



Date: March 25th, 2013

TO: Board Members – Vancouver Park Board
FROM: General Manager – Parks and Recreation
SUBJECT: Pitch and Putt Utilization

RECOMMENDATION

- A. That the Board approve seasonally operating the three Park Board Pitch and Putt courses including Stanley Park, Queen Elizabeth Park and Rupert Park to better align with the seasonal nature of the pitch and putts recreational activity.*
- B. That the Board approves the modification of the Host Facility Agreement with the First Tee of Metro Vancouver/YMCA for the use of the Rupert Park Pitch and Putt and other courses on terms identified in this report.*
- C. That all legal documentation is to be in a form which is satisfactory to the Director of Legal Services for the City of Vancouver and the General Manager and;*
- D. That the General Manager be authorized to execute and deliver all such documentation on behalf of the Board.*

POLICY

On May 28th 2012 the Board endorsed the Strategic Framework objectives including two of the strategic directions: Excellence in Resource Management with Enhanced Fiscal Planning and Strategic Asset Management objectives and Parks and Recreation for All with the Relevant Programs and Services goal.

The Park Board approves use of all lands under its jurisdiction.

BACKGROUND

The Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation manages the operation of three Championship Courses including Fraserview, McCleery and Langara along with three Pitch & Putt courses including Stanley Park, Queen Elizabeth and Rupert Park. There are five other municipalities that operate pitch and putt courses including Ambleside, Murdo Fraser, West Richmond, Central Park and Kensington Park.

On July 9th, 2012 a motion was passed by the Board directing staff to compile and report back on usage and revenue metrics for Vancouver's public golf and pitch and putt courses. The Golf Metrics Report was presented to the Park Board Commissioners on Monday November 5th, 2012. The report provided an overview of the national and local golf industry and detailed metrics for the championship and pitch and putt courses. The metrics included rounds played, user demographics, the utilization level of each course and the financial performance of the different areas of golf. As a part of the Strategic Plan directions of Excellence in Resource Management and Parks and Recreation for all staff have identified opportunities to enhance the performance of our Pitch and Putt courses.

DISCUSSION

Two important items that the metrics identified for the Pitch and Putt courses were the extreme seasonality of the demand for this recreation service and the significant underutilization at all courses and in particular at the Rupert Park location. In the summer season there is an average of 114 rounds played per day per course. In the winter season this drops to 10 rounds per day per course. Rupert Park has the lowest utilization rate of 36% in the summer and only 5% in the winter. The relative isolation and limited access to transit are factors influencing Rupert Parks' usage. In addition the 15th hole has been suspended for the last three years due to concerns with errant golf balls. Due to the low utilization rate during the winter season the Pitch and Putt courses collectively generate a loss in excess of \$200,000 for that time period.

	Summer April 2011– Oct 2011		Winter Nov 2011 – Mar 2012	
	Utilization %	Net Contribution	Utilization %	Net Contribution
Stanley Park	52%	\$230,290	8%	\$ -74,698
Queen Elizabeth	38%	\$ 114,349	6%	\$ - 66,828
Rupert Park	36%	\$ -37,996	5%	\$ - 64,330

Staff have done further investigations of these two metrics in regards to the causes, possible solutions and recommended changes in operation to improve the efficiency and utilization of the Pitch and Putt courses.

The seasonality metric is driven by two factors. The first is that the majority of the users treat this as a seasonal recreation activity similar to our outdoor pools and we limit related services such as lifeguarding and concessions according to the seasonality.

The second factor is the degree of impact that weather has on the users. During the time period of November 2012 through February 2013 there were 84 days when there were no green fees purchased at a one of the courses. Another indicator of the impact of weather is that on the Sunday February 24th there was heavy rain and no rounds were purchased.

This is in contrast to a week later on Sunday March 3rd which was sunny and 251 rounds were purchased. Under the current operating model the courses are fully staffed on all days year round. While weather is a factor for all outdoor activities the championship courses have a utilization rate as high as 38% in the winter season compared to the pitch and putt courses being as low as 5%, indicating the differing users.

There are five other municipalities in the Lower Mainland that operate Pitch and Putt courses and all but one course completely closes during the winter season. Kensington Park in Burnaby operates on a very limited weather basis.

Staff recommends changing of the pitch and putt courses to operate seasonally so that during the winter season we would not be fully staffed and there would be free community access, weather permitting. This would better align with user demand, other seasonally operated Park Board recreation facilities and would be consistent with other municipally run pitch and putt courses. In addition staff estimate that the over \$200,000 loss generated in the winter season would be reduced by in excess of \$100,000.

In regards to the current users of the Pitch and Putt courses staff propose that there be a first year pilot to provide open community access to the courses during the winter season, weather permitting. This would allow the community access at no cost and those users with annual passes to continue to use the courses during the winter season. Staff would consult with the season pass holders and others in the community to establish the operating conditions so as to provide safe conditions and ensure that any damage to the course be minimized. This will support the Strategic Framework in regards to “Improving Inclusivity and Accessibility” by allowing those that might not normally be able to afford this activity a trial period.

The schedule of winter maintenance would include a fulltime roving Greensman changing holes, course clean-up, safety and drainage inspections and tree pruning augmented by staff from the Stanley Park and Queen Elizabeth maintenance crews for daily course inspections. It is anticipated that the Queen Elizabeth Parks would operate with temporary greens for a part of the season. Park Board staff have met with representatives of CUPE 1004 and CUPE 15 as well as the staff potentially impacted and should the seasonal operation be approved, will continue to work with the Locals over the next six months to minimize any impact.

First Tee Partnership

On April 19th, 2010 the Board approved the Host Facility Agreement with the First Tee Metro Vancouver/YMCA. This agreement with an initial 5 year term focused on the use of the Fraserview course to act as the programming home of the First Tee. The First Tee is an initiative of the World Golf Foundation and was created in 1997 to introduce young people of all backgrounds to the game of golf and the life lessons it teaches. Through the First Tee life skills experience, a curriculum for teaching character education through specific life skills, children and teenagers around the world discover how skills essential to success on a golf course can help them flourish in life. These skills include self-management, interpersonal communication, goal setting, mentoring and effective conflict resolution. The Metro Vancouver chapter is the second in Canada after Montreal.

The First Tee program has made a proposal to work with the Park Board to expand the access for the use of other courses and make the Rupert Park Pitch and Putt the designated “Home of the First Tee Vancouver “program. The key elements of the proposal are the following:

- Renovate the old pro shop to act as the base for the program
- Enlarge the 9th hole putting green for the teaching of the short game and putting
- Install a synthetic turf area for a First Tee driving range
- Remediate the 15th hole which has been out of service for 3 years
- Install signage indicating the course is the “Home of the First Tee Vancouver“ chapter
- After school programs and summer camps

The First Tee would provide the funding estimated as up to \$80,000 over the next three years to implement the above improvements. If approved the work would begin in the fall of 2013.

As a part of the agreement with the Park Board the First Tee would have limited use of the front nine holes of the Rupert Park course for the teaching of youth from the ages of 7-18. The use of this area would be focused on historically slow time periods and seasons. During the programming time the public would have the option of playing the remaining 9 holes at a reduced rate or playing the 9 holes twice at the current rate.

The benefits to the community would include:

- A fully functioning 18 hole Pitch and Putt course at Rupert Park
- Local community access to the First Tee program within easy walking or cycling distance
- Increased access to courses and qualified instruction
- Through programs such as KIdSafe, Aboriginal Education Program and Big Brothers/Big Sisters facilitate the transportation to the courses and First Tee/YMCA provides scholarships to cover the cost of the First Tee activities

SUMMARY

Due to the significant drop in utilization in the winter most other municipalities operate their pitch and putt courses seasonally and generally from April thru October. During this winter season from November 2012 to February, 2013 there were a total of 84 days where no revenue was generated at the three Park Board pitch and putt courses.

The recommendation for the effective and efficient operations of the Pitch & Putts throughout the year is to offer full services during the summer season and provide weather permitting open community access during the winter season.

The First Tee proposal offers an excellent opportunity to increase the direct utilization of the Rupert Park Pitch and Putt and over the longer term introduce more youth to the sport of golf and encourage their use of all Park Board golf operations in the future.

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