

Date: April 10, 2008



TO: Board Members – Vancouver Park Board
FROM: General Manager – Parks and Recreation
SUBJECT: Partnerships and Public Access to Vancouver Schools

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Board receive this report for information.

BACKGROUND

In December 2007, the Board requested staff to explore and report back on an action plan to secure partnerships for specific infrastructure and program provisions, as well as, on specific ways in which the Park Board can engage the Vancouver Board of Education (School Board) staff and private schools to improve access to their facilities.

There is a growing demand by Vancouver residents for greater access to sports facilities. This trend is growing as governments and school boards are increasingly emphasizing the necessity for citizens to be more active and pursue healthier lifestyles. National statistics show that the public is responding and incorporating more activity into their lifestyles.

Urban sports spaces are becoming more precious as Vancouver continues to increase in density. There is an ever increasing need and demand to utilize all large urban sports spaces to their maximum potential. These trends have led to a desire to actively explore the best ways to access and utilize school sports facilities to their maximum potential for the benefit of the entire community.

DISCUSSION

There are many potential partners that the Park Board can engage to explore the opportunities to increase the quantity and quality of Vancouver's public recreation infrastructure and programs. To fully realize this potential, the Park Board has three primary ways to explore and develop partnerships: government based infrastructure grants; public-private or public-public partnership and community based fundraising.

Often these methods of partnering overlap in addressing priority recreation infrastructure needs. The recent development of Sunset Community Centre is a good example of government based infrastructure and community based fundraising. The Millennium Sports Centre exemplifies public – non-profit and community based fundraising. The partnerships to be explored will be significantly informed by the ongoing three year Park Board Capital plan. These three year plans set the tone for the infrastructure and program direction that the Park Board will take. Many of the partnerships to be explored

will be natural extensions of direction set by the Capital Plan process. Other potential partnerships can arise from groups or individuals who bring forward ideas for the Board to consider.

Each potential partnership opportunity will need to be individually explored, researched, developed, and evaluated. Improving access to public and private schools is a good example of a partnership to be explored. This potential partnership will be used as an example for exploring partnership opportunities.

Vancouver Board of Education – Indoor Sports Facilities

The School Board currently operates 109 school buildings: 18 secondary schools, 78 elementary schools and 13 primary annexes. All of these facilities have large indoor spaces and adjacent playing fields. The size of indoor and outdoor spaces vary widely from secondary schools to primary annexes. A typical secondary school will have one to three full size gymnasiums of approximately 6,000 sq. ft. Elementary schools typically have one gymnasium of approximately 4,000 to 5,000 sq. ft. The 13 primary annexes tend to have half size gymnasiums or large activity spaces less than 3,000 sq. ft.

These facilities are used extensively for school activities from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday to Friday from September 1 to June 30. To facilitate use of the remaining space and time, the School Board rentals department allocates the school indoor and outdoor sports facilities on weekday evenings, weekends and during school breaks such as July and August. The cost to rent the school facilities is displayed in the following table.

Gymnasiums Rentals on Weekday Evening

Facility	Number	Hourly Rental Cost	Availability
Double Gym - 7,000 to 11,680 sq. ft.	15	\$44.00	Already in use
Large Gym: 4,000 to 6,000 sq. ft.	26	\$32.00	Already in use
Small Gym: 2,925 to 3,999 sq. ft.	44	\$25.50	Already in use
Activity Space: 2,925 sq. ft.	34	≤ \$25.50	Already in use

The School Board rentals department is already allocating most of the available gymnasium space on weekday evenings. The rental rates for school gymnasiums on weekday evenings are comparable to rental rates at most community centres.

Gymnasiums Rentals on Weekends

Facility	Number	Hourly Rental Cost	Availability
Double Gym - 7,000 to 11,680 sq. ft.	15	\$119.00	Mostly Available
Large Gym: 4,000 to 6,000 sq. ft.	26	\$107.00	Mostly Available
Small Gym: 2,925 to 3,999 sq. ft.	44	\$100.50	Mostly Available
Activity Space: ≤ 2,925 sq. ft.	34	≤ \$100.50	Mostly Available

There is considerable gymnasium time available on weekends. The weekend availability of gymnasium space is due in large part to the high operating costs associated with opening a School Board facility on weekends. In addition to the hourly room rental fees, there is an extra staffing cost of \$75.00 per hour to pay for School Board staff to open and maintain the facility beyond the traditional school operating times. Finally, there are some clean-up costs associated with weekend rentals. These high weekend rental costs create an economic barrier that makes use of school gymnasiums prohibitive for some organizations.

School Community Connections

The School Community Connections pilot project is underway in partnership with the Board of Education to assess the public demand for weekend gymnasium space. Results of this four month pilot will be analyzed and reported out to both Boards this June.

Funded under the School Community Connections Project, two large school gymnasiums were made available for Park Board staff to book on Saturdays. The gyms at Windermere and King George Secondary were programmed with recreation activities during the four month pilot. A combination of drop-in and registered physical activity programs were promoted locally and citywide to see the extent of public demand for weekend indoor sports facilities. It is anticipated that with a growth in awareness of this weekend program, we will attract more children, youth and families to be active at their local high schools.

Vancouver Board of Education–Outdoor Sports Facilities

The School Board also provides extensive access to their playing fields, tennis and basketball courts on evenings and weekends. These facilities can be accessed through their rentals department. The school playing field rental rates are comparable to Park Board rates as there are no additional labour costs attached. School playing fields and outdoor courts are already extensively used by a wide range of community groups and individuals.

Vancouver Private Schools Sports Facilities

Vancouver has 46 private schools. All 18 high schools and several of the elementary schools were surveyed on the availability of their sports facilities (gymnasiums) for public use on evenings and weekends. The results confirmed that there are limited opportunities for the general public to access private school sports facilities. What access is available is scheduled around regular school and extra-curricular activities as well as special events and summer school.

Community access is primarily or exclusively provided to school alumni, school parents, groups associated with current students, and organizations with similar beliefs or missions. The majority of rental gymnasium times are already occupied by the above listed groups. The sole indoor swimming pool is fully booked for school activities, by private swim instruction companies and some aquatic sport groups.

SUMMARY

Partnerships

Through the Capital Plan process, the Park Board encourages individuals, groups and organizations to step forward with major infrastructure and program partnering proposals. A corporate review and public forum process is in place to explore and assess these proposals and make recommendations to the Board. Finally, the Park Board can be directly approached by individuals and groups who wish to propose time-sensitive partnership opportunities that fall outside of the timelines for the Capital Planning process.

Access to School Facilities

There is considerable weekend indoor gymnasium space available in the School Board system. The current barrier to accessing this space is primarily the cost to rent the facilities. The weekend gymnasium costs range from \$100 to \$119 per hour. This high cost is a result of the \$75 per hour labor expenses associated with operating the school gymnasium on weekends. The current subsidized pilot programs at Windermere and King George Secondary schools will provide additional data on the demand for weekend use of school gymnasium.

School Board outdoor sports facilities are already extensively rented to a wide range of public groups and organizations. There may be some benefits for the School Board and Park Board to coordinate their collective field allocation more closely, however, the opportunity for greater public access is limited. These outdoor facilities are already providing maximum public access at a reasonable cost.

There is little opportunity for expanded public use of private school sports facilities. These private organizations prefer to provide available rental opportunities to parents and organizations that are affiliated with the school.

The demand for sports facilities will continue to increase as all levels of government emphasize the need for citizens to lead more active lifestyles. The School Board, Park Board and provincial government will need to work collectively and explore long term solutions which reduce barriers to accessing indoor public sports facilities.

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