

Date: May 28, 2008



TO: Board Members – Vancouver Park Board
FROM: General Manager – Parks and Recreation
SUBJECT: School Community Connections Project

RECOMMENDATION

A. THAT the Board receive this report for information;

and

B. THAT the Board direct staff to pursue the additional physical activity program opportunities through the School Community Connections partnership with the Vancouver Board of Education.

BACKGROUND

In 2004, the Province of British Columbia developed the School Community Connections Program in consultation with the Union of BC Municipalities and the BC School Trustees Association. The intent of the program is to help school boards and communities revitalize schools and make them centres for community activity and learning.

In February 2006, the Vancouver Board of Education (School Board) invited the Park Board to partner with them in a project to make secondary school gymnasiums more available for physical activity on the weekends. While there is some history of local school and community centre collaboration for shared use, they have been driven by site staff relationships and informal agreements, not by any formal or common agreement between the Boards. The Board's community centre association partners make extensive use of schools during the week when gym time is available, but higher rental costs continue to be a significant barrier to weekend use.

A formal application was made to the BC School Trustees Association by the School Board and the Park Board, which was approved in May 2006. Funds for a Phase I study allowed staff to work with School Board staff to develop plans and priorities for action. Phase II Pilot Project plans, developed by Park Board staff at Renfrew Park and West End Community Centres were approved for start-up in September 2007, at Windermere and King George Secondary Schools. Park Board staff, accompanied by School Board project staff, presented the original plans and timelines to the Park Board's Planning Committee on June 5, 2007.

DISCUSSION

The labour dispute of 2007 delayed the launch of the first pilot phase until Saturday, January 12, 2008. Programs were branded and launched under the “Get Up and Go!” program, by the West End and Renfrew Park Community Centres. The Pilot Phase was 15 weeks in duration, ending April 26, 2008. Appendix 1 lists the Saturday program posters at both schools.

The Phase II report (Appendix 2) is attached, which describes the program criteria, goals and design of the physical activity project, how the project is governed, and summarizes the financial results of the first pilot phase of the project. This report has been forwarded to the BC School Trustees Association to satisfy their requirements, and to obtain funding for the project’s final phase. It proposes continuing the pilot for a full year at Windermere and King George Secondary Schools, as well as the addition of a third secondary school-based series of community programs.

Results

Windermere Secondary School's 3 gyms afforded staff the opportunity to develop more program options than what is possible with King George Secondary, which features 2 gyms. Results from the first phase indicate that Renfrew-Collingwood residents took greater advantage of these programs than their counterparts in the West End.

Patronage from registered participants, drop-ins and observers at Windermere Secondary School totaled 1,303 visits, while the King George Secondary School programs reported a modest total of 115 drop-in patrons. Windermere Secondary School opened for a full 15 sessions, while the low turnout to King George Secondary School resulted in an earlier wind-up of programs by March 29th, for a total of 11 sessions.

King George Secondary School Pilot Learning

Co-location of the community centre and school makes it an ideal partnership, but participation was low. One gym supervisor can handle the program with good communication to the centre next door. Staff discovered that they will need to do more promotion and begin as soon as possible, as residents of the West End may not expect to be able to enjoy badminton, volleyball, basketball or indoor soccer on Saturdays.

Extensive community consultation and marketing are required in order to raise the community’s awareness about these new physical activity programs. With limited numbers of children and youth in the West End, the community youth worker will help to strategize the best programs for younger folks and their families next season.

Windermere Secondary School Pilot Learning

Program planning and promotion were effective immediately at Windermere Secondary School. Families with younger children particularly enjoyed being able to visit the school for the first time, and be active simultaneously in adjoining gyms.

A group of young adults attended drop-in basketball regularly. In response to a journalist's question about what he'd be doing if he weren't here playing hoops with his buddies, a young accountant responded, "probably on the couch surfing the TV" and then added, "well, either that or more contract work, but this is better for me".

Staff reached out to BC Wheelchair Sports, but access barriers proved to be a challenge. Subsequent connections with the disability sport community led to the first public series for the sport of "Sitting Volleyball" which is new to BC, and a media event was held at Windermere Secondary School on March 15th, in conjunction with Volleyball Canada.

Staff will continue to seek out new and demonstration activity for specialized sport programs as the opportunities arise, and are currently in discussions with Windermere Secondary School staff about potential access to other activity spaces and equipment in the wing of the school where the gymnasium is located.

Fees and Program Costs

Program delivery costs at King George Secondary School for staffing and promotions totaled \$ 2,013.55, or \$ 183.00 per day. Program costs at Windermere Secondary School, including staffing coordination, supplies, promotion and instructor contracts, totaled \$ 6,725.27, or \$ 450.00 per day. Given the comparative capacity of the respective school gyms, a reasonable target for Windermere Secondary School is 150 persons, and for King George Secondary School is 100 persons.

Based on those targets, the fee to meet King George Secondary School costs is under \$2.00 per active patron, while the fee to meet Windermere Secondary School costs is \$3.00 per patron. The factors which led to these costs and fee averages may change over time.

Next Steps

The Pilot Phase Report in Appendix II has been forwarded to the BC School Trustees Association for their review, along with a request for approval of the final phase. Subject to approval, staff will continue the programs at both Windermere and King George Secondary Schools for another full year. Improvements in marketing, equipment and instructional contracting based on pilot programs will be introduced.

Staff will develop a list of secondary school gyms and adjacent community centres for possible expansion to a third site in September 2009. Continuation and expansion is conditional to funder approval of the final grant phase. Staff will advise the Board once funding has been approved, expansion site criteria have been agreed upon, and future expansion sites have been selected. A report with recommendations for future sustainability of this partnership will be brought forward to the Boards following completion of the next phase of the partnership, sometime in the late Spring of 2009.

SUMMARY

The School Community Connections project is a partnership between the School Board and the Park Board. Gyms at Windermere and King George Secondary Schools were programmed by the local centre staff each Saturday for the first four months of 2008, and interim results are being reported to the Board. The labour dispute of 2007 caused delays to the original timeline of September 2007 to March 2008, and the short pilot was more popular at Windermere Secondary School, than at King George Secondary School.

Staff plan to continue Saturday activities at both schools, and hope to offer a third school option, subject to funder approval. Results of the second pilot phase will be reported back to the Board by late spring of 2009, along with recommendations for future sustainability of this School Board-Park Board partnership program.

Prepared by:

Liane McKenna
Vancouver East District
Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation
Vancouver, BC

LM:bp