

**Minutes of Meeting
Planning Committee, Vancouver Park Board**

DATE OF MEETING: October 3, 2006

ATTENDEES: Park Board Commissioners
Commissioner Korina Houghton, Chair
Commissioner Spencer Herbert

Park Board Staff

Piet Rutgers	Director of Planning and Operations
Mark Vulliamy	Manager of Research and Planning
Barbara Joughin	Committee Secretary

Delegations

Eleanor Hadley

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 pm, with the following Agenda:

1. Approval of Minutes of September 19, 2006 Meeting
2. Safety in Parks

1. Approval of Minutes of September 19, 2006 meeting

The minutes of the September 19, 2006 meeting were approved as presented.

2. Safety in Parks

Mark Vulliamy gave a presentation on safety, crime and emergency response in Vancouver parks. He told the Committee that safety in parks goes beyond crime to include all dimensions of personal security, and outlined staff, public and police perspectives on the issue. Results from the Park Board's 2003 Synovate survey show that a high percentage of Vancouver residents think that parks are safe, Vancouver police statistics show that crime occurs mainly outside parks, and staff report that management of parks is challenged by homelessness, the impacts from trade in sex and drugs, and extremely large crowds at public events.

Currently, parks are patrolled by Park Rangers, beach lifeguards, Vancouver Police Department (VPD) beach bike patrols and mounted squad, and a volunteer skate/bike patrol, and that additional monitoring is provided by summer playground leaders. The VPD's Patrol Support Analysis Team tracks all reported occurrences of criminal activity in Vancouver and they provided the Park Board with access to their database to track and map crime in and adjacent to parks. Staff tracked six crimes (assault, mischief, robbery, theft from auto, auto theft, trafficking) in ten parks and have found it to be a useful tool for before/after analysis and to show areas where crime occurs.

Planning and Operations plays an important role in addressing safety in parks through both planning and development approaches, and operations and maintenance activities. Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles can be applied in new and upgraded parks, including provision of alternate paths, appropriate lighting, open sightlines, and displacing undesirable activities with increased park and facility usage.

Addressing safety in parks through operations and maintenance activities can include regular maintenance and safety inspections, prompt repairs and graffiti removal, moving homeless encampments, and “hardening targets” by posting park hours and locking washrooms overnight. District staff develop safety-focused park partner groups, and liaise with Neighbourhood Integrated Service Teams (NIST).

Staff provided three examples of programs in other contexts: Ottawa’s cell phone loan program, Toronto’s Park Safety Audit Tool, and UBC’s “blue phones”, a line dedicated to 911. Possible safety initiatives were put forward for the Committee’s consideration, including:

- expanded park ranger program, especially into shoulder seasons
- education and safety advisories, to encourage attention to personal safety while using parks
- expanded partnerships with other agencies and community groups on safety objectives
- emergency communications in large parks (ie cell phone or blue phone system)
- improved wayfinding and locational systems in large parks

Delegation

Eleanor Hadley told the Committee that she no longer uses Stanley Park because she does not feel safe. She commented that the data shows the number of assaults but not how many people have stopped using parks out of fear. She said that Vancouver people are denied the use of their parks and that more security is needed today than in the past, especially in the summertime.

Discussion

- A member of the Committee acknowledged the value of interagency collaboration to address issues related to homelessness and asked for more information on the existing process. Staff described a West End program that addresses homelessness and related issues with non-police responses, and noted that uncivil doesn’t mean criminal.
- A Commissioner asked if signs help prevent after-hours use of parks and staff noted that signs empower the police to act. The Committee expressed interest in signage at trailheads and discussed the benefits of an overall update of wayfaring and locational signage in parks.
- A member of the Committee mentioned a Burnaby program that trains staff to look for crime and suggested that training staff to know what to look for is a way to increase safety in parks.
- A Commissioner asked if the effectiveness of the Park Ranger program has been evaluated. Staff explained that the Park Rangers respond to medical emergencies, assist lost park users and children, help manage the intensified use of parks in the downtown area, particularly concerning dogs and permits, and monitor antisocial and suspicious behaviour. The Committee inquired about the possibility of applying Park Ranger presence to the VPD data, and staff responded that there were challenges but it might be useful to show where a program has an effect over time.
- A member of the Committee asked about the training that the Park Rangers receive to qualify them to secure a place like Stanley Park. Staff explained that they are trained to deal with the kinds of situations they manage, up to what is handled by the police, and noted that it is not appropriate to have a paramilitary force in parks.
- Staff described how Park Board youth workers have helped build youth capacity and deter youth crime through programs so that youth are now a valuable resource to their recreation centres and to the city. The Committee suggested that youth programming could be combined with the Park Ranger program, and that youth could be included in other partnerships by combining resources with other groups.

Staff summarized the initiatives that could increase safety in parks and invited the Committee to indicate which they would like staff to pursue. The Committee discussed the Park Ranger program, education, park partnerships, phone systems, and wayfinding and locational signage.

Comments from the Committee included:

- trying to find ways to address safety and security
- people have perceptions of crime or danger that may not be substantiated but we need to be concerned about this
- not very interested in blue phone or cell phones, better to put money into Park Rangers
- don't want to exclude phones, please provide costs/benefits
- like Park Ranger program but want to find out how to get more bang for our buck
- interested in youth partnership ideas
- interested in providing trailhead information for people
- the idea of signage at trailheads ties in with wayfinding
- part of a plan for an overall update of signage in parks

Next Steps

The Committee asked staff to

- distribute the presentation on safety in parks to the Board for information and consideration;
- research Burnaby's program to train their staff to look for crime;
- develop a list of options and their costs and benefits.

Staff will prepare a memo that describes each option in terms of their costs and benefits, distribute it to the Board for their review and consideration prior to the commencement of budget discussions, and report back to the Finance Committee.

3. Next Meeting

The meeting adjourned at 8:35 pm. The next meeting will be held on Tuesday, October 17, 2006.