



October 20, 2023

**TO:** Park Board Chair and Commissioners  
**FROM:** General Manager – Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation  
**SUBJECT:** Golf Services Plan - Framework

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## RECOMMENDATION

- A. THAT the Vancouver Park Board direct staff to proceed with development of a Golf Services Plan, generally as described in the report dated October 20, 2023, titled “Golf Services Plan - Framework”;
- B. THAT the Vancouver Park Board direct staff to resume capital and maintenance golf improvement projects, that draw from the Golf Course Capital Reserve Fund, in accordance with relevant City and Park Board spending policies; and
- C. THAT the Vancouver Park Board authorize staff to utilize the Golf Course Capital Reserve Fund as a potential funding source for the Golf Services Plan given the direct link between the Golf Services Plan and benefit to golf users.

## REPORT SUMMARY

This report seeks decisions on a Golf Services Plan framework and the resumption of capital and maintenance golf improvement projects that draw from the Golf Reserve.

The Golf Services Plan will recommend direction of capital investment at golf assets for a 5-to-10-year time horizon. It will seek ways to optimize the golf business model to align with best practices, advance reconciliation, and equity in golf, sustain and enhance current golf service levels, and retain permanent park designation of golf lands. The Golf Services Plan will not consider redeveloping golf lands for non-park use.

Resumption of Golf Reserve capital and maintenance improvement projects will allow staff to remedy minor deficiencies and make small upgrades and improvements as required concurrently with development of the Golf Services Plan.

## BOARD AUTHORITY & POLICY

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 that occur within those parks. All golf lands are designated permanent parks, except Rupert Park Pitch & Putt and Stanley Park Pitch & Putt which are under the care, custody and management of the Park Board.

On October 19, 2020, the Park Board approved the [VanPlay Framework](#), for Vancouver’s [Parks and Recreation Services Master Plan](#). VanPlay 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 Direction to Welcome Everyone by responding to challenges and future trends through proactive park design, operations and maintenance practices.

## **PREVIOUS DECISIONS/UPDATES**

[May 18, 2001, Golf Course Financial Sustainability Plan](#) – approved the establishment of a Capital Reserve Fund for future golf course improvements and major repairs.

[October 22, 2019, Golf in Vancouver Parks – Overview](#) – provided an overview of Park Board's golf services and operations, in response to the Board's request for information.

[November 4, 2019, Golf in our Parks – A Deep Dive Analysis -](#) directs staff to complete a Golf Strategy, building on existing environmental policies, long-term trends of golf and land usage, and considering the full spectrum of realized and unrealized benefits to inform its development.

[November 30, 2020, Service Plan, Operating and Capital Budgets – Parks and Recreation -](#) directs staff to postpone all non-essential capital investments and all non-essential maintenance improvement investments drawn from the Capital Reserve Fund for Golf Course Improvements (Golf Reserve), with the exception of investment(s) approved by Board prior to November 30, 2020, until full completion and adoption of the Golf Strategy, and that current funds from the Golf Reserve be redirected to Finance and expedite the Golf Strategy

[January 16, 2023, "Think Big" Revenue Strategy -](#) directs staff to apply the revenue-generating lens to the golf strategy, including an exploration of several specific business actions.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **Municipal Golf Courses**

The Park Board manages approximately 250 parks in Vancouver. Six of these parks contain three championship golf courses, and three pitch & putt courses. Combined, these golf assets occupy approximately 15% of all Park Board managed areas, or 200 ha (494 acres). The championship golf courses and driving ranges are all located south of 49th Ave, while the pitch & putt courses are all located north of 41st Ave, in Stanley Park, Rupert Park and Queen Elizabeth Park.

The three championship courses were built between the 1920s and 1950s. Langara Golf Course was compressed from 175 to 125 acres in the 1970s. All courses were significantly renovated in the early to mid-1990s. In the summer of 2023, the Park Board completed a multi-year project at Langara Golf Course to improve drainage and playability of the grounds.

From 2016 to 2019, the combined number of rounds played at the championship and pitch & putt golf courses remained relatively unchanged. In 2021/2022, the number of rounds increased by 30% over 2019 figures, and subsequent golf gross revenues rose by about 40% to more than \$14 million gross revenues in 2022. In 2022, golf was the Park Board's highest revenue-generating activity (17.6% of total revenues), followed by recreation admissions (17.4%) and parking (12.8%). For more detailed information please refer to Appendix A.

Where possible, Vancouver's municipal golf courses are co-located with other ancillary uses such as golf retail, food and beverage services, public washrooms, and are surrounded by trails that are accessible to the public. Many of these courses include ponds, wetlands and wooded areas that have become preferred habitat for birds, small mammals and other urban wildlife.

Since 2003, staff have focused on environmental stewardship, with Audubon designation first achieved on championship courses in 2003, and initiatives such as on-course tree planting, conversion of out-of-play areas to biodiversity-supporting meadows and pollinator gardens, and creation of water management plans to limit potable water use on golf courses. These water management plans include specific water conservation strategies and set targets which are monitored for compliance. Currently Langara uses no potable water to irrigate the golf course, while McCleery and Fraserview average 50-60% potable water use. Rainwater and groundwater are used to meet the remaining irrigation needs.

### Citywide Policy Context

According to [Vancouver Plan](#), the city is expected to add about 260,000 more people (for a total population of about 920,000 people) by 2050. Vancouver is also expected to continue to be the largest regional job centre and welcome up to 210,000 more jobs by 2050.

Many championship and pitch & putt golf courses are located close to areas that will see increased residential density and intensified commercial or industrial uses in the coming years. As the city builds out to higher densities, these golf courses are critical large green space reserves for generations to come. With increase land values, the ability to acquire new parkland is diminishing which means that these golf course lands will be even more relevant as future green spaces to meet park and recreation needs and to work towards the long-term vision to restore Vancouver's ecological network (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Municipal golf assets in the context of Vancouver Plan's long-term ecological vision

**DISCUSSION**

**Planning for Golf**

Vancouver’s municipal golf trends were relatively stable until disruption by the COVID-19 pandemic significantly increased both usage and revenue generation in 2021 and 2022. While it is unclear if these golf trends will be sustained, staff recommends taking a comprehensive look at Park Board’s golf services, benchmark them against municipal counterparts, and chart a path for a higher quality and more diversified service delivery.

In 2023, the Board directed staff to apply a revenue-generating lens to golf operations and explore business-specific actions such as leasing clubhouses to restaurant food operators and raising golf fees for tourists. The [“Think Big” Action Plan](#) endorsed by the Board in July of 2023, seeks to address the growing maintenance and renewal needs of parks and recreation assets and sustain service delivery while reducing the burden on taxpayers. Golf’s more than \$5.75 million contribution to the Park Board’s 2022 operating budget supports maintenance, asset renewal and service delivery in other parks and recreation portfolios.

Given the circumstances outlined above, staff recommends the preparation of an action-oriented Golf Services Plan rather than conducting a more extensive Golf Lands Strategy with a longer time horizon. Figure 2 compares these two deliverables, grounded in the definitions provided by VanPlay.

	<b>Golf Lands Strategy (per 2019 Board Motion)</b>	<b>Golf Services Plan (now recommended)</b>
<b>VanPlay Key Terms Definition</b>	A <b>strategy</b> presents a long-term vision for the future. Creating a strategy typically involves analysis, including an audit of the current state, a needs assessment, and a gap analysis. Building from this, a vision for the future is co-created with the community. Strategies define principles that guide decision-making and lead to implementation.	A <b>plan</b> enacts strategies by outlining tasks required for implementation that are time and resource bound.
<b>Content</b>	Golf, parks and recreation topics	Golf and ancillary uses
<b>Engagement</b>	Public engagement to create a vision	Stakeholder engagement to identify opportunities
<b>Time Horizon</b>	15 year time horizon	10-year time horizon
<b>Length of planning process</b>	24 months to complete strategy	15-18 months to complete plan

**Figure 2:** Comparison between Golf Lands Strategy and Golf Services Plan

Five key assumptions guide the scoping of this planning work. Specifically, the Golf Services Plan will:

- Optimize the golf business model to align with best practices;
- Explore opportunities for reconciliation and equity in golf;
- Sustain and enhance current golf service levels;
- Retain permanent park designation of golf lands; and
- Not consider redeveloping golf lands for non-park use.

### **Restoring Access to the Golf Reserve Fund**

The [Capital Reserve Fund for Golf Course Improvements \(Golf Reserve\)](#) was established in 2001 to ensure sufficient funds were in place for future golf-related capital projects. It is funded annually through golf user fees, and spending from the Golf Reserve is authorized per the City of Vancouver Capital / Operating budget policy.

The Golf Reserve can only be used to fund capital and maintenance improvements at the golf courses as part of the Park Board's long-term asset management plan, and spending needs to be approved through the annual budget process.

During the 2020 budget process, the Board directed that non-essential capital investments and all non-essential maintenance improvement investments drawn from the Golf Reserve be postponed until adoption of the Golf Strategy, and that current funds from the Golf Reserve be redirected to finance and expedite the Golf Strategy. There are now upgrades required that include:

- Rectifying minor deficiencies such as regular dredging of ponds at McCleery Golf Course;
- Minor clubhouse upgrades, and food and beverage improvements that can be used to enhance the visitor/customer experience; and
- Larger capital investment requirements due to aging assets, such as improvements to the Fraserview driving range, water system infrastructure replacement, etc.

Staff recommend resumption of capital and maintenance improvement projects that draw from the Golf Reserve, in accordance with relevant City and Park Board spending policies. This will allow for the rectification of golf course deficiencies, conducting course upgrades and food and beverage improvements, and piloting novel improvements concurrently with the Golf Services Plan preparation. Investment prioritization for larger capital projects will be included in the Golf Services Plan, and subject to the Capital/ Operating Budget processes outlined above.

## **FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The estimated cost of the Golf Services Plan is between \$350k and \$450k for consultant services and internal project management costs, including contingency. The overall project cost is expected to be about 70% the cost of the Golf Lands Strategy, due to the shorter length of the planning process and more focused scope of work as itemized in Figure 2. There is sufficient funding available in the Golf Reserve to fund the Golf Services Plan.

## **RECONCILIATION AND EQUITY CONSIDERATIONS**

As a controlled-entry activity within the Park Board's recreation system, golf inherently prioritizes use by people who can afford it. As such, golf continues to interrupt Indigenous access to areas programmed for this use. The Golf Services Plan will be subject to the standard referrals process to solicit input from the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Nations.

## **NEXT STEPS**

Pending a Board decision, staff will finalize the scoping and begin the procurement process to retain consultant services to undertake the Golf Services Plan.

## **CONCLUSION**

Given that COVID-19 interrupted golf trends and that a new normal is still uncertain, staff recommend that the Park Board approve this framework for the Golf Services Plan, and resume capital and maintenance improvement projects that draw on the Capital Reserve Fund for Golf Course Improvements.

General Manager's Office  
Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation  
Vancouver, BC

Prepared by:  
Catarina Gomes, Kasel Yamashita, Park Board Planning, Policy & Environment

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**APPENDIX A: Detailed Information on Vancouver’s Municipal Golf Courses**

From 2016 to 2019, the combined number of rounds played at the championship and pitch & putt golf courses remained relatively unchanged with about 225,000 to 255,000 combined rounds played each of those years (Figure A1). Since 2019, the number of rounds played at championship and pitch & putt golf courses has increased by 30% to 332,000 in 2022. . . 2020 was a disrupted year due to COVID shutdowns, so statistics are excluded from trend analysis.

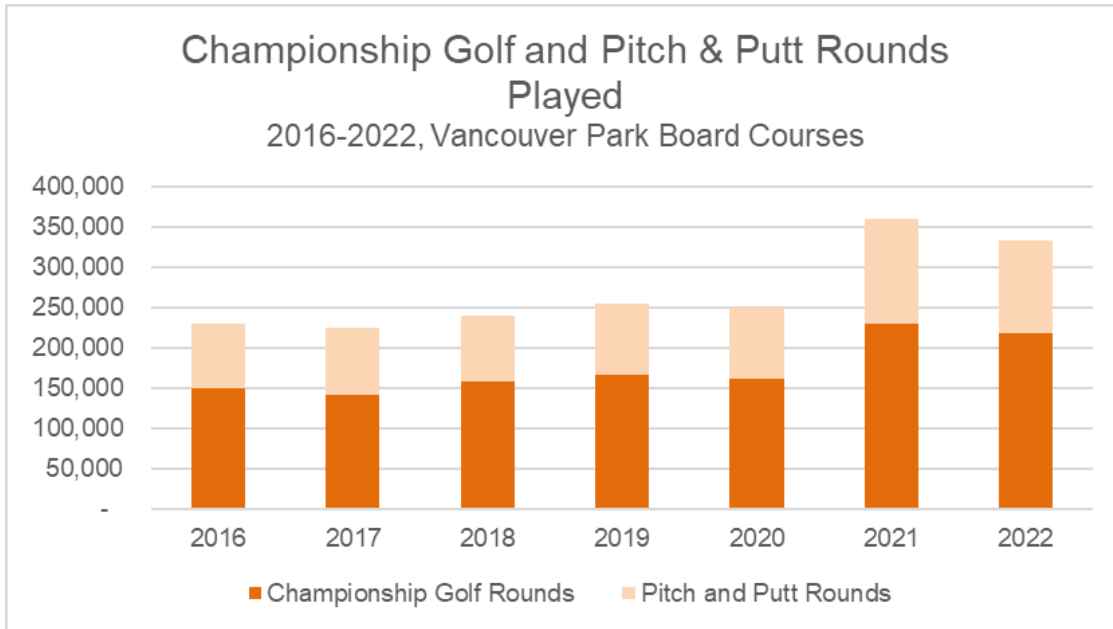


Figure A1: Championship Golf and Pitch & Putt Rounds Played at Vancouver’s Park Board Courses 2016-2022

Golf and pitch & putt gross revenues have risen in 2022 by about 40% over 2019 values to more than \$14 million gross revenues. In 2022, golf was the Park Board’s highest revenue-generating activity, followed by recreation admissions and parking.

The growth in revenue and rounds played at Vancouver’s municipal golf courses from 2016 to 2022 can be attributed to several factors, including the recently completed drainage improvement project at Langara, steady increases to golf fees and, more importantly, the renewed interest in golf following the 2020 shift to COVID-safe recreational activities. This trend has been reported across North America.

The current demographics of users at the Park Board’s championship and pitch & putt golf courses is composed of approximately 75% adult (19-64) of which, males make up most players. There are several clubs and programs in place to support and grow the game for all user groups. Park Board offers the largest senior’s discount (30%) among all local competitors and 50% discounts for youth (<18) golfers. Pitch & putt complements championship golf and provides a lower barrier to entry with affordable rates for those people with lower incomes who may not otherwise be able to access the three championship golf courses. The Leisure Access Pass program is not currently supported at golf courses or pitch & putts