

Date: January 16, 2008



TO: Board Members – Vancouver Park Board
FROM: General Manager – Parks and Recreation
SUBJECT: Queen Elizabeth Park - Observation Tower Public Process

CONSIDERATION

A. THAT the Board endorse in principle the concept of a privately developed and operated observation tower in Queen Elizabeth Park, and that staff prepare a call for Expressions of Interest;

OR

B. THAT the Board not endorse the concept of a privately developed and operated observation tower in Queen Elizabeth Park.

POLICY

The Board approves park development projects.

On May 28, 2007, the Board moved to refer the proposed observation tower concept to a public review process.

BACKGROUND

Observation Tower Inc., a private group represented by John Norton and the architect Richard Henriquez, approached the Park Board in the Spring of 2007 with a proposal to privately develop and operate an observation tower in Queen Elizabeth Park. The Board endorsed a public review process, with the request that its direct costs be paid by the proponents. This report summarizes the public review process.

DISCUSSION

Staff developed a public process centered on two public meetings, the first at Riley Park Community Centre on Saturday, November 10, 2007 in the early afternoon, and the second at Douglas Park Community Centre on Tuesday, November 20, 2007.

These public meetings were advertised in the *Courier* and in the *Ming Pao* newspapers. 1500 bilingual (English/Chinese) invitation flyers were delivered to residences in the neighbourhoods around Queen Elizabeth Park. An additional 500 of these flyers went to a number of public facilities in the area including community centres, library, and neighbourhood house. 150 colour posters went to all City community centres and libraries, an additional 30 were laminated and put up in Queen Elizabeth Park. Two large signs were erected at the intersection of 33rd Avenue/Ontario Street and at the parking lot on the Little Mountain reservoir. Invitations went out by fax and email to stakeholder lists including both individuals and businesses. The observation tower proposal was put up on the Park Board's website, and the Park Board issued a press release to draw attention to the public process. Local print media and radio covered the issues.

Both public meetings started as an open house with display panels and model, followed by a staff presentation on the background, a proponent presentation by Richard Henriquez introducing the observation tower, a brief presentation by Ned Jacobs on an alternate proposal for a lower lookout structure, and questions/comments from the floor. The two meetings attracted more than 300 people (200+100). Of a total of 50 speakers, 13 were in favour of the proposal, eight in favour of a more modest lookout structure, seven were undecided, and 22 were against a tower or lookout.

At the first meeting, staff collected 110 completed comment forms, 63 at the second. In addition, the Park Board received 21 comment forms by fax or mail, 2 phone calls and 115 pieces of correspondence in form of letters and emails. In total, there were 311 written submissions from the public (deadline December 19, 2007)¹ in response to the tower proposal: 83 (27%) in favour, 20 (6%) undecided and 207 (67%) against, see appended charts.

The most frequent reasons given in both spoken and written comments in favour of the proposal emphasised:

- Both views and enjoyment of nature are important to Queen Elizabeth Park. A tower would provide great views (mentioned 27 times) of the city and surrounding landscape without impacting trees (mentioned 9 times).
- The tower could become an architectural landmark for the city (10) that would be an attraction for visitors (18) and residents.
- The tower could be a good revenue source (9), it would draw more people into the park and improve viability of existing attractions.
- The tower would not detract from the park but enrich the experience of a park visit (14).
- Public-private partnership would allow building this without requiring public funding.

The most frequent reasons given both in spoken and written comments for a negative assessment were:

¹ Taking additional correspondence received until January 16, 2008, into consideration, the total number of submissions is now 353, with 29% in support, 8% undecided, and 62% opposed.

- Views are important but the scale, expense and impact of the proposal are not justified, instead views should be restored by selective pruning (mentioned 63 times in written submissions), possibly in combination with a modest lookout (mentioned 44 times).
- The proposal would disturb the greatest asset of the park which is its nature (62), the tower is not beautiful (48), there is enough development in the park already, the park should be left alone (53), and the tower would negatively impact important habitat (15).
- Public parks should not be subject to commercialisation (37), and should not be used for private profit (36) at the expense of public values.
- This proposal would not serve residents but only tourists (30), in part because the ticket price would not be affordable for residents (21).
- The neighbourhood has had too much disturbance already through big construction projects like the rebuilding of the reservoir, the Canada Line construction, the Hillcrest project and the coming redevelopment of Little Mountain housing.
- The tower would not be a successful business, therefore changes to the operation would be made later that would be negative for the park, or the taxpayer might be forced to subsidise it the way the Bloedel Conservatory is subsidised.

NEXT STEPS

If the Board endorses the concept of a privately developed and operated observation tower, a competitive process for the selection of a private developer/operator needs to be put in place, by way of a call for Expressions of Interest or a Request for Proposal. This process could lead to a number of design and operating models being put forward. Staff would undertake a detailed technical and design analysis of all relevant aspects of the competing proposals, also including analysis of operation and management plans, business plans, proposed financial benefit to the Park Board, and a review of relevant City policies.

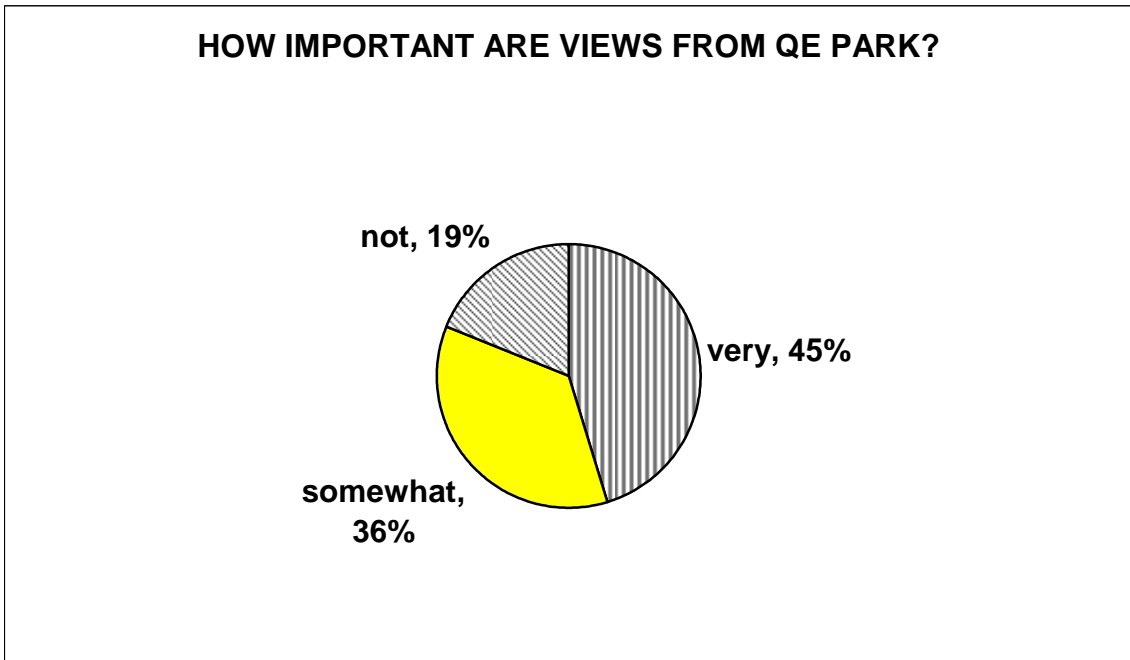
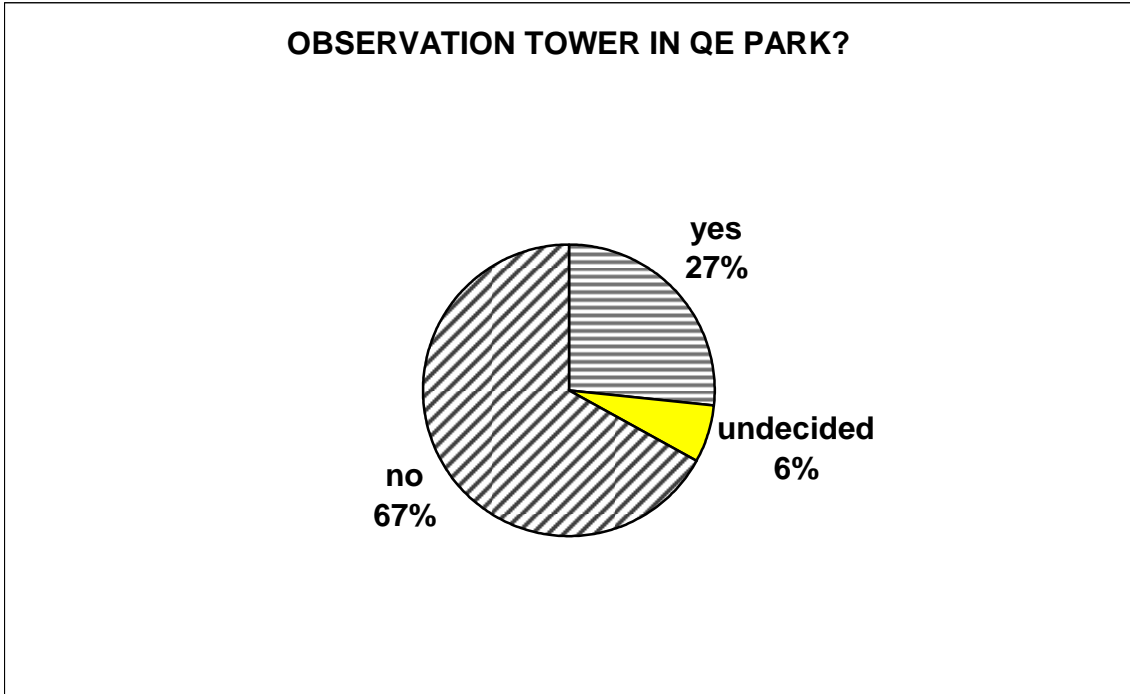
Should a preferred proposed concept be endorsed by the Board, a detailed design phase would precede the permit applications including a potential rezoning followed by development and building permit. Any business arrangement between proponent and Board would be captured in a legal agreement.

The City's permit process would require further public process, in addition to further public review that the Park Board might request.

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Appendix A



Written comments re. observation tower proposal

