

Minutes of Meeting
Planning Committee, Vancouver Park Board

DATE OF MEETING: December 5, 2006

ATTENDEES: Park Board Commissioners

Commissioner Korina Houghton, Chair
Commissioner Spencer Herbert
Commissioner Loretta Woodcock

Park Board Staff

Piet Rutgers	Director of Planning and Operations
Mark Vulliamy	Manager of Research and Planning
Kate Davis-Johnson	Manager of Park Development
David Yurkovich	Project Manager
Michel Desrochers	Research Planner
Barbara Joughin	Committee Secretary

Delegations

1. James Evans
2. Gavin Ross Mount Pleasant Community Centre Association
3. Howard Redekopp
4. Hilda Nanning China Creek Neighbourhood Coalition
5. Philip Ratzlaff China Creek Neighbourhood Coalition
6. Magdy Elyas
7. Doug Donut
8. Derek DeLand
9. Jeff Chan Vancouver Skate Park Coalition
10. Calen Sinclair
11. Tony Tasker
12. Emma Atkinson
13. Matthew Kwok
14. Barbara Wright Cedar Cottage Neighbourhood Safety Office
15. Jason Landry
16. Jaydene Cormier
17. Edward Dinter
18. Raine Forbes
19. Kimberley Graham Licensed Family Childcare
20. Myrna Eleema
21. Kim Glennie Skate Instructor
22. Daniel Cummer
23. Jason Pay

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

1. Approval of Minutes of November 7, 2006 Meeting
2. Victoria Park Design
3. China Creek South Park Concept

1. Approval of Minutes of November 7, 2006 meeting

The minutes of the November 7, 2006 meeting were approved as presented.

2. Victoria Park Design

David Yurkovich presented the Committee with information about Victoria Park, located between Victoria and Salsbury Drives and Kitchener and Grant Streets. He described the park's existing features (mature trees, bocce courts, children's playground, washrooms) and its history.

The bocce courts are a prominent feature of the park, used by men of the Italian community, some of whom have been playing bocce in the park for 40 years. In 2003, the Victoria Park Neighbourhood Society was formed to be advocates for park improvements, and the group has worked with Park Board staff to develop the concept options. In October 2005, the Park Board approved Victoria Park improvements in the 2006-08 capital plan, budgeted at \$575,000.

Two open houses have been held in the community, one in July 2006 to develop the vision and another in October 2006 to review the concept options. Key components of the community vision are to upgrade the children's playground and the washrooms, improve the drainage in the park, and address concerns about public drinking. Two concepts were developed from input from the community. In Concept A, the bocce courts are moved to the east side of the park, and in Concept B, they are rebuilt in the same location. 74% of the public responses at the October open house supported Concept A, with some concern expressed over the inclusion of the bocce courts and the washroom and associated drinking problems.

Delegation

James Evans commended staff for an excellent job, and told the Committee that while there are still concerns about the bocce courts, the Victoria Park Neighbourhood Society is in favour of Option A. The group's intention is to encourage positive uses in the park and discourage negative elements, and they would like the redevelopment to proceed as soon as possible because of cost escalations.

Discussion

- A Commissioner asked for information about how the washroom will be upgraded and staff explained that the size of the washroom will be increased, fixtures will be upgraded, and the facility will be made wheelchair accessible. A Commissioner asked if the building will be repainted and if the original artwork will remain, and staff noted that this design element will be determined at a later stage.
- A member of the Committee inquired whether changing the contour lines of the landscape will make a difference to the sightlines for theatre productions. Staff explained that there will be subtle changes in grade for drainage that will not affect the sightlines, as well as some contouring around the play area.

Next Steps

- Seek Board approval of concept – January 2007
- Tender contract – Spring 2007
- Construction – Summer 2007

Recommendation

The Planning Committee recommended that Option A be brought to the Board for approval in January 2007.

3. China Creek South Park Concept

Michel Desrochers presented the Committee with information about China Creek South Park, including its location (between Broadway and 10th Avenue at Clark Drive), important park features (mature trees, open lawn, skatebowls, basketball court, Nanook Daycare), the public process to date, and several planning constraints that create significant design challenges. There is a \$350,000 budget for improvements at China Creek South Park.

Two options were presented to the Committee. Features common to both options include: new children's playground and plaza, pathways and entrances, benches and picnic tables, more trees, landscape feature for the historical creek, community garden, 10th Avenue bike path, and bollards along the lanes. Option 1 creates a core in the center of the park comprised of the skatepark and a new playground and plaza. In Option 3, the skatepark is removed, and a new plaza and playground are the central place in the park, and are located farthest away from the peripheral streets. From 82 surveys, received at a community meeting in October, results show greater support for Option 1 (63) than Option 3 (19).

Mark Vulliamy identified the key interests as those represented by skateboarders, residents in "the first row" (those immediately facing the park), and residents further away. Those who support Option 1 (keeping the skatepark) include skateboarders and residents who live beyond "the first row", and they are the majority voice (referring to the history of the bowls, being "eyes on the park", no replacement facility yet). Those in support of moving the skatepark, a smaller group consisting of many residents in "the first row" and one that is more affected (the impacts of noise, park design dominated by bowls, skatepark does not meet current locational criteria). He said the planning challenge is to offer recreational opportunities to skateboarders and create a quality neighbourhood park in this park-deficient community.

Staff recommended that a modified Option 1 be implemented to retain the bowls in place and remove the bowls after a replacement facility has been built or when bowls need major investment. This option would include mitigation against noise and other problems, and moving ahead with relocating the skateboard facility to a nearby park (John Hendry Park).

Delegations

1. Gavin Ross told the Committee that the Mount Pleasant Community Centre Association unanimously supports Option 1 because Option 3 will be more costly and use money that could be better spent elsewhere in the system. He noted that any new skate facility will be hard to locate and this one met the criteria of the day in 1979.
2. Howard Redekopp said the process needs to build on the shared goal of all community members, which is to create a safe, clean park that is aesthetically pleasing and welcoming. Because this park will always be faced with the challenges of homelessness and drug addiction, he urged the Committee to avoid blaming the skatepark for the problems related to this reality, and noted that adding a berm and removing the wooden ramps would address the noise problem. Removing the skatepark at any time will create a void for local youth.
3. Hilda Nanning believes the skatepark has a negative impact on the neighbourhood and is concerned about the lack of intervention by the city. She described the parties, drinking and drug use, unsanitary practices, and noise in the park and said people feel bullied in their homes and at meetings. She told the Committee that there are no resources to supervise or monitor the skatepark and those in close proximity to the park are being mistreated and have endured in silence. She asked for more respect to be shown to the residents.
4. Philip Ratzlaff – Hilda Nanning read his letter stating opposition to the skatepark in China

Creek Park. He said that it is not appropriate that behaviors such as drug use and public toileting occur so close to a daycare. Many neighbours feel intimidated about speaking out against the skatepark.

5. Magdy Elyas told the Committee that the skatepark hours of use have expanded as the demands of skateboarders have grown and bowls are now used 24/7. He said that it is not good that children at the playground will be exposed to bad language and smoking, and that more people will use the playground if the skatepark is removed. He said the Park Board needs to solve the problem it has created.
6. Doug Donut said Vancouver is a youthful city and skateboarding is affordable and is a culture of health rather than drugs and parties. He told the Committee that this park does not have the same problems with drugs as other areas do because skateboarding teams use their influence to police the park against drug use.
7. Derek DeLand said that the arguments made by residents are valid, but the issues can be addressed with design. He noted that noise can be lowered with four-foot high berms, and that the people who are partying after dark are not skateboarders.
8. Jeff Chan told the Committee that this is a successful skatepark used by people of all ages. He fears that once it is removed, the problems will persist, but the park will be gone. He has not heard any concerns from the daycare about their proximity to the skatepark.
9. Calen Sinclair noted the skatepark's historical significance. He reminded the Committee that this is an east side park that has never had a washroom and has been ignored until two years ago.
10. Tony Tasker told the Committee that there has been disregard for public input and that it was decided from the beginning that the skatepark should come out. He said it is unreasonable to buy a house on the edge of a park and try to control the behaviour in the park. He asked the Committee to keep the skatepark and make it better.
11. Emma Atkinson said if the skatepark is taken out, there will be nowhere for people her age to de-stress and hang out close to where they live. She told the Committee that skaters are not the cause of the drug problem and tell drug users to leave, and she said that there are many ways to reduce the noise. She is in favour of Option 1.
12. Matthew Kwok – Barbara Wright read his letter listing his concerns about the skatepark. He said that the Park Board has failed to implement effective measures to manage after hours use but is responsible for dealing with violations to park hours of use. He said that people living in the vicinity have suffered too long.
13. Barbara Wright spoke in support of Option 3 on behalf of the Cedar Cottage Neighbourhood Safety Office. She said that skateboarders in the park have failed to police themselves and residents are tired of feeling intimidated and unsafe in their community park. She thinks the noise issues are minor compared to other issues, including the unhygienic situation that exists for children.
14. Jason Landry noted that this is one of the oldest skateparks in North America. He has noticed a number of young families in the area and kids that are skating down the block, and he wants his children to be able to go to this skatepark. He shared his thoughts about noise, the location of the skatepark and its long term benefits to the park, noting that measuring usage per foot, this is one of the busiest parks in the city and that skaters are essentially an unpaid security force.
15. Jaydene Cormier has been asking for a playground to be replaced in the area but the process has been very slow. She would like to see the park rejuvenated as an inner city park that includes a skatepark. Her family has not experienced any of the problems that others have reported but noted that these behaviors can be minimized with community involvement. The skatepark has high entertainment and educational value for her young children, and she

believes it is the heart in the park. She noted that areas of China Creek are not being used properly and this creates security issues.

16. Edward Dinter told the Committee that the problems with the skatepark have multiplied tenfold since it was installed, and listed the reasons why people don't want skateparks in their neighbourhoods. He said that the neighbourhood has been neglected and noted that this is a chance to rectify many problems and show consideration and respect for all the people in the area.
17. Kim Glennie noted that the neighbourhood has social problems, and advocates keeping the skatepark where it is because revitalized bowls with a skateboard stewardship program could bring a very positive element to the park. She said that while it is very important to encourage healthy activity, too many kids in east Vancouver lack recreational facilities, and asked the Committee to consider keeping the skatepark in place.
18. Myrna Eleema told the Committee that park users park cars anywhere and related an incident where ambulance access was restricted with serious results. She said that on the Park Appreciation Day, everything was safe and clean but the park is not like this all the time.
19. Raine Forbes – Kimberly Graham read her letter stating that the problem is that the park does not present a family-friendly environment because the skate bowl dominates the safest and most usable area of the park. She said the users of the skatepark show little respect for the park, and while they have done a good job representing their right to skate, the real issues are safety, cleanliness, noise pollution, and lack of monitoring and supervision. She asked the Committee to ensure that the park is utilized in a democratic fashion, rather than by one special interest group.
20. Kimberley Graham runs a licenced family daycare in the area, and told the Committee that there is no playground within the neighbourhood that does not require crossing a major street. She said that coexistence between the skatepark, a plaza and a playground might occur in a perfect world, but it would be best to find another location for the skatepark. Making a great park in the centre of an area that is changing constantly would go a long way to creating a good neighbourhood.

The Committee took a break at 9:10pm, and returned at 9:15.

21. Daniel Cummer sees both supervised and unsupervised younger kids at the skatepark, and he talks with both kids and parents. He said that the park is being used on a regular basis and he has seen people throw a football and Frisbees, and golfing. He told the Committee that some of the skateboarders take pride in the park and clean it up, but it is hard to keep up with it everyday. He noted that a washroom could be built for the cost of taking out the bowl.
22. Jason Pay moved to Vancouver because of the skate bowls at China Creek Park. He told the Committee that is a very safe skatepark, and at least half of the users are children every time he goes there. He explained that a skateboard park has to be dry and clean, or users will get hurt. In addition, it has to be lit for boarders to be able to see, which proves it is not boarders there at night. He supports Option 1 because it is a place for the kids to go and he is optimistic that everyone can get down to it and made the park together.

Discussion

- The Committee asked about the condition of the park in general and the playground in particular, and heard about the presence of garbage and syringes, and that there is only one garbage can in the park.
- A member of the Committee asked about the basketball court use. A member of the public said that the court was well-used before its condition deteriorated.
- The Committee discussed the importance of a park design that creates friendly spaces and brings positive activities into the park. Staff said that while a sports field or diamond would be inappropriate for this park, it should have a children's playground and retain the casual open spaces in the north and the south portions of the park.
- A member of the Committee asked about the remaining life of the skate bowls. Although the bowls were very strongly built, staff estimate that within 4-6 years the bowls will start to deteriorate and major repairs will become necessary.
- The Committee heard that the neighbours are impacted by noise in the park in all hours of the day and night, including noise generated from the skatepark, and from people partying and swearing. Staff noted that intermittent clanging is a characteristic of skateboarding that most people object to and that there are opportunities to address noise problems through the design of the park, including the use of berms and concrete as a replacement for asphalt surfaces and wooden elements. It was also noted that skateboarders are not the only youth that use the park.
- The Committee discussed the effectiveness of berms as a means to control noise associated with the skatepark. A berm located to the south and southwest of the skatepark would help reduce noise for the neighbours, but staff explained that the available area available is limited by the requirement to provide passage for pedestrians and bicycles. Berms reduce noise but they also change sightlines and reduce visibility, and may impact against managing late night activity in the park.
- A member of the public asked what kind of monitoring resources the Park Board will provide if the skatepark remains in the park. A Commissioner asked staff to describe what discussions have been held with the police about China Creek Park, and a member of the Committee requested information about how this park is reported in the Safety in Parks report. Staff will follow up with the police and provide the Committee with the statistics.
- A member of the Committee suggested that the YMCA be approached about building a washroom attached to the daycare. Staff noted that there are concerns related to maintenance, cleanliness, and safety.
- A Commissioner stated that the budget is insufficient for redeveloping this park and the Committee discussed the budget. Staff said that washrooms would cost \$100,000 to 200,000 if attached to the daycare; \$5,000-10,000 would be required to build a berm; \$60,000 to build the playground (more than \$100,000 if built with a rubber mat surface); and \$5,000 for public consultation. Depending on volume, the cost of adding a concrete surface to the skatepark could be \$15,000, and it would cost between \$150,000-300,000 to construct a new skatepark in a nearby park versus \$25,000 for decommissioning.
- A member of the public asked the Committee to request staff to facilitate a process to bring the different groups together. A member of the Committee said a staff liaison could be provided once a community group has been formed.

Comments from the Committee included:

- the Park Board is not putting enough money into this park;
- it has been a neglected park;
- there should be more garbage cans in the park;
- have not demonstrated how not having the bowls would benefit the park;
- we don't have enough money to address the noise;
- what kind of activity will replace the bowls?;
- taking out the bowls will displace a whole group of people and not create solutions to the problems;
- this is a problem area for vagrancy, and what are the police are doing in the park?;
- don't agree that the problems in the park are because of the skatepark, there are a lot of problems in the area;
- support Option 1;
- keep the bowls, add a playground, and see how it goes;
- need to work with a neighbourhood group like Victoria Park's to work toward revitalization of the park;
- the different groups need to work together to solve the problems;
- assess for improvement in five years when the bowls need to be replaced, and remove the bowls then if this has not worked;
- support Option 1;
- skateboard coalition is getting stronger and more responsible;
- supportive of any activity that replaces negative activity; want to see some collaboration between skate community,
- Park Board, police and community;
- need to build bridges;
- need to support the people who have negative experiences;
- don't see evidence at this point that boarders are creating majority of the negative behaviours in the park;
- need to get rid of wooden structures;
- explore potential of partnership with YMCA for washrooms;
- respect heritage issue because this skatepark is unique for its age and structure in Canada and North America.

Recommendation

The Planning Committee recommended that the Board approve Option 1 for the upgrade of China Creek South Park subject to the following:

- removal of the noisiest elements (wooden ramps and metal rails) from the skateboard area;
- construction of a grassy berm south of the two skateboarding bowls to buffer noise;
- addition of extra garbage bins near the skateboard area;
- installation of signs near the skateboard area stating appropriate park etiquette;
- formation of a park committee, consisting of residents, skateboarders and Park Board staff, to monitor, assess and act on operational issues in the park.

4. Next Meeting

The meeting adjourned at 10.25 pm. The next meeting will be held on Tuesday, January 9, 2007.