



February 26, 2021

TO: Park Board Chair and Commissioners
FROM: General Manager – Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation
SUBJECT: Burrard View Park - Proposed Vancouver Urban Food Forest

RECOMMENDATION

- A. THAT the Vancouver Park Board approve the Vancouver Urban Food Forest Collective Garden at Burrard View Park, as applied for in their Expression of Interest (EOI) and as outlined in this report; and
- B. THAT the Vancouver Park Board approve a 5-year licence agreement with Vancouver Urban Food Forest Foundation to operate the community garden, with terms consistent with those in the Urban Agriculture Policy.

REPORT SUMMARY

In 2020, Park Board staff received an Expression of Interest (EOI) for a new community garden in Burrard View Park, called the Vancouver Urban Food Forest. The proposed collective garden includes a permaculture-based area of annual and perennial plants and a food forest of native, fruit-bearing trees and shrubs in collaboration with Indigenous community members. The proponents are a group of community-based non-profits from the Hastings-Sunrise neighbourhood who have collaboratively developed the EOI, garden design, associated maintenance plan, and programming. Public feedback on the proposed garden indicates a 69% majority support for the garden, but with many supporters requesting a different location in the park; 28% of respondents were opposed and 3% provided neutral feedback. After review of the EOI and public feedback, staff recommend approving the Vancouver Urban Food Forest at the proposed location, and entering into a 5-year licence agreement to operate the community garden.

BOARD AUTHORITY / POLICY / PREVIOUS DECISIONS

In 2013, the Park Board passed the [Local Food Action Plan](#) that has guided the distribution, implementation and ongoing support of community gardens and other food assets managed by the Park Board.

In 2013, City Council passed the [Vancouver Food Strategy](#) that guides the advancement and support of the food system across the city.

In 2015, the Park Board passed the [Urban Agriculture Policy](#) that informs the development and implementation of urban agriculture projects in parks.

In 2019, the Park Board passed [VanPlay: Parks and Recreation Master Plan](#) that informs the supply, renewal and distribution of food assets in parks.

In 2021, the Park Board will review the proposed update to the Park Board Local Food Action Plan

BACKGROUND

In spring 2020, in response to the ongoing need for increased food security in the neighbourhood exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, a group of three community organizations (“the proponents”) approached the Park Board about their interest in establishing the Vancouver Urban Food Forest (VUFF) in Hastings-Sunrise. Selecting a potentially appropriate site involved analyzing area park sizes / available open space, future plans for park redevelopments, proximity and connection cost of water source for garden irrigation, proximity to public washrooms, and the ability to serve equity-seeking populations. The proponents and Park Board staff considered the suitability of neighbourhood parks including Callister and Hastings Park. Given multiple considerations by staff and the proponents, Burrard View Park in the Hastings-Sunrise neighbourhood was chosen as the most potentially appropriate site.

The proponents, Kiwassa Neighbourhood House, Lettuce Harvest, and Refarmers making up the Vancouver Urban Food Forest Foundation, have shared mandates to address food insecurity and food justice, climate change, and social disconnection through projects that build skills and confidence and produce food locally using regenerative techniques.

In November 2020, Park Board staff received an EOI from the proponents including details about the proposed location, physical aspects of the proposed VUFF, programming and community connection, and day-to-day operations and maintenance. The EOI also described the anticipated community (e.g., relationships and programs) and physical connections (e.g., pathways and welcoming garden design) to the adjacent playground and field house, with opportunities to invite users of those park amenities to use the VUFF space and participate in programming. Although there is currently a pause on intakes for community garden proposals due to staffing reductions and the Park Board Local Food Action Plan update currently underway, staff made an exception with this proposal given the geographic adjacency to a large Equity Initiative Zone (VanPlay Report 3).

Key elements of the proposed VUFF are:

- a medicine wheel-inspired garden of annual and perennial plants planted and maintained using permaculture practices;
- no individual plots, only shared gardening and harvest;
- an adjacent food forest of native plants planned, maintained and programmed with Indigenous partners from the neighbourhood; and
- nature-based and recycled-material storage, composting and community seating spaces.

Programming -- an important element of the community benefit of the proposed VUFF -- is planned to invite neighbours to the garden, and members of the proponents’ communities to engage in learning new skills and building community connections. The proponents are well positioned in terms of resources and existing relationships in the community, including with urban Indigenous collaborators to develop and execute meaningful programs. The objectives of the programming include:

- developing tailored collaborations with the field house residents and daycare and other community members to offer education about local food growing; and
- providing opportunities to learn about climate action, food sovereignty and sustainable food growing.

The area within a 6-block radius of Burrard View Park includes about 40% single-family homes and 60% low-rise apartment units. Within this radius, there are three low-income BC Housing complexes, the Aboriginal Mother's Centre, and the Kiwassa Neighbourhood House, all offering needed supports to underserved populations; 59% of people in Hastings-Sunrise are visible minorities (CoV Social Indicators Profile, 2020).

Burrard View Park offers amenities including a daycare, playground, off-leash dog area, a fieldhouse with participants in the Field House Activation Program, and a privately run hospice. There are plans to upgrade the playground in 2022. The new VUFF is proposed for the southeast corner of the park, to the north and west of the "activated" field house in an area of currently mown turf grass and passive use. This location offers sufficient sun exposure, direct access to irrigation water and washroom facilities, and opportunities for natural connections with adjacent park amenities like the fieldhouse, playground, and daycare (see Figure 2 below).



Figure 2: Proposed garden/urban food forest location and amenities in Burrard View Park

In discussions regarding the physical location of the VUFF, Park Board staff and the proponents highlighted:

- opportunities to share storage space and collaborate with the field house residents (participants in the [Field House Activation Program](#));
- opportunities to connect with the neighbouring daycare and playground users to facilitate children's and community skills development and programming;
- accommodation of a playground upgrade nearby the existing playground in the near future, facilitated by Park Board staff;
- all maintenance and programming within the footprint of the VUFF to be the responsibility of the proponents, as laid out in a licence agreement.

Public Feedback

The public was notified of the project as required by the Urban Agriculture Policy and invited to provide feedback. Notifications and engagement involved:

- a [webpage](#) with project information;
- letters mailed to residents within two blocks of the park (1,034 letters); and
- a notification sign posted in the park.

All of these materials included a Park Board email address where members of the public could provide feedback. The Burrard View Community Association was not directly contacted, nor were residents who live outside the two blocks around the park. While some individuals may have been less informed about the process, staff are confident that broader community perspectives are captured in the efforts to apply an equity-driven evaluation of the available information.

The Park Board received a total of 108 email and phone responses to requests for feedback. A total of 69% of respondents were in support of the project, while 28% were opposed, and 3% of were neutral. Of those who are in support of the project, roughly 2/3 supported this location while 1/3 supported a different location within the park. Public feedback included comments on:

- the need for more community gardening opportunities in the neighbourhood;
- the need to maintain open space in the park as most of the open space in this park has been dedicated to an off-leash dog area, playground and field house; some of these comments were opposed to the VUFF, others were in support of the VUFF, but in another location within the park;
- the need to upgrade other amenities in the park, including the playground and the tennis courts, before dedicating capacity to a garden;
- how the park is ideal as it is; and
- the value of a decolonized approach to addressing food security and community connection.

The most common reasons for supporting the VUFF were:

- addressing food security and climate change;
- using a decolonized approach to food growing and education; and
- building community, particularly for underserved residents.

The most common reasons for opposing the VUFF were:

- reduced passive use space;
- would prefer funds spent on other amenities; and
- concerns about upkeep, aesthetics, and general changes to the park.

In addition to the public engagement efforts by the Park Board, the proponents have undertaken their own outreach and relationship-building in the neighbourhood.

CONSIDERATIONS

Alignment with Park Board Priorities

The proposed VUFF would exceed the 50% communal gardening criteria in VanPlay, would serve people living in an equity initiative zone, and would demonstrate alignment with the Park Board's efforts at reconciliation and at engagement with local First Nations and the urban Indigenous population. The proposal is technically feasible and can offer opportunities for community engagement, education and skills development. The proponents are well positioned in terms of financial resources and connections in the community to build, maintain and activate the space.

Location Choice

Burrard View Park was selected because of its proximity to Equity Initiative Zones and the availability of necessary amenities (listed below). The specific location within the park was selected to offer:

- the least costly option compared with any other options within the park, due to proximity to a water source connection for irrigation and washrooms;
- proximity to other groups (e.g., fieldhouse residents, daycare, playground users) for collaborative programming opportunities;
- feasibility of garden success (e.g., sun exposure); and
- the best potential social connection to the fieldhouse and playground.

Land Use

The VUFF, if approved, would be located in between the playground and the field house, one of two passive use spaces in the park. Although the proposed garden will reduce the amount of passive park space in the park in mown turf grass, the proposed space offers additional opportunities for community connection, proximity for park users to participate in VUFF programs and maintenance, and proximity to water supply and washrooms. There is another relatively large mown turf grass passive use space to the north of the Cottage Hospice.

A growing population and increasingly densified housing in the City of Vancouver means that parks are being used by more people and for more activities. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in an estimated over 30% increase in passive park use in 2020, meaning that areas that might have been considered underutilized in the past are now activated for passive activities like picnicking, impromptu play, relaxation and household "bubble" or physically-distanced socializing. Traditional community gardens and proposed collective gardens like the VUFF are of interest to those seeking activities close to home; they are also a significant change to more sole-purpose use, meaning the physical spaces are no longer available for passive activities.

Adjacencies

Burrard View Park contains a recently formalized unfenced dog off-leash area (OLA). In 2019, staff installed a new water fountain, park benches, and boundary bollards, as well as new signage indicating the revised OLA boundaries. The park updates align with the guidance provided in the People, Parks and Dogs Strategy, adopted by the Park Board in 2017, including the recommendation for either large setbacks or secure fencing when OLA's are located near activity areas deemed 'incompatible'. The strategy identifies community gardens as an incompatible adjacent use to dogs off-leash, requiring a minimum setback of 50m without a secure boundary, and the proposed VUFF would meet that if the [unfenced] southern boundary is observed. Staff recommend future consideration is given to either a secure fence along the northern portion of the garden or along the southern boundary of the OLA if there are conflicts between off-leash dogs and community garden activities.

Costs

The estimated proponent cost of developing the VUFF was calculated as part of the EOI to be \$63,000. These expenses include professional design services, communications, materials and supplies. These are proposed to come from fundraising and grants.

The costs to the Park Board include preparing the site (sod removal), installing an irrigation water source from the adjacent fieldhouse (hose bib), and providing the initial load of soil and compost at a total cost of approximately \$17,000. This would come from the Local Food budget in the 2019-2022 capital plan.

Should a fence be needed in future, the cost for along the northern border of the VUFF would be an additional \$10,000, or approximately \$20,000 if along the southern boundary of the OLA.

NEXT STEPS

Subject to Board approval of the recommendations in this report, a licence agreement will be prepared so that site preparation and construction could begin in spring 2021.

CONCLUSION

Based on site evaluations, public feedback, and review of relevant policies and information, staff recommend that the Park Board approve this project and enter into a 5-year licence agreement with the Vancouver Urban Food Forest Foundation.

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