

Date: April 4, 2012



**TO:** Board Members – Vancouver Park Board  
**FROM:** General Manager – Parks and Recreation  
**SUBJECT:** *A-maze-ing Laughter* in Morton Park

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## RECOMMENDATION

*THAT the Board accept the long-term loan or donation of A-maze-ing Laughter -- a sculpture composed of fourteen bronze laughing figures by artist Yue Minjin -- for continued exhibition in Morton Park, with all arrangements to the satisfaction of the General Manager.*

## POLICY

In 1998, the Park Board adopted the Acceptance Guidelines for Long Term Gifts of Public Art. These guidelines are designed to ensure that high quality work is added to Vancouver's public spaces. Included in the guidelines are procedures for evaluating proposed donations of art and memorials in a manner fair to the donor and the public. The guidelines also outline a consultation process, which includes independent assessments by artists and other members of the professional art community as well as feedback from the general public.

## BACKGROUND

In 2005 the Park Board entered into a 10 year contract with Vancouver Biennale Foundation for the provision of a series of temporary exhibitions of sculpture on park lands. Yue Minjun's sculpture *A-maze-ing Laughter* was installed in Morton Park in 2009 as part of one of these temporary exhibitions. The Board has now received a proposal from the Biennale Foundation to extend the exhibition of this sculpture. The Foundation has indicated that they are currently engaged in a campaign which could result in either the Biennale's acquisition of the work as part of their own collection, in which case they would propose an extended exhibition period of 20 years; alternately the campaign could result in the donation of the work to the Park Board for permanent exhibition at this location.

## DISCUSSION

The sculpture proposed for long term exhibition is composed of fourteen bronze figures which are recognized as a signature work from this internationally recognized artist. The sculpture has proven very popular with the public over the course of its recent exhibition in Morton Park. The media attention for this work has also made the sculpture an iconic image for the 2009 – 2011 Biennale.

The Biennale Foundation initially approached the Park Board only about the extension of the exhibition and not the donation. In the absence of a policy specific to long-term loans, the Park Board's process for public art donations was carried out, which included the following:

- A formal discussion regarding donor/loaner responsibility for all costs associated with the project was held with the Foundation;
- The Public Art Committee was consulted for the aesthetic review on January 16, 2012 and has officially endorsed the project.
- An technical review was convened, the Biennale Foundation agreed to a process recommended by Park Board Operations staff regarding necessary upgrades to the surfacing, drainage and landscape;
- Community consultation on the question of a long-term loan, involving site signage, brochure distribution to all residents in a two block radius of the installation, advertisement in the Courier newspaper, information on the Park Board website and social media outlets, and postings at West End Community Centre was completed. Members of the public were given three weeks in which to respond. One thousand and fourteen (1014) responses were received.
  - 912 (90%) were in favour of keeping the sculpture at Morton Park. Four hundred thirty-one of these were simple declarations of support and one hundred and eighty four were extremely effusive regarding the value they placed on keeping the work. Additional comments included the “joy” the work brought to passers-by and the sense of the work having become a Vancouver landmark.
  - One hundred and two (10%) of the responses were not in favour. Of these forty-seven commented on the aesthetics of the piece. Fifteen respondents were concerned about damage to the surface and/or the natural surroundings being compromised.

Subsequent to the consultation the Biennale Foundation was able to negotiate a time limited reduction in the purchase price of the artwork from \$5M to \$1.5M based on the artist's desire to see the work remain on public display. Therefore, a timely response from the Board could be critical to the opportunity for the work to remain in Vancouver. Staff is recommending the Board approve this proposal for either long-term loan or donation. Though the consultation specified a 20-year installation, the public response noted above indicates a clear majority of support for the retention of the artwork. All other aspects of the review were positive and would be unaffected whether the result is a long-term loan and donation.

**SUMMARY**

This sculptural installation meets the Board's criteria for "Long Term Gifts of Public Art and Memorials" and has become a very popular piece for both residents and visitors to Vancouver.

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