

Date: March 4, 2005



TO: Board Members – Parks and Recreation
FROM: General Manager – Parks and Recreation
SUBJECT: Everett Crowley Park Management Plan

RECOMMENDATION:

- A. THAT the Everett Crowley Park Management Plan be received for information;*
- B. THAT the Key Management Goals and Strategies of the Everett Crowley Park Management Plan, included as Appendix A, be adopted to guide future park use and management of the park, and*
- C. THAT implementation of the Everett Crowley Park Management Plan as laid out in the Implementation: Categories and Phasing section of the Plan be achieved through future operating budgets and the 2006 – 2008 and subsequent Capital Plan processes.*

BACKGROUND

This park, the fourth largest in Vancouver, is located at the corner of Kerr Road and Marine Drive in the southeast corner of the city. A city landfill between 1944 and 1964, it has evolved into the second largest naturally forested park in Vancouver. It was designated park in June, 1987 and named for Everett Crowley, a former Park Board Commissioner and owner of the nearby Avalon Dairy.

Since this 39.44 hectare park was established, the surrounding community has taken an active stewardship role that has included removal of invasive plants, tree planting, restoration of some areas to native species and the development of education programs in the park. A range of site studies, reports and proposals were prepared on behalf of park stewardship groups. Almost two decades later, however, the need was apparent for a community supported, comprehensive, long-term park management plan that could define park uses and guide park development into the next phase of its evolution. Consequently, in early 2004, the Everett Crowley Park Committee (a subcommittee of the Champlain Heights Community Association), Evergreen and the Park Board agreed to conduct a comprehensive review of Everett Crowley Park for the purpose of establishing a management plan.

DISCUSSION

Plan Overview

The Everett Crowley Park Management Plan proposes priorities and zones for habitat restoration objectives which have implications for how the park is accessed, how it is used and for

appropriate amenities development. It contains proposals to deal with control of invasive plant species, remediation of soil conditions, pond and stream restoration strategies, future trail development and linkages, and measures for interpretation and education focused on the restoration process. It specifically addresses the balance between current active uses of the park – primarily off-leash dog walking – and habitat restoration and identifies areas of the park to be designated off-leash.

The Management Plan's Executive Summary has been excerpted in Appendix B to provide a fuller explanation of the background and directions of the Plan.

Public Process

Preparation of the Everett Crowley Park Management Plan has been an inclusive process involving many members of the community and was directed by a steering committee made up of representatives of the Everett Crowley Park Committee, Evergreen and Park Board staff. A consultant team led by Lees + Associates Consulting Ltd. and including Gartner Lee Ltd., Patrick Mooney, Al Grass, Judith Myers and Praxis Pacific, was selected by the steering committee to develop the Management Plan.

An open house was held on June 17, 2004 at the [Champlain Heights Community Centre](#) to initiate the Management Plan process. The display panels (posted on the Park Board website) covered all aspects of the park as it exists today, its past and future potential. Nearly 90 people attended and submitted feedback forms.

After months of research and consultation, a draft Management Plan was prepared and circulated to the steering committee. The overall direction was also presented to the public at an Open House on January 25, 2005. Of the 79 people who signed in, 60 filled out feedback forms. A summary of the feedback is included in Appendix C.

Key Management Goals and Strategies

Staff recommend that the Board receive the Everett Crowley Management Plan for information and adopt the key management goals and strategies of the Plan, as included in Appendix A, to guide future park use and management of the park (an overview of the management goals follows). Each of the six goals is elaborated upon in much greater detail and related to the four key management strategies in the Management Plan. These are to be realized through implementation of the Implementation: Categories and Phasing section of the Plan through the 2006 – 2008 and subsequent capital plan processes. The management goals can be summarized as:

- Managing the Rough and the Refined – managing the park as a natural landscape that is not manicured, yet has sufficient improvements to meet safety and use needs.
- Optimizing Habitat Potential – restoring tree, shrub and grass layers that, in combination, result in maximizing bio-diversity through a range of habitats best suited to this part of the city and the region.
- Managing Invasive Species – implementing an eradication and control plan for those plants that are literally taking over the park. Integrated Pest Management methods underpin this strategy.

- Balancing Active and Passive Uses – managing the balance of active use, passive use and prime habitat in order to address dog owners’ needs – currently the primary active users of the park.
- Incremental Infrastructure Improvement – implement, through a series of steps, improvements to bulk storage handling, an improved materials storage area, new service access, dog-waste collection, garbage collection and trail maintenance. Consider the construction of an interpretation centre and washroom building, and a community garden.
- Maximizing Community Involvement – optimize the strong sense of community ownership in this park through enhancement of the ParkPartners program.

The Management Plan is premised on the concept that an ecologically-based approach will provide the greatest long-term benefit to the local community as well as the community at large. It is a management plan rather than a master plan so its emphasis is on clarifying directions rather than designing and developing the park. Although additional consultation is required, the overall goal of the Plan is to provide a framework for and define policy and procedures to guide the park’s short- and long-term restoration, maintenance and uses in an effective and sustainable way. Implementation of recommendations in the Plan will address immediate threats to the park as well as enhance the balance of habitat and active uses.

Key Issues

The feedback results from the January 25, 2005 Open House showed strong support for most of the proposals and most of the provisions of the plan were either not commented upon or were received positively at the Open House. However, strong concerns were expressed in relation to three issues:

- definition of off-leash and on-leash areas for dogs;
- the presence and operation of the service and storage area near the Kerr Street entry to the park; and
- potential hazards associated with its historical use as a landfill.

The steering committee met subsequently, on February 10, 2005, to address these issues. They were able to resolve all three and their recommendations have been incorporated into the final draft of the Management Plan. A brief discussion of the three issues follows.

Dogs: Everett Crowley Park is currently not a designated off-leash park but the Management Plan recognizes it as a de facto off-leash park, and seeks to formalize that status. At the same time, the environmental objective of the Plan is to manage the site for recreational use in accordance with strategies promoting biodiversity so it also seeks to protect sensitive habitat areas. People who don’t have dogs or wish to use the park without encountering off-leash dogs also need to be accommodated. So the challenge to resolve this issue was to find an appropriate and community-supported balance between competing objectives and uses of the park. The steering committee, working with the consultants, developed and unanimously recommended a concept plan (included as the Access Framework plan in the Master Plan) illustrating zones where no access would be permitted, trails where dogs would not be allowed, on-leash trails and off-leash trails. Off-leash designation can be implemented upon adoption of this report, noting that the revised on/off leash areas may be subject to further refinement and testing and will be evaluated after an appropriate period of use.

Park Service Area: Some members of the community felt that safety and access concerns with the current park service area were not adequately dealt with in the draft Management Plan as presented at the January Open House. Consequently, the steering committee recommended that the following provisions be incorporated into the Plan: a) the service area be consolidated, separated and screened to reduce its negative impacts on the park; b) the service area be redesigned to make the operations more efficient; c) better interpretation around waste and environmental issues, i.e. reduce, reuse and recycle, be provided; and d) improved management protocols be introduced. Accordingly, redesign and redevelopment of the Kerr Street entry area will be a first priority. Staff will report back on the design process and funding. Imported top soil and fill material to the service area in Everett Crowley Park was also identified as a service area issue as people were concerned about the amount and purity of these materials. Acquiring clean fill and topsoil for parks at minimal cost is a sustainable practice and extremely important for parks generally and in particular to implementing the restoration initiatives for Everett Crowley Park, as outlined in the Management Plan. To address soil quality issues, at Everett Crowley and all other service areas, guidelines are being prepared and will be brought forward to the Board for approval to ensure that inappropriate soils are not introduced onto park properties.

Landfill Issues: Members of the public were concerned about the safety of using the park for themselves and their pets and wondered whether the review of the landfill provided adequate assurances in this regard. To address these concerns, the following recommendations of the steering committee were incorporated into the Plan: a) that appropriate actions be taken to protect park user health and safety; b) due diligence be followed in dealing with landfill management practices; and c) this be clearly communicated to the public. As custodians of the park, the Board has to be able to assure the public that the park is safe to use, and that the park is being managed appropriately and with due diligence. To this end, staff will review the documentary evidence again with City Engineering staff responsible for current landfill sites and with the appropriate environmental protection agencies. This process has begun, the results of which will be reported to the Board once it has concluded.

Given the resolution of these issues and subsequent revisions incorporating them into the Management Plan, the steering committee unanimously supported the Plan and recommend adoption of the Key Management Goals and Strategies in Appendix A.

Implementation

The Management Plan proposes a set of categories of related initiatives for the purpose of allocating resources. The proposed phasing for each project within each category indicates its priority. This approach suggests the possible funding sources or the parties most likely responsible for implementation. An advantage of this is that it is opportunistic, i.e., as possible funding sources become available (capital or donations of labour and materials), a range of improvement projects can be considered simultaneously, without adhering to any set order. Projects may be selected from any category according to the needs and wishes of stakeholder groups. Funding is expected from both operating and capital budgets as well as outside sources.

In many cases, categories will overlap or be interrelated due to the nature of projects. For example, habitat improvements may well include improving infrastructure, and infrastructure improvements (such as the Kerr Street service and entry area) would logically result in

improvements to fire and emergency access, and even habitat (application of stored soils to problem areas).

Plan recommendations will address immediate threats to the park as well as enhance the balance of habitat and active uses. Projects that address immediate problems improvements (such as the Kerr Street service and entry area) should be undertaken first, but they should incorporate related projects whenever possible to take advantage of potential construction savings. Additional consultation, planning, design and costing is required for many of the implementation initiatives and will be subject to reports back to the Board. All are to be realized through implementation of the Implementation: Categories and Phasing section of the Plan through future operating budgets and the 2006 – 2008 and subsequent Capital Plan processes.

Research Reports

Two preliminary research documents were commissioned as companion reports to the Management Plan. The first, "Preliminary Research - Potential Educational/Interpretive Centre - Everett Crowley Park", documents precedents for park interpretive centres and green technologies for on-site servicing needs. The second, "Dealing With Dog Waste In Vancouver Parks Preliminary Research for Dog Waste Composting at Everett Crowley Park" investigates dog waste as a management issue, focusing on collection and disposal. Both documents are available on the Park Board website.

SUMMARY

Since the Everett Crowley Park Management Plan is a management plan rather than a master plan, its emphasis is on clarifying directions rather than designing and developing the park site. It is intended to define policy and procedures to guide the park's short- and long-term restoration, maintenance and uses in an effective and sustainable way and lead to an appropriate and community-supported balance between competing objectives and uses of the park. Therefore, it is recommended that the Board receive the Everett Crowley Park Management for information; adopt the Key Management Goals and Strategies of the Management Plan, included as Appendix A, to guide future park use and management of the park; and that implementation as laid out in the Management Plan be achieved through future operating budgets and the 2006 – 2008 and subsequent Capital Plan processes.

Prepared by:
Planning and Operations
Board of Parks & Recreation
Vancouver, B.C.
(ASD)

Everett Crowley Park Management Plan: Key Management Goals and Strategies

A. Key Management Goals

1. Manage “the rough and the refined”

Objectives:

- Establish the nature of the park with a park vision statement.
- Implement management strategies to encourage designated uses, ensure public safety and enhance habitat while maintaining the special natural qualities of the site.

2. Optimize Habitat Potential

Objectives:

- Enhance existing habitats according to their existing characters in order to create a diverse range of habitat types.
- Coordinate efforts to control invasive species.

3. Manage invasive species

Objectives:

- Address the spread of invasive species.
- Coordinate efforts to control invasive species.

4. Balance Active and Passive Uses

Objectives:

- Provide facilities and information to accommodate active and passive uses, reduce conflicts and improve the park experience for all park visitors.
- Undertake public education to increase understanding of the park’s history and evolution, and its diverse habitat types.

5. Undertake Infrastructure Improvements

Objectives:

- Undertake incremental park initiatives to upgrade existing park infrastructure.
- Commence long-term planning of community-based proposals.

6. Maximize community involvement

Objectives:

- Optimize community ownership through enhancement of the ParkPartners program.
- Optimize increased participation of individuals and groups in implementing the approved Management Plan.

- Commence long-term planning of community-based proposals.

B. Proposed Management Strategies

The following management strategies are proposed to assist in implementing the management plan:

1. Address Landfill Issues

- No evidence has been found of landfill issues that preclude continued public use.
- The presence of the landfill will continue to constrain some uses.
- Avoid excavation or any disturbance that could cause erosion.
- Undertake professional site evaluation prior to planning any construction projects.
- Further testing would be required to determine current levels of methane or leachate being produced by the buried landfill.

2. Enhance Habitat; Control Invasives

- Proposed management zones were developed according to existing site vegetation patterns and their potential to become specific, plant and animal “habitat types.” Undertake long-term development of habitat types through a range of initiatives including soil cover, removing invasives and planting native species.
- The habitat potential of the Avalon Pond area is the most significant. This area is therefore designated the “priority, high level intervention and enhancement zone. Plan and implement incremental, long-term projects to realize this potential.
- Control invasives, particularly knotweed, as the first priority for improving park habitats. Involve community volunteers in a pilot project to control knotweed.

3. Balance Active and Passive Uses

- Designate Everett Crowley as an off-leash park.
- Plan and develop active use, dog play areas in collaboration with dog owners and community groups. Create open fields and amenities for both dogs and dog owners.
- Improve the quality of the park experience for passive uses to attract new visitors
- Adopt and implement a trails access plan. Encourage compliance through signage and public education.
- Provide educational and interpretive materials.

4. Improve Infrastructure

- Upgrade infrastructure with accessible paths, emergency access routes and dedicated access for Park Board service vehicles.
- Improve park entries, the Park Board Service and Storage area, viewpoints and trails.

Everett Crowley Park Management Plan Executive Summary (excerpted from the Plan)

Park Background

The physical and social history of Everett Crowley Park is unlike any other park in Vancouver. Located on the site of the former city of Vancouver landfill, the property was officially designated as a park less than 20 years ago, as a direct result of community advocacy. The park's naturally regenerating landscape remains relatively undeveloped. Its primary community stewards, the Everett Crowley Park Committee, proposed that the park be managed as "an urban wilderness". This vision provided the starting point to develop this plan, whose objective is to determine the most appropriate management goals and strategies for the site in the context of a long-term, overall park management plan.

The Management Planning Process

The Everett Crowley Park Management Plan is the product of a collaborative process that took place from May 2004 to March 2005 between the consultant team, and park stakeholders, which included the Everett Crowley Park Committee, Evergreen and the Vancouver Park Board. The consultant team responsible for conducting the process included individuals with expertise in:

- Landscape architecture, park and recreation planning and policy development;
- Accessible site design;
- Landfill management and post landfill closure planning;
- Plant community and wildlife habitat management;
- Biological control of invasive plant species, and
- Public process facilitation.

The planning process was based on three management goals:

- That the park should be managed to create the greatest possible biodiversity;
- That the park should be managed to serve diverse park users representing a growing and changing urban population, and
- That the park should be managed with the greatest possible level of public stewardship.

Preliminary information was presented to the public at an Open House held on June 17th, 2004. The Open House provided an opportunity for neighbours and other park users to review the work in progress and provide their input through a questionnaire and comment form.

A refined draft Management Plan was presented to the public at a second Open House held on January 25, 2005. Visitor comments and responses to a second feedback form indicated that three areas of concern remained unresolved. In response, stakeholders and the consultant team met to discuss and revise the draft plan, particularly as it related to proposed levels of dog access, safety of the buried landfill and conditions at the park entry/service yard area.

The final Management Plan reflects the consensus of those involved in the planning process regarding basic issues such as use, access, improvement areas and management strategies. It provides a long-term vision for the evolution of the park as a natural area with diverse habitat

qualities and infrastructure to provide a place of refuge, recreation and interpretive value for a wide variety of users.

The Growth of a Landfill

From its beginning - as a forested slope with a major ravine - to its present day condition as a wooded plateau perched on an escarpment above Southeast Marine Drive, the park site has undergone a series of major physical changes.

At the turn of the last century, Kinross Creek formed a deep ravine through what is now the centre of the 39 hectare park. In the 1930's, the ravine became a dumping ground – a practice that was formalized by the City in 1944 with the creation of the Kerr Street Dump. An estimated four million cubic metres of garbage were deposited here before its closure and capping with fill dirt in 1967. A gravel quarry that operated for over thirty years in the northeast corner of the park had, by that time, disturbed most of the site's remaining vegetation.

Soon after abandonment, alder, cottonwood and a host of pioneer and escaped garden species began to colonize the future park site, establishing the pattern for the existing mix of vegetation. The landfill was decommissioned to the standards of the day and does not presently exhibit any apparent pollution or hazardous conditions.

Park Stewardship

Since closure of the dump, the park has been used and cared for by residents in the Champlain Heights neighbourhood. Although largely undeveloped, a range of recreational activities take place in the park, from walking and jogging to biking, nature appreciation and stewardship events. Presently, Everett Crowley Park is largely an active use park, with dogs and their owners as the primary users.

Since 1994, Earth Day and other planting and park care events have been led by park stewardship groups, notably Evergreen and Everett Crowley Park Committee. The Everett Crowley Park Committee, a sub-committee of the Champlain Heights Community Association, represents the adjacent community, which was responsible for the original dedication of the park in 1987 as well as for initiating most of the improvements now evident in the park. Evergreen is the agency that has provided critical project funding, expertise and organizational capacity to rally significant, essential volunteer efforts.

Long-term park stewardship has led to a very strong proprietary sense about the park, in those that use it and in those involved in its care. The un-programmed use of the park and its “natural” character inspire affection in many but not everyone across the community. Little is known about those who do not currently use the park, why it does not appeal to them or what could be done to encourage them to visit.

Key Park Issues

The key issues identified at Everett Crowley Park include:

- Circulation (Park Board Vehicle Access, Pedestrian/Cyclist Access, Parking and Emergency Access)
- Universal Accessibility
- Unauthorized Uses; (Litter and garbage, vandalism)
- Trails (Boardwalk, Deck at Avalon Pond)
- Park Infrastructure (Garbage receptacles, washrooms)

- Visibility and Safety (Park image, signage)
- Noise and other Impacts
- Park Board Service Needs
- Fire Hazard

Four specific site issues were addressed according to the three basic management goals:

1. Evaluating Landfill Issues

The presence of the landfill will continue to constrain some uses and require special evaluation prior to planning any built improvements. As noted earlier, however, an assessment of the park determined that there was no evidence of serious landfill-related conditions that would preclude continued public use. Excavation or disturbance that could cause erosion should be avoided to prevent contact with buried waste. Further testing is required to determine current levels of methane (or any other gases) or leachate potentially being released by the former landfill.

2. Enhancing Habitat; Controlling Invasives

The variety of existing, distinct plant communities around the site provided the basis for developing a habitat-based management plan. Potential plant and animal habitat areas were identified, including field and meadow habitats that could accommodate active, off-leash use, and an area of potential prime habitat around Avalon Pond that could not.

Four levels of management were identified based on the level of intervention and enhancement proposed to create plant and animal habitats appropriate to the park. Levels or zones of management were mapped and linked to proposed levels of both active and passive uses. The concept of managing plant succession was suggested to develop the broadest range of habitats possible at this site.

In spite of significant volunteer efforts over the years to control numerous invasive plant species, the park remains threatened by several pernicious plants, most seriously knotweed species. The current lack of an effective, mechanical means of controlling the spread of this plant indicates that an integrated management strategy is required. It is recommended that a pilot control project be implemented immediately. A range of other habitat enhancement strategies is also proposed, most of which either depend or would be facilitated by support from park stewards. The Avalon Pond area is recommended as a priority area for improvement due to its potentially significant habitat values.

3. Balancing Active and Passive Uses

Although not currently an official dog off-leash park, off-leash activities are the most common uses in the park. Support for off-leash designation was demonstrated at the two Open Houses as over 85% of respondents to a feedback form indicated their agreement with the concept.

A major challenge of the planning process was to develop a management plan that could accommodate active, off-leash use without alienating other visitors, who may have concerns about dogs or interests in passive--or other active--park uses not compatible with off-leash dogs.

The long-term framework for this plan requires that management zoning be adaptable to population pressures and changing demands for park space over the very long term. An "Access Framework Plan" proposes that the existing trails system be divided into routes open

to leashed dogs, unleashed dogs or people only. These three trails/access designations match the character of the habitats and management zones in which they are located. A range of uses and possible amenities are proposed for the active and passive uses zones. This concept includes possible active dog play area(s) with specific amenities for dogs and dog owners. It also provides the opportunity to make future changes to management zoning and access, based on community experience and the success of habitat creation efforts.

4. Improving Infrastructure

The parking lot and trails through Everett Crowley Park are the only significant infrastructure improvements in the park. The Park Board's annual maintenance budget (\$20,000) is well below what it should be for a park of this size and significance. Use of the park for bulk materials storage/handling at a prominent location at the Kerr Street entry has been a problem for years, and has recently become unacceptable. This issue, combined with the lack of consistent signage, inadequate garbage facilities and the potential for wildfires adds up to the need to improve basic infrastructure. Infrastructure improvements are suggested to improve site access for parks vehicles, fire, police and medical emergencies.

Park Identity and Vision

Everett Crowley Park remains a natural area despite the many proposals that have been made over the years for its development. Park stewards and regular visitors have expressed concerns that the "urban wilderness" character of the park remains in jeopardy. Public response at the Open House, however, confirmed strong public support for maintaining the park as a natural area, and continuing its well-established stewardship objectives.

A long-term vision, crafted in terms of hundreds of years and not just decades is required. If Everett Crowley Park is to fulfill its habitat and use potential, changes to the park should be made within a framework that acknowledges the length of time and dynamics across which ecosystems develop.

(For the complete Executive Summary, please refer to the Everett Crowley Park Management Plan)

Feedback Form Summary

The following table indicates the number of responses received for each rating (Strongly Support to Don't Support) on the feedback form. Not all of the 60 respondents answered all of the questions and, in question 9, the ranking of the facilities or activities is indicated in parentheses.

1. Do you support creating diverse habitat zones to enhance the long-term environmental and recreational potential of the park?						
Neutral						
Strongly Support	14	11	16	3	14	Don't Support
2. Do you support Park Board working together with stewardship groups to enhance the park?						
Strongly Support	22	13	9	5	6	Don't Support
3. Do you support installing dog play facilities in designated off-leash areas?						
Strongly Support	16	5	10	2	20	Don't Support
4. Do you support the proposals to restore the Avalon Pond area?						
Strongly Support	29	8	10	4	10	Don't Support
5. Do you support developing an educational/interpretive centre in the park?						
Strongly Support	8	5	6	7	31	Don't Support
6. Do you support locating community garden plots on the north edge of the park, east of the service area?						
Strongly Support	4	6	8	6	34	Don't Support
7. Do you support restoring trails and adding seating and other site furnishings?						
Strongly Support	11	9	12	4	19	Don't Support
8. Do you support the conclusion that the service area should be consolidated and separated from pedestrian park access?						
Strongly Support	16	8	12	1	15	Don't Support

<p>9. Implementation of the management plan is long-term and requires further study and design. Please check the five facilities and activities that you think should be given the highest priority in future planning and development of the park: # (ranking)</p>		
Additional parking	8	
Community Gardens	7	
Outdoor classrooms	5	
Outdoor events area	5	
More and or different types of signs	12 (6)	
More waste receptacles	35 (1)	
Dog play area	24 (4)	
Viewpoint improvements	27 (3)	
Additional entrances to the park	7	
Compost demonstration area	3	
Park educational/interpretive centre	10 (8)	
More and or new trails	20 (5)	
Picnic tables	6	
Controlling invasives	32 (2)	
Bus stop near Kerr St entrance	11 (7)	
Accessibility Related	9	(this category was added on to the feedback form by some meeting attendees)