

Date: May 03, 2006



TO: Board Members – Vancouver Park Board
FROM: General Manager – Parks and Recreation
SUBJECT: Oak and 37th Park Site Design and Funding

RECOMMENDATION

- A. That the design plan for the park site at Oak Street and 37th Avenue described in this report and illustrated in Appendix A be approved;*
- B. That the Board endorse the approach to identify potential sites for an interim BMX/mountain biking facility as presented in this report.*

POLICY

A conceptual design for the Oak Street and 37th Avenue park site was approved by the Board on June 13, 2005.

BACKGROUND

The City bought the 11.23 ha (27.75 acre) Shaughnessy Golf Course, located between 33rd and 37th Avenues and Oak and Willow Streets, in 1961 for school and park use. Eric Hamber Secondary School was built on the northerly portion. The southerly 4.76 ha (11.75 acres) were designated a park site which has remained largely in an unimproved, naturalizing state since it was purchased.



Since the park site was purchased in 1961, very little park development occurred. At the moment, the park site features a loosely clustered woodland and meadow character, used by the community for dog walking and BMX/mountain biking. People expressed concerns over damage by biking activities, perceived antisocial behaviours, invasive species, fire and security, and tree retention but also an appreciation for its casual natural character.

The Conseil Scolaire Francophone (CSF) is building a public francophone secondary school across from the park site on the south-east corner of Willow Street and 37th Avenue. Their school site is not large enough to accommodate a full size playfield so the CSF approached the Park Board to enter into a partnership for the development and use of facilities on the park site. The Vancouver Ultimate League (VUL) also approached the Park Board to develop four Ultimate fields on the site to support league play and possibly enable VUL to stage tournaments.

In light of these various interests and concerns, Park Board directed staff in October, 2004 to design a public consultation process for park development of this site and to explore partnership options with the CSF and the VUL. In January, 2005, Park Board approved a design and public facilitation process funded by the CSF and the VUL. PWL Partnership Landscape Architects Ltd. and CitySpaces Consulting Ltd. were hired to facilitate this process.

Following public open houses held on February 24 and April 6, 2005, Park Board approved the resulting recommended development concept on June 13, 2005 (refer to Appendix B). The concept was developed after considerable public consultation, and allows for the creation of a neighbourhood park with a playfield, children's playground, off leash dog area, meadow and trails in a naturalistic setting.

Staff were directed to report back on a final design and a proposed funding, financing and timing strategy. Regarding the concept, the Board asked that consideration be given to preservation of song bird habitat and maintain separation of children and off-leash dogs in the final location of the children's play area. Staff were also directed to work towards resolving related issues, including working towards finding an appropriate location for development of a youth park facility suitable for the BMX/mountain biking community; investigating ways to increase capacity for Ultimate field users; and resolving washroom access for the users of the existing Eric Hamber field and the proposed park facilities at Oak and 37th.

DISCUSSION

Design Development

A more detailed design plan (Appendix A) was developed from the approved concept plan (Appendix B) by the landscape architecture firm Durante Kreuk and the wildlife ecology firm Robertson Environmental Services. This preliminary design was presented

at an open house held on April 20, 2006 at VanDusen Botanical Gardens. Approximately 50 people attended and almost 60% submitted comment sheets. The majority of respondents, including Save Our Parkland Association, liked the design. Most of those who did not like the plan (25%) were concerned about what they considered unresolved issues. Although the concept plan includes one regulation play field which can be used as two Ultimate fields, a few people were concerned about the lack of more casual fields, e.g. for pick-up baseball. A summary of comments from the open house is attached (Appendix C).

The approved concept plan located the more active neighbourhood park functions, like the children's play area, closer to the Willow Street frontage for safety, easy access and visibility from the community. The play area was located to be separated from off leash dogs by the sports field and to take advantage of the more naturalized setting, using retained trees to provide shade for the children.

This proposal raised some concerns about the loss of existing habitat. Retaining the existing bramble all along Willow Street was also a concern for nearby residents who found it a barrier to using the park and a source of discomfort about their safety. Consequently, the consulting team, including wildlife ecologist Ian Robertson, recommend moving the play area slightly further north than in the approved concept plan and maintaining a large area of existing trees and shrubs nearest the intersection of Willow and 37th largely undisturbed. To compensate for those areas where habitat – comprised of both native and invasive species – is to be removed along Willow Street, larger areas of habitat are proposed along Oak Street, along the south side of the park and the area north-east of the playing field. This latter area will include a biofiltration area, using runoff water from the playing field, to provide important new habitat in the park.

The estimated cost of design and development of this park is currently \$730,000. The funding available from the 2006-2008 Capital Plan is \$300,000. The CSF has agreed in principle to contribute all the cost associated with the field and half of the trail costs, but the precise amount of the contribution is still under negotiation. Staff will report back shortly on the terms of the agreement with the CSF and the funding contribution. Approval of the design plan is required now in order to meet the construction schedule (i.e. commence in September 2006), but the project will only proceed within this timeframe if successful negotiations can be concluded with CSF.

Related Issues

As noted above, the Board directed staff to work on issues connected with the development of the Oak and 37th park site, and report back. The most urgent of these is the BMX/mountain bike relocation, since implementation of the park concept plan will displace this activity.

The BMX/mountain biking activities in the Oak and 37th park site are located under a mature stand of Fir trees the community wants maintained as a centre piece in the development of the park. Unfortunately, this stand of large conifers where the jumps are located is being negatively affected by the removal of turf, movement of soil and soil compaction. Termination of biking activities and restorative work is required if these trees are to be successfully retained in the new park.

In looking at options for the park development concept, potential incompatibilities that could result from some combinations of uses were identified. It was concluded that BMX/mountain biking activities need a large area (the precinct area occupied by the bike activities is about 7500 m²/80,000 sq. ft.) away from other uses (off-leash, children unstructured play, habitat) and therefore could not be accommodated on this site in harmony with the new uses as reflected in the adopted concept plan.

Therefore, staff concluded that the BMX/mountain biking activities need to be accommodated on another site. To begin a process of finding an appropriate site, staff will bring forward a proposal for consultation with the public and other City departments to find a temporary site to accommodate BMX and mountain bike activities, and possibly for a BMX/Mountain Bike Strategy for Vancouver to guide capital investments so that facilities are successful in both the short and long terms.

The other issues staff were directed to work on are not critically affected by park development. There have been preliminary discussions on options to increase capacity for Ultimate, beyond the two fields which will be available at Oak and 37th. Future resolution of this issue is likely connected with the increasing field capacity generally, through synthetic turf development, which may enable the re-allocation of existing fields instead of the development of current non-field sites.

Concern about the lack of access to washrooms was expressed during consultations on the development of the park site at Oak and 37th, particularly by the users of the artificial turf field at Eric Hamber Secondary School. Developing free standing washrooms on the new park is not recommended. However, staff are negotiating an agreement with the Vancouver School Board (VSB) to secure access to the two existing washroom/change facilities located on the west side of Eric Hamber.

SUMMARY

A more detailed design plan (Appendix A) for the park site at Oak and 37th was developed from the approved concept plan (Appendix B) and was supported by the majority of people who attended an open house to view and comment on the design. Staff are currently negotiating an agreement and funding contribution with the CSF, which has agreed in principle to contribute all the cost associated with the field and half of the trail costs. Staff will report back shortly once the negotiations are concluded with CSF.

Staff will also bring forward a proposal for consultation with the public and other City departments, to begin a process of finding an appropriate temporary site to accommodate BMX and mountain bike activities, and possibly for a BMX/Mountain Bike Strategy for Vancouver.

Prepared by:

Planning and Operations
Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation
Vancouver, BC
ASD

Appendix A

Oak and 37th 2006 Recommended Design Plan



Appendix B

Development Concept Approved June 13, 2005



Appendix C

Oak and 37th April 20, 2006 Open House – Feedback

Approximately 50 people attended. 28 submitted feedback forms. In addition, two emails were received from nearby residents, subsequent to the meeting, who were unable to attend. Their concerns were addressed in the design.

1. Responses to the question: Do you like the design plan?

Like = 15 (54%) Dislike = 7 (25%) Neutral = 2 (7%) No answer = 4 (14%)

2. Responses to questions what changes/modifications would you suggest and why?

- Off leash dog area - planting of berms along path
- Water near the off leash area (X 2)
- Concerns of heavy traffic on Oak Street for the dogs' safety (X 2)
- Recreation of the children's play area - find a more suitable location (X 2)
- Proposed picnic areas need clear signage that no dogs allowed - hygienic reasons
- Warm up area for sport teams
- Take out the path through the off leash dog area to minimize confrontations between dogs and people just walking
- Protect ruby crown kinglet (Willow Street side natural bramble protective environment)
- Save trees, keep area natural (X 2)
- Adding backstops in one or two corners so children & adults can play casual softball and baseball (X 3) and field available to the general public
- Concerns of the placement of children's play area - impacting neighbours along Willow Street.
- Don't over manicure the park - keep as natural as possible and less pathways
- Fence/wall along Eric Hamber School side needs to be cleaned up
- Add water fountain, benches, picnic tables
- BMX must go

3. General comments on the design

- A wonderful resolution to this natural park – good uses for all
- Want to participate in development of this park
- Washroom facilities needed for park users (X 4)
- Good compromise from previous plans
- Excellent plan to accommodate so many
- Provide good signage, keep park clean
- Protect underground stream (Willow Street side)
- Plant local, BC drought resistant plants

- Douglas Park is used for Ultimate already, don't need another site so close by
- No parking regulation on Willow Street should be changed to allow parking
- Do not cut the grass - beautiful wild flowers in the Summer
- A full fence should be installed on Oak Street and school side
- Blackberry bushes should be diminished before they take over park
- More garbage cans
- Not happy with this proposal because it ignores all the dog owners
- Keep park as is