



June 29, 2021

TO: Park Board Chair and Commissioners
FROM: General Manager – Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation
SUBJECT: Coopers' Park Renewal – Concept Plan

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Vancouver Park Board approve the proposed Concept Plan for a new fitness area, and renewal of the existing playground and dog off-leash area planned for Coopers' Park, as outlined in this report and as shown in Figures 2 to 4.

REPORT SUMMARY

Coopers' Park, a 1.71 hectare park in downtown Vancouver on the False Creek seawall, serves one of the most densely populated area in the city and experiences thousands of visitors travelling to and through the space annually. Current programming includes: open lawn areas on the west side; a playground and multi-purpose basketball and skateboard court under the cover of the Cambie Bridge in the middle of the park; a secondary smaller playground on the east side of the park; and the largest and one of the most highly utilized dog off-leash areas downtown. The programmed areas under the bridge offer a unique opportunity for covered recreation in Vancouver, and are in demand all year round.

In 2016, as a result of nearby rezoning the Park Board received Community Amenity Funding to develop a new recreation amenity under the Cambie Bridge in a paved plaza on the northern edge of the park. Other planned improvements for this park include a full renewal of the play-space under the bridge, a full renewal of the off-leash area, as well as a new single-use, universal washroom approved by the Board in 2020. Staff have developed concept plans for a unique fitness area in this location. The purpose of this report is to share the findings of the public engagement process, and to seek Board decision on the proposed conceptual plan for Coopers' Park. Pending Board approval, staff will proceed with detailed design and construction.

BOARD AUTHORITY / POLICY / PREVIOUS DECISIONS

As per the [Vancouver Charter](#), the Park Board has exclusive jurisdiction and control over all areas designated as permanent and temporary parks in the City of Vancouver, including any structures, programs and activities, fees, and improvements or major changes that occur within those parks.

The proposed changes in Coopers' Park are supported by principles and directions outlined within the following:

- [VanPlay](#), the Park Board's Parks and Recreation Services Master Plan (2019/20), sets priorities and provides tools and policies to support the pursuit of equity, connectivity and access to parks and recreation for all. This project aligns with VanPlay's goals to grow and renew assets (Goal 1), prioritize delivery of resources (Goal 3), and foster safety and welcome (Goal 8). Coopers' Park is also adjacent to an Equity Initiative Zone as described in VanPlay Report 3: Strategic Bold Moves.

- [Parks Washroom Strategy](#) (2020): Guides the planning, building, and operation of parks washrooms in Vancouver parks with both short and long-term recommendations, including the installation of a new single use washroom building in Coopers' Park.
- [Greenest City Action Plan](#) (2020): Sets two targets to improve access to nature (150,000 trees and 5 min walk to greenspace).
- [Rain City Strategy](#) (2019): Reimagines and transforms how the city manages rainwater with the goals of improving water quality, resilience, and livability through creating healthy urban ecosystems in partnership across the City of Vancouver.
- [People, Parks & Dogs Strategy](#) (2017): Promotes the comfort and safety of all park users by fostering responsible dog ownership and clarifying rules, boundaries and etiquette for dog off-leash activity in parks.
- [Seniors Fitness in Parks](#) (2016): Board motion directing staff to review opportunities to install senior friendly (all ages / all abilities) fitness equipment in Vancouver parks.
- [Bird Strategy](#) (2015): Celebrates the importance of birds in Vancouver, and provides voluntary landscape guidelines to enhance urban bird habitats.
- [Urban Forest Strategy](#) (2014): Policy and operational guidelines to enhance the urban forest on private lands, streets, and parks.
- [Healthy City Strategy](#) (2014): 13 long-term goals for the well-being of the City and its people, including ambitious targets to reach by 2025, and especially a goal to encourage active living and getting outside.
- [CD-1 Rezoning - 998 Expo Boulevard \(Concord 5B West\)](#) (2014): Identifies Community Amenity Contributions towards a new recreation space under the Cambie Bridge and a new park washroom.

BACKGROUND

Coopers' Park was built in 1991 as part of the [False Creek North Official Development Plan](#). The park spans the boundaries of both Yaletown and Northeast False Creek in the Downtown Peninsula, one of the most densely populated area of Vancouver, which is home to over 100,000 people, 150,000 jobs, and an estimated 4,500+ dogs and a growing number of visitors. The project site is a highly visited and visible location that serves the expanding downtown community, as well as the thousands of active users travelling the adjacent False Creek seawall, or passing through to the pedestrian on-off ramp for the overhead Cambie Street Bridge.

Current programming in the 1.71 ha park includes: open lawn areas on the west side, a playground and multi-purpose basketball and skateboard court under the cover of the Cambie Bridge in the middle of the park, and the largest dog off-leash area (OLA) downtown, along with a secondary smaller playground on the east side of the park (see Figure 1). The programmed areas under the bridge offer a unique opportunity for covered recreation in Vancouver, with protection from inclement weather and are in demand all year round.

In 2016, the Park Board received funding to develop a new "recreation amenity" under the Cambie Bridge in a paved plaza adjacent to the northern edge of the park. The funding was the result of public consultation for nearby rezoning to increase residential density, during which, added

pressure on the park was one of the main concerns heard. In response, a Community Amenity Contribution (CAC) was provided to increase recreational space.

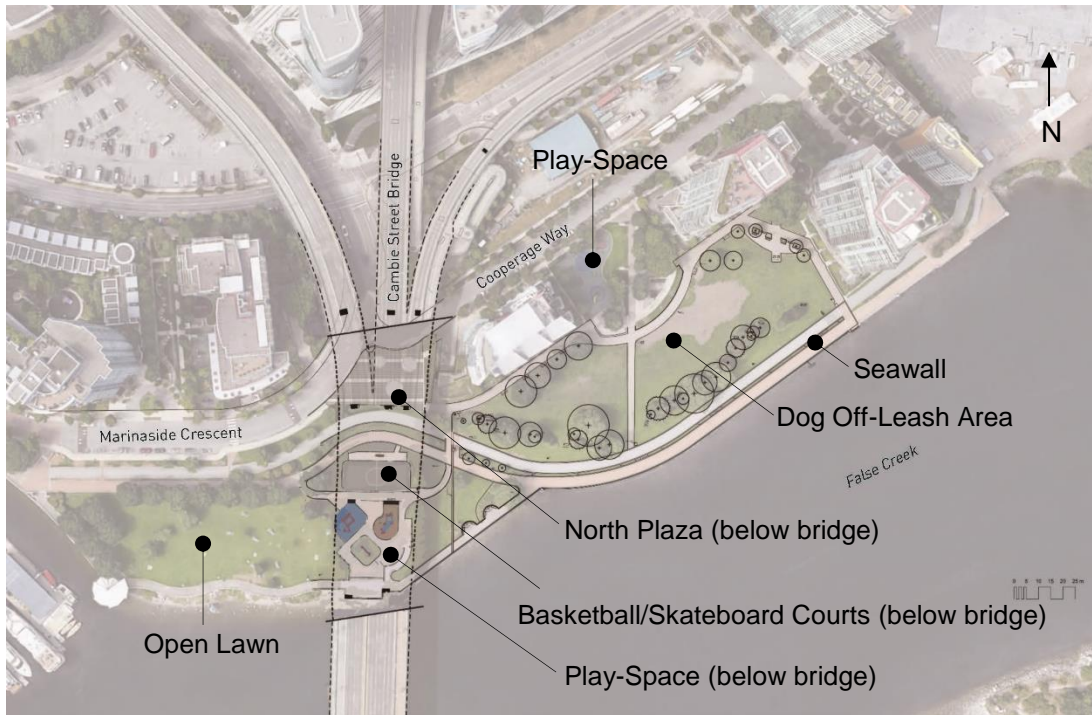


Figure 1: Coopers' Park - Map of Existing Park Amenities

New Washroom

The Parks Washroom Strategy, approved by the Board in November 2020, identified Coopers' Park as a high priority for a new washroom, and suitable for the trial of a single-use, universal model such as the Portland Loo. Real Estate and Facilities Management (REFM) staff are currently leading procurement and installation of the Portland Loo and working closely with Park Board staff on determining the best location for the new washroom.

Asset Renewal

Both the play equipment and safety surfacing under the bridge have reached the end of their lifespans. Additionally, the off-leash dog area does not adhere to the adopted guidelines in the People, Parks and Dogs strategy, and staff have heard significant public concern over the lack of fencing and the condition of the grass surfacing.

Design Process

Staff have been working on the proposed improvements for Coopers' Park since 2017. The design goals leading the recreation amenity and renewed play-space under the Cambie Bridge are:

- create a welcoming and fun recreation amenity;
- utilize the covered under-bridge environment including vertical surfaces and ceiling height;
- combat both the grey of Vancouver winters, and surrounding concrete by including creative lighting and bright colours; and
- design something unique and memorable that draws inspiration from our local environment.

The proposed concept for the off-leash area renewal closely follows the design guidelines developed through the People, Parks and Dogs strategy, with an emphasis on:

- materials and layout that can withstand intense use; and
- amenities for dogs and people to enhance safety, fun and comfort.

DISCUSSION

Public Engagement Process

Public engagement for the proposed improvements in Coopers' Park sought feedback on all park changes as outlined below. The process included two public open houses, three public questionnaires, and review with stakeholder groups.

Public Engagement #1

The first public open house was held in Coopers' Park on May 30, 2018, to gather feedback on initial concepts for the recreation amenity. A link to the [open house information displays](#) is provided on the [project webpage](#). Members of the public were asked to provide feedback on:

- how they currently use the park;
- what qualities they most preferred about each of the five options presented;
- how or if they would use each of the options; and
- what their preferred option was overall.

In total, 571 respondents completed the questionnaire, providing an overall positive response to the project. A preference for a non-conventional workout spot was the most preferred option, while the giant red octopus received the most favourable comments. There is clear general support for a bright design that can be used throughout all seasons. Some of the main concerns and additional requests identified include:

- need for a park washroom;
- safety improvements to improve separation between cyclists and pedestrians;
- improvements to the play-space and basketball/skateboard court; and
- park lighting.

Public Engagement #2

Feedback from the first open house provided guidance to the proposed conceptual plans that were considered at the second open house, which was held in the park on September 7, 2019. A link to the [open house information displays](#) is provided on the project webpage, which show proposed plans for a Pacific Northwest themed fitness area to support parkour and calisthenics with the addition of the play-space renewal that includes a giant red octopus structure. Members of the public were asked to provide feedback on:

- which elements of the fitness area and play-space they most preferred;
- if they thought they would use the new fitness area; and
- if they liked the proposed concept overall.

In total, 654 respondents completed the questionnaire, showing strong support for both the fitness area and play-space. The majority of respondents indicated they would use the fitness

area and the most preferred elements included the rocky outcrop, whale-bars, under water lighting, and red octopus play structure. The main concerns heard included:

- the need to include more traditional, age-friendly fitness equipment as well;
- the need to ensure universally accessible features and access throughout play-space; and
- further emphasis on improving safety and preventing conflicts between cyclists and pedestrians throughout the programmed area under the bridge.

These factors were evaluated and will be addressed in the future, as described in the design and considerations section of this report. A link to the [engagement summary](#) for the first two questionnaires is available on the project webpage.

Public Engagement #3

Due to ongoing Provincial Health Orders limiting in-person gatherings The third public engagement process was conducted entirely online on the City's [Shape Your City platform](#) between March 19, and April 6, 2021. The third engagement sought feedback on proposed options for renewal of the off-leash area and notified the public of the pending Portland Loo installation. A link to the [information boards](#) is available on the project webpage. Members of the public were asked to provide feedback on:

- Current use and opinions of the existing OLA;
- What the preferred amenities and surfacing types are; and
- Whether they liked the proposed concept.

A total of 465 respondents completed the questionnaire, with high overall support for the proposed improvements to the OLA. There was also indication that more people would use the OLA once the improvements are implemented. The main concerns heard include:

- Preference for natural grass over synthetic turf; and
- Reduced size of OLA due to location of fencing.

These factors were evaluated and will be addressed in the future, as described in the design and considerations section of this report. A link to the [engagement summary](#) is available on the project webpage.

Fitness Area Design

Feedback from the public engagement indicated that the most preferred option was a non-conventional "workout spot", followed closely by the giant red octopus and bright spot options. Staff therefore developed a concept that included elements from all three. The proposed conceptual design for the plaza is a Pacific Northwest themed fitness area to support calisthenics and parkour exercises, which are already popular activities in this park (see Figure 2).

Calisthenics and Parkour training use limited equipment to perform exercises. In calisthenics, minimal to no equipment is used to perform exercises such as pulling, pushing, muscle-ups, jumping and swinging. Parkour involves overcoming obstacles to get from one point to another in a fast and efficient way using movements such as running, climbing, swinging and jumping. Parkour and Calisthenics training provide a number of benefits such as improved strength, flexibility, agility, balance and most importantly fun.



Figure 2: Proposed concept for a Pacific Northwest themed fitness area at Coopers' Park

The themed fitness area design features:

- exercise bars at different heights, sizes and grip size which look like a whale skeleton;
- a rocky outcrop for climbing, stretching, observing, balancing etc.;
- small step elements that can be used for jumping, split-squats, dips, step-ups and that are themed after BC's endangered glass sponge reefs;
- sculptural bull kelp elements which maximize the dramatic ceiling height in the space and can be used for pole climbing, stretching or attaching various exercise bands to;
- resilient, rubberized safety surfacing;
- specialized lighting that reflects on the underside of the bridge deck to mimic the feeling of being underwater; and
- integrated lighting in the seating and ground elements to create more visual interest and inspired by coastal phosphorescence.

Staff are working closely with local parkour and general fitness experts to ensure the design is optimized for functional use.

Play-Space Design

The play-space design continues the Pacific Northwest theme (see Figure 3) and includes:

- a custom giant red octopus play structure with sliding, climbing, and exploration opportunities;
- swings, including an accessible harness seat;

- a rubber mound with climbing holds and tunnel, themed after a porpoise;
- resilient rubber surfacing with a sand play area;
- new seating opportunities and peripheral tree planting; and
- a drinking fountain and new bike racks will also be included as part of this project and located to serve the programmed area under the bridge during detail design.

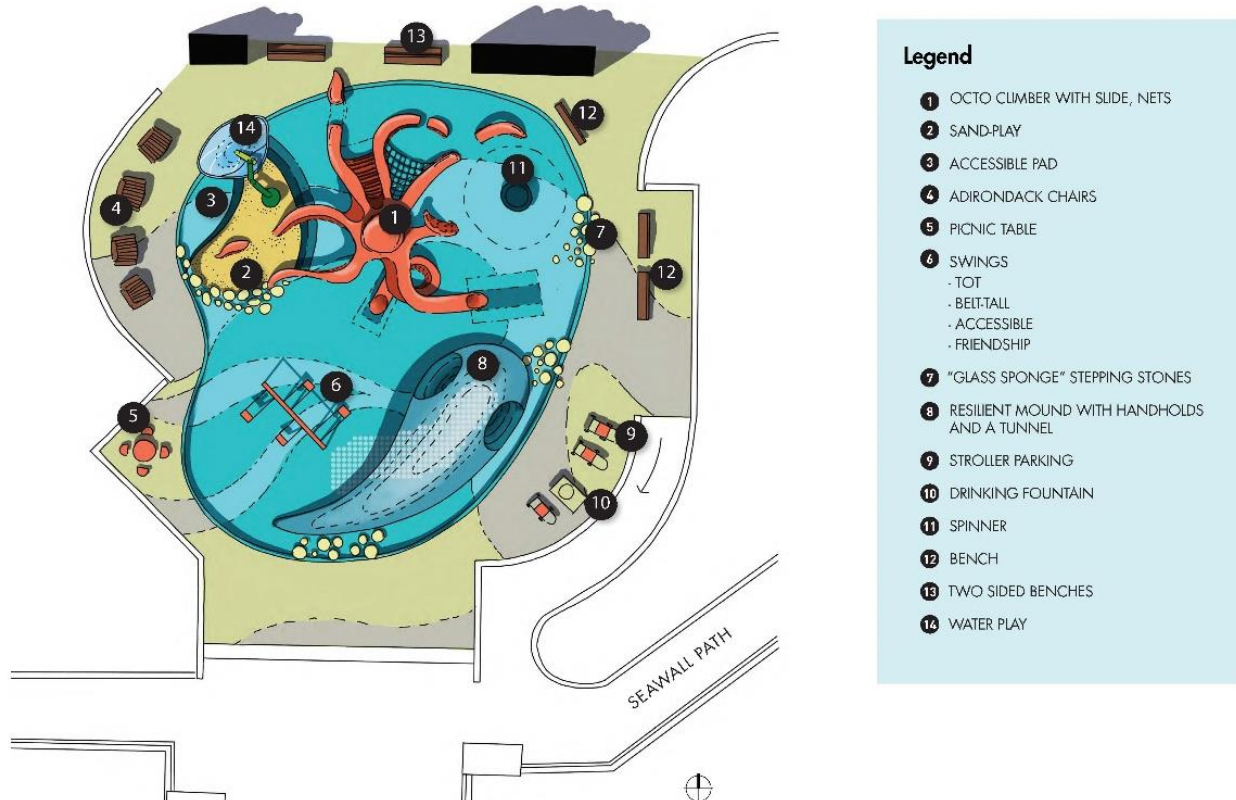


Figure 3: Proposed concept for a Pacific Northwest themed play-space at Coopers' Park

Staff are working closely with designers on the custom octopus structure to ensure that play value, including accessible elements, is maximized and to develop a feature that can become a unique landmark on the seawall.

Dog Off-Leash Area Design

The People, Parks & Dogs Strategy categorizes off-leash areas based on size and location, and outlines design recommendations for each category. Based on the size (0.4 ha) and downtown location, the Coopers' Park off-leash area is considered a 'Neighbourhood Urban' off-leash area.

Features recommended for this category include:

- durable specialty surfacing such as synthetic turf;
- secure, high quality fencing; and
- special and standard amenities.

The proposed concept (see Figure 4) includes all the aforementioned elements as well as:

- an accessible walking loop;
- a separate “low intensity zone for smaller/shyer dogs”
- agility and water play opportunities;
- seating, sheltered areas and lighting to support all-seasons use;
- green infrastructure features to mitigate dog waste impact on storm-water system; and
- a synthetic turf dog run, with a mix of sand and natural grass in the lower activity areas.

Staff were also able to address concerns about limited size of the initial off-leash area concept by moving the fence closer to the seawall pathways in the revised concept.



Figure 4: Proposed concept for renewal of dog off-leash area

CONSIDERATIONS

Land Tenure

This park expansion area (identified as the North Plaza) is designated Engineering Right of Way (ROW) at the intersection of Marinaside Crescent and Cooperage Way, and currently serves as the designated cycling and pedestrian connection between the park and on/off ramp to the Cambie Bridge above. Understanding the demand for parks and open space in the Downtown Peninsula is high and continues to grow, City of Vancouver Engineering Services is supportive of repurposing the road right of way for uses that support community amenities. This is particularly beneficial when these spaces are contiguous to existing parks.

There are a number of park spaces within road right of ways in the city, such as Lillian To Park in the Riley Park neighbourhood and Sun Hop Park in the Mt. Pleasant neighbourhood. Park Board and Engineering Services staff will be looking at securing the tenure of these open spaces for the future and will report back to the Board.

Engineering Works

Conflicts between cyclists and pedestrians was one of the most frequent concerns heard during the first two public engagements. The seawall bike path diverts from the waters edge to run between the basketball/skateboard court and north plaza before jogging back down to the water on the east side of the bridge. The combination of pedestrians travelling through the park, users of the programmed areas under the bridge, cyclists moving through the north plaza and along the seawall, and sightline issues caused by the bridge columns results in challenging conflicts between people on bikes and people walking. The addition of the proposed fitness area will attract even more visitors to this area and limit the movement of cyclists and pedestrians through the north plaza. Engineering staff have been working on a separated cycling connection and pedestrian safety improvements to better connect the seawall to Pacific Blvd further north, and the Cambie Bridge overhead. Park Board staff will continue to work with engineering staff on coordination of the two projects, to improve safety and wayfinding for visitors to this area.

Additional coordination between Engineering and Park Board staff is ongoing around seismic upgrade requirements for the Cambie Bridge. Park Board staff will work with Engineering staff on the design of the playground and north plaza space to ensure compatibility with ongoing access and maintenance needs for the Cambie Bridge, and to ensure the two projects can continue on complementary timelines.

Skateboard Improvements

Planning work is underway for a [Skateboard Amenities Strategy](#) to guide long-range delivery of skateboarding locations throughout the city. As part of the strategy, staff are reviewing how the skateboard area at Coopers' Park can be improved and enhanced. Recommendations will be identified, explored, and implemented as part of this process.

Synthetic Turf

The Coopers' Park off-leash area serves the most densely populated neighbourhood in Vancouver for people and dogs. Natural grass surfacing cannot withstand the intense use of dogs running and digging in the frequency this park experiences. Many municipalities have begun to install dog specific synthetic turf, which has a deeper drain layer and anti-microbial infill to combat dog waste residue. The turf is on a regular irrigation schedule and in the dry summer months, a non-toxic enzyme is used to further break down dog waste residue. Coopers' Park will be the first off-leash area in Vancouver to pilot this system in the renewed central "dog-run area" and staff will monitor closely to assess the success. Though synthetic turf was the most preferred option for surfacing during public engagement, staff heard many requests for natural grass lawn, and staff have included grass lawn in the lower intensity areas of the revised concept.

Traditional Fitness Equipment

Coopers' Park is already a very popular spot for all types of outdoor fitness, and though staff are working to design a custom fitness area that is accessible to a wide range of abilities the inclusion of more traditional fitness equipment will still better serve some of the park visitors. Staff intend to explore locations for installation of traditional fitness equipment in the park during detail design.

Finances

A high level estimate for these combined works is in the range of \$3.2M to \$4.0M. The cost estimate will be refined during the design development stage to reflect market value of construction materials at the time of tender. Based on standard maintenance and operation practices for amenities of similar size, the additional operating budget for this park is estimated at a range of \$96,000 to \$120,000 per year.

Given the urban location and anticipated high utilization of this park, the new park would benefit from onsite programming. This will be considered as the Downtown Parks activation project advances.

NEXT STEPS

Subject to the Board's decision on the recommendations outlined in this report, detail design for the new fitness area, playground and off-leash area renewal will commence. Park Board staff will continue to work with City Engineering staff on the new cycling connection, ensuring a safe connection for both pedestrians and cyclists in this busy park.

Delivery of these amenities will occur in phases. The washroom and off-leash area construction are estimated to commence in fall 2021, while the custom fitness area and playground will require further coordination, and staff estimate construction will begin in spring 2022. Staff will continue to update the Board as these projects progress.

CONCLUSION

The proposed improvements to Coopers' Park all have proven community support through the public engagement process. They align with Park Board and City goals to promote well-being by increasing access to recreation amenities, and investing in assets where they are needed most. Park use during the pandemic has reached record highs and especially in our dense, downtown neighbourhoods where private outdoor space is so limited. Our downtown parks serve crucial roles in building community resilience, wellness, and connectivity and the proposed improvements for Coopers' Park will help support these needs.

Staff recommend the Vancouver Park Board approve the proposed concept for a new Pacific Northwest themed fitness area, along with renewal of the seawall playground and off-leash area, so that the project can proceed to the detail design stage.

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