



October 13, 2021

TO: Park Board Chair and Commissioners
FROM: General Manager – Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation
SUBJECT: Park Ranger Service Model – Phase 1 Report Back

RECOMMENDATION

- A. THAT the Vancouver Park Board endorse the proposed Phase 1 changes to the Park Ranger Service Model as outlined in this report, which include:
- i. Increasing the regular full-time staff complement to support expanded year-round coverage with additional daily shifts; and
 - ii. Create new positions with Peace Officer status to provide enhanced by-law enforcement support.
- B. THAT, subject to the Board's approval of Recommendation A, staff be directed to seek an additional \$1.8M of funding through the 2022 Service Planning and Budget Process, along with considerations of reinvestment opportunities through increases in fees and internal budget allocations, in order to implement the proposed changes.

REPORT SUMMARY

Park Rangers are the front-line ambassadors in Vancouver's parks with a mission to "ensure Vancouver parks are safe, enjoyable, and conserved for all". They support a broad range of activities, events, and emerging issues, and respond to a steady high volume of service requests.

While the role of Park Rangers has evolved over time in response to changing needs, the program has not undergone a significant review since its inception over twenty years ago. In order to better support the Rangers in providing safe, clean and welcoming parks and recreation spaces, the Park Ranger Service Model requires updating to provide role clarity, address ongoing capacity and funding issues, improve delivery of core services, and support bylaw enforcement efforts. As potential solutions to address capacity issues and service delivery gaps involves consultation and collaboration with many other groups, this comprehensive review work is ongoing and being undertaken in phases. The purpose of this update is to report back on the first phase of the review, which has focussed on core service funding needs and bylaw enforcement challenges. The proposed changes outlined in this report include increasing the full-time staff complement to better address service demands, support regular city-wide patrols, and to allow for a designated team to respond to emerging issues, and exploring the creation of new positions with enhanced enforcement authority.

RELATED POLICY / PREVIOUS DECISIONS

In February 2001, the Vancouver Park Board approved continuation of the [Park Ranger program](#) that was first [initiated in May 2000](#). The objective of this new program was to manage park activities through a coordinated approach that would provide better support for public information and education, as well as broader coverage for conflict resolution. Rangers were to serve as park

ambassadors – they were not given authority to enforce park by-laws; these matters were referred to the appropriate enforcement agencies.

In January 2010, the Park Board supported a [collaborative approach to enforcement](#) of city and park bylaws during the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver, which included Park Rangers temporarily forming part of the bylaw enforcement workforce. In addition to enforcing park by-laws, Rangers maintained their ambassador role, assisting visitors with wayfinding as well as providing information about Vancouver and its park network.

In July 2010, based on positive outcomes of having Park Rangers assist with by-law enforcement during the Winter Olympics, the Board approved [new bylaws prohibiting smoking](#) in Vancouver parks, with Park Rangers named as bylaw enforcement officers with the authority to issue tickets for smoking related offences.

On November 16, 2015, in response to several security related incidents over the last few years in Stanley Park, the Vancouver Park Board directed staff to develop a comprehensive [security plan for Vancouver parks](#).

On September 19, 2016, the Park Board unanimously carried the motion to investigate the creation of a [Vancouver Park Board Youth Ranger Program](#) focused on environmental responsibility, sustainability, civic leadership, and community engagement.

On October 11, 2017, the motion titled [Park Ranger Funding & Safety](#) was referred to staff to report back on the estimated costs to enable 24-hour Park Ranger patrols, and to provide clarification regarding whether the responsibilities of Park Rangers would be altered as a result of implementing overnight patrols of parks.

On November 6, 2017, the Board received a [report back on Park Ranger Funding & Safety](#) and approved [recommendations](#) for “staff to develop a comprehensive and sustainable Park Ranger Service Model, [...] to address safety, security, cleanliness and maintenance concerns, particularly in relation to the increased use of injectable drugs in Vancouver parks.”

In July 2020, the Board approved recommendations to amend the [Parks Control By-law regarding temporary shelters in parks](#). The report identified that once enacted, plans to operationalize the new by-laws would include reviewing the Park Rangers role in encampment monitoring, management, and by-law enforcement, with a separate report back to the Board on the overall ranger service model. The Board enacted the [by-law amendments](#) in September 2020.

In October 2020, the Park Board approved the [VanPlay Framework](#), for Vancouver’s Parks and Recreation Services Master Plan. The proposed Park Ranger Service Model aligns with VanPlay Goal 8: Foster a system of parks and recreation spaces that are safe and welcoming to all. To support this goal, [The Playbook](#) includes the Approach for Action P.1.1: Increase capacity of park rangers services based on a detailed service review (Ranger Service Review).

In October 2021, the Park Board enacted [by-law amendments](#) to clarify that feeding wildlife, either directly or indirectly, is prohibited in Vancouver parks and offences may be subject to fines of \$500, with the Vancouver Police and Park Rangers given authority to issue these tickets.

BACKGROUND

Park Rangers are a responsive mobile team supporting a broad range of activities, events, and emerging issues throughout the park system. They are the front-line ambassadors in Vancouver's parks whose day-to-day work involves ensuring that these invaluable public resources are protected and remain safe welcoming places for all, both now and into the future.

History of the Park Ranger Program

The Park Board first initiated the Park Ranger program in May 2000 to better monitor and manage park activities through a coordinated approach that would provide improved public information and education, as well as broader coverage for conflict resolution. Rangers were to serve as ambassadors of the Board in parks, and their primary role was to increase public awareness of park by-laws, rules and regulations, direct queries where appropriate, and liaison with other City of Vancouver (City) departments, partners and stakeholders when needed. Park Rangers did not have the authority to enforce city or park by-laws and so primarily dealt with issues that could be resolved through information, education and/or conflict resolution. Issues which could not be resolved through these methods, or required a long term or alternate solution, (e.g., enforcement, maintenance responsibilities, safety issues, etc.) were referred to the appropriate department or agency.

The program operated seven days a week over the peak summer period (late May to early September), providing coverage from 6:30am-10:15pm via 14 seasonal auxiliary staff and 1 full-time programmer. For the remainder of the year, Park Ranger staffing was reduced to monitoring special events and sport fields only.

While the first year experienced growing pains and presented a steep learning curve, the program overall was successful. The knowledgeable cross-trained team was able to better support park patrons with information and education. Additionally, regularly dealing with people experiencing homelessness, buskers, and off-leash dogs improved working relationships with City partners and other agencies (e.g., housing, community & health services, police, animal control, etc.).

Some of the key learnings included:

- new tasks stretched resources when combined with existing monitoring duties;
- expectations of the Ranger Program varied significantly between the public, staff and the Rangers themselves;
- enforcement of Park Board by-laws is expected, however the City's enforcement officers (police, animal control, health, parking, by-law staff) were reluctant to charge park by-law violators; and
- misperceptions that the Ranger Program could solve all problems which occur in parks.

In 2001, the Board approved staff recommendations that the Park Ranger Program be continued, with the report back noting that ongoing success would be dependent on the public, staff, stakeholders, and partners having a clear understanding of the Park Ranger's role and priorities in managing park activities and behaviours by park patrons.

The Park Ranger Program was to maintain its ambassador philosophy of informing and educating the public rather than focusing on the enforcement of park by-laws, which would be left to the departments with the skills and resources to prosecute by-law violators. Monitoring city-wide recreation activities in parks would be the Ranger's first priority, and they would continue to deal

with issues that could be resolved through information, education and/or conflict resolution; all other issues would be referred to the most appropriate resources.

It was recognized that maintaining strong working relationships with community partners and enforcement agencies, and being able to clearly define the Park Ranger's role to these groups, was critical. Additionally it was acknowledged that the Park Board needed to work with the various enforcement departments to confirm they will enforce park by-laws, and to ensure these by-laws reflected enforcement concerns and could withstand legal challenges.

Park Ranger By-law Enforcement

In 2006, City and Park Board staff began working together on a regulatory framework in preparation for the 2010 Winter Olympic Games being held in Vancouver. Recognizing the Games would be an intense and busy period for by-law enforcement staff, a collaborative approach for enforcement during the Games was developed. In January 2010, the Board supported having Park Rangers form part of the [2010 Winter Games By-law Enforcement](#) workforce, and enacted a Park Board Ticket Offences By-law that set fines that could be issued by Park Rangers during that time period (Feb 1 to Mar 31). In addition to enforcing City and Park Board by-laws, these field staff were to be ambassadors for Vancouver and assist visitors with wayfinding as well as provide information about the city and its park network.

After successfully assisting with bylaw enforcement efforts during the Winter Olympics, in July 2010 Park Rangers were given ongoing authority to enforce the new Smoking Regulation By-law passed by the Board to ban smoking at all parks and beaches. Through a new Park Board Ticket Offences By-law, Park Rangers (along with Police Officers) could issue tickets with fines ranging from \$250-\$500 depending on the by-law offence. This by-law was recently updated in October 2021 to expand the Ranger's ticketing authority to include offences related to feeding wildlife. A more comprehensive review of all park by-laws and fines for offences is underway.

It is important to note that while the Park Rangers role has expanded over the years to include by-law enforcement, their ability to respond to escalated conflicts remains limited and still requires heavy reliance on other enforcement resources and agencies. The ongoing challenge is that enforcing park by-laws is not a priority for these various other groups and so the necessary support is often not available.

Park Ranger Funding and Park Safety

In 2017, a motion to address [Park Ranger Funding and Safety](#) concerns was referred to staff for consideration. The motion stated that the existing "budget for Park Rangers and park maintenance is inadequate to address the significant challenges related to drug use and garbage in various parks." It proposed introducing 24/7 Park Ranger coverage and recommended seeking additional funding to support these added patrols and for maintaining the cleanliness and safety of Vancouver parks on an ongoing basis.

In the [subsequent report back](#) in November 2017, staff outlined some of the efforts made to improve park maintenance, safety, & security, which included:

- increased presence at parks most impacted by drug use and homeless encampments;
- a new Ranger station and dedicated patrols in Andy Livingstone Park;
- additional funding to increase the number of Park Ranger regular positions from five (5) to twelve (12), with shift coverage from 7am to midnight, seven (7) days per week;

- service agreement with the City's Engineering Streets division to temporarily assist with the maintenance of six DTES parks 5 days/ week;
- two security attendants added to more frequently service the playgrounds and public washrooms in Andy Livingstone and Creekside Parks 5 days/week (budgeted for 2017 only).

The report back also provided an estimate of the initial funding needed to support 24/7 Park Ranger patrols, noting that consideration should be given to when extra staffing would be most effectively employed. It was suggested that additional morning service coverage would be more beneficial, however a more thorough review and assessment was still required, which could be included as part of an overall service model review. The Board approved the recommendation for staff to develop a comprehensive and sustainable Park Ranger Service Model, in consultation and collaboration with the Vancouver Police, City of Vancouver, and community partners, to address safety, security, cleanliness and maintenance concerns in Vancouver parks.

DISCUSSION

The role of Park Rangers has evolved significantly over time in response to emerging and changing needs. As outlined in this report, historically the primary role of Park Rangers was to monitor park activities, educate & inform the public, resolve conflicts, and facilitate referrals to appropriate resources. Demands were highest during the summer months when park usage was at its peak, and so maintaining a predominantly auxiliary workforce provided flexibility to adjust staffing to meet changing seasonal demands.

Over the years, population growth, urban density, and complex social issues have resulted in rising and competing use of limited park space on a year round basis. As well, in addition to responding to an annually increasing volume of service and event requests, Park Rangers have been frequently called upon to assist with other service gaps such as: bylaw enforcement, wildlife response, securing park facilities, clearing encampments, debris removal, performing needle sweeps, monitoring film productions, traffic management, forest and trail conservation, etc.

Homelessness in Parks

In recent years, large-scale encampments have occurred within a number of Vancouver parks, with the largest being at Strathcona Park, which reached approximately 400 tents/structures. Year-round encampments in Stanley Park also continue to be a concern; Park Rangers removed 142 active and 64 abandoned camps from the park in 2020. In addition to managing and removing encampments, Park Rangers dedicate large amounts of staff resources towards encampment prevention.

The majority of Park Ranger resources are currently directed towards identifying issues and opportunities to connect homeless and street involved individuals with programs and services in other City departments and agencies. Park Rangers work respectfully with people living in public parks and provide referrals to shelters, housing, and support services, which assists and encourages safer and healthier alternatives for housing. Park Rangers also work cooperatively with the City's Urban Issues Team to clear homeless encampments when necessary, and assist those living outdoors to safer housing solutions when this occurs.

Increasing Service Demands

Over the past five years, the Park Ranger program has experienced a dramatic increase in service requests, with the majority related to challenges arising from complex health, urban, and social issues and the impacts on park safety and cleanliness. These issues have been further

exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic with increased demands put on outdoor public spaces.

As shown in Figure 1 below, the number of Park Ranger cases has increased by 1,153% from 2015 (1,909 cases) to 2020 (22,010 cases). Social issues related cases (e.g. mental health, drug addiction and temporary structures in parks) rose by 40% in 2020, and are forecast to continue rising during 2021.

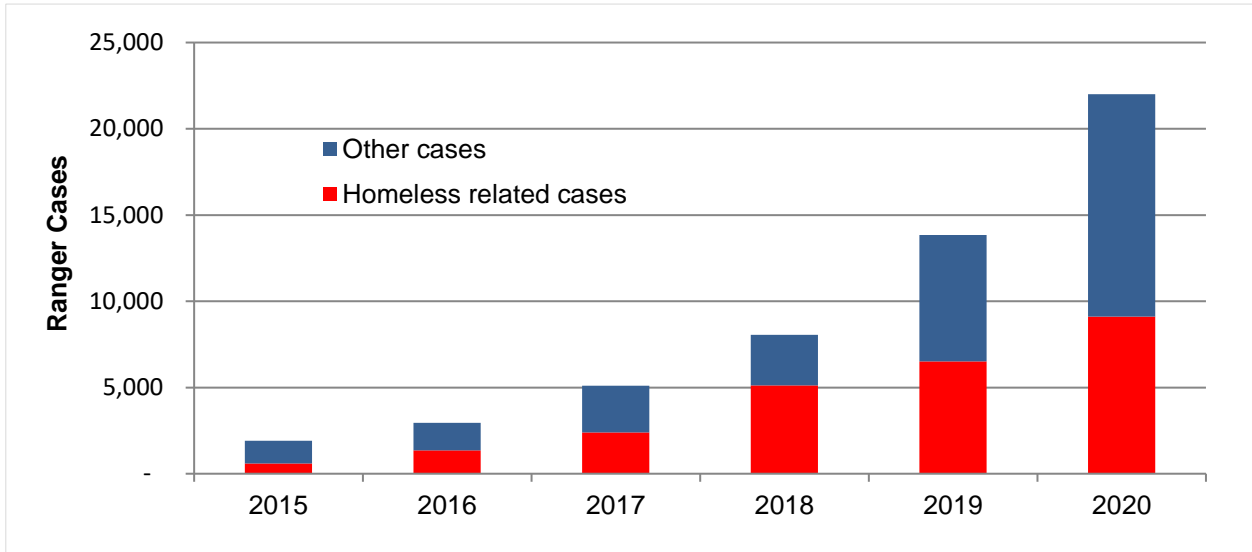


Figure 1: Park Ranger Case Volumes 2015-2020

As funding and resources for the Park Ranger Program have not kept pace with expanding community needs and service requests, rising case volumes have overwhelmed the Ranger team. Urgent and high risk matters, such as managing encampments and addressing wildlife issues in parks, are prioritized over regular work, but this triaging process impacts response times and results in many lower risk service requests going unattended (such responding to amplified noise, smoking, and off-leash dog complaints).

As shown in Figure 2 below, in 2020 less than a quarter of all cases were addressed within the 72 hour response time target, and 25% of the cases received no response at all.

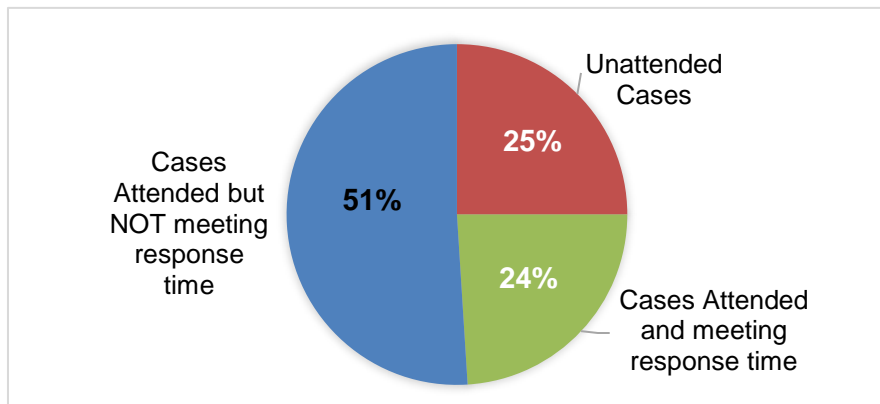


Figure 2 – Park Ranger Response Time (within 72hrs) Outcomes - 2020

Additionally, ongoing efforts to respond to the substantial increase in service requests received over the past several years without any additional capacity has had a detrimental impact on other core services, resulting in a:

- reduced sense of some parks feeling welcoming and safe;
- reduced ability to respond to lower priority/low risk issues;
- delayed service request response times;
- reduced litter and needle picking, impacting overall park cleanliness;
- reduced maintenance of natural and synthetic turf; and
- reduced trail maintenance and park conservation efforts.

Park Ranger Program - Current State

The Ranger Program is currently operating with a base labour budget of \$1.3 million, with a separate budget to cover expenses for supplies, vehicles, equipment, uniforms, etc. This funds the equivalent of 15 full-time positions, which is currently comprised of a combination of regular full-time (RFT), temporary full-time (TFT), part-time and auxiliary staff. In terms of actual service coverage, this funding provides for only four (4) Ranger shifts, to cover 16 hours/day, 7 days/week, to manage 240 parks. In order to respond to special requests and emerging needs, the Ranger Program has consistently operated in a deficit, drawing funds away from other Park Operations services and deliverables. As well, as the availability of auxiliary staff varies, these unexpected extra hours can often require staff working overtime, resulting in higher overall costs.

The Park Rangers mandate has evolved and expanded over the years, and while the ambassador role has remained consistent, due to limited resources focus has shifted to responding to emerging issues and high risk service requests, with less time available for regular park monitoring and patrol activities.

The expanded Ranger core services currently include, but are not limited to, the following:

- providing park visitor information and wayfinding;
- educating the public about park conservation, regulations, and by-laws;
- monitoring city-wide recreation activities in parks;
- monitoring and maintaining order and safety in parks; performing needle sweeps;
- protecting & securing park facilities, amenities and natural assets;
- supporting special events and filming;
- offering homeless outreach in parks; conducting safety checks; connecting individuals with appropriate support services;
- working with Vancouver Police, Vancouver Fire and Rescue Service, BC Ambulance, CoV Corporate Security, and other departments and agencies on issues occurring in parks;
- enforcing park by-laws; issuing tickets for offences related to smoking and feeding wildlife;
- performing wildlife rescue;
- providing traffic management services; and
- responding to a broad range of park-related concerns and service requests reported via 3-1-1 and VanConnect.

Understanding that the existing funding levels and staffing models have not been sufficient to address the current demands being put on the Park Rangers, staff have been reviewing the current service model, Ranger case metrics, and feedback from the Park Ranger team and other key stakeholders to develop a sustainable plan for moving forward. The overall goal in updating the service model is to provide role clarity, address ongoing capacity and funding issues, improve core service delivery, and support bylaw enforcement efforts.

In order to identify how best to address capacity issues and service delivery gaps, the current core services need to be reviewed to determine what work should remain with the Park Rangers, what work should be prioritized, and what work would be more appropriate to be handled by other staff resources. This review is ongoing and is being undertaken in phases as it requires considerable consultation and collaboration with the many impacted groups, as well as alignment with work underway on the park security plan. In the meantime, using the current core services as the initial baseline, staff have focussed on addressing core service funding needs and bylaw enforcement challenges as the priority for the first phase of the review.

Proposed Park Ranger Service Model – Phase 1

In this first phase of the service model review, staff are proposing that additional funding be sought through the annual budget and service planning process to better support the delivery of core services and to improve bylaw enforcement efforts. As outlined below, increasing the full-time staff complement will provide more consistent year-round coverage to address current service demands, support regular city-wide patrols, include a team designated to respond to emerging issues, and offer enhanced by-law enforcement capability.

1. Expand Full-time Staff Team

- supplement existing staff team with the equivalent of 16 new full-time positions, to bring full staff complement to the equivalent of 31 full-time positions (doubling capacity);
- allows for a minimum of eight (8) Ranger shifts/day, covering 16 hours/day, 7 days/week, providing broader and more effective city-wide coverage;
- new positions would include some supervisory and Peace Officer roles;
- continue shifting away from seasonal auxiliary staffing model; having regular full-time staff will provide greater consistency and reliability in service delivery.
- seasonal auxiliary staffing will remain a practice as the auxiliary workforce allows for staffing up levels for emerging priorities or special events.

2. City-wide Park Ranger Patrols

- increased staffing will enable teams to maintain regular city-wide patrols at all parks;
- develop “regional” hubs to support equitable delivery of services city-wide;
- supports front-line park ambassador role;
- supports delivery of core services, such as:
 - o monitoring parks and seawall for safety, hazards, and cleanliness;
 - o supporting sport field bookings, special events, and filming;
 - o providing park by-law education and enforcement;
 - o following-up on complaints and service requests;
 - o engaging in community outreach and education programs;
 - o coordinating traffic management;
 - o responding to wildlife issues.

3. Specialized Task Teams to Support Urban Issues

- increased staffing will enable creation of specialized Ranger Task Teams to respond to issues in the urban core;
- enhanced training programs will focus on trauma informed, harm reduction approaches;
- primary responsibilities will include:
 - o ensuring that parks, washrooms and other amenities remain safe and clean
 - o maintaining regular patrols of all urban parks; needle sweeps & clean-ups;
 - o focusing on emergency response/emerging issues;
 - o assisting with those experiencing homelessness in parks; connecting individuals with appropriate support services;
 - o managing encampments and temporary structures;
 - o conducting fire patrols in Stanley Park.

4. Create New Positions with Enhanced Enforcement Capabilities

- increased staffing will enable creation of some new positions with Peace Officer status to support Rangers with by-law enforcement;
- Rangers have authority to issue tickets for certain by-law offences but cannot demand identification if refused;
- Peace Officer status provides authority to demand identification; non-compliance can result in detainment/arrest;
- encourages increased by-law compliance and less reliance on other enforcement agencies;
- supports setting enforceable fines for other by-law offences (amplified sound, beach fires, unpermitted events, etc.);
- enables Park Board to prioritize enforcement efforts to not further marginalize equity deserving groups or people disproportionately impacted by the housing crisis, opioid epidemic or impacts from COVID-19.

In addition to the Park Ranger Program service model changes noted above, staff also further investigated the feasibility of introducing 24/7 Park Ranger coverage as requested in the motion referred to staff. At this time staff are not recommending implementation of 24-hour Ranger coverage. While the current CUPE 15 collective agreement does allow for temporary scheduling of Park Rangers to overnight shifts, these shifts would be subject to overtime. It was determined that increasing coverage during regular shifts would yield much greater benefits.

Staff were also directed to investigate the creation of a Youth Ranger program with the goals of engaging youth in park stewardship, encouraging environmental sustainability, while fostering civic leadership, community engagement and safety. Initial pilots were run successfully, but ongoing funding and programming resources still need to be identified for it to be sustained long term. As such, this initiative has been included in the overall core service review being undertaken as part of the next phase.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Park Ranger program has incurred an operating budget deficit each year since 2015, as shown in Figure 3 below. The accumulated operating labour cost deficit from 2015 through 2020 was \$2.2M. The overspend forecast for wages in 2021 is \$1.1M.

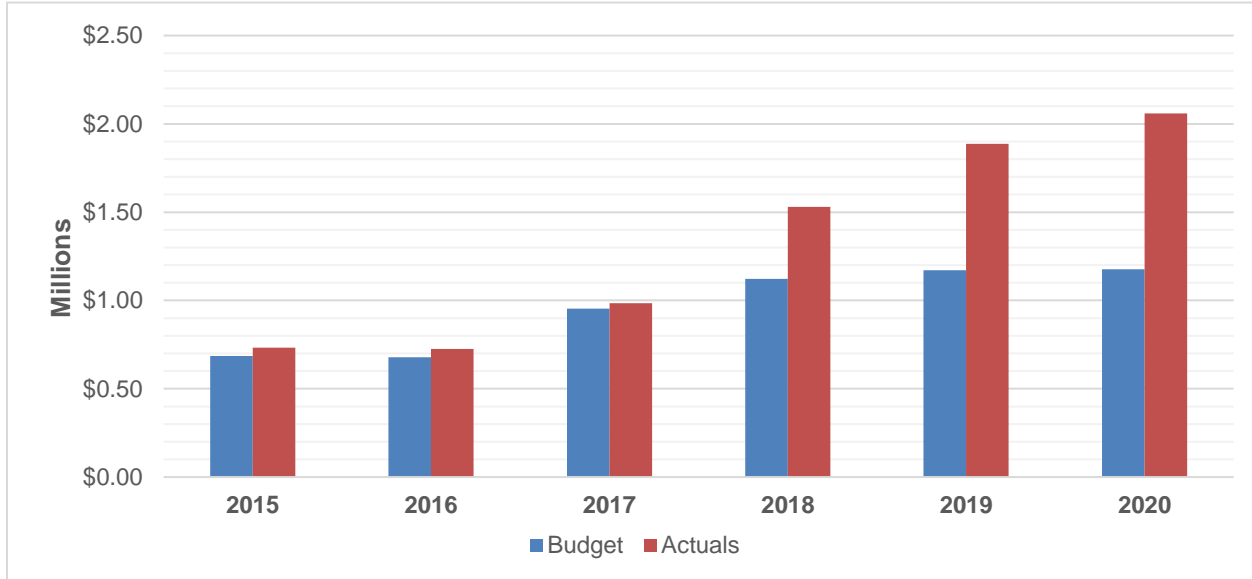


Figure 3 – Park Ranger Labour Costs (Budget vs Actuals)

This has affected the ability to deliver core services in other areas of Park Operations, such as managing invasive species, maintaining and improving park cleanliness, and field maintenance. To address service delivery gaps and reduce impacts to other core services, the Park Ranger Program will require additional ongoing base funding of \$1.8 million to fund the proposed increased staffing levels outlined in this report (equivalent to 16 new full-time positions). This additional funding will be sought as a new funding request through the 2022 Service Planning and Budget process, along with considerations of reinvestment opportunities through increases in fees and internal budget allocations within Park Board.

CONCLUSION & NEXT STEPS

The Park Ranger Program is integral to delivering on the Park Board’s commitment to ensure that Vancouver parks are safe, accessible, and welcoming spaces for all. The Park Ranger Service Model review has been undertaken to ensure that Rangers receive the support they need to deliver their core services in an effective and sustainable manner. The proposed changes outlined in this report represent the first phase of the overall service model review. By increasing the number of Rangers on duty each day, and by transitioning to a full-time, year-round staffing model, the Park Rangers will be much better positioned to address current service demands. The additional coverage will support regular city-wide patrols, allow for a designated team to respond to emerging issues, and improve overall Ranger presence city-wide. As well, the creation of new positions with enhanced enforcement authority will support Rangers with by-law enforcement, encourage compliance, and decrease reliance on other external enforcement agencies. Subject to Board approval, implementation of these recommendations will require seeking additional

funding through the Service Planning and Budget process in order to increase the overall Ranger staffing complement.

Staff are also continuing to review the expanded core services currently falling under the Park Ranger, which involves ongoing consultation and collaboration with many impacted stakeholders and staff. The goal is to identify further opportunities to improve service delivery, to provide role clarity, and to address ongoing capacity and funding issues. This work will also align with the ongoing development of the Security Plan. Staff will report back to the Board once this review is complete.

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