

Date: March 5, 2010



**TO: Board Members – Vancouver Park Board**  
**FROM: General Manager – Parks and Recreation**  
**SUBJECT: Consultant Award for 2010 Ghost Train and Bright Nights in Stanley Park Events**

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## RECOMMENDATION

- A. THAT the Board award the consultant's contract for Artistic Director of the 2010 Stanley Park Hallowe'en Ghost Train and Bright Nights in Stanley Park to Mortal Coil Performance Society for a total consulting fee of \$32,000 plus GST/HST and disbursements of a maximum of \$126,000 plus GST/HST, as set out in this report.***
- B. THAT no legal rights shall arise hereby, and none shall arise until execution of the contemplated contract. The Board may rescind this resolution at any time up to the execution of the contemplated contract.***

## POLICY

Consultants' contracts over \$30,000 must be approved by the Board.

## BACKGROUND

Every December since 1998 the Board, in partnership with the BC Professional Fire Fighters' Burn Fund, has presented "Bright Nights in Stanley Park" at the Miniature Railway and Children's Farmyard. Since 1999, during October, the Board has operated the Stanley Park Hallowe'en Ghost Train. Mortal Coil Performance Society was contracted as Artistic Director of both events in 2000, and since then has created and managed their artistic elements.

The Board pays a consulting fee to the Artistic Director and approves a disbursements budget for the Artistic Director to manage and pay for the creative and artistic elements of each event. This covers all aspects of hiring, directing, scheduling and paying the performers, the production and technical management, and the creation of costumes, installations, visuals and sound. The Artistic Director contracts directly with performers, artists, suppliers etc., up to the approved amount of this budget. The Board reimburses the Artistic Director for these costs.

## DISCUSSION

### **Mortal Coil Performance Society**

In its own words, "Mortal Coil is a non-profit Vancouver performance company dedicated to creating imaginative theatre and spectacle through the use of stilts, masks and fantastic costuming. The company performs in theatres, at festivals and at site-specific events locally, nationally and internationally. It empowers communities to

celebrate their creativity through classes, workshops and lecture / demonstrations for professional performers, educators, the general public and at risk street youth”. Mortal Coil works with a large pool of local performers, musicians, technicians, production specialists and artists and involves many of them in these two events. It has mentored theatre and dance students and street-involved youth at the Ghost Train.

### **Ghost Train**

Each year, staff, the Event Manager and the Artistic Director agree on a theme, which the Artistic Director then develops into the final production. To date, the Ghost Train has had such diverse themes as Scary Fairy Tales, Shakespeare, Day of the Dead, B Horror Movies and Underworlds from different world cultures. Mortal Coil has an understanding of the challenges of the outdoor environment, and has developed a good working relationship with staff. The vision, and the artistic and administrative management provided by Mortal Coil ensures that the event is unique and creative. The Ghost Train is now one of the few major Hallowe'en events in Vancouver where parents will bring young children. It attracts a multicultural audience of all ages. It also acts as a lead-in to Bright Nights and many people attend both of these events.

Other activities for patrons of the Ghost Train have included storytelling, and crafts such as mask and puppet making. The Children's Farmyard is decorated by staff as a Haunted Farmyard. The role of the Farmyard in the 2010 event is currently uncertain, but if it is not open as a Farmyard, then an alternative event element will be developed.

The Stanley Park Ecology Society runs “Creatures of the Night” walks at the Ghost Train and sells popcorn as a fundraiser at both events. The Ghost Train allows SPES to reach a large audience and spread awareness of its programs and educational messages. Based on initial discussions, SPES may play a larger role in the 2010 event.

### **Bright Nights**

The focus at Bright Nights is on the lights and displays, created by Board staff and the Burn Fund. Performance elements are limited. As a result, the Artistic Director's role at this event is considerably less than at the Ghost Train. The Artistic Director works with the event organizers to create, schedule and supervise several performers, in addition to arranging for Santa, musicians and the community choirs who perform at the event. The Artistic Director also works with staff on some displays in the train area.

### **Contract Fee and Disbursements**

The amounts to be paid to Mortal Coil pursuant to this contract in 2010 are:

	<u>Ghost Train</u>	<u>Bright Nights</u>	<u>Total</u>
Artistic Director Fee	\$ 25,000	\$ 7,000	\$ 32,000
Artistic Disbursements	<u>\$ 84,000</u>	<u>\$42,000</u>	<u>\$126,000</u>
Total	<u>\$109,000</u>	<u>\$49,000</u>	<u>\$158,000</u>

This is the same fee as in 2009. Disbursements have been increased by 5% over 2009, to help allow for the impact of increased costs due to inflation and HST

## **2009 event results, revenues to the Board and plans for 2010**

### Ghost Train

October 2009 was the wettest October since 2003. As an outdoor event, the Ghost Train was severely impacted by this weather. Attendance was 31,000, which was down 12% from the prior year. The 2009 event showed a small loss, of about \$16,000. Had attendance been the same as in 2008, the event would have had a surplus. Approximately break even results are typical at the Ghost Train.

For 2010, relationships with existing sponsors will be developed and more sponsors sought. There will be increased emphasis on marketing to groups and businesses in the early part of the run when there is surplus capacity on the trains. The 2010 Ghost Train will run for 24 nights. Ticket prices (including HST) are \$11 adult, \$7 discount (discount rate applies to children, youth & seniors). After allowing for the impact of HST, this is a small increase in the net ticket price over 2009, which should also help with the goal of increasing revenues. Group and Leisure Access rates are available to help make the event accessible to all. Approximately half of the tickets for each night are sold in advance by Ticketmaster. The others are sold onsite, on the same day only.

### Bright Nights

Bright Nights is always extremely popular. The 2009 event had record attendance. Over 107,000 people rode the train and visited the Children's Farmyard. Unlike at the Ghost Train, the weather in December 2009 was good, with the lowest rainfall in years and no wind or snow closures. Net revenues to the Board from the 2009 event were \$260,000.

2010 Bright Nights will run for 36 nights. Ticket prices (including HST) are \$9 adult, \$6 discount. Similar ticket sales arrangements apply as noted above for the Ghost Train.

### **Future Artistic Direction at these events**

When the contract with Mortal Coil was approved in 2009, it was considered to be time to review future artistic options for these events. Staff had planned to issue a Request for Proposals in early 2010 for an Artistic Director for both events for 2010 onwards.

However, given the uncertainty over the future of the Farmyard and the recent focus on Olympic related projects both at the Board and within the artistic community, there is now insufficient time to work through the RFP process to potentially make a change this year. Planning needs to begin very shortly for the 2010 Ghost Train. This RFP will now be postponed until 2011.

## **SUMMARY**

Mortal Coil has provided a creative and professional service to these events for the past ten years. It has the resources, the vision and the ability to work to enhance the artistic experience for visitors. The proposed fees and disbursements are reasonable for the scope and nature of the projects.

Prepared by:  
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