



Date: July 13, 2015

TO: Park Board Chair and Commissioners
FROM: General Manager - Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation
SUBJECT: Creating Greater Community Engagement

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Vancouver Park Board hold a Town Hall meeting in early October 2015, in a location yet to be determined, as a pilot for a series of community meetings to be held in different quadrants of the city; and

FURTHER THAT the October pilot be reviewed and public feedback sought to plan three additional Town Hall meetings in 2016.

POLICY

One of the four key priorities in the Vancouver Park Board's Strategic Framework for 2013-17 is "Engaging People".

BACKGROUND

In 2003, the Park Board made a decision to take some of its meetings out into the communities to increase public participation and make it easier for residents to attend meetings which are normally held at 2099 Beach Avenue in Stanley Park. At the time it was considered by the Board as a pilot project which could possibly see more scheduled for next year. These meetings were generally well attended and regarded as successful, however this practice was discontinued in 2011 as other priorities emerged.

On February 16, 2015, the Park Board indicated that it wished to revive the tradition of taking the Board to the community, and they passed a motion titled "Creating Greater Community Engagement", which directed staff to work on a plan to take Park Board meetings or open house sessions to different neighbourhoods across the City a minimum of twice per year, giving priority to facilities under Park Board jurisdiction. This motion referenced the 2014-18 Board's Inaugural Meeting held offsite at VanDusen Botanical Gardens along with the planned online streaming of Park Board meetings (launched on April 27, 2015), as examples of expanding access and enhancing transparency of Board decisions.

In April 2015, staff provided a progress report update on the community engagement plan. Staff recommended a community meeting be held in the fall of 2015, piloting a Town Hall format that would include a large group discussion lead by an experienced facilitator, with opportunities for small table break-out discussions with a role for each Commissioner. To further refine the approach, it was recommended that the suggested format go to community consultation with a small stakeholder group who could provide feedback on the concept and assist in refining a list of topics. It is envisioned that the report from this first Town Hall event will inform planning of future community engagement efforts, and factor into development of future Park Board policies and programs.

DISCUSSION

In 1998, Vancouver City Council and the Park Board adopted the following “Guiding Principles for Public Participation”:

Public participation provides citizens who are affected by, or interested in, a civic decision with opportunities to participate in the decision making process in order to improve the resulting decision, plan or protest. The goal is to make better decision that maximize public benefit, minimize negative impact, satisfy a wide range of stakeholders and are easier to implement.

With these goals in mind, staff considered how best to create greater community engagement through the holding of Park Board meetings in the community. On June 17, 2015, staff met with representatives from Trout Lake and Dunbar Community Centre Associations, Jericho Sailing Centre and Brock House to seek feedback on how best to proceed with the Board’s direction. This stakeholder feedback can be summarized as follows:

- provide informal Town Hall meeting format rather than formal Board meeting;
- be prepared to present Park Board direction to partners and participants, and be transparent about intentions and criteria for choosing topics and locations;
- be clear that the first meeting will be a pilot for the proposed Town Hall format; it will guide the planning for additional meetings which will be held in areas that are representative of city geography and demographics;
- consider grouping communities or centres together - e.g. Killarney and Champlain have much the same demographics;
- pick big issues of City-wide interest such as: facilities renewal, changing demographics in recreation, water sports, gardens (how best to spend Park Board gardening dollars) urban forests (how do citizens support tree planting goals), corporate sponsorship of assets, etc;
- provide opportunity for community members to submit questions in advance
- provide subject-matter experts as a resource to the public and Commissioners
- use Talk Vancouver survey to get feedback on pilot meeting and present to Board to guide decision making on format, process, and topic selection for future community engagement efforts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Staff recommend moving forward with a community hosted Town Hall meeting that offers a facilitated discussion on an issue of significant community concern. Although past practice involved holding regular meetings at various community centres, staff advise that relocating these meetings would impede access to Park Board decisions since live online streaming is now available for meetings held in the Park Board boardroom.

NEXT STEPS

July 2015 - Using stakeholder feedback as a guide, issue a broad call to all Community Centre Associations, partners, and stakeholders asking for an expression of interest in holding a Park Board Town Hall Meeting as a pilot in early October 2015. Indicate that expressions of interest should be submitted to staff by August 15, 2015

August 2015 - Assess expressions of interest in pilot project for suitability and decide on several potential partners; in consultation with senior staff, meet with potential partners to review possible hosting agreements and cost sharing arrangements; once host has been chosen, review topic selection, draft hosting agreement and strike organizing committee.

September 2015 - Provide status update to the Board outlining host, topic selection, facilitator, and event details; advertising and publicity begins for the Park Board Town Hall meeting.

October 2015 - Hold evening Town Hall meeting in early October; date and location to be determined.

Fall 2015 - Develop 2016 plan for additional Town Hall meetings in geographically and demographically diverse neighbourhoods of the City (guided by Town Hall pilot meeting outcomes).

SUMMARY

The Park Board motion to “Create Greater Community Engagement” represents an opportunity to increase public awareness and access and strengthen community connections. A Town Hall meeting on an issue of broad public interest, with an engaged and committed partner, will encourage positive dialogue with a diversity of voices that can inform future policies and programs. Feedback from this event, both in terms of topic and process, will be used to guide the planning of additional Town Hall meetings in 2016.

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