



May 9, 2017

TO: Park Board Chair and Commissioners
FROM: General Manager - Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation
SUBJECT: Downtown Skateboard Park - Interim Relocation Engagement Process

RECOMMENDATION

- A. THAT the Vancouver Park Board approve the engagement process proposed for the location and conceptual design of an interim street-style skateboard park to temporarily replace the Downtown Skateboard Park as described in this report; and
- B. FURTHER THAT staff report back to the Board on the findings of this engagement for approval of the location, prior to the development of the facility.

OVERVIEW

The Downtown Skateboard Park is a skateboard facility located on City of Vancouver land that was designed, constructed, and is currently managed by the Vancouver Park Board. The City's plan to [remove the Georgia and Dunsmuir viaducts](#) and reconfigure Pacific Boulevard will result in the removal of the skateboard facility. A new facility will be constructed in the redesigned Andy Livingstone Park as part of the North East False Creek project. This report outlines the efforts by Park Board staff to locate and construct an interim recreational skateboard facility on another City owned property in order to compensate for the loss of the Downtown Skateboard Park.

Relevant guiding documents include the [Vancouver Sport Strategy](#) (2008), [Skateboard Strategy for Vancouver](#) (2005), and aspects of the [Park Board Strategic Framework](#) (2012) as follows:

Parks and Recreation for All

- 1.3 Enhanced Participation and Active Living
- 2.2 Sport for Life

Engaging People - Community

- 6.1 Active Community Participation
- 6.2 Improved Communication and Engagement
- 6.3 Open and Approachable Organization

BACKGROUND

In October 2015, Vancouver City Council [approved in principle the removal and replacement of the Georgia and Dunsmuir viaducts](#), and approved the Northeast False Creek (NEFC) Conceptual Plan. A final decision on whether to proceed with viaducts replacement is anticipated to be before City Council in late 2017, when they consider a new area plan for NEFC, associated public benefits strategy, and a street and utility design package.

Northeast False Creek is one of the largest undeveloped areas in the downtown peninsula. It is home to a diverse range of people of all ages, incomes, and ethnicities. Over the last 20 years, the population has grown from 260 residents in 1996 to 6,303 in 2016. The 20-39 age group is consistently the largest and is almost double the proportion (67%) of the city overall (34%). It is expected that the new neighbourhood could include approximately 10,000 - 12,000 new residents when completed.

The City of Vancouver and Vancouver Park Board staff, in collaboration with numerous stakeholders and with support from external consultants, has been studying the NEFC area for several years, with a specific focus on the most appropriate structure plan (network of streets and associated infrastructure), the renewal of existing parks and creation of a significant new waterfront park. Staff will be bringing the NEFC Area Plan to Council in late 2017 for decision on whether to proceed with the project.

The plan to remove and replace the Georgia and Dunsmuir viaducts has opened up an opportunity to reimagine the completion of the eastern basin of False Creek, including the creation of new Creekside Park extension and the renewal of Andy Livingstone Park. While the replacement street network represents a tremendous opportunity for the development of high quality greenspace in downtown Vancouver, the realignment of Pacific Ave will require the removal of the Downtown Skateboard Park, commonly referred to as “Skate Plaza” or “the Plaza”.

Skateboarding is one of the fastest growing sports in North America and offers opportunities for flexible self-motivated creative recreation that is accessible to a wide variety of individual users for little cost. The International Olympic Committee recently announced that park terrain skateboarding would be included as an event in the 2020 Olympics in Tokyo which shows both international recognition and acceptance of the sport as well as showing a need for the development of high quality training facilities.

Data from Statistics Canada's National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth shows that participation in team sports tends to peak around age 10 and drops off considerably after the age of 20. As a self-directed sport, skateboarding often follows a different trend and extends into adulthood because it is an unstructured, flexible and adaptable activity with low barriers to participation.

The Skate Plaza is a 2,000 m² (21,500 ft²) premier, partially covered skateboarding outdoor facility. It currently sits in a large triangular traffic island beneath the Georgia and Dunsmuir viaducts at the south-west corner of Quebec Street and Union Street (see Figures 1 & 2). The Plaza is owned by the City of Vancouver and is maintained, programmed and administered by the Park Board.

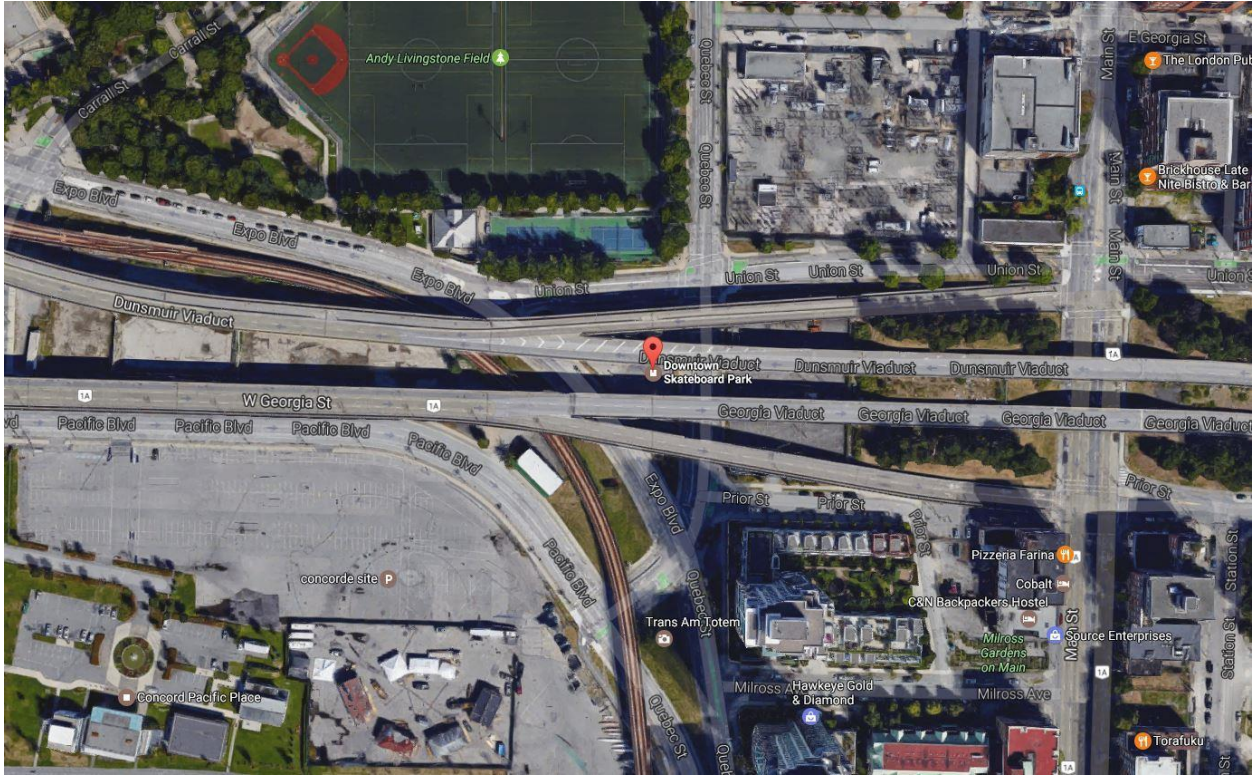


Figure 1. Existing Skate Plaza Location



Figure 2. Existing Skate Plaza beneath Georgia and Dunsmuir viaducts

The street-style Skate Plaza was developed in 2004 by the Park Board to provide skateboarders with a safe alternative to skateboarding on the downtown streets and

sidewalks. It has since become a local social hub and recreation spot for skateboarders and has gained recognition as a citywide and international destination. In 2011, the Plaza was upgraded to provide additional skate features for improved programming. The success of the Plaza is based on several factors that are to be considered in the placement and design of the interim facility including:

- its proximity to downtown;
- the inclusion of cover (from the viaducts);
- the use of high quality durable street-style features;
- large size;
- accessibility to a wide range of users with varying skills and abilities; and
- the fact that the space is open and highly visible to passersby.

A survey on the Plaza was conducted in 2016 (Downtown Skateboard Plaza User Survey) and includes survey data, trends, and analysis related to users and the Plaza, and other skateboard facilities city-wide (Appendix A). Over 2,200 users participated in the survey from around the world. Key findings from the survey include that the majority of respondents list the Plaza as their favourite skate park in the city and it offers a sense of community unlike any other park. Other findings include:

- If the Plaza were unavailable (construction/demolition of the viaducts) skaters are most likely to use the streets of Vancouver as an alternate skating location
- While skateboarding still tends to be a male dominated activity, skaters over 35 years old is a growing demographic and is becoming an activity shared between children and parents
- Most users (+60%) visit the site more than once week for up to 3 hours per visit

The existing Skate Plaza is expected to be decommissioned as part of the viaduct replacement phasing with construction impacting the use of the space by 2019-2020. A new permanent Skate Plaza will be rebuilt as part of the renewal of Andy Livingstone Park, and is estimated to be built between 2021 and 2025. In order to compensate for the displacement of this well-used recreational amenity for an extended period (i.e. several years), an interim street-style skate facility is to be designed and constructed in time for the removal of the viaducts and the construction of the new street network.

Vancouver currently has eight other skateboard facilities including China Creek South, Kensington Park, Hastings Park, Leaside Tunnel, Strathcona Park, Quilchena Park, Coopers Park and Mount Pleasant Park. The newest skate park located at Mount Pleasant Park, completed in 2012, was upgraded with a new sound barrier in 2015 that is performing well. The existing facility at Quilchena Park will be undergoing a renewal in 2017. The renewal will include repairs to existing features and the addition of some new features within the existing footprint.

DISCUSSION

The [NEFC Emerging Directions for Area Plan](#) (January 2017) notes that the project will “establish at least 15 acres of new parks, public open spaces and hard surface recreation space” and will “replace and improve the Skateboard Plaza”. The NEFC Park Design led by

the consultant, James Corner Field Operations, is currently exploring the location and size of the permanent Skate Plaza in the new and redesigned park space in NEFC.

During public engagement, the NEFC team noted that an interim space would be provided “while construction in the area is completed” (Open House Fall 2016 Imagine the Future of NEFC).

The interim skateboarding facility should be of similar size, provide cover (similar to Skate Plaza), have “street” style skate features, and be located within reasonable proximity to the existing Skate Plaza. Additional location criteria for this facility include the guidelines outlined in the Vancouver Skateboard Strategy such as adjacency to transit, good sightlines, and minimizing impact on residential neighbours. Recent feedback from the skateboard community notes the preference to have skateparks in highly visible locations in order to dispel stigmas that skateparks are hubs for unwanted social activities. Existing homelessness and drug use challenges at Andy Livingstone Park and the Plaza are being managed separately from this process.

Park Board staff have identified several City-owned sites as possible locations for the interim facility and are in discussions with City staff about access to these sites. Noise can be an issue of concern for residents living in proximity to skateboard areas, and therefore site selection is focussed on locations as far away from residences as possible.

Funding for the interim facility will be provided through the NEFC capital budget as part of the overall NEFC public realm enhancements; the project represents a sizeable investment. It is estimated that the facility will be in place for at least 5 years, while the new park is constructed, and therefore utilizing a truly portable facility is not practical as it would not be durable enough. Preference has therefore been given to underutilized spaces including spaces underneath bridges and other roadways that have the potential to serve as long term facilities.

The siting and design of the interim facility are to be decided through an engagement process which includes the public and stakeholder groups. Development of the interim skate facility has been broken into two phases:

Phase 1 - Engagement and Concept Design

A Request for Proposal (RFP) will be issued to retain a multidisciplinary team comprised of designers, engagement specialists, and skate park designers to:

- a. evaluate three candidate sites identified by staff in order to determine the location that best meets criteria provided
- b. facilitate public engagement to review the potential locations as well as identify desired skate features and themes
- c. develop two conceptual skate park designs for the preferred site for public comment
- d. use public feedback to finalize a concept plan for the new facility

Engagement is to include two public open houses and eight stakeholder meetings, which will include the Vancouver Skateboard Coalition, local Business Improvement Associations, Community Centre Associations, schools, community police, nearby residents and business owners as required.

The RFP for Phase 1 is expected to be issued mid-2017 and the concept design is to be completed in early 2018. A proposed location and conceptual design for the interim facility will be brought to the Park Board for consideration of approval, prior to proceeding with Phase 2.

Phase 2 - Interim Facility Implementation

A design/build RFP will be issued to retain a skateboard facility designer to further detail the approved concept plan and construct the skate park if the project is approved by the Board.

The RFP for phase 2 is to be issued in 2018 and construction is targeted to be complete prior to the viaduct replacement construction phasing that impacts the Skate Plaza.

SUMMARY

The Vancouver Skateboard Park is a popular, internationally renowned skate facility that provides high quality recreation close to downtown.

The existing Skate Plaza is expected to be decommissioned as part of the viaduct replacement phasing with construction impacting the use of the space by 2019 or 2020. A new Skate Plaza will be rebuilt as part of the renewal of Andy Livingstone Park which is estimated to be built between 2021 and 2025.

The loss of this amenity would leave thousands of users without a safe space to engage in an independent, active, and social sport. The development of an interim facility is critical to ensuring existing service levels are maintained during the planning and development of the NEFC parks while supporting initiatives related “Park and Recreation for All” from the Park Board’s Strategic Plan.

The engagement plan and stakeholder facilitation identified in this report to locate and design the interim facility have been developed to support principles related to engagement identified in the Strategic Plan including “Active Community Participation” and “Improved Communication and Engagement”. Should the Board approve the proposed project process, staff will initiate the consultant procurement process immediately and report back to the Board at the conclusion of the work in 2018.

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