



June 28, 2019

TO: Park Board Chair and Commissioners
FROM: General Manager – Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation
SUBJECT: West End Waterfront Masterplan – Project Approach

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Vancouver Park Board approve the key themes and scope of work to inform the West End Waterfront Masterplan, which will include Alexandra Park, English Bay, Morton Park, Sunset Beach Park, and the adjacent road network in the study area.

REPORT SUMMARY

As the West End community grows in population, demand for public space for both active and passive uses is increasing, putting pressure on the existing park systems, infrastructure, and surrounding transportation networks. One of the most popular and well-visited series of parks and public spaces in Vancouver is the English Bay and Sunset Beach Park shoreline areas. To anticipate growth and increased demand, while also preserving and enhancing the qualities of the West End waterfront that make it so spectacular, a comprehensive masterplan to provide a consistent planning and design approach is required.

The West End Waterfront Masterplan project, co-led by the Park Board and the City of Vancouver Engineering Department, aims to strategically and holistically identify priorities for improvements to the park system and surrounding transportation network, and enable genuine collaboration with Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations. The draft scope of work outlined in this report has been developed to reflect the need to address key themes and considerations related to park uses, accessibility, safety, operations, ecological conditions, climate change resilience, seawall conflicts, and traffic congestion, all of which impact the overall park experience.

Subject to the Board's approval of the key themes and scope of work proposed for the masterplan, a Request for Proposals will be prepared and distributed to a shortlist of qualified consultants identified through the procurement process, with the masterplan work anticipated to begin in December 2019.

BOARD AUTHORITY / POLICY / PREVIOUS DECISIONS

As per the [Vancouver Charter](#), the Park Board has jurisdiction and control over the use of Vancouver parks, which includes all structures, activities, and improvements within those parks.

The [Vancouver Biodiversity Strategy](#) (2016) outlines key principles including maintaining ecological processes (restore habitats and species), connect citizens to natural areas in the city and celebrate biodiversity through education & stewardship

The [People, Parks & Dogs Strategy](#) (2018) provides a framework for the next ten years and beyond, to deliver well-planned and designed parks that accommodate park users with and without dogs and minimize conflict.

[Reconciliation Mission, Vision, and Values \(2018\)](#) to guide and support the implementation of the Park Board's [eleven Reconciliation Strategies](#) (2016).

[On Water](#), Vancouver's Non-Motorized Boating Strategy (June 2019) will guide the future direction, implementation, and delivery of non-motorized watercraft recreation.

[VanPlay](#), Vancouver's Parks and Recreations Services Masterplan includes [10 Goals to Shape the Next 25 Years](#) (Reports 1 & 2 approved in July of 2018; Reports 3 & 4 to be presented to the Board for approval in 2019).

The [West End Community Plan](#) (City Council in 2013) identifies potential improvements to the West End to support parks, public space and transportation objectives. These improvements are listed in the Public Benefits Strategy (PBS) which provides 10 and 30 year priorities, and a funding formula for each service category

BACKGROUND

Context

The West End neighbourhood waterfront precinct is one of the most popular and well-visited series of parks and public spaces in Vancouver. Lined with iconic destinations and vistas that define the Vancouver experience, the area features the continuous Seaside Greenway, vibrant and expansive beaches, and sweeping views of English Bay, the Salish Sea and Vancouver Island beyond. The stretch of shoreline known as English Bay and Sunset Beach Park is located within the unceded traditional territories of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Nations and represents a significant place to their people. It is expected that this masterplan will deeply consider the acknowledgement that this waterfront area is on unceded territories and that it will involve extensive engagement and collaboration with the three Nations.

Today, English Bay remains a significant location to residents and visitors, and is considered to be one of the top destinations in the City for outdoor public use. The waterfront park system lines the southwestern edge of the West End community, one of the densest neighbourhoods in all of Canada, and draws crowds in the thousands each day of the year as the City's premier sunset watching spot. Uniquely situated among Vancouver's top attractions, the waterfront parks also serve as a preeminent connection for people walking and cycling as part of the larger Seaside Greenway (Seawall) system that runs along the perimeter of the Downtown Peninsula, Stanley Park, and False Creek.

The population of the West End community is anticipated to increase steadily over the coming years. This population growth, compounded with regional population growth and tourism growth at roughly 4% annually, will result in increasing demand on green spaces and beaches. In order to anticipate this growth and avoid overcrowding of amenities like concessions and washrooms, and congestion on the Seawall and local transportation systems, a masterplan is needed to rethink the park uses, transportation functions, and infrastructure of the West End waterfront in a coordinated manner.

Purpose of the Masterplan

The purpose of the project is to develop a comprehensive masterplan that anticipates growth and increased demand while preserving and enhancing the qualities of the West End waterfront that make it so spectacular. The Plan will provide a consistent planning and design approach for the implementation of all improvements needed to both the parks and surrounding transportation networks of the West End waterfront, phased over time. The plan will build upon the West End Community Plan and the information collected from previous strategies from the West End neighbourhood.

The parks and beaches are managed by the Park Board, while Engineering Services has responsibility for the street and public rights-of-way. A number of issues have been identified related to general degradation of park lands in this area, including environmental and water quality issues, climate change (including sea-level rise) maintenance, drainage, aging infrastructure, conflicting uses and programming needs, safety and social issues currently impacting park experiences. The Seawall is also experiencing a number of issues with respect to crowding and user conflicts, and these are expected to increase as the population grows.

Study Area

The project study area (see Figure 1 below) overlaps a network of parks and road alignments that, in their entirety, make up a total of approximately 95 acres (38 ha). The key components are:

- Alexandra Park;
- English Bay Park;
- Morton Park;
- Sunset Beach Park; and
- a number of roadways including Beach Avenue, Pacific Street and the foot of Davie Street

Figure 1: West End Waterfront Masterplan Study Area



DISCUSSION

The following key themes and considerations are informing the scope of work for the Request for Proposals.

Key Themes & Considerations

1) *Enhancements and Upgrades to Park Services, Facilities and Infrastructure*

With increased levels of population in the area, and the abundance of competing uses, there is a strong need to upgrade services and infrastructure in the park. There is a significant amount of infrastructure that is aging, and is becoming cost prohibitive to upkeep, some of which needs to be replaced and others, potentially reconsidered altogether.

As the project will aim to discover the park's identity, use and programming, this will enable the masterplan to determine new services and supporting infrastructure that align with the goals identified. This includes but is not limited to food and beverage services, washroom and changing facilities, aging infrastructure and utilities, safety and operations and maintenance. Revitalizing park conditions will focus on addressing operational challenges and costs.

Due to demands for enhanced aquatic recreational uses downtown, as well as aging infrastructure of the current facility, the Vancouver Aquatic Centre is targeted for replacement. Based on the outcome of the Aquatic Strategy later this year, the masterplan will support the siting of the new location.

2) *Park Identity and Functionality*

Given the location and orientation of English Bay and Sunset Beach Park along Vancouver's waterfront, the area is an attractive and highly suitable area for large gatherings. Many major events and public attractions are hosted here on an annual basis, while the natural aesthetic provides an ideal setting for filming. The parks are also situated in one of Vancouver's densest neighbourhoods, the West End, and act as the premier destination for all of its residents, as well as the downtown community, in much need of respite and connection to nature and the ocean.

The study area provides a broad range of options for recreation, mainly centered on water, such as swimming and beach activities, canoeing and kayaking, and beach-side sports such as beach volleyball, bocce ball, and frisbee. Grassed areas are often used for informal acrobatics, yoga, picnics, social gatherings, outdoor education and many passive sport activities. There is a strong need for space for these activities, especially in a dense neighbourhood like the West End. With all of these demands for space, infrastructure and programming, it is important to carefully consider all of these uses, and how to balance various demands for current and future uses, while also maintaining and enhancing the beach experience.

Working to discover the identity of the waterfront parks through the masterplan process can help to establish and prioritize the park's uses, programming and infrastructure. This identity can be employed to improve park features, infrastructure, vegetation and approaches to horticulture, furnishing, lighting and hard and soft surfacing materials and any other park elements. There is also potential to thoughtfully consider the future of public art, memorials and monuments.

3) *Neighbourhood Connectivity and Seawall Enhancement*

The West End waterfront is heavily used for people travelling through the area along the most well-used portion of Vancouver's seawall, and over time has been resulting in increasing conflicts. Through the masterplan process, opportunities can be identified to increase the amount of space and quality of experience for people walking and cycling, provide appropriate amenities for the numerous user groups, and reduce conflicts due to congestion. Connections to the surrounding neighbourhood for people walking and cycling also need to be enhanced, in particular the connection to the east under the Burrard Street Bridge.

The West End Plan (2013) identified opportunities for expansion of parks and open spaces (the reallocation of space currently used for motor vehicle traffic or parking), new or improved infrastructure and facilities located in areas managed by the Park Board or Engineering Services, and careful integration with the surrounding network with clear and legible gateways into the park from key corridors and greenways. As a result, it will be valuable and important through the master-planning process to explore all possibilities and coordinate all future changes to the West End waterfront to combine efforts and maximize public benefits.

The Seawall within the study area sees a high volume of around 1.5 million people biking annually, with a monthly average of 83,000 people on bikes (2,800 daily). The peak use of these facilities occurs in the summer months, with daily volumes reaching upwards of 10,000 people cycling. The Seawall also needs to be better integrated with the surrounding street network, particularly the growing number of pedestrian and bicycling priority streets in the West End.

Key opportunities include visioning around converting roadways to park space to create enhanced park experiences and options for addressing overall growing seawall congestion, especially in peak periods.

4) *Climate Change and Resilience*

It is anticipated that the Salish Sea (including English Bay) is and will continue to be impacted by climate change. Increasing temperatures are melting glacier and polar ice caps, feeding more freshwater into the ocean. Climate change is also driving up the average temperature of ocean waters, causing them to physically expand in volume. The BC Provincial government advised municipalities in 2011 to plan for 1 metre (3 feet) of sea level rise by the year 2100, and 2 metres (6 feet) by the year 2200. Creative methods of waterfront restoration to adapt to a changing climate and resulting rising sea levels will be a key focus of this masterplan work.

In addition to sea level rise, climate change is causing weather system changes resulting in drier and hotter summer months. This will continue to impact vegetation, while simultaneously creating environments for invasive species to thrive. Appropriate vegetation selection and sound strategies for establishing new plantings should be key considerations in restoration efforts.

5) *Coastal Shoreline Habitat Restoration / Ecological Integrity*

The waterfront of English Bay and Sunset Beach Park contains important and ecologically sensitive intertidal zones that play a vital role in the overall ecological functioning of the Georgia Strait region. The intertidal zones in general are a critical interface between

terrestrial and marine ecosystems; the ebb and flow of the tide determines the rhythm of life cycles and behaviours of many animals, both marine and terrestrial.

The upland areas of English Bay and Sunset Beach Park play an important role in the overall health of the Vancouver waterfront and False Creek. The restoration of waterfront area and its ability to reduce the quantity of urban run-off and improve quality by filtering run-off can play a role in improving the overall coastal environment and False Creek.

The masterplan will explore opportunities to restore and enhance the study area's ecological integrity by:

- planning for sea level rise and increased storm events;
- protecting and enhancing biodiversity;
- restoring and protecting intertidal zone habitat;
- implementing vegetation native to the area (and suitable for coastal environments);
- establishing management zones and protected areas;
- integrating stormwater management best practices;
- introducing soil restoration for higher quality vegetation; and
- applying effective design to balance human use within a thriving ecosystem.

Project Approach

Given the complexities and geographic overlap of priorities in the West End Community Plan, the Park Board and the City of Vancouver's Engineering Services propose to combine the initial planning work on these projects into a single masterplan. This process will be co-led to allow for a consistent planning and design approach for the connected spaces along the waterfront, as well as for a more efficient public engagement and implementation process. Staff will keep the Park Board and City Council fully informed throughout the process.

Engagement and communication with the public, stakeholders, Park Board and Council, and staff will be critical to ensuring success in developing the masterplan. This project will be informed by robust and inclusive community engagement, tailored to the interests, needs and aspirations of park users, local residents, and businesses, as well as for Vancouver residents citywide.

Stakeholder groups have already been identified for inclusion in this process and include: local residents; seniors; water-based recreation users; accessibility advocates; community centres; arts & culture, environmental, and transportation groups; and neighbourhood businesses, among others.

Scope of Work & Schedule

In order to bring together the various aspects of the project, including community engagement and technical expertise of staff and stakeholders, the delivery of the work is proposed to occur in the draft key strategic phases outlined below. The details and exact timelines will be determined and updated once the project team is in place.

PHASE 1: Listen & Learn

- Project start up, planning, initial data synthesis & background research
- Public engagement – Round #1a
- Opportunities, constraints, generation of preliminary goals and principles
- Public engagement – Round #1b

PHASE 2: Vision Development

- Develop draft vision, validate goals and principles
- Public engagement – Round #2
- Park Board (and Council) updates

PHASE 3: Initial Concepts

- Confirm goals and principles, validate vision, and generate ideas
- Stakeholder engagement
- Develop initial concepts
- Public engagement – Round #3
- Park Board (and Council) updates

PHASE 4: Final Concepts and Masterplan

- Develop preferred concept and articulate project vision
- Develop phased plans with implementation and funding plans
- Public engagement – Round #4
- Park Board (and Council) reports (for decision)
- Finalize phased implementation and funding plans

FUTURE PHASES

- Procurement for design development and construction documentation delivery
- Detailed design, construction documentation, and construction for first phase.

It is anticipated that the masterplan work will begin in December of 2019, will take approximately 20 months to complete, and will be ready to start preparations for detailed design for the first phase of improvements by spring of 2021, as allocated for spending in the 2019-2022 Capital Plan.

NEXT STEPS

Pending Board approval of the recommendations outlined in this report, a Request for Proposals will be sent out to a shortlist of qualified consultants at the beginning of August 2019. It is anticipated that the procurement process will take approximately 2-3 months. An integrated Park Board and City staff team will embark on an evaluation process and will report back to both the Park Board and Council at key milestones.

CONCLUSION

The West End Waterfront Masterplan is a very timely and much needed study aligned with existing and emerging policies that will help the Park Board, the City, the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Nations, and the broader community to sort through the complexities and establish priorities in renewing the West End waterfront. It is an exciting project that will take advantage of the site's importance and prominence in order to engage the community in creative and meaningful ways to produce an exceptional outcome.

General Manager's Office
Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation
Vancouver, BC

Prepared by:
Emily Dunlop, Planning, Policy & Environment

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