



CHAIR'S REPORT – 2021 YEAR IN REVIEW

— January 24, 2022 —
(deferred from December 13, 2021)

The following report is intended to highlight some of the Park Board's work over the past year.

With the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, housing crisis, opioid crisis, and climate emergency, 2021 has proven to be yet another unusual and challenging year. Despite this, the Park Board Commissioners and staff have continued to demonstrate resilience and adaptability in their commitment to providing safe, clean and welcoming parks and recreation spaces to all.

Pandemic Response & Restart

In response to ever changing Public Health Orders, Park Board has had to continually adapt operations in order to safely resume services as restart plans proceed.

101st Polar Bear Swim Goes Virtual

With in person gatherings still restricted, 2021 kicked-off with the much loved Polar Bear Swim reimagined as a virtual event, with participants encouraged to take a Polar Bear Dip at home. Over 1,400 participants registered, with 800 submitting images or videos to receive their collectors' badge and commemorative certificate.

COVID-19 Vaccination Clinics

With the roll-out of new COVID-19 vaccines, Park Board staff worked with Vancouver Coastal Health to host pop-up vaccination clinics at Creekside, Sunset and West End Community Centres in the spring, catering to the 75+ age categories, with a larger vaccination clinic at the Kerrisdale Seniors Centre that ran through the summer.

Lifeguard Shortages

One of the most significant staffing challenges during the pandemic has been the national shortage of lifeguards. This systemic issue is due to a number of factors, including reduced lifeguard training opportunities for new staff, recertification extensions, career changes, availability of enhanced employment insurance benefits, and reduced comfort levels with returning to work during the pandemic. To minimize impacts and closures at Vancouver pools and beaches, the aquatics team implemented various staffing approaches and management plans to prioritize service delivery and maximize available staff resources.

Electronic Board Meetings – Procedure By-law Updates

Through a BC Ministerial Order allowing for electronic meetings so that Board business could be safely conducted while still adhering to COVID-19 public health restrictions, all Park Board meetings were being held virtually, with most Commissioners attending remotely, since May 2020. This experience demonstrated that the Board could effectively conduct its business via electronic means, and that allowing speakers to participate remotely reduced barriers for those unable to attend in person. Additionally, the ability for Commissioners to attend remotely provided more flexibility with scheduling In Camera and Special Meetings when needed on short notice.

In April, the Board enacted new Procedure By-laws to allow for speakers to participate remotely, and in October, once the necessary Vancouver Charter amendments were made, the Board enacted further by-laws to allow Park Board meetings to be held electronically and for Commissioners to attend remotely.



Mandatory COVID-19 Vaccination Policy

As BC moved into Step 3 of its Restart Plan in September, many restrictions regarding gatherings were lifted and employees began returning to the workplace. Commissioners also returned to the workplace, with the Board resuming in-person meetings on September 27. Recognizing that vaccination is a reasonable measure that supports minimizing the ongoing health and safety hazards and operational impacts of COVID-19 in relation to employees, volunteers, the public and the safety of the community overall, the City introduced a policy making COVID-19 vaccination mandatory for all employees by December 6. In support of this policy, the Board unanimously approved a motion confirming that all Commissioners are fully vaccinated against COVID-19 and will voluntarily follow the intent of the staff policy, as well as advice from public health.

Festival of Lights & Bright Nights

Last year, these popular Park Board holiday events were cancelled just before opening due to tightened COVID-19 health orders, and staff quickly responded by creating virtual experiences of both events that were well received. This year, both events will once again be open for in-person visits, with extra COVID-19 safety protocols in place to protect visitors and staff.

Challenges & Opportunities

Stanley Park Coyotes & Feeding Wildlife By-Law Updates

Coyotes play an important part in balancing our ecosystem and co-existing with wildlife is an important principle of wildlife management in BC. This year we saw an unprecedented increase in coyote related incidents in Stanley Park, which resulted in temporary overnight park closures in September. It is not normal for coyotes to pursue people and this behaviour is usually the result of being fed either directly or indirectly by people. Feeding wildlife interferes with the natural ecosystem, is unhealthy for animals, and encourages food-conditioning that can lead to potentially aggressive behaviours.

Park Board staff worked closely with the BC Conservation Officer Service, Stanley Park Ecology Society, and the Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development (FLNRORD) to address and reduce coyote conflicts in the park. This combined effort included over 700 hours of research, public education, responding to incidents, managing trail closures, installing wildlife-proof bins and posting additional signage.

In October, the 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. These by-laws will support ongoing efforts to foster healthy co-existence with urban wildlife.

Homelessness in Parks

Homelessness continues to be a complex social challenge resulting in rising numbers of people seeking temporary shelter in public spaces and parks. Partnerships across all levels of government, public health, and community services are critical to resolving this growing humanitarian crisis by addressing affordable housing, health, mental health, and social support needs.



In March 2021, the Park Board signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Province of BC and City of Vancouver to formalize the shared commitment to work together to bring the encampment in Strathcona Park to a close and prevent future encampments by connecting unsheltered residents to housing that preserves their dignity, respects the need for culturally-appropriate services for Indigenous people, and considers the needs of the surrounding community. Through a phased collaborative approach that included ongoing engagement with the residents and community in and around the park, the encampment was closed by the end of May, with the east side of the park temporarily closed for remediation until October.

The Park Board continues to work with community, government and Indigenous partners to support people sheltering in parks, recognizing that a collaborative approach to bringing people indoors is essential for the well-being of some of Vancouver's most marginalized and vulnerable residents, as well as for the well being of the broader community.

Extreme Weather Events

The Park Board responded to several extreme weather events in 2021, including winter storms and king tides causing seawall and shoreline damage (with barge souvenirs!), a record-breaking heat dome putting residents at risk, an extended heat wave and drought followed by heavy rains impacting the urban forest, and atmospheric rivers causing flooding. In addition to offering Park Board facilities as warming and cooling centres during extreme heat and cold periods, some of the other measures undertaken this year to protect residents and Park Board assets included:

- using park irrigation systems to provide temporary pop-up spray sites;
- opening wading pools ahead of schedule;
- closing Stanley Park overnight during the drought to reduce forest fire risk;
- increasing Ranger patrols to monitor for fires and to provide public education about risk of heat and impact on health and safety;
- increasing irrigation of street trees through community engagement, additional watering shifts, and collaborating with City Engineering Services.

As well, in response to the summer heat wave the Board passed two climate emergency related motions: the first to more effectively identify support for seniors and those vulnerable and isolated who may be negatively impacted by heat waves or other climate emergencies; and the second to prioritize emergency watering measures and work on the Urban Forestry and Climate Emergency Action Plan motion to mitigate the impacts of summer heat and drought on Vancouver's urban forest.

Park Ranger Service Model

In 2017, recognizing that the role of Park Rangers had evolved over time in response to changing needs, the Board directed staff to undertake a comprehensive service model review to support the Rangers in providing safe, clean and welcoming parks and recreation spaces. The Board received a report back on the first phase of the review, which focussed on core service funding needs and bylaw enforcement challenges. The Board endorsed increasing the full-time staff complement, and directed staff to report back with recommendations for the mandate of the new enhanced by-law enforcement positions and to seek an additional \$1.8M of funding through the 2022 Service Planning and Budget Process. On December 7, Council approved \$0.3M as an ongoing investment for Park Rangers, with direction for staff to work with the Park Board to further



invest in the expansion of the Park Ranger program if additional revenues or savings are available in 2022.

Decolonization, Arts and Culture

The Board received a presentation on the new Decolonization, Arts and Culture department, which brings together the Reconciliation and Arts teams to support reciprocal learning through a decolonizing lens and demonstrate a decolonized relationship with land, community, and cultural practice. An interim progress report was provided on the Colonial Audit work, which outlined the audit process, what type of information will be included, and the next steps.

Some of the 2021 events and activations applying a decolonization and reconciliation lens included the “Our Park Project”, Community Engaged Arts, and the Circles Music Concert in Andy Livingstone Park, “Blanketing the City” mural in Cathedral Square Park, “Team UP” activations in urban parks, and the Survivors Pole Refurbishment Ceremony at Pigeon Park.

Strategic Plans & Capital Projects

East Fraser Lands New Park

In June, the Board approved the concept design for a new park in East Fraser Lands, which is part of the 10+ hectares of parks planned for the EFL neighbourhood. The design has high overall community support and aligns with Park Board policies to deliver services equitably, increase access to nature, create new habitat areas, and manage and treat storm water through natural features.

Coopers’ Park Expansion & Renewal

The Board approved the concept plan for Coopers’ Park that includes a design for a Pacific Northwest themed fitness area to support calisthenics and parkour exercises, a new play-space, a renewed off-leash dog area, and the installation of a new single use washroom. The improvements to Coopers’ Park have received broad community support and reflect the principles and direction from a number of Park Board strategies, including the People, Parks and Dogs and Washroom strategies, as well as from two Board approved motions promoting the installation of all ages, outdoor bodyweight exercising and general fitness equipment.

Playground Renewal Projects

Several park playground renewal projects were completed this year, including those at Brewers, Ash, Beaconsfield and Winona Parks.

VanDusen & Bloedel Strategic Plan

After pausing in March 2020 due to the pandemic, this project was relaunched in January 2021. In October, the Park Board unanimously approved the proposed strategic plan, which was developed collaboratively with the Vancouver Botanical Gardens Association (VBGA). The plan includes shared values, vision, mission, and goals foundational to daily operations and the long-range planning of VanDusen Botanical Gardens, the Bloedel Conservatory, and associated facilities. Staff are currently focusing on the work required for negotiation and ratification of a new Joint Operating Agreement (JOA) to govern the relationship between the Park Board and VBGA moving forward.

Local Food Systems Action Plan

The Board approved a new Local Food Systems Action Plan, which outlines the current state of Park Board food assets and services and proposes an ambitious five-year implementation plan. It reflects a shift in priority from increasing the number of assets and services, to improving the access and equitable delivery of assets and services in parks and facilities. The four goals and 38 actions outline steps to move towards a just, sustainable, and decolonized local food system by: making space for Indigenous food sovereignty, increasing equitable access to food assets and services, and working towards food system resiliency as part of climate action.

VanSplash Implementation Update & Outdoor Pool Study

In preparation for the 2023 Capital Planning process, the Board received an update on VanSplash implementation and an overview of the outdoor pool study findings, including funding needs for the Hillcrest and Mount Pleasant outdoor pools.

Pilot Initiatives

Low Intensity Turf Maintenance (Meadow Pilot)

Following temporary changes in mowing practices during COVID-19 in 2020, the Board approved a motion directing staff to establish incremental targets and develop an implementation plan for altered mowing regimes, and report back on the effect on biodiversity, ecological benefits, operational efficiency/diversification, emission comparability, and financial sustainability. An interim update was provided at the end of April, outlining the plan to for a pilot of 20 meadow sites in 2021. The findings from this pilot were reported back in November, and the Board approved recommendations to continue the transition of 37 hectares of piloted low-use turf on park managed lands to natural management, and expand to a total of 42 hectares by 2030 (7% of total park managed turf).

Stanley Park Temporary Bike Lane on Park Drive

In recognition of the Climate Emergency, increased bike use, and the ongoing Stanley Park Mobility Study, the Board directed staff to implement a temporary bike lane in Stanley Park on Park Drive. Staff reported back in November with the initial feedback, data analysis and next steps, and the Board approved a motion directing staff to keep the temporary bike lane in place until the Stanley Park Mobility Study is complete and staff report back with long-term recommendations.

Alcohol in Parks Pilot

After the Province amended the Liquor Control and Licensing Act (Act) to recognize the Park Board as a governing body under Section 73(2) of the Act, the Board was able to enact the Park By-laws required to allow the Alcohol in Parks Pilot approved in July 2020 to finally proceed. Twenty-two sites were identified as locations where the public consumption of alcohol would be permitted for the duration of the pilot, which ran from July to mid-October. The sites were selected based on access to public washrooms and waste disposal facilities, and to eliminate overlap with essential park spaces such as playgrounds, sports fields, beaches, ecologically sensitive areas, and community gardens. Staff will report back on the pilot findings and feasibility in December.

