



Date: September 19, 2003

**TO: Board Members - Parks and Recreation**  
**FROM: General Manager - Parks and Recreation**  
**SUBJECT: Cob Building Project**

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## RECOMMENDATION

*That subject to financing, the Board approve the Cob building project to replace the existing concession building used by the Stanley Park Ecology Society in the train area with all arrangements to the satisfaction of the General Manager.*

*That the Board approve funding \$20,000 from the Corporate Sponsorship Funds to support this project.*

## POLICY

### Park Board Strategic Plan

A goal under Environmental Stewardship is to “protect and preserve natural areas in the City, operate in an environmentally responsible manner, and to develop public awareness of conservation and ecological values”. Modeling environmental best practices provides an example of “capital renewal projects as opportunities to develop green buildings”.

### Corporate Sponsorship

This proposal meets criterion C of the Corporate Sponsorship Funds Policy (see Appendix A): to fund one time expenditures over and above the existing funding level in the operating budget which are beneficial to the overall Parks and Recreation system.

## **BACKGROUND**

The word 'cob' comes from an old English root meaning "a lump or rounded mass". Cob building is a traditional hand-building technique using earth mixed with water, sand and straw. No forms, bricks or wooden structures are required. Cob dries to a concrete hardness and has been used for centuries around the world and in climates similar to Vancouver's. In Britain there are cob buildings (e.g., houses and sheds) many centuries old. The materials are non-toxic and recyclable and the building technology requires little power or use of manufactured materials. Buildings are often rounded and sculptural, leaving evidence on the surface of the work of human hands. It combines aspects of art and architecture.

The Stanley Park Ecology Society operates a small concession in the plaza of the train to raise funds for its educational programming. The concession building has been planned for replacement and this project would replace the approximate square footage of the existing shed.

## **DISCUSSION**

The Cob project would involve a partnership between the Park Board, the Stanley Park Ecology Society (SPES) and a youth serving non-profit society. The site of the cob shelter would be on the entrance path leading from the train parking lot to the plaza.

The objectives for this project are:

- to demonstrate 'green' building practice through the use of cob to replace the SPES' stand;
- to pursue sustainability in all aspects of the project including using recycled, non-toxic and local natural materials;
- to provide opportunities for learning about sustainability through this process;
- to engage youth in the construction; and
- to provide information on cob buildings to the public during the construction and upon completion of the building.

In addition, the construction of the building will assist in assessing engineering, fire and permitting implications for additional and/or larger cob structures. The completed building will enhance the park experience for park visitors by creating a structure that is beautiful and ideally suited to its environment.

Construction of the building will be under the direction of Down To Earth Building Bee, a group of local builders who teach and participate in a variety of natural building projects in BC. They operate on the premise that cob-building is a creative response to the many negative impacts generated by conventional building practice. Their purpose is to work in partnership with community groups and together demonstrate the viability of cob structures.

Youth involvement will be integral to this project. The project will collaborate with an organization such as the Environmental Youth Alliance or the First Nations Employment Centre to provide training for four youth. The youth, as well as learning all aspects of cob-building from developing a plan to securing materials, will reach out to high school students and youth connected to community centres to demonstrate cob techniques and offer opportunities for hands-on experience. The youth organization which will partner on this is not determined as yet and will be confirmed in the Spring of 2004 when funding for the youth employment program is secured. Both the above-mentioned organizations have indicated strong interest in participating.

The cost of this project is estimated at approximately \$ 40,000 (see Appendix B). While the materials used for cob-building are relatively inexpensive, this project is a demonstration project and the budget includes fees for crafts professionals, landscaping, educational programming and documentation. The SPES is committed to raising funds and securing in-kind resources to match funds provided by the Board and will offer financial and logistical administration for the project (see Appendix C).

Construction would not commence until all funding has been secured. The project is planned to start in May 2004 and continue through the summer. The shelter is less than 100 ft<sup>2</sup> and will not require a building permit. City staff have been approached to request their involvement in monitoring the building so that the City might begin to develop regulatory conditions for cob building.

Once completed, information on cob technology will be available at the shelter and SPES will include the shelter in ongoing educational programming. The structure planned is very attractive and, being made of natural materials, is more compatible with the Stanley Park environment than most structures. It is anticipated that the cob shelter will enhance the experience of park visitors.

The BC Professional Fire Fighters Burn Fund has been informed of this project because of its work on the Bright Nights train event. It is proposed that they incorporate the shelter as part of the displays.

## **SUMMARY**

This cob building project is in accordance with the Park Board Strategic Plan in providing a demonstration of green building practice. The project will also enhance the park environment with a natural sculptural element. The funding requested meets the requirements of the corporate sponsorship policy.

Prepared by:

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