

Date: January 12, 2005



TO: Board Members – Parks and Recreation
FROM: General Manager – Parks and Recreation
SUBJECT: Fruit Trees in Parks and Public Areas

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT the Board receive this report for information.

POLICY

In 1990, the Park Board approved the Street Tree Management Plan which was designed to improve the care of the tree inventory, increase the planting of street trees and broaden species diversity.

In 1992, Vancouver City Council passed the Street Tree Bylaw which gives care custody and control of street trees to the Park Board, and prohibits unauthorized pruning of street trees.

In 1996, the Park Board approved the Community Garden Policy, which states “the Board will support the development of community gardens in Vancouver”.

BACKGROUND

On July 8, 2003, City Council approved a motion supporting the development of a just and sustainable food system for the City of Vancouver that fosters equitable food production, distribution and consumption; nutrition; community development and environmental health. To support this initiative, the Vancouver Park Board asked staff to explore opportunities regarding the planting of fruit trees in parks and other public areas.

In March 2004, a staff group met to discuss the feasibility of growing fruit trees in parks. Items discussed included the existing fruit tree inventory, opportunities for planting additional fruit trees, operational issues and stewardship models.

In May 2004, staff met with representatives from City of Vancouver Social Planning and various interest groups including City Farmer, Environmental Youth Alliance, Strathcona Community Gardeners, the Vancouver Fruit Tree Project and the Renfrew Collingwood Food Security Institute. There was a round table discussion that identified the benefits, concerns and opportunities related to planting fruit trees in public areas.

Staff reported back to the Planning and Environment Committee on January 11, 2004 with a summary of work done to date and an implementation plan for 2005.

DISCUSSION

There are many potential environmental, educational and community benefits associated with planting fruit trees in parks and other public spaces. Locally available organic fruit grown in public areas could reduce transportation emissions and costs, and foster environmental awareness in the community. Educational opportunities would be especially beneficial for children and youth in dense urban environments. There is great community development potential in linking neighbours and creating long-term stewardship opportunities of public spaces. Fruit harvested could be distributed to address local hunger and nutrition issues. Aesthetically, fruit trees enhance the urban forest by adding spring flowers, fruit and fall colour. In addition, urban agricultural is a valuable recreational activity.

A number of factors need to be considered to have successful fruit production. Vancouver's climate limits the kinds of fruit that can be grown successfully, therefore selection of appropriate fruit varieties is crucial. Trees planted in public areas must be large enough to withstand environmental influences and vandalism. Cultural considerations include proper ongoing maintenance, pruning and pest control to maximize production. Concerns associated with fruit trees can be minimized by planting trees in appropriate locations, thorough harvesting and promptly cleaning up fallen fruit.

Opportunities

Various opportunities were identified:

- Encourage fruit tree planting in community gardens where the organization and volunteer base already exist.
- Modify tree planting programs in parks to include suitable low maintenance varieties such as sweet chestnuts, hazelnuts, serviceberries, etc.
- Plant fruit trees on wide street rights-of-way where there is community support
- Investigate the concept of a community orchard, using the Community Garden model. This would require finding a suitable under-utilized city property, commitment from a stable organization and a community consultation process.
- Public education programs could raise awareness and encourage residents to plant fruit trees on private property. Harvesting of fruit on private property through external organizations could be facilitated by the Park Board.

Implementation Plan for 2005

1. Staff will continue researching fruit tree varieties that grow well in Vancouver's climate and have reduced maintenance requirements.
2. Several dozen small fruit trees have been acquired and are being grown at the Park Board's Langley Tree Farm, for future planting in parks and street rights-of-way.
3. A group of six fruit trees will be planted at Slocan Park when they are available, as part of the Slocan Park development.
4. Staff will modify the tree planting program in parks, and include suitable low

- maintenance trees with food potential such as walnut, hazelnut and sweet chestnut.
5. Park Board staff will work in collaboration with, and provide support to the Food Policy Council and Social Planning staff to develop and implement educational outreach programs that increase public awareness of the benefits of planting fruit trees. This support could involve providing space for workshops, technical expertise, and offering the public access to affordable fruit trees.
 6. Provide public information regarding the location of fruit trees in public areas.

CONCLUSION

In 2004, the Park Board engaged in work to explore increasing the fruit tree inventory on public land, as part of our support of the Food Policy Council's objectives. Continuing work, as outlined in the implementation plan for 2005, aims to expand opportunities for public access to fruit trees.

Prepared by:

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