



SPECIAL BOARD MEETING MEETING MINUTES

SEPTEMBER 26, 2019

A Special Park Board meeting was held on Thursday, September 26, 2019 at 6:38 pm, at the Park Board Office.

PRESENT: Commissioner Tricia Barker
Commissioner John Coupar
Commissioner Dave Demers, Vice-Chair
Commissioner Camil Dumont
Commissioner John Irwin
Commissioner Stuart Mackinnon, Chair

ABSENT: Commissioner Gwen Giesbrecht

GENERAL MANAGER'S OFFICE: Malcolm Bromley, General Manager
Cheryl Chan, Manager, Executive Office and Board Relations
Jessica Kulchyski, Meeting Assistant

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Chair acknowledged that the meeting is taking place on the traditional territory of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations. The meeting is being held on the land respectfully and with honour to each other, the land and the communities that the Commissioners serve. The Chair invited Commissioners to join him in committing to actions of reconciliation in their deliberations and decisions.

SPECIAL AGENDA ITEMS

1. Oppenheimer Park

The Chair noted that Commissioners Barker and Coupar had requested the Special Board meeting in accordance with the Park Board Procedure By-Law.

Commissioner Coupar commented that he and Commissioner Barker had requested the Special Board meeting as they believe the public should be provided with a fulsome picture of the situation at Oppenheimer Park, informed of the actions that have been taken by the Park Board and hear the concerns and recommendations of the Park Board and City staff to address the situation.

The Board was advised that between September 24, 2019 and 4:00 pm, September 26, 2019, the General Manager's Office received one email opposed and one in support of obtaining an injunction for Oppenheimer Park. There was also one email received in support of clean and safe parks in the Downtown Eastside (DTES).

All emails have been forwarded directly to Commissioners.

The following guests introduced themselves:

- Howard Chow, Deputy Chief Constable, Vancouver Police Department (VPD)

- Marcie Flamand, Superintendent, VPD
- Paul Mochrie, Deputy City Manager, City of Vancouver
- Rob Renning, Deputy Fire Chief, Vancouver Fire and Rescue Services.

In response to the request from Commissioners Barker and Coupar, Mr. Mochrie and Deputy Fire Chief Renning led the review of a presentation providing the background and an update on the situation at Oppenheimer Park and noted:

- Increasing homelessness crisis in Vancouver:
 - Over 600 people were identified as sleeping unsheltered during the 2019 homelessness count
 - The number of tents/structures being reported across the City has increased over time
 - City response to the increasing number of tents/structures
- Recent history of encampments and their resolution
- Background and current status of the 2019 Oppenheimer Park encampment
- Identification of and response to life safety risks
- Financial implications of the Oppenheimer Park encampment:
 - Estimate of City costs from January 1 to July 31, 2019
 - Costs incurred during the week of August 23, 2019, following the issuance of the General Manager's order to vacate
- City staff do not support the option of sanctioned/managed encampments and continue to focus on assisting people to transition to indoor spaces and housing options
- City's short-term response to the homelessness crisis.

Deputy Chief Constable Chow led the review of a presentation regarding the rising violence in the DTES and highlighted:

- Area defined by the VPD as the DTES
- Increasing number and seriousness of calls for service from January 2018 to August 2019
- The impact of the focus for calls shifting to Oppenheimer Park
- Increasing violence in the DTES:
 - Increase in assaults and swarmings of police officers
- Support for an injunction being obtained to clear the encampment to deal with the increasing violence.

Malcolm Bromley, General Manager, Park Board, along with Mr. Mochrie, Deputy Fire Chief Renning and Deputy Chief Constable Chow, responded to questions from Board. There was discussion on:

- The incremental costs incurred by Vancouver Fire and Rescue Services, VPD and the City due to the Oppenheimer Park encampment
- Whether the provision of storage for possessions would reduce the City's costs
- Stress and safety risks to VPD and Vancouver Fire and Rescue staff as a result of the Oppenheimer Park encampment
- All Oppenheimer Park campers were offered shelter during the week following the issuance of the General Manager's order on August 19, 2019
- Observations and information obtained by the VPD related to Oppenheimer Park attracting gang, drug and weapons activity

- The lack of options to safely heat a tent
- The City's jurisdiction for housing and investments to solve homelessness
- VPD's definition of a "call for service"
- Support of the Park Board staff, VPD and City to obtain an injunction to resolve the Oppenheimer Park encampment
- Deaths and injuries due to propane fires in Vancouver.

Commissioner Dumont introduced a motion and noted the need to take collaborative action toward the goal of decampment of Oppenheimer Park. Commissioner Dumont responded to questions from the Board.

Main Motion

MOVED by Commissioner Dumont
SECONDED by Commissioner Irwin

WHEREAS:

1. Tent encampments in parks and elsewhere are appearing in greater numbers and with greater frequency in the City of Vancouver and in its parks, including Oppenheimer Park;
2. There is a significant number of people in our city experiencing homelessness, due to a lack of appropriately affordable housing, who require access to washroom and shower facilities;
3. All levels of government need to work together to address systemic factors that prevent people from accessing safe, secure housing and basic health care; and
4. Oppenheimer Park plays a vital role to the community and services a diverse population that has limited access to other green spaces.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

- A. THAT the Board of Parks and Recreation acknowledge its strong support and gratitude for the Mayor and City Council's efforts to find housing for the people camping in Oppenheimer Park and other public spaces;
- B. THAT the Board of Parks and Recreation express interest in collaborating with and sharing responsibility with the City of Vancouver and Union partners in further development and implementation of programs such as, but not limited to, peer-driven Park Stewardships and employment opportunities;
- C. THAT the Board of Parks and Recreation requests of the City of Vancouver and its partners to continue to seek housing for the people in our community who are experiencing homelessness, including the community currently camping in Oppenheimer Park;
- D. FURTHER THAT temporary housing/shelter options that are accessible, safe and dignified be activated in order to help bridge the gap from the current housing

baseline in anticipation of one where more longer-term housing is made available;

- E. FURTHER THAT the Board of Parks and Recreation commits to the goal of decampment at Oppenheimer Park to be managed in conjunction with the implementation of the aforementioned temporary and more permanent strategies noted above; and
- F. THAT, where appropriate, the Board of Parks and Recreation encourages the General Manager and/or other staff to attend and participate in meetings with members of the community currently camping in Oppenheimer Park and their supporters.

Amendment to the Main Motion

Commissioner Coupar introduced an amendment to the Main Motion to direct the General Manager to issue a GM order and to seek an injunction to remove structures and campers from Oppenheimer Park. The Chair ruled the amendment out of order on the basis that it is contrary to the Main Motion and Section 11.4(a) of the Procedure By-law that requires a Commissioner who voted with the majority to make a motion to reconsider a previously defeated motion.

Challenge of the Chair

MOVED by Commissioner Coupar
SECONDED by Commissioner Barker

THAT the ruling of the Chair be overturned.

DEFEATED

In favour: Barker, Coupar

Opposed: Demers, Dumont, Irwin, Mackinnon

Recess

The meeting recessed at 8:19 pm and reconvened at 8:33 pm.

The Board heard from speakers who provided comments and responded to questions from the Board regarding:

- Encouragement for the Park Board to consider seeking an injunction to end the Oppenheimer Park encampment
- The need for collaboration to house the homeless
- The opinion that injunctions will not end homelessness in the City
- The danger posed by the unsafe drug supply to the campers in Oppenheimer Park
- The opportunity for the City and Park Board to collaborate to decamp Oppenheimer Park and to seek longer-term solutions to homelessness
- Support for the Park Board to continue to resist seeking an injunction
- The need for the Park Board and City to have a direct connection with the Oppenheimer Park campers to gain a true understanding of the issue
- The opinion that the Oppenheimer Park encampment increased the safety of campers

- The need for immediate health and safety supports such as sanitation, warming tents and running water
- The opinion that the current activities in Oppenheimer Park are appropriate
- Disagreement with comments provided by the City and VPD during the meeting
- Request that the Park Board support the residents of Oppenheimer Park
- Encouragement for the Park Board continue to resist the Mayor's request to cede jurisdiction of Oppenheimer Park
- The opinion that other levels of government have failed to take action to further reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, despite their statements to the contrary
- Request that the Park Board advocate with the federal government to provide housing for Indigenous people in Vancouver
- The need to find real solutions for the housing and opioid crises

Extension of Meeting

MOVED by Commissioner Dumont
SECONDED by Commissioner Irwin

THAT the Park Board extends the meeting beyond 10:00 pm.

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

- The need for a better solution to homelessness than tent cities
- Concern with the intention of the word “decampment” in the motion
- The responsibility to protect vulnerable people and their basic human rights
- Policies that criminalize homeless people perpetuate the problem
- The need to utilize allocated financial resources to implement solutions to homelessness, rather than to discuss and study the issue
- Living in Oppenheimer Park provides a sense of belonging and safety to the campers in a dehumanizing environment.

Amendment to the Main Motion

MOVED by Commissioner Irwin
SECONDED by Commissioner Dumont

THAT Item E be amended to:

- E. FURTHER THAT the Board of Parks and Recreation commits to the goal of voluntary decampment at Oppenheimer Park to be managed in conjunction with the implementation of the aforementioned temporary and more permanent strategies noted above.

CARRIED

In favour: Demers, Dumont, Irwin, Mackinnon

Opposed: Barker, Coupar

Question on the Main Motion, as Amended

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

- A. THAT the Board of Parks and Recreation acknowledge its strong support and gratitude for the Mayor and City Council's efforts to find housing for the people camping in Oppenheimer Park and other public spaces;
- B. THAT the Board of Parks and Recreation express interest in collaborating with and sharing responsibility with the City of Vancouver and Union partners in further development and implementation of programs such as, but not limited to, peer-driven Park Stewardships and employment opportunities;
- C. THAT the Board of Parks and Recreation requests of the City of Vancouver and its partners to continue to seek housing for the people in our community who are experiencing homelessness, including the community currently camping in Oppenheimer Park;
- D. FURTHER THAT temporary housing/shelter options that are accessible, safe and dignified be activated in order to help bridge the gap from the current housing baseline in anticipation of one where more longer-term housing is made available;
- E. FURTHER THAT the Board of Parks and Recreation commits to the goal of voluntary decampment at Oppenheimer Park to be managed in conjunction with the implementation of the aforementioned temporary and more permanent strategies noted above; and
- F. THAT, where appropriate, the Board of Parks and Recreation encourages the General Manager and/or other staff to attend and participate in meetings with members of the community currently camping in Oppenheimer Park and their supporters.

CARRIED

In favour: Demers, Dumont, Irwin, Mackinnon

Opposed: Barker, Coupar

The Board adjourned at 10:37 pm.

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Malcolm Bromley
General Manager

Commissioner Stuart Mackinnon
Chair