

Date: July 17, 2008



TO: Board Members – Vancouver Park Board
FROM: General Manager – Parks and Recreation
SUBJECT: Oppenheimer Park Redevelopment - Concept Plan Revisions

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Board approve the revised concept plan - Option 2 as described in this report and illustrated in Appendix 3.

POLICY

The Board approves new park designs.

BACKGROUND

Oppenheimer Park is one of Vancouver's busiest parks that serves a very diverse population in the Downtown Eastside (DTES). The park is unique, in that it is jointly operated by the VPB and Carnegie Centre, which is a division of the City's Community Services Group. Oppenheimer Park is a refuge for many less fortunate people who rely on the services and support offered by Carnegie staff at the park. It is also a green refuge for many of those people who live in challenging conditions in the DTES.

On March 10, 2008, the Board approved a concept plan for the redevelopment of Oppenheimer Park (see Appendix 1). The plan includes building a new field house, children's playground and basketball court, and involves realigned pathways, planting trees and other landscaping. The plan was arrived at after an extensive public consultation process that involved the local community, park users, staff, consultants and stakeholders. The plan also involved the removal and replacement of 10 Japanese Cherry trees, or Sakura as they are known.

DISCUSSION

Following the Board's approval, staff and the Park Redevelopment Committee were made aware of the significance of the Sakura. In 1977, over 70 Nikkei seniors were involved in the planting 21 Sakura in Oppenheimer Park to commemorate the 100th

anniversary of the arrival of the first Japanese immigrants to B.C. Today, 10 of the original trees remain, along with five more recent replacements.

In response to the concern that several Sakura were to be removed at part of the approved concept plan, the Coalition to Save the Legacy Sakura of Oppenheimer Park was formed. Many meetings were held with members of the Coalition and Park Redevelopment Committee to better understand the significance of the trees and to seek a solution which would accommodate the functions and features of importance to each of the various stakeholders.

Three options were developed that preserved all or most of the Sakura, while maintaining the main elements of the original concept plan. These options were the focal point of discussions that included the Coalition, the Park Redevelopment Committee, staff and consultants. These options are illustrated in Appendices 2, 3 and 4.

On July 14, 2008 the Park Board Committee heard presentations from staff and the Coalition, and listened to 11 delegations. The Coalition presented a new option which is illustrated in Appendix 5. Staff recommended to proceed with Option 2 which was supported by the Park Redevelopment Committee. The Committee was made aware of the financial, timing and community related consequences of delaying the project. The Board directed staff to meet again with the Sakura Coalition and Park Redevelopment Committee to review the approved concept plan, the revised plan - Option 2, and the new plan submitted by the Coalition, and attempt to reach consensus.

On July 17, 2008 the Oppenheimer Park Redevelopment Committee and the Coalition to Save the Legacy Sakura of Oppenheimer Park met with staff at the park. The various concept plans were reviewed again. The new plan from the Coalition was reviewed by the consultants and discussed with the group. It was acknowledged by the Coalition that they did not have the benefit of participating in the previous design and consultation process. The Coalition's plan did not adequately address some of the important inter-relationships of the elements in the park, and for this reason was not pursued. The representative from the Buddhist Temple offered to revisit Option 3 that locates the field house in the north east corner of the park, closer to the temple. This option retains all of the Sakura, but was felt to have significant limitations with regard to the impact it would have on the field house design, programming and park use. It is the opinion of staff and members of the redevelopment committee that the revised plan Option 2 is the best concept plan, in that it is a compromise that retains most of the functionality of the original concept plan while preserving all but two of the Sakura.

Staff asked the Coalition if they would consider a compromise position by supporting the revised plan Option 2. After discussing the request, the Coalition stated they could not support the removal of any Sakura, because preservation of the trees was the key principle of their formation. The Coalition also said they hoped to work closely with staff and the community in developing commemorative features that preserve the legacy of the Japanese-Canadian influence in the area so the memory is not forgotten by future generations. Staff support appropriate commemoration in the park and also note that this

project is the first step in a much larger revitalization plan for the Japantown area. Through this broader process, the City of Vancouver has committed to support the commemoration of the historical and cultural heritage in the area.

The Coalition have asked that this report mention the many letters of support they have received, and the 1,800 signatures on a petition that supports saving all Sakura in the park.

The revised plan - Option 2 creates a large open area for active and passive recreation, including the Powell Street Festival. It includes a new children's play area, basketball court and a new field house located in a strategic central location in the park. This option retains all but two Sakura – one original and one replacement. With the implementation of Option 2, there will be 9 original Sakura trees retained and 10 additional planted for a total of 23 Sakura. The Japanese Cherry will be the dominant tree species in the park. Staff believe that Option 2 respects both the legacy of the Sakura and the contributions made by the redevelopment committee who represent the local community, park users, various organizations and other stakeholders in the area.

The Coalition, through its efforts, has raised awareness of not only the Sakura, but the significant contribution of Japanese-Canadians in this neighbourhood. The Park Board and City of Vancouver look forward to working with the Coalition and Japanese-Canadian community by building on the awareness this process has generated.

SUMMARY

The consultation process has been a community based effort that has tried to recognize and consider the diverse needs of park users, residents and community stakeholders.

Staff are recommending the Board approve a revised concept plan – Option 2 as described in this report and illustrated in Appendix 3. Staff believe this option, although a compromise for many stakeholders, will result in a park redevelopment that best serves the local community, while respecting the input and contributions that have been made by all throughout the consultation process.

Prepared by:

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