



**TO:** Park Board Chair and Commissioners  
**FROM:** General Manager – Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation  
**SUBJECT:** Fundraising & Development – 2020 Year in Review

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## RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Vancouver Park Board receive for information, the Fundraising & Development – 2020 Year in Review, which includes an examination of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on activities within this program.

## REPORT SUMMARY

Philanthropic donations assist the Park Board in delivering the organization's mandate and contribute to the Park Board's long-term financial sustainability. Under normal market conditions, the organization's Fundraising & Development Office generates approximately \$1 million in donation revenue annually. Not surprisingly, fundraising and development activities were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the 2020 fundraising results, review the impact of the pandemic on this service area and present some insights into what to expect in 2021.

## 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 structures, programs, activities, fees, and improvements that occur within designated parks.

[VanPlay](#), the Board's Parks and Recreation Services Master Plan (2020) sets priorities and provides tools and policies to support the pursuit of equity, connectivity, and access to parks and recreation for all. The Park Board's fundraising and development programs align with VanPlay's directions to "Welcome Everyone" (parks and recreation experiences that improve quality of life), "Deliver Services Equitably" (a fair and effective parks and recreation system), and "Weave the City Together" (parks, nature, recreation and culture integrated into everyday life). In particular, philanthropy provides the Park Board with incremental funding and plays a role in supporting VanPlay's Framework Goal 10 – Secure Adequate and Ongoing Funding.

## BACKGROUND

Many residents choose to make a difference in their communities by donating to their favourite park or recreation activity. These donations are tax deductible and assist municipalities in delivering programs, services and experiences important for residents and visitors, both today and into the future. The [Canada Helps 2020 Giving Report](#) and [Blumbergs' Snapshot of the British Columbia Charity Sector](#) provide valuable insights into the philanthropic sector in Canada and British Columbia, respectively.

Vancouver's parks and recreation facilities impact residents and visitors in ways that influence their decisions about philanthropy and social responsibility, so much so, that their giving is

increasingly being directed to the Park Board. Donations made to the Park Board are received in the form of tribute gifts made in-honour of a special occasion or in-memory of loved ones, major gifts for capital projects, and planned gifts made through bequests.

In 1991, the Park Board introduced the Gifts for Parks Program. This program provides opportunities for residents to make a donation to fund a new park bench with a personalized dedication at an existing bench site for a 10-year term. At the end of the term, donors have the option to renew their support and fund the dedication for a further 10-year term. The Park Board currently has 1,305 dedicated park benches. Demand for the program remains high especially for bench sites located at shoreline and destination parks, and also for benches at new park developments. Donations received through this program support the renewal of valuable park amenities enjoyed year-round by residents and visitors to Vancouver.

In 2004, the Park Board endorsed fundraising and development as a strategic business priority, approved dedicated resources to enhance the Gifts for Parks Program, and implemented new fundraising and development initiatives. The latter included acceptance of planned gifts through bequests and estates, securing major gift funding for capital projects from park partners, community groups and organizations, establishing tribute funds for friend/family/employee groups to make in-memory or in-honour gifts, and assisting community groups with crowdfunding initiatives. A fundraising and donor management software is used to administer donations, track and maintain donor information, record stewardship and cultivation activities, develop solicitation appeals and segment donor interest for future marketing, as well as communication and engagement activities.

Fundraising and development initiatives have resulted in the acquisition and engagement of 13,316 donor constituents who have made donations ranging from a \$1 gift made by a young child for the Kitsilano Accessible Playground development, to a \$1,000,000 matching gift donation from a local philanthropist to Stanley Park's restoration program after the windstorm in 2006. With the exception of 2020, overall participation in the program has increased annually from individuals, organizations, foundations, community groups, and special interest groups. With the introduction of on-line giving, the Park Board's capacity to accept donations has also increased. Over 90% of donations are transacted online which enabled the Park Board to administer and fulfil 2,631 donations in a safe and secure manner during the pandemic.

The Park Board recognizes the importance of building strong relationships through donor recognition and stewardship, which is key to acknowledging the value of our donors and being accountable for the use of private funding. Guidelines for donor recognition include annual recognition on the organization's website. The organization's fundraising and development program is promoted in the [People and Programs](#) web page and has representation with several fundraising organizations, including [Leave-A-Legacy](#), [Canadian Association of Gift Planners](#), and [National Association of Park Foundations](#). The program has gained awareness amongst Vancouver residents and the fundraising community.

In 2015, the Park Board approved a motion for the [development of an implementation plan to establish a public foundation](#). This initiative is currently on hold pending a review of key components that are critical for a foundation's success and long-term sustainability (e.g. financial processes, human resource considerations, policies, and board recruitment). Determining foundation alignment with the organization's changing priorities resulting from the pandemic will also be assessed during the review.

## DISCUSSION

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused considerable economic and social turmoil and the fundraising sector has not been immune to these impacts. Donation activity has declined worldwide, and not surprisingly, the pandemic's impact on the Park Board's fundraising and development activities in 2020 was meaningful. Throughout the year, fundraising and development staff worked hard to deliver core services, which included donation administration, donor stewardship and cultivation, and provided support for individuals, community groups and foundations in their philanthropic interests for parks and recreation. Key areas of focus included securing pledged donation commitments from 2019 for capital projects, responding to bequest inquiries, and securing new donations for dedicated park benches. Staff also worked closely with other departments, including Park Operations and Real Estate & Facilities Management, to provide service delivery for the Dedicated Park Bench Program. Despite the many challenges faced in 2020, there were also many positives, including:

- Many enquiries from existing donors and donor prospects regarding their interest in leaving planned gifts to the Park Board. This increase was experienced across the charitable sector as individuals reviewed their personal financial situation;
- Staff worked closely with Park Board partners, such as community lawn bowling clubs to administer donations on their behalf by setting up on-line donation pages for members to support lawn bowling facility maintenance and operational upgrades during the pandemic;
- Processes were introduced to offer donors the option to set-up recurring monthly pledge payments, thereby assisting donors in fulfilling their wish to fund a dedicated park bench during an emotionally and financially difficult period; and
- Although the pandemic presented challenges for staff to engage with donors and community groups in-person, the Park Board's annual renewal campaign for the Dedicated Park Bench Program presented an opportunity for staff to personally engage donors via telephone instead of sending solicitation letters. This approach received strong positive feedback from donors who indicated it was a welcome and appreciated surprise to receive calls from Park Board staff while remaining safe at home.

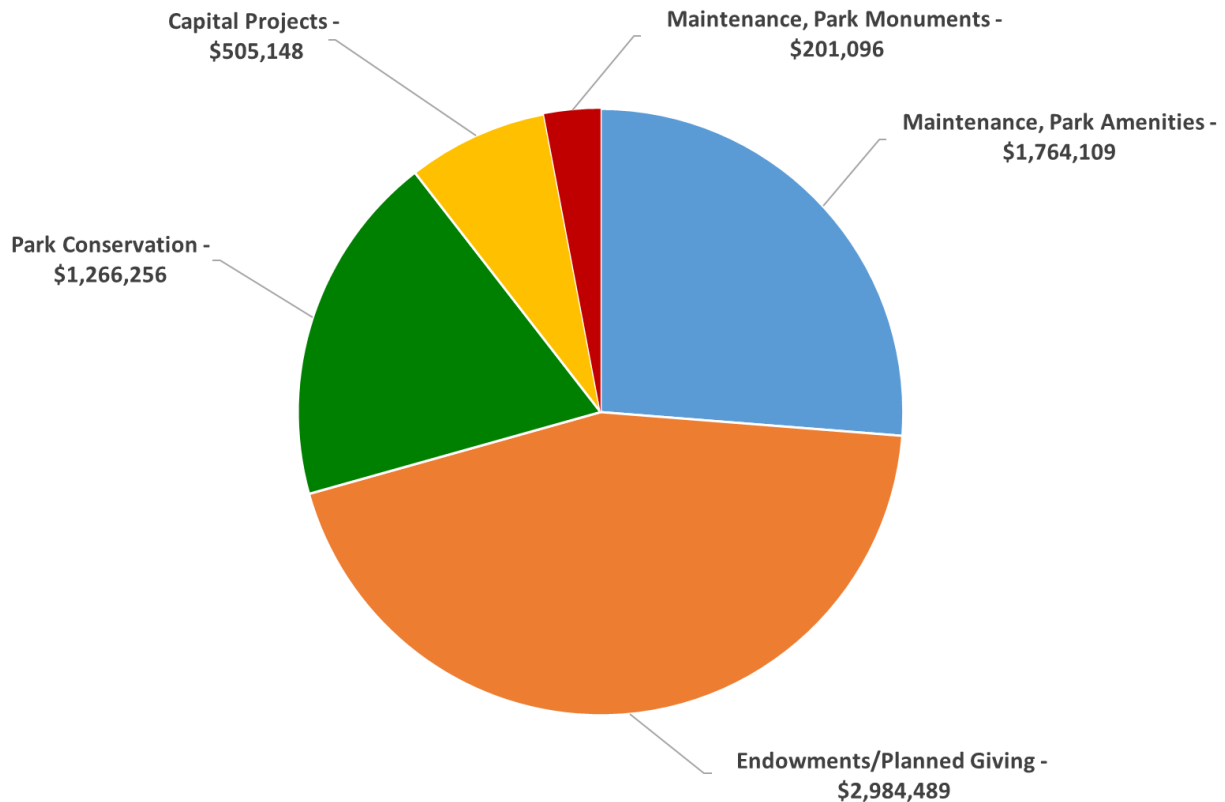
Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, total donation amounts received by the Park Board declined 6% in 2020 compared to 2019 (\$986,630 vs. \$1,045,210). A breakdown of donation amounts by donor purpose/area of interest for 2019 and 2020 is presented in Figure 1.

DONATION PURPOSE/AREA OF INTEREST	2019		2020		% DIFFERENCE
Park Amenities	\$	630,633	\$	426,077	-32%
Recreation Projects	\$	304,880	\$	319,968	5%
Endowments/Planned Giving	\$	36,667	\$	185,516	406%
Park Conservation	\$	65,501	\$	52,257	-20%
Park Monuments	\$	7,529	\$	2,813	-63%
<b>TOTAL DONATION AMOUNTS</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>1,045,210</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>986,630</b>	<b>-6%</b>

**Figure 1 – Donation Amounts by Donor Purpose/Area of Interest**

Funds received by the Park Board are administered and disbursed through a donation reserve account. In 2020, \$384,499 was disbursed to designated areas of interest, \$247,545 was used to fund program administration, and \$206,794 supported operational expenses related to the program. The remaining \$147,791 was added to the donation reserve account, along with \$94,713 in earned interest, bringing the total donation reserve balance to \$6,721,098 as of December 31, 2020. The donation reserve provides for donations to be designated to areas of

interest, and disbursed as projects are initiated. Figure 2 outlines the intended uses of the funds currently in the donation reserve.



**Figure 2 – Donation Reserve Funding Distribution**

The administration expenses associated with the Park Board's fundraising and development operations represent approximately 25% of the funds generated, and fall into the lower third of the Canada Revenue Agency's recommended standard (ranging from 20% to 35%).

The following sections provide some valuable insights into key fundraising campaigns.

### **Dedicated Park Bench Program**

The dedicated park bench program generated \$426,076 in 2020. Donations were used to install and maintain 61 new dedications (funded through the annual solicitation appeal for new dedications) and maintain 23 dedications (funded for a further 10-years through the renewal solicitation appeal). Participation levels decreased in both categories. In a typical year, 75 new dedications are funded (compared to 61 in 2020), resulting in a 19% decrease; the annual renewal rate also decreased from 45% to 35%.

### **Recreation Projects**

A total of \$319,968 was received from donors for recreation projects. The spray park renewal at Connaught Park was made possible through a \$260,500 major gift pledged in 2019 by the Kitsilano War Memorial Community Centre Association and fulfilled in 2020. The Park Board received \$59,468 in donations from members of lawn bowling club partners at Kerrisdale, Dunbar, Granville Park, Stanley Park, West Point Grey Park and Pacific Indoor Bowling Club for facility upgrades that were necessary to enable social distancing, thereby enabling clubs to resume activities in a safe manner during the pandemic. Participation levels increased due to the number of individual donations made through the bowling clubs, and revenue was just

slightly lower than the previous year due to a pledged gift from the Rotary Club of Vancouver for an outdoor ping pong table at Kitsilano Beach Park. Due to the pandemic, this project was delayed and the installation will take place in 2021.

### **Planned Giving**

Planned giving accounted for \$185,516 in 2020. One planned gift was received through a bequest to support access and inclusion for kayaking programs. One notice of probate on a planned gift was received and six notices of provision-in-will were received with the Park Board named as a beneficiary. Donation amounts will be identified as work unfolds with trustees and executors for the estates in 2021.

### **Park Conservation**

Philanthropic contributions for park conservation totaled \$52,257. Donations made through tribute funds for in-memory or in-honour gifts help support conservation of parks, monuments, and the protection of urban forests and natural areas. While the participation level was similar to previous years, total revenue declined due to a reduction in gift size.

## **LOOKING AHEAD TO 2021**

Donation activity during the first quarter of each year is traditionally slower than the rest of the year. However, due to the ongoing impacts of the pandemic, it is expected that donation activity will remain slow throughout the year resulting in a drop in donation revenue below the range and scale experienced in 2020. This is due in part to the inability to secure new major gifts in 2020, and also that existing major gifts committed for projects that were not completed in 2020 will remain outstanding until the projects are completed. The most notable being, a \$250,000 major gift donation from the Riley Foundation for creek restoration at Volunteer Park.

As a result, 2021 is expected to be another difficult year for fundraising. However, staff will continue to support residents and community groups in their philanthropic interests, look for ways to increase support in areas of greater need within the organization, and identify areas where donor interest may align with areas of need within the VanPlay framework. In 2021, while waiting on the development of the foundation, staff will also develop an enhanced fundraising plan with a few select priorities to integrate opportunities and expand on existing fundraising initiatives.

## **CONCLUSION**

Philanthropy plays an indispensable role in society, particularly in light of the financial pressures faced by all levels of government, as well as increasing social inequality. Donations secured through the Park Board's Fundraising & Development Office help build, maintain, and protect the places and spaces that define Vancouver. The goal of the Office is to continue to engage residents in philanthropy, promote the Park Board as a philanthropic organization of choice for Vancouverites, and increase the organization's capacity to receive, invest, and build a source of sustainable funding that supports the Park Board's mission to "provide, preserve and advocate for parks and recreation to benefit all people, communities and the environment."

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