

Date: June 20, 2008



TO: Board Members – Vancouver Park Board
FROM: General Manager – Parks and Recreation
SUBJECT: Queen Elizabeth Park Tree Management Plan

RECOMMENDATION

A. THAT the Board endorse the Queen Elizabeth Park Tree Management Plan

POLICY

The “Tree Removal on Public Lands in Vancouver” policy adopted by the Park Board in 1990 states that trees may be removed from city parks to facilitate the re-establishment of views that benefit the general population.

In 1990, City Council adopted guidelines to protect selected views, including five view cones from Queen Elizabeth Park.

The 1999 “Long-Range Vision for Queen Elizabeth Park” (John Talbot and Associates) identified the need to prepare a strategy for view preservation that would minimize the impact on park trees.

BACKGROUND

In January 2008, the Board considered the concept of a privately developed and operated observation tower in Queen Elizabeth Park, and although it was not approved, requested that staff report back by Spring 2008 on tree management options for restoring the views from Queen Elizabeth Park.

Queen Elizabeth Park is the highest point in the city at 153m (approximately 500 ft) above sea level. It has long been a favorite location for viewing the city and the surrounding area, for residents and tourists alike. In recent years, the trees have largely obstructed the view to the downtown core.

At the request of the Board, staff has prepared the draft ‘*Queen Elizabeth Park Tree Management Plan*’ (Appendix A), which balances the management of the trees with regaining the diminishing view.

DISCUSSION

The draft *Queen Elizabeth Tree Management Plan* calls for restoration of three view corridors through the removal of approximately 70 trees, from 6 to 18m (20 to 60 ft) in height, as well as pruning of the lateral branches of 8 more. Most of the trees to be removed are common to British Columbia and none are endangered in the wild. A registered biologist would be hired to assess all trees prior to their removal. None of the trees to be removed commemorate events or persons.

About a third of the trees slated for removal are in poor condition due to overcrowding, storm damage, and disease. Many of the conifers were planted in plantation-style blocks which were not thinned as the trees grew. The crowded conditions resulted in poor tree form with sparse foliage due to lack of light, except at the top of the trees. Some of the pines suffer from needle blight, and others have broken leaders and crooked poor form due to storm damage. These damaged, diseased, and overcrowded trees would normally have been removed as part of regular maintenance but were left in place due to the controversy regarding tree removal in the lookout areas. As was learned from the Stanley Park experience, it is important that we manage the trees to ensure healthy development and reduce risk to the public.

The plan proposes to remove trees beginning in early summer 2008, except for those with nests, which would be removed when the nesting season was over, after mid-August 2008.

Replanting would occur, on a two-to-one basis, in the fall and winter of 2008-2009. Replacement trees planted in the view corridors would be of species that attain a maximum mature height of 5-10m (15-30 ft). Replacement trees would be chosen for year-round beauty, adaptability to our Vancouver climate, and wildlife value. About one third of the trees would be planted in the areas where trees were taken down, near the lookouts. The remaining compensatory tree plantings would be made in non view-sensitive areas of the park using native west coast species such as Douglas fir and red cedar to create additional forest habitat in the park.

The cost for approximately 140 replacement trees and 80 shrubs is estimated at \$21,350. Costs for labour and supplies to remove and plant replacement trees and shrubs will be covered in the operating budget.

A public process - which included a public meeting, web-based and media information, and a telephone poll - was undertaken to obtain public views on the plan. To advertise a May 29, 2008 public meeting, 1500 homes in the vicinity of Queen Elizabeth Park were leafleted, ads were placed in the city-wide edition of the *Courier* and *Ming Pao* newspapers. *The Vancouver Sun*, *Province*, and *Georgia Strait* newspapers included coverage about both the proposal and the meeting in editions the week prior to the public meeting.

Fifty-three people attended the public open house at the Celebration Pavilion on the Plaza at Queen Elizabeth Park. Of 17 speakers at that meeting, 11 were opposed to the removal of trees. Feedback forms received at the meeting indicate 26 of those in attendance supported the *Tree Management Plan*, 18 did not and 5 were undecided.

Information about the plan and meeting were also available on the Park Board website, as was an on-line feedback form (34 in favour, 33 opposed and 3 undecided). Letters (12 in favour, 20 against) and calls (10 opposed, 3 in favour) were also received.

A tabulation of responses received is presented below:

	Support	%	Oppose	%	Undecided No opinion Don't Know	%	Total Responses
Letters	12	29%	20	49%	9	22%	41
Phonecalls	3	21%	10	71%	1	7%	14
Feedback Forms	27	54%	18	36%	5	10%	50
Online Feedback Form	34	49%	33	47%	3	4%	70
Total	76	43%	81	46%	18	10%	175

A telephone survey of 500 residents of the Lower Mainland was undertaken by market research company Synovate in June 2008. Of respondents aware of the proposed *Queen Elizabeth Park Tree Management Plan* (N=207), 60% strongly or moderately supported removal of trees on a 2-1 replacement basis. Respondents, both those who had and had not heard of the Plan prior to the survey call, approved at 52%, while 19% were opposed (the remainder had no opinion). More than a third of respondents felt that 2-1 replacement of trees was a good compromise, 19% felt that the view is part of the heritage of the park. Ten percent were against cutting down trees in the park.

	Support	%	Oppose	%	Undecided No opinion Don't Know	%	Total Responses
All respondents (Lower Mainland) Telephone Poll	259	52%	96	19%	145	29%	500

Public reaction to the plan is clearly mixed. Opponents express concern for the impact on air quality, the impact to wildlife, and the heritage and aesthetic value of the trees. Those in favour of the plan support the restoration of lost views and thoughtful management of trees within the park's view corridors.

CONCLUSION

The Tree Management plan would protect the view corridors, one of the park's principal assets. Management of the trees, and replanting on a 2 for 1 basis will restore and preserve principal view corridors, resulting in a net increase in future tree cover and enhancement of wildlife habitat within the park.

SUMMARY

The Board is asked to approve the Queen Elizabeth Park Tree Management Plan authorizing the removal of approximately 70 trees, as well as pruning lateral branches of 8 trees.

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AD:ms