



Creating Vancouver's First Inclusive and Accessible Sensory Park for Children

Excerpted from Minutes December 11, 2023

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MOVED by Commissioner Viridi
SECONDED by Commissioner Howard

WHEREAS:

1. The Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation is dedicated to creating recreational spaces that are inclusive, safe, and accessible to all residents, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds;
2. On June 20, 2018, the Government of Canada introduced Bill C-81, An Act to ensure a barrier-free Canada (the Accessible Canada Act) in Parliament. The Accessible Canada Act received Royal Assent on June 21, 2019, and came into force on July 11, 2019;
3. The purpose of the Accessible Canada Act is to make Canada barrier-free by January 1, 2040. This involves identifying, removing and preventing barriers in federal jurisdiction in a number of priority areas including the built environment (buildings and public spaces) and the design and delivery of public programs and services;
4. In June 2021, the province's Accessible British Columbia Act became law. It provides a framework to identify, remove, and prevent barriers to accessibility and represents an important step toward making B.C. a more accessible and inclusive province that supports people with disabilities to meaningfully participate in their communities;
5. The Park Board is subject to the requirements of the Accessible British Columbia Act and the Accessible Canada Act and fully embraces the obligations outlined in legislation and remains resolute in its efforts to achieve inclusivity and accessibility in all aspects of Park Board jurisdiction;
6. With the exception of the Kitsilano Beach Park playground, which was designed for access and inclusion in 2010-2011, and included accommodations to address the needs of neurodiverse children (consistent with the understanding of these needs at the time), and the Douglas Park Playground, which was designed for children with neurodiverse needs (2018-19), there are no parks in Vancouver that meet the standard of a fully inclusive and accessible sensory park for children;
7. Children with mobility and other challenges deserve equal opportunities to enjoy sensory-rich recreational activities in Vancouver parks and recreation facilities and to connect with their peers in an accessible environment;
8. Children who are neurodiverse, particularly those with Autism Spectrum Disorder, often require specialize sensory-friendly environments where they can comfortably engage their senses, explore, and interact, thereby fostering their social, cognitive, and emotional development. There is a known deficiency of these specialized spaces within Vancouver parks and recreation facilities;



9. An Inclusive and Accessible Sensory Park for Children requires specific elements and accommodations such as:
 - i. sensory-rich play zones that stimulate various senses, including touch, sight, sound, and smell, while ensuring comfort and sensory-friendly experiences for neurodiverse children, particularly those with Autism Spectrum Disorder
 - ii. inclusive and accessible sensory equipment designed to be usable by children of all abilities, including those in wheelchairs.
 - iii. accessible pathways, ramps, and surfacing to ensure safe and easy mobility for children with mobility challenges.
10. Given the growing demand and recognition of the need for inclusive and accessible spaces in our city, an urgent need therefore exists to create recreational environments that can cater to the diverse needs of our community, notably the needs of neurodiverse children, children with autism, and those who use wheelchairs;
11. The creation of a flagship accessible and inclusive sensory park in Vancouver, one that would uniquely cater to the needs of neurodiverse children, children with autism, and those who use wheelchairs, would represent a monumental step toward providing the kind of equitable recreational spaces for all residents in alignment with important legislative steps taken by the federal and provincial governments and reflective of the Park Board's goal to accomplish various inclusivity and accessibility objectives; and
12. The establishment of Vancouver's first fully accessible and inclusive sensory park would send a strong signal of the Park Board's unwavering commitment to creating a better, more accessible and more inclusive future for all residents.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

- A. THAT the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation commit to the planning, development, and construction of Vancouver's first inclusive and accessible sensory park, designed to accommodate the unique needs and preferences of neurodiverse children, those with Autism Spectrum Disorder, and those with mobility challenges.
- B. THAT the sensory park's design shall accommodate and prioritize, but not be limited to, the following features in accordance with best design practices:
 - i. Sensory-rich play zones that stimulate various senses, including touch, sight, sound, and smell, while ensuring comfort and sensory-friendly experiences for children, particularly children with autism.
 - ii. Inclusive and accessible sensory equipment and elements designed to be usable by children of all abilities, including those in wheelchairs.
 - iii. Accessible pathways, ramps, and surfacing to ensure safe and easy mobility for children with mobility challenges.



- C. THAT staff be directed to identify and recommend an optimal location for an inclusive and accessible sensory park, taking into account existing parks that may be up for renewal and/or new park development opportunities that may arise or be currently contemplated.
- D. THAT staff be directed to explore a diversity of funding sources, including but not limited to the Park Board and City capital budgets, government grants, private donations, corporate partnerships, and community fundraising, in order to secure the necessary financial resources for this project;
- E. THAT the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation and Park Board staff shall actively seek community and key stakeholder input on the vision outlined in this motion for an inclusive and accessible sensory park project, including feedback from parents, caregivers, and organizations that represent children with autism such as the Pacific Autism Family Network (PAFN), and those with mobility challenges, to ensure that the sensory park's design is inclusive and responsive to the community's needs, and

FURTHER THAT staff be directed to engage with, and potentially partner with, relevant organizations that specialize in designing inclusive and accessible sensory experiences to facilitate the successful implementation of this flagship project.
- F. THAT staff be directed to update the Board, the public, and all relevant stakeholders on the progress of the project on a regular basis and not less than once per year, to see their ongoing input and feedback throughout the project development process.

THAT the motion be referred to the January 22, 2024, Committee meeting to hear from speakers.

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY