

**Minutes of Meeting of the Board of Parks and Recreation
Planning & Environment Committee Meeting
Held at the Vancouver Park Board Office on
Thursday, July 7th, 2011**

ATTENDEES: Park Board Commissioners

Sarah Blyth, Chair
Raj Hundal, Vice Chair
Stuart Mackinnon
Aaron Jasper
Loretta Woodcock

Park Board Staff

Malcolm Bromley	General Manager
Danica Djurkovic	Acting Director, Planning & Operations
Bill Manning	Manager, Arboriculture & Horticulture
Katherine Isaac	Planner
Kevin Tuerlings	Recorder

Delegations:

- Meghan Carvell Davis
- Sasha Gilton

The meeting was called to order at 6:30pm, with the following agenda:

1. Approval of Minutes of the June 2, 2011 Meeting
2. Dogs Off-Leash Update
3. Leaf Blowers

1. Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Planning & Environment Committee held on Thursday, June 2, 2011 were adopted as circulated with recommended revisions.

2. Dogs Off-Leash Update

Staff presented on the proposed vision for off-leash areas in Vancouver: a comprehensive network of off-leash areas (OLA) that work for people and dogs and successfully co-exist with other park uses. The intended purpose of the update is to obtain the Committee's feedback on draft principles, which would then guide policy development, and would in turn allow the Park Board to achieve the above vision.

In 1997 the Park Board created the 'off-leash area' program and designated 4 pilot off-leash sites at Balaclava, Hillcrest, Killarney and Nelson parks. This number has grown to 35 off-leash areas in 2011, with the understanding that dogs are allowed in all Vancouver parks if they are on-leash.

The City of Vancouver is striving to serve a growing dog population; based on a 2008 Ipsos Reid report there is an estimated 145,551 dogs in Vancouver – approximately 36% of Vancouver households have one or more dogs. When compared with other cities in terms of sheer number of OLA's per population, Vancouver was in the group of cities which are at the forefront of OLA development in North America, at 18,645 people per 1 OLA (compared to Calgary's best 8,517 people/OLA, and Chicago's worst 270,000 people/OLA).

To better improve the off-leash strategy staff has looked at dog strategy task force work, Vancouver experience, public feedback and what other cities are doing to come up with eight draft principles:

1. Off-leash areas are an important part of our park system
2. Off-leash areas need to work for all park users
3. Physical separation can create off-leash areas that work for all
4. Good design will create places that work for people and dogs
5. Off-leash areas need to be carefully placed within parks
6. Off-leash areas need to be strategically located across the city
7. There is a meaningful role for education and enforcement
8. Off-leash areas part of standard park planning processes.

The proposed next steps are to post proposed draft principles on the website for public feedback in July, identify priority off-leash areas for improvement and explore partnership possibilities, and report back to the Board in early 2012.

The following delegations requested to speak to the Committee:

- Meghan Carvell Davis
- Sasha Gilton

The following is a summary of the foregoing delegations:

- Happy that staff has done a lot of research and work. Agree with proposed principles.
- There needs to be a system analysis of Vancouver OLA's.
- OLA's need more fencing. With fences there is no question of where the boundaries begin and enforcement becomes easier.
- Suggests Vancouver adopts a system like Toronto where the OLA requires a chip to enter which is on the dog license, at a cost of approximately 7 dollars a year which will help with cost recovery.

- No OLA in Mt. Pleasant area. No reasonable place to walk to, so dog owners must use school fields in the area. Too dark and muddy in the winter; fields all booked in the summer.
- Smaller OLA's are preferred over large destination areas. Smaller ones become a neighbourhood gathering area, rather than a large, crowded destination dog park.

Discussion

A member of the Committee asked if other jurisdictions heavily enforce their on-leash by-laws. Staff answered that the overwhelming direction is that physical separation of areas helps curb physical confrontations, so enforcement is often replaced by education of the park users by rangers, and is a much preferred approach.

A member of the Committee asked how a sandy area like a portion of a beach would be partitioned. Staff answered that ideally a natural land form would be available, such as a cove, to make an off-leash area. In the past, a temporary, non-intrusive plastic mesh barrier has been used. In Calgary, if physical boundaries are not possible, they at least show a definitive line of where areas start, which is another option.

A member of the Committee asked what can be done about overuse in destination OLA's where the ground gets destroyed over time. Staff replied a material like a crushed stone, which is coarser than sand, but less than gravel, can be used to alleviate wear-and-tear while still being comfortable for dogs.

A member of the Committee asked if a publicized enforcement calendar for popular OLA's can be introduced to let the public know of days and times of planned enforcement. Staff answered that they will consider this possibility, but it may be difficult because the Park Board does not have control over by-law enforcement.

A member of the Committee asked if there are short term funds to use towards working on "hot zones" to make fences. Staff answered that there is only money left in the current 2011 budget to specifically address signage in the parks, and no extra money will be available for fences until the 2012-2014 Capital Plan.

A member of the Committee followed up and asked if the signage can have improved language, and a new direction, such as a new mascot. Staff answered that new signs have been carefully designed for the past 6 months, with more pictures and a friendlier, easy to understand approach.

A member of the Committee followed up, and asked where English is not the first language in areas, are there multilingual signs. Staff answered there will be a few, but the intent is to show more information through pictures on signs. The direction is to try and get the signs to work without words. All 35 OLA locations will have these new signs.

Staff will report back to the Board in spring 2012 in accordance with the outlined plan.

At this time Commissioner Woodcock left the meeting.

3. Leaf Blowers

Staff presented on the current methods of leaf blowing used by Park Board staff in the field. The presentation was prompted by a motion put forward on July 5, 2010 requesting that the Board replace the use of gas powered leaf blowers with more sustainable methods of clearing leaves.

Currently there is a prohibition on the use of gas powered leaf blowers within a defined area of the West End. Over the past 10 years the Park Board has upgraded their equipment to quieter and more environmentally friendly backpack leaf blowers. Leaf blowers are regarded as a labour-saving device, reducing the time it takes to rake and sweep by three times, as well as reducing the possibility of injury to workers.

The U.S Environmental Protection Agency standard for backpack blowers is 50 grams of emissions per kilowatt hour; the equipment used by the Park Board emits 12.4 g/kWh, and also produce 65 dBA's of noise. Moving forward, staff believe there are two options: to maintain the status quo and continue using the leaf blowers as usual and updating the technology when possible, or removing the use of leaf blowers and reverting back to manual labour. The latter option would require an estimated \$2 million increase to the annual budget.

Discussion

A member of the Committee asked what other municipalities are doing. Staff answered that neighbouring municipalities in the lower mainland are using gas powered blowers. However Surrey, for example, has a lot of their work contracted out, so they would be using more blowers than Burnaby. Vancouver has been working on reducing noise and emissions more than other municipalities.

A member of the Committee asked why the city would not be interested in spending the estimated \$2 million dollars in order to eliminate the approximately 5 pounds of particulate matter produced per hour of leaf blower use to help reach the goal of Greenest City by 2020. Fellow Commissioners answered that budget constraints would not allow such an expenditure on manual labour, and the potential for injury is increased with the constant strain of raking large parks. Staff added in regards to particulate matter, workers are sensitive to the issue, and where park users may be affected by leaf blower use, workers do not opt o use the leaf blowers at that time.

A member of the Committee asked if the potential for lost work hours by staff injury through increased manual labour is included in the estimated \$2 million increase. Staff answered the additional cost of lost hours is not included in the estimated budget increase.

A member of the Committee asked if staff can create a reduction strategy to be brought back to the Board. Staff answered there is always time to look at best practices and reduction, as well as the appropriateness of mulching leaves, hand work, and proper leaf blowing use

Members of the Committee would be in favour of a reduction strategy and said they believe it is an exercise worth undertaking in order to get a better idea of the costs of increased manual labour as well as the effects of continued leaf blower use. One member of the Committee disagreed with the majority, stating they feel the leaf blowers are a necessary measure to reduce work load and staff injury while in the field and that the possible increase in the maintenance budget could be better used in more urgent areas.

The item will return to the Board at a future date.

The meeting adjourned at 8:00 PM.

Danica Djurkovic, Acting Director,
Planning & Operations

Commissioner Sarah Blyth,
Chair