

Date: March 27, 2009



TO: Board Members – Vancouver Park Board
FROM: General Manager – Parks and Recreation
SUBJECT: Public Wireless Internet Access

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Board receive this report for information, along with the City Council report attached as Appendix A.

BACKGROUND

At the January 19, 2009 meeting, the Board passed the following motion:

THAT Park Board staff work with Community Centre Associations on the feasibility of providing wireless high-speed internet coverage and report back with an implementation plan to provide free wireless at community centres.

At the January 20, 2009 meeting, City Council passed the following related motion:

THAT staff be directed to prepare a report and implementation plan by April 7, 2009, on the cost required to provide public wireless high-speed internet coverage in all Vancouver Civic Buildings; and

FURTHER THAT the report include information on the likelihood that overlapping wireless networks will result in wireless coverage in City facilities in the future without the City's involvement in providing this coverage.

DISCUSSION

Due to the similarity of the above motions, Park Board and City staff worked together to research and report back on them. The City Council report attached as Appendix A includes a full discussion of previous City "Wi-Fi" initiatives, existing public wireless access provided at all branch libraries and three community centres, research into options for providing wireless access at all community centres and other civic facilities, and discussion on environmental considerations and technological change.

In addition, Park Board staff were asked to work with the Community Associations on this motion. Staff sent out a memo to solicit input from community centre staff and Community Associations on this initiative. Subsequently, staff attended the Community Association Presidents meeting to solicit feedback on this initiative. Feedback is summarized below:

- This initiative is largely supported by the Associations
- There were many questions and concerns regarding cost, especially if the Community Associations would be asked to contribute to the cost
- Some Associations felt that while this is a positive initiative, it only serves patrons who have laptops; it would be more inclusive if public PCs/kiosks were also provided at the community centres.
- Some of the Associations felt strongly that public wireless internet at their sites should be filtered. This was based on the concern that many young children use the community centre and they would not want them potentially exposed to inappropriate sites. Conversely, the three community centres that currently offer this service do not filter sites, and have not had any issues to-date
- Some of the Associations provide this service, or are interested in providing this service to their room rental customers.

SUMMARY

This report, along with the attached City Council Report, outlines the research, options available, and approximate cost to implement public wireless internet access at community centres and other civic facilities. Staff concur with the findings reported by City staff. In view of the implementation costs and technical implications, staff recommend that the Board consider Council's decision before proceeding to the implementation of the "Wi-Fi" initiatives.

Prepared by:

Corporate Services
Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation
Vancouver, BC

:nm