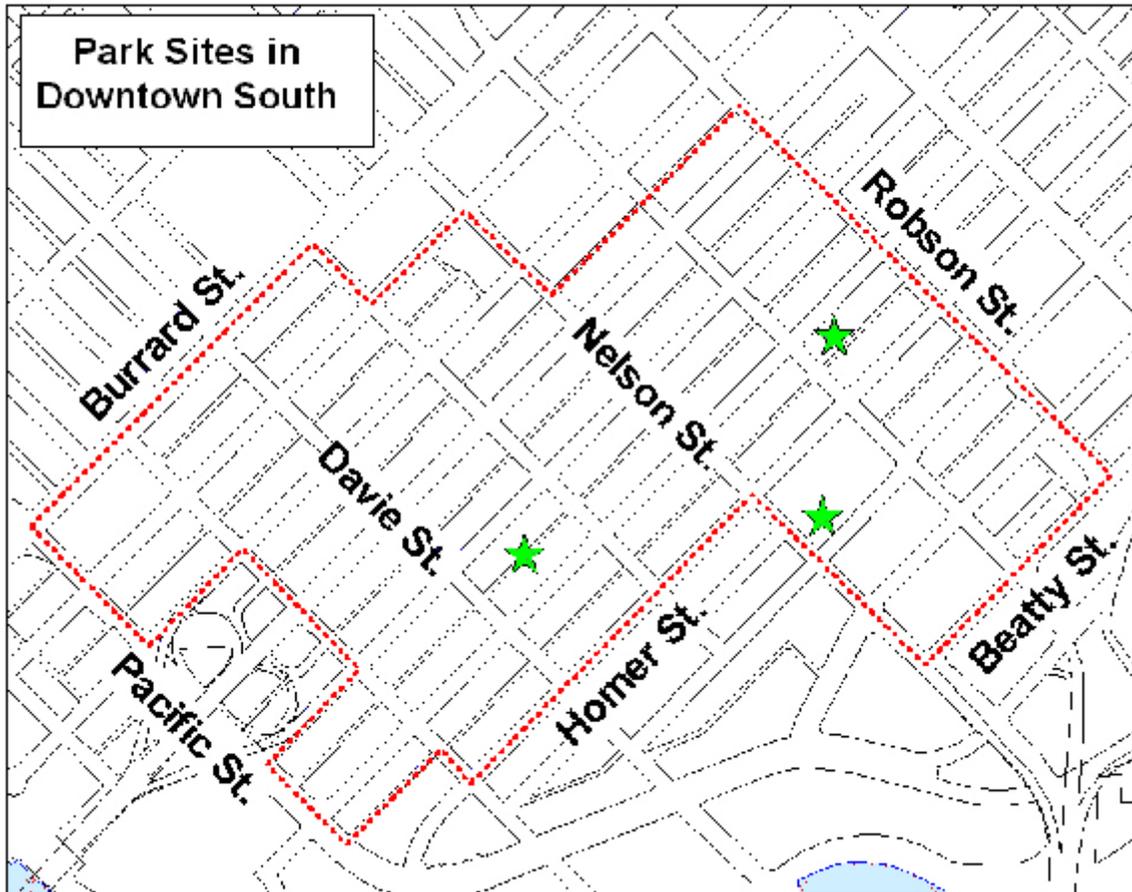
The proposed development of three residential towers at 901 Mainland Street includes a proposal for a public park on top of the public parking in the south easterly corner of the site. The park is bounded by Mainland Street and Nelson Street, by Lot 57 including loading docks of older buildings, and by the proposed development. The site is part of Downtown South.

¹ An “air space parcel” is the legal term to define a portion of real estate that is cut off at a certain elevation. At 901 Mainland Street, the “air space parcel” for the park would include the ground level and the space above it, but not the parking garage below the ground level.



Park acquisition in Downtown South is guided by the Downtown South Community Plan and the subsequent park acquisition strategy adopted by Council on May 16, 1991. Both policies set a target of 4.5 acres of park space for the neighbourhood as the minimum goal to serve a population of 11,000 residents, equivalent to 0.4 acres per 1,000 residents (the park standard is 2.75 acres per 1,000 residents).

The first park in Downtown South, the southern assembly, is in the 1100 block of Richards Street at Davie Street (2.3 acres). It will be constructed in two phases; the first phase (one acre) is nearing completion. A second park of about 0.8 acres, the northern assembly, is planned for the 800 block Richards Street at Smithe Street. The park proposed in this report would add 0.4 acres, leaving a shortfall of about one acre to be addressed by other acquisition opportunities in the future. Population growth beyond the planned 11,000 residents, however, would trigger the demand for a renewed analysis of community service and amenity needs as well as funding opportunities.



Park Location

The proposed park location is at the southerly end of the development site. The choice of location was informed by three considerations: solar orientation, relationship with the Yaletown public realm and the distribution of other parks in Downtown South.

The Downtown South Guidelines emphasize the importance of sunlight in parks, requesting that shadows are to be minimized on a prioritized hierarchy of spaces with parks as the top priority, and public open spaces as the second priority (2.6.1, a). The Guidelines further state that new developments should be designed to preclude shadowing across the property line of parks and public open spaces (2.6.1, b). Shadow analyses provided by the developer demonstrate that the proposed location for the public park is the only location within the development site that meets these requirements in a three-tower development. The proposed location offers the sunniest park.

The public realm of Yaletown is dominated by the presence, materials and use of the old loading docks. These docks extend across Nelson Street onto Lot 57 bordering the park to the west, thus introducing the vocabulary and potentially the uses of Yaletown's public spaces. Staff felt that this extension of the Yaletown character offers an interesting array of design and programming choices for the public park, linking it to the focus on arts and culture so prevalent in the neighbourhood.

The proposed park location is also a good fit when considering the location of the other parks in Downtown South, the southern park assembly under construction at Davie and Richards Streets, and the northern park assembly at Richard Street and Smithe Street. These three will form a triangle that is reasonably spaced apart, thereby maximizing the accessibility of each for residents, workers and visitors in the area.

Park Programming and Design

The program and design for the park are developed in response to the Yaletown context, the immediately adjacent built environment and the character of the Downtown South Park that is under construction. The public realm of Yaletown features loading docks that are animated by the uses of adjacent buildings spilling out, heritage facades, materials that include bricks, granite and concrete, activities extending into the night, and a strong presence of art and design.

The concept of the park builds on these characteristics (see Park Landscape Plan in Appendix A). It is conceived as a simple rectangular room with green walls: double rows of trees along the streets, and single rows along the buildings. These trees sit in large raised planters with lush seasonal plantings offering colour, scent, movement, variety and exuberance. The impact of Nelson Street is filtered through screens overgrowing with vines. These strong vertical green edges are perforated to allow pedestrian passage, drawing people in from the sidewalks.

The centre portion of the park is a softly undulating carpet of granite setts, studded with curving pieces of old granite curbs for informal seating under a canopy of ornamental flowering trees. More formal seating is incorporated on all four sides. Artful and subtle lighting will keep the park welcoming and safe after sunset.

The park is rooted in a tradition of small urban spaces that are designed and constructed with the highest quality of materials; it will be a precious little space that is attractive for a sunny lunch break, for a cup of coffee, or for meeting up with a group of friends. Yaletown activities will reach into this park with programmed events like street fairs and sidewalk sales, outdoor art exhibits and installations, or intimate musical and theatrical performances².

The character of this park is in marked contrast to the park under construction at Richard Street and Davie Street with its garden-like landscape of water, stone, lawn, big trees and colourful plantings, plus many play opportunities for children. Together, these two parks begin offering a variety of park experiences that is intended to be further expanded with the future park at Richard Street and Smithe Street.

The design of the park is only conceptual at this time. If the Park Board endorses and Council approves this proposal, then further design development will be required. The final design of the park will be reported to the Park Board for formal approval.

Park Funding

The proponent is offering to convey for a nominal sum an Air Space Parcel to the City for the park, and to pay for landscape design and construction up to the level of a private greenspace. Staff are seeking a higher quality of execution, and are seeking Council's approval to allocate funding for that incremental cost increase for park construction from Downtown South Development Cost Levies.

The proponent's consultant and staff have estimated costs for the proposed design concept. Staff are proposing that the City assume responsibility for those costs not typically found in private landscapes in Downtown South, including the hard surface paving and granite, the metal screens, the specimen trees in the centre of the park, some of the lighting and half of the irrigation cost. The estimate for these items is \$460,000. The City's share of the cost of park design and construction is slightly less than the proponent's share at \$470,000.

The value of the conveyance of the Air Space Parcel to the City is close to nominal, as there is no development potential. It should be noted, however, that the acquisition of a piece of land in Downtown South the size of the proposed park would cost about \$3.5 Million.

² The Yaletown Business Improvement Association has suggested a number of programming ideas: the weekly farmers markets, events marking the solstices, performances at Halloween, the Yaletown adventure games, Christmas outdoor craft fair, and lunchtime concerts.

In a neighbourhood as intensely developed as the Downtown South, creating parks for people is a challenge as the long history of the park at Richard Street and Davie Street demonstrates. It is therefore important to take advantage of opportunities such as this one where park benefits can be achieved at a fraction of the usual cost. Overall, staff feel that the proposed conveyance of the Air Space Parcel for park, the additional proponent's share of park construction and the City's share create good value for the public.

Timing

The proposed development includes 3 residential towers, one on Homer Street at Smithe Street and two along Mainland Street. The project has been designed to allow construction in two phases. The developer expects to start construction in early 2004. The park and public parking may be part of either phase.

Conclusion

The project at 901 Mainland Street is a rare opportunity to provide an additional park in Downtown South. The park would add 0.4 acres of park in this fast growing community, and is well located in relationship to the other parks. Because of its proximity to Yaletown, it will accommodate residents, workers and tourists alike. Its design and programming will be unique and add to the variety of high-quality parks in downtown Vancouver.

Prepared by:

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