

Date: June 30, 2006



TO: Board Members – Vancouver Park Board
FROM: General Manager – Parks and Recreation
**SUBJECT: Aquarium Revitalization and Expansion Proposal:
Technical Review and Public Consultation Process**

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Board endorse the technical review and the public consultation process, as outlined in this report, to evaluate and gather public input on the proposal by the Vancouver Aquarium to revitalize and expand the Aquarium in Stanley Park.

POLICY

Major changes to parks and/or facilities within parks require Park Board approval.

The Park Board's Strategic Plan (2005) stated that "a broader public process is needed when issues are more complex or controversial, when the trade-offs are bigger, or when an issue is of particular interest to the public", and that the Park Board is "committed to open and transparent decision-making".

BACKGROUND

The Aquarium in Stanley Park opened in 1956. It has been expanded several times, most recently with the Discovery Education Centre, which is currently under construction. The Aquarium covers about 1.2 hectares of land in Stanley Park, and includes about 100,000 square feet of indoor floor area and several outdoor pools. Paid attendance at the Aquarium was approximately 750,000 in 2005.

In early 2006, the Aquarium put forth a proposal to revitalize and expand the Aquarium. The revitalization component involves reconstructing and improving aging portions of the Aquarium. The expansion component involves the creation of larger outdoor pools for beluga whales, steller sea lions, and dolphins. The revitalization and expansion proposal also includes the provision of an upgraded public plaza at the entrance of the Aquarium, a new food concession and new public washrooms, all of which are in need of upgrading or replacement.

The Aquarium's revitalization and expansion proposal is a high profile project because:

- it is located in Stanley Park, Vancouver's premier park and a National Historic Site;
- the Aquarium is one of Vancouver's top destinations for tourists and residents, and a prominent research and educational institution;
- the area within which the Aquarium is located has seen significant change since the closure of the Stanley Park zoo in the early 1990s; and
- the Aquarium exhibits cetaceans (aquatic mammals), which is the source of significant public debate.

DISCUSSION

Prior to the Park Board making a decision with regard to the proposal to revitalize and expand the Aquarium, staff are recommending a technical review of the proposal and an in-depth public consultation process.

The technical review will be led by Park Board staff and encompass a variety of topics, including:

- the amount of land required by the proposed expansion;
- the impact of the proposal on existing trees and landscape features;
- the impact of the proposal on the network of pedestrian pathways;
- the impact of the proposal on vehicular traffic and parking;
- the siting of public accessible features such as the free public viewing area and the salmon hatchery;
- the design of public plaza at the entrance of the Aquarium; and
- other topics generated during the review process.

The public consultation process will be broad in its outreach and in its methods of collecting public opinions. Tools to share information with the public will include:

- handouts;
- display boards;
- newspaper inserts;
- websites;
- a scaled model of the proposal; and
- a computer slideshow.

A variety of methods will be used to notify individual citizens and community groups of the public review and specific public events, including:

- notification letters;
- electronic mails;
- newspaper advertisements;

- information signs to be placed at the Aquarium; and
- notices at all major Park Board facilities.

A variety of methods will be available for citizens to share their opinions on the proposal, including:

- a feedback form (available on the website, in the newspaper insert, and at public events);
- emails, letters and faxes;
- public open houses (at least three: one downtown, one on the east side and one on the west side);
- meetings with a wide range of stakeholders and interested parties, including youth and academics;
- focus groups (randomly selected residents living in Vancouver);
- one-on-one interviews; and
- a telephone survey.

The public consultation will focus on but not be limited to the following topics:

- the individual items identified in the technical review;
- the level of support for the revitalization and expansion proposal; and
- the review of the rules governing cetaceans (aquatic mammals) in captivity (this is the subject of a companion report).

A summary report on the public consultation will be prepared, and will include public feedback that is both quantitative and qualitative.

The public consultation process will be jointly managed by the Park Board and the Aquarium, with all costs to be borne by the Aquarium. A more detailed outline of the proposed public consultation process has been prepared by the Aquarium's communications consultant (Kirk & Co.) and is attached as Appendix A.

NEXT STEPS

If the proposed process described in this report is approved by the Park Board, the technical review and the preparatory work for the public consultation process will commence immediately. Some of the public consultation events will be held in August, but the majority of the events will be held in September. The technical review and the public consultation should be completed by the end of September.

In October, staff will prepare a report summarizing the technical review and the public consultation. The Park Board will consider the staff report and hear delegations on the proposal to revitalize and expand the Aquarium in October or November.

SUMMARY

In response to a proposal by the Aquarium to revitalize and expand their facility in Stanley Park, Park Board staff are recommending a detailed technical review of the proposal and a thorough public consultation process to gather public input on the proposal.

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