



May 6, 2019

TO: Park Board Chair and Commissioners
FROM: General Manager – Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation
SUBJECT: Special Event Guidelines – Proposed Update & Interim Direction

RECOMMENDATION

- A. THAT the Vancouver Park Board direct staff to update the Park Board’s Special Event Guidelines, which were last updated and approved in 2003, to address current issues and ensure alignment with the values and principles of the Park Board, and to better support Vancouver’s event community; and
- B. FURTHER THAT, in the interim, the Board clarify its perspectives and principles regarding commercial events and activities in parks and direct staff to:
- Option 1* - continue with the existing Park Board practice of reviewing, assessing, and enabling commercial events and activities as applications and proposals are received.
- or*
- Option 2* - maintain and support the existing Park Board portfolio of commercial events and activities, but issue a moratorium on the introduction of any new commercial initiatives until after the Special Event Guidelines have been updated and approved by the Board.

REPORT SUMMARY

Vancouver parks are home to approximately 1,300 events and activations annually. The Park Board’s Special Event Guidelines provide the framework for delegating access to event organizers, operationalizing event initiatives, and supporting the event community. The current framework was introduced in 2003 and is in need of an update to better support events of all sizes (improve access, reduce barriers, etc.), tackle emerging issues, and better address the pressures/demands for commercial event and activity space in the city. The purpose of this report is to provide the Park Board with an overview of its current special event portfolio, review some key challenges/limitations of the existing Special Event Guidelines framework, seek Board approval to update the framework, and obtain clarity on the Board’s position with respect to accommodating ongoing and increasing applications/proposals for commercial event and activity space during the update process.

BOARD AUTHORITY / POLICY / PREVIOUS DECISIONS

Per the [Vancouver Charter](#), the Park Board has exclusive jurisdiction and control over park land use in the City of Vancouver, including any events, activities, programs, fees, structures, and improvements that occur within designated parks.

On November 20, 2003, the Board approved the current [Special Event Guidelines](#) framework.

On January 23, 2017, the Board unanimously approved a motion titled [Permits and Special Events](#), which directed staff to review its permitting process and to consult with community groups, interested individuals, stakeholders, and partners on actions that can be taken to address community concerns.

On March 12, 2018, the Board unanimously approved a motion titled [Safety at Concerts and Major Events](#), which directed staff to consult with interested groups and to implement a policy requiring that safety measures for women and other at risk groups be included in future contracts with music festival and concert organizers, and to encourage organizers of already approved events to adopt such measures voluntarily.

BACKGROUND

Special Events in Parks

Civic open spaces such as parks and plazas are popular locations for entertainment and celebrations of all natures and sizes. These activities fall within the Park Board's mission of providing a wide variety of leisure opportunities for Vancouverites, and range in size from events that engage hundreds to initiatives that engage tens of thousands of residents and visitors. The spectrum of activities includes picnics, weddings, runs and walks, sporting events, community celebrations and festivals, music concerts, arts and cultural events, and vendor markets.

Special events are held in two distinct categories of park space:

- those organized and delivered in publicly accessible and free locations; and
- those organized and delivered in admission-based sites or in leased spaces (such as VanDusen Botanical Garden and Malkin Bowl, respectively).

Current Special Event Framework

Delegating use of an open, public park location to an event organizer, including commercial activities, is accomplished by applying the Park Board's Special Event Guidelines. This framework, approved by the Park Board in 2003, sets out the permit application requirements for event organizers, defines the process for evaluation and selection, and informs event terms and conditions. When required, the Board is called upon to approve select special events (typically initiatives not included in the organization's annual Calendar of Major Special Events and/or for events that are in variance with one or more Park Board by-laws). Key pillars of the Special Event Guidelines, specifically the goals/objectives of the current framework, the key assessment/evaluation criteria, and the prioritization hierarchy for allocation of event space, are summarized below.

Goals/Objectives

- Promote a diverse range of activities and opportunities;
- Ensure fair and equitable access to parks;
- Balance needs of casual and organized park users, event participants as well as park neighbours;
- Ensure efficient and effective use of park space while at the same time protecting and preserving park environments; and
- Ensure events are conducted in a safe and responsible manner.

Assessment/Evaluation Criteria

- Event alignment with Park Board mandate;
- Suitability of a particular location to accommodate an event;
- Stakeholder feedback (residents, park users/partners, Park Board staff, etc.);
- Impact on park visitors/user experiences;
- Market/user appeal and need for event or service;
- Visual impacts;
- Accessibility (physical and economic); and
- Net benefits (public/community benefits, economic, etc.).

Allocation Priorities for Event Space

- First Priority: Park Board activities;
- Second Priority: Park Board partners (community associations, Stanley Park Ecology Society, etc.), other government agencies, school board, etc.;
- Third Priority: Non-profit organization whose event is primarily of interest to the general public;
- Fourth Priority: Non-profit or private group whose event is of primary interest to the organization; and
- Fifth Priority: Commercial initiative (an event/activity organized for profit).

Event Types & Distribution

The Park Board's role in supporting special events is primarily that of a host venue or location. To this end, the Park Board issues approximately 1,300 permits annually for special events and other activities. Approximately 94% of the Park Board's annual events are recurring; the remaining 6% are new initiatives. Excluding picnics and weddings, the vast majority of events are public and support charitable, non-profit, and/or community initiatives. A very small number of events, although often high profile in nature, are commercial or private initiatives.

While the term 'event' is used generically to describe a wide range of activities, in practice, events can be very unique, both within and across event categories. As a result, the required Park Board staff support varies considerably across event initiatives. Smaller events such as picnics and weddings can be delivered with relatively low staff involvement (where key tasks would include ensuring space is suitable for proposed activity, validating space availability, outlining insurance requirements, collecting applicable fees, etc.). Conversely, large events require significant staff oversight and resources. Park Board staff are responsible for delivering the services required of smaller events but are also actively involved in supporting various permitting requirements, delivery of food services, structures (stages, video towers/equipment, etc.), event power (generators, green power), licensed areas, detailed event plans, and both Festival Expediting Staff Team Committee (FEST Committee) and Park Board approvals. The FEST Committee is made up of representatives from the Vancouver Police Department,

Vancouver Fire & Rescue Services, Park Board special events and park operations teams, City of Vancouver special events, traffic management and licencing & permits departments, Vancouver Coastal Health, BC Ambulance Service, and BC Liquor Control & Licensing Branch.

Not surprisingly, the lead times required to process and deliver smaller and simpler events is much different than the planning horizon for larger and more complex events. A general baseline is provided below:

- Smaller and simpler events – 2 months;
- Events with licensed areas – 6 months;
- Events taking place on multiple jurisdictions (e.g. Park Board, City, Metro Vancouver, CHMC, etc.) – 6 months; and
- Large events or concerts with significant production and talent booking requirements – 18 months or more.

Park Board staff are also responsible for developing and delivering an increasing amount of Park Board organized events such as Bright Nights in Stanley Park, Holiday Heights at Bloedel, Festival of Lights at VanDusen, Symphony at Sunset, and many others. Third party permitted events, particularly commercial initiatives, help to fund the Park Board led initiatives referenced above and contribute to Park Board general revenues to support overall operations.

The figures below provide a breakdown of the distribution by event type and the distribution by revenue for initiatives taking place in Vancouver parks in 2018.

Figure 1 – Distribution by Event Type/Category

Event Type/Category	Number of Events	% Distribution
Picnics (private events)	738	58%
Community Events & Celebrations (charitable/non-profit) <i>(e.g. Paws for a Cause, Ovarian Cancer Walk of Hope, RBC Race for the Kids, Punjabi Mela, Earth Dance, McSpadden County Fair, etc.)</i>	271	21%
Weddings & Other Events (private events) <i>(e.g. Beedie Rock 'n' Park)</i>	103	8%
Sporting Events (charitable/non-profit) <i>(e.g. Asahi Tournament, Coho Run, James Cunningham Seawall Run, BMO Vancouver Marathon, Wheelchair Tennis Tournament, Dragonboat Festival, etc.)</i>	103	8%
Vendor Markets (farmers markets) <i>(e.g. Riley Park, Trout Lake, Kitsilano, Thornton, Hillcrest, etc.)</i>	24	2%
Festivals & Concerts (charitable/non-profit) <i>(e.g. KitsFest, Folk Fest, Bard on the Beach, Powell Street Festival, African Descent Festival, Festival of India, Pride Sunset Beach Festival, etc.)</i>	17	1%
Commercial Events (concerts, sporting events, etc.) <i>(e.g. Lululemon SeaWheeze, Diner en Blanc, SKOOKUM, Bacio Rosso, GranFondo, The Park Show, MEC Vancouver Road Race, etc.)</i>	15	1%
Total	1,271	100%

Figure 2 – Distribution by Revenues

Event Type/Category	Event Revenues	% Distribution
Commercial Events (concerts, sporting events, etc.) <i>(e.g. Lululemon SeaWheeze, Diner en Blanc, SKOOKUM, Bacio Rosso, GranFondo, The Park Show, MEC Vancouver Road Race, etc.)</i>	238,550	44%
Picnics (private events)	79,090	15%
Community Events & Celebrations (charitable/non-profit) <i>(e.g. Paws for a Cause, Ovarian Cancer Walk of Hope, RBC Race for the Kids, Punjabi Mela, Earth Dance, McSpadden County Fair, etc.)</i>	71,432	13%
Sporting Events (charitable/non-profit) <i>(e.g. Asahi Tournament, Coho Run, James Cunningham Seawall Run, BMO Vancouver Marathon, Wheelchair Tennis Tournament, Dragonboat Festival, etc.)</i>	54,581	10%
Weddings & Other Events (private events) <i>(e.g. Beedie Rock 'n' Park)</i>	45,595	8%
Festivals & Concerts (charitable/non-profit) <i>(e.g. KitsFest, Folk Fest, Bard on the Beach, Powell Street Festival, African Descent Festival, Festival of India, Pride Sunset Beach Festival, etc.)</i>	45,082	8%
Vendor Markets (farmers markets) <i>(e.g. Riley Park, Trout Lake, Kitsilano, Thornton, Hillcrest, etc.)</i>	9,183	2%
Total	543,513	100%

In addition to the sanctioned activities referenced above, numerous unsanctioned and unpermitted events also take place in parks annually, many of them coordinated via social media (e.g. Pokemon Go, dog and car meet-ups, etc.). Vancouver parks are also home to several rally and protest initiatives.

Impacts of Special Events

The direct and indirect impact that events have on communities are important in a number of different ways. On the positive side, special events contribute towards making Vancouver a fun and vibrant city and generate a range of benefits, including:

- Supporting diversity, inclusion, accessibility, and cultural vibrancy;
- Encouraging social connections and activity by bringing people together;
- Fostering skills development and community building;
- Drawing people together and activating new places and spaces;
- Enabling fundraising opportunities; and
- Supporting tourism and regional economic development.

On the flip side, special events can also create some negative impacts or externalities. These can include:

- Loss of public space use during event periods;

- Competing uses/conflicts between stakeholders;
- Environmental impacts such as sound and light emissions, increased traffic, congestions, etc.; and
- Damage to grass and other park assets.

One of the key responsibilities of the Park Board special events team is to ensure that positive impacts are maximized and that conflicts or negative impacts are mitigated or eliminated altogether. The latter can be minimized considerably by properly understanding the impacts associated with the delivery of key event initiatives, placing events in appropriate locations, and by scheduling events at acceptable frequencies and times.

DISCUSSION

Need for Updated Special Event Guidelines

While staff continue to utilize and apply the Park Board's current Special Event Guidelines, they are dated and increasingly mismatched to meet present day needs and requirements, both from a Park Board as well as event industry perspective. As a result, two motions have been approved by the Board in recent years aimed at addressing stakeholder concerns and feedback directed at the Park Board's special event framework. In addition, many operational practices have also shifted or evolved organically in recent years to better address market requirements. Consequently, a comprehensive update is needed to better address public, industry, and Park Board objectives, as well as address emerging issues and market pressures, including:

- ***Vancouver Market Conditions / Pressure on Event Space***

As Vancouver continues to grow and develop, many spaces that previously hosted events and activities, particularly commercial initiatives, are now being used for other purposes (e.g. Cavalia site, Concord lands, Larwill Park, etc.). Looking to the future, these pressures are not expected to subside and it's anticipated that other locations within the city may be removed from the inventory of event venues/locations. As a result, event organizers are increasingly looking to park spaces as potential event sites, particularly for commercial initiatives. The attractiveness of our park locations, especially those located along the waterfront or in close proximity to the downtown core, will continue to draw the attention of the event industry.

- ***Growth of the Event/Festival Sector***

Events and festivals are one of the fastest growing forms of tourism, and they play important roles in destination development, animators of public/static spaces, and are catalysts for many other benefits. This growth trend is expected to continue, and when combined with the loss of other historical event locations in Vancouver, will further exacerbate pressures for hosting events in parks.

- ***Commercial Events and Activities***

Due to the abovementioned market trends/pressures, the Park Board is receiving more unsolicited proposals for commercial events, activities and business services than ever before. Given the limitations of the existing framework, Park Board staff have been using a gating approach to review, assess, and advance appropriate applications/proposals as they emerge. While this process has produced some positive results, it can be time consuming for both staff and the applicant, and can result in staff having to make judgement calls without Board direction on how to proceed with unsolicited proposals. An updated special event framework will provide greater clarity surrounding the Board's

perspectives and principles related to commercial activities in parks, and improved procedures to address these opportunities.

- **Park Board Reconciliation Strategy**

The Park Board formally adopted a new [Reconciliation Strategy](#) in early 2016. This strategy is more than a ceremonial acknowledgement of First Nations territories. Rather, it represents a significant step in the Park Board's effort to resolve historical and complex political, social, economic, and cultural issues and relationships related to Indigenous peoples. It also creates an opportunity for the Park Board to partner with the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations to preserve spiritually and archeologically significant places. An updated special event framework will take into account Park Board and First Nations considerations, including but not limited to establishing approval processes for activities at sensitive sites, determining appropriateness/compatibility of events at these locations, establishing conditions of use, etc.

Project Timeline and Scope

Notwithstanding the reasons outlined above, moving forward with an update of the Park Board's Special Event Guidelines at this time would be opportune since the City of Vancouver is going through a similar exercise to update their Special Event Policy framework. As a result, proceeding with an update of our Special Event Guidelines would allow for strategic alignment in applicable and appropriate areas between the City and Park Board.

In order to update the Park Board's Special Event Guidelines, it is anticipated that several important components of work will need to be completed, including but not limited to the following tasks:

- Review of best/comparative practices in other cities, with a specific focus on commercial events and activities;
- Stakeholder engagement (residents, event organizers and other stakeholders);
- Review and update of Special Event Guidelines, paying particular attention to commercial events and activities;
- Review of Park Board fee structure; and
- Review of Park Board event space allocation approach.

It is anticipated that it will take approximately 12 months to complete this initiative. While the project is underway, it is expected that staff will continue to receive unsolicited applications/proposals for new commercial events and activities in park locations. In order to provide applicants with accurate information and properly manage expectations, staff are seeking to obtain clarity from the Board regarding their values and principles with respect to commercial initiatives in parks. Specifically, staff are seeking direction from the Board through one of the following two options:

Option 1 - *continue with the existing Park Board practice of reviewing, assessing, and enabling commercial events and activities as applications and proposals are received.*

Under this option, Park Board staff would continue to bring forward market-based opportunities for Park Board consideration and potential approval. These opportunities could include but would not be limited to new music concerts, special exhibitions, vendor

markets, and/or new experiences (such as ziplines, unique dining services, aerial playgrounds, etc.).

Option 2 - maintain and support the existing Park Board portfolio of commercial events and activities, but issue a moratorium on the introduction of any new commercial initiatives until after the Special Event Guidelines have been updated and approved by the Board.

Under this option, Park Board staff would continue to review, assess, and enable all event categories with the exception of commercial events and activities. Accordingly, any applications for new concerts, special exhibitions, vendor markets and/or new experiences would not be advanced until the introduction of the Park Board's new Special Event Guidelines.

NEXT STEPS

Subject to Board approval of the recommendations outlined above, Park Board staff will develop a detailed project plan and initiate the process to update the organization's Special Event Guidelines. Concurrent with that work, Park Board staff will follow the approach selected by the Board with respect to Option 1 or Option 2 as presented in the preceding section.

CONCLUSION

Close to 1,300 sanctioned events and activities are held annually in Vancouver parks. The Park Board's Special Event Guidelines provide the framework for approving, delegating access, and operationalizing these initiatives. Last updated and approved in 2003, these guidelines no longer meet the needs of the Park Board and the event community. Given the changing dynamics of the Vancouver market place and the increasing pressure to accommodate new events and activities, many of them commercial in nature, Park Board staff are recommending that the organization's Special Event Guidelines be updated. Concurrent with this recommendation, staff are also seeking clarity on the Board's values and willingness to accommodate new commercial events and activities during the period in which the guidelines are being updated.

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