



Report Date: October 11, 2024

VanRIMS No.: 08-3000-30

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TO: Park Board Chair and Commissioners
FROM: Director, Business Services
SUBJECT: Bard on the Beach Pilot Program

RECOMMENDATIONS

- A. THAT the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation (“Park Board”) authorize staff to negotiate to the satisfaction of the Park Board’s General Manager and the City of Vancouver’s (the “City”) Director of Legal Services and enter into a contract with Bard on the Beach Shakespeare Festival for a pilot program that will enable the Festival’s mainstage arches to remain onsite at Señákw/Vanier Park during the event’s off-season between November 2024 and March 2025.
- B. THAT the City’s Director of Legal Services and Park Board’s General Manager be authorized to execute on behalf of the Park Board the contract contemplated by Recommendation A above.
- C. THAT no legal rights or obligations will be created by the Park Board’s adoption of Recommendations A and B above unless and until such contract is executed by the authorized signatories of the City as set out in these Recommendations.

PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

Established in 1990, Bard on the Beach (“BOTB” or “Festival”) is Western Canada’s largest not-for-profit, professional Shakespeare Festival. A longstanding Vancouver summertime favourite, the Festival is presented in Vancouver’s Señákw/Vanier Park against a spectacular backdrop of mountains, sea, and sky. With the Festival’s growth and maturity over the past three and a half decades, and the evolution of park use over the same period, a number of issues have emerged which present both financial and operational challenges for BOTB as well as the Park Board.

Staff from BOTB and the Park Board have worked collaboratively to explore solutions for these issues and an immediate opportunity has been identified that will provide benefits for the Festival, park users, and the Park Board. The purpose of this report is to present this opportunity, explain how it would be executed, and seek the Board’s approval to pursue the opportunity as a pilot program between November 2024 and March 2025.

BOARD AUTHORITY / PREVIOUS DECISIONS

As per the [Vancouver Charter](#), the Park Board has exclusive jurisdiction and control over parkland use in the City of Vancouver (including any structures, programs and activities, fees, and improvements within parks) and approves the use of all lands under its jurisdiction on such terms as the Park Board may decide.

On June 22, 2020, at an *in camera* meeting (the decision was subsequently made public in a [memo](#) to the Board on March 2, 2023), the Park Board approved a series of Planning Principles as a framework for initiating a collaborative master planning process for Vanier Park between the Park Board and the xʷməθkʷəy̓ əm (Musqueam), skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səlilwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) peoples (“MST” or “Host Nations”). This work would be undertaken jointly with the City of Vancouver’s Arts, Culture and Community Services department (ACCS). While staff have undertaken initial outreach to the Host Nations, the undertaking of a full planning process and associated public and stakeholder engagement is not currently prioritized for funding through the 2023-2026 Capital Plan; the pilot program opportunity referenced in this report would have no effect on this longer-term work.

On October 19, 2020, the Park Board approved the [VanPlay Framework](#), as Vancouver’s [Parks and Recreation Services Master Plan](#). VanPlay sets out priorities and provides tools and policies to support the pursuit of equity, connectivity, and access to parks and recreation for all. The Framework provides a succinct method for referencing and implementing VanPlay directions. The pilot program contemplated in this report supports and aligns with VanPlay’s directions to “Welcome Everyone” (parks and recreation experiences that improve quality of life) and “Weave the City Together” (parks, nature, recreation and culture integrated into everyday life).

On January 16, 2023, the Board approved the [“Think Big” Revenue Strategy motion](#) to prioritize and enable opportunities for increased commercial revenues. Subsequently, on July 17, 2023, the Board endorsed the Think Big Action Plan as presented in Appendix A in the [“Think Big” Revenue Strategy – Report Back: July 6, 2023](#), and further validated the preliminary revenue-generating opportunities presented in Appendix D, which included enabling seasonal/temporary park attractions/services and activating public spaces.

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Established in 1990, Bard on the Beach is Western Canada’s largest not-for-profit, professional Shakespeare Festival. A longstanding Vancouver summertime favourite, the Festival is presented in Vancouver’s Señákw/Vanier Park against a spectacular backdrop of mountains, sea, and sky, and offers Shakespeare plays, related dramas, and special events in two modern performance tents from June through September. The Festival is known for its signature blend of high-quality artistic programming and a welcoming, informal experience for local residents and visitors from around the world.

Attesting to its popularity, attendance at Bard on the Beach has grown dramatically since its inception, from 6,000 in 1990 to approximately 90,000 in 2023; in total, more than 2 million guests have enjoyed the Bard experience over its thirty-five seasons. During this period, the Festival’s operating budget has grown from \$35,000 in 1990 to over \$10 million in 2024. Programming has also expanded from one play annually to at least four each season, and from 34 performances in its inaugural year to over 200 in 2024.

In addition to its artistic performances, BOTB’s educational division (Bard Education) offers year-round program opportunities for youth, adults, and teachers to play and explore Shakespeare.

With the Festival’s growth and maturity over the past three and a half decades, and the evolution of park use over the same period, a number of issues have emerged which present both financial and operational challenges as well as impacts for BOTB, park users, and the Park Board. These issues are summarized in the table below.

Key Issues for Bard on the Beach	Key Issues for Park Board
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increasing operational costs are impacting the financial and programmatic viability of the Festival ▪ Post-event park remediation requirements are costly and lack effectiveness ▪ Annual event permit approach and the associated lack of tenure impedes longer term planning and investment ▪ Interest in year-round activation/vitality at Seńákw/Vanier Park 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Seeking new approaches to reduce turf damage and improve public benefit/usability during BOTB off-season ▪ Annual event permit model is time consuming and inefficient ▪ Festival fee model needs updating to better align with Think Big Strategy ▪ Consideration needed to accommodate long-term park planning initiatives with the Host Nations ▪ Commitment to Reconciliation programs and initiatives

Staff from both BOTB and the Park Board have demonstrated a strong interest and commitment in working collaboratively to address these issues for the mutual benefit of the Festival, park users, and the Park Board. Accordingly, several meetings have taken place since December 2023 between representatives of both organizations to properly document key issues and initiate solutions-based discussions. Several potential solutions were identified and one has now emerged as a candidate for a pilot program between November 2024 and March 2025.

DISCUSSION

Pilot Program Proposal

Historically, BOTB’s infrastructure has been removed from the event site during the off-season between November and March. The proposed pilot program would see all Festival infrastructure removed from the event site, with the exception of the main stage tent arches. These would remain in place during the offseason (with the tent fabric removed).

Why is this Needed?

Like the vast majority of arts, culture and event organizations across the region, BOTB is experiencing rapid expense escalation. In particular, the financial and logistical realities of BOTB’s signature tents have become increasingly challenging and threaten the Festival’s financial and programmatic sustainability. Specifically:

- The cost of erecting and taking down the event’s infrastructure has increased rapidly and will continue into the future;
- The sourcing of seasonal labour and heavy equipment required for the mainstage work is becoming a greater risk; and
- The heavy equipment required for installation of the mainstage causes significant disturbance to the event site.

How Would the Pilot Program be Implemented?

The Festival's infrastructure would be disassembled and removed from the event site similar to previous years, with the exception of the mainstage arches. These would be left in their existing location with the tent fabric removed. The mainstage arch footings would be boxed and framed in wood for public safety and equipment protection. The boxes would then be wrapped with vinyl graphics showcasing art or other decorative concepts. BOTB and Park Board staff would prioritize the display and representation of MST content if possible. Downward facing lighting elements would also be added to create appeal and enhance the public realm aesthetic. The activation would also be supported by security services/oversight.

Figure 1 – Close Up View of Mainstage Arch Footings with Graphics

Figure 2 – Broader View of Mainstage Arch Footings with Graphics**Pilot Program Benefits**

Staff recognize that sensitivities and concerns may exist when access to public spaces is impacted, and as a result, consider all requests of this nature carefully. Staff are supportive of pursuing this pilot program due to the meaningful benefits that would accrue to a valued arts and culture partner, park users, and the Park Board, including:

- *Support for the arts and culture sector* – implementation of the pilot program will result in material cost savings for BOTB;
- *Improved public use opportunities* – the pilot program will reduce the need to use heavy equipment required to remove the mainstage arches, thereby decreasing turf damage and remediation requirements to the event site, and improving public use opportunities; and
- *Alignment with Think Big Revenue Strategy* – the pilot program would provide a meaningful revenue stream back to the Park Board.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Subject to Board approval, Park Board staff will work with BOTB to finalize the financial terms and conditions in a manner consistent with industry best practices. All expenses related to the delivery and execution of this pilot program will be borne by BOTB; accordingly, there will be no costs to the Park Board related to this initiative. Revenues generated from the provision of this service will be used to support programs and services across Vancouver's parks and recreation system.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS**Learning Opportunity**

The pilot program will provide an opportunity to gauge public opinion and inform other potential future initiatives with BOTB.

Low Risk

The pilot program is considered to be low risk given it will take place during the winter season, in a location without significant public use and involve no park user displacement.

Legal Considerations

Park Board policy requires that all contracts, renewals, extensions, and any other forms of commitments and contracts will be on terms and conditions approved by the City Solicitor.

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

Bard on the Beach is Western Canada's largest not-for-profit, professional Shakespeare Festival. A longstanding Vancouver summertime favourite, the Festival is presented in Vancouver's Señákw/Vanier Park. Faced with several emerging issues that present both financial and operational challenges for BOTB as well as the Park Board, staff from both organizations have engaged collaboratively to identify potential solutions to these challenges. An immediate opportunity has been identified to implement a pilot program to leave BOTB's mainstage arches onsite at Vanier Park during the offseason which would enable the Festival to realize significant cost savings.

Park Board staff have carefully considered the various aspects of this pilot program and are confident this initiative can be executed successfully and as intended. Accordingly, staff recommend that the Board approve this pilot program as outlined above.