



Report Date: December 4, 2024

VanRIMS No.: 08-3000-30

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TO: Park Board Chair and Commissioners

FROM: Director, Park Operations

SUBJECT: Stanley Park Hemlock Loper Response and Mitigation Plan - Advancing Phase 3

RECOMMENDATIONS

- A. THAT the Board authorize staff to prepare a Change Order to advance mitigation and restoration of approximately 25% (40 hectares) of the Phase 3 scope in Q1 2025 as funded by previously approved project budget to address public safety risks in high use areas of Stanley Park.
- B. THAT the Board support Bid Committee and Supply Chain Management's authorization to award the Change Order amending the current Phase 2 contract for the extent of work contemplated by Recommendation A above, exercising authorities in the Corporation's procurement policy.
- C. THAT the Board direct staff to continue advancing a competitive procurement process for contracted services to support the remainder of Phase 3 (Q4 2025 – Q1 2027) risk mitigation and restoration with a report back to the Board for approval of the extent of treatment prior to implementation in accordance with the October 9, 2024 decision.

PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

This report provides an update to Park Board on the state of Stanley Park following recent weather events and seeking a decision on advancing a portion of mitigation and restoration work from the Phase 3 scope in Q1 2025 originally planned to start in Q4 2025.

Supply Chain Management have been consulted on adherence with the Corporation's procurement policy and advancing a change order to amend the current contract for Phase 2 is in accordance with the Park Board and City's procurement policies.

BOARD AUTHORITY / PREVIOUS DECISIONS

As per the [Vancouver Charter](#), the Park Board has exclusive jurisdiction over the maintenance, operations and "closing to the free use of the public the whole or any part of any of the parks...at such times and for such periods as may be deemed advisable".

The Board approved the [Park Board Procurement Policy \(2022\)](#) which states that all contracts with values of \$2,000,000 and greater require Council approval, with Vancouver Park Board, Department Head - Park Board General Manager, Chief Procurement Officer, and City Solicitor concurrence.

Related Corporate [Procurement Policy ADMIN-008 \(2023\)](#) states that all contracts with values over \$3,000,000 require Council approval, with Department Head - Park Board General Manager, City Manager, Chief Procurement Officer, and City Solicitor concurrence.

Both Procurement Policies are aligned and state:

Section 13.6/12.6. Extended Authority of Bid Committee During Council/Board Recess Where an Award is required to be authorized by Council or the Board and is being considered for approval by Bid Committee at a time when Council or the Board is not scheduled to meet for another 4 weeks (as measured from the date the matter is brought to Bid Committee) such as for example (but without limitation) during the summer recess or winter holiday recess, the Bid Committee is authorized to make the Award on behalf of Council or the Board.

Section 13.7/12.7. If the Bid Committee makes an Award under subsection 13.6/12.6, the Award will be reported by the Chief Procurement Officer to Council at the next scheduled Council meeting and by the Finance Director to the Board at the next scheduled Board meeting.

On [October 8, 2024](#), the Park Board approved staff advancing planned Phase 2 (October 2024-April 2025) risk mitigation and restoration work, which will address health and safety risks in highly visited areas of Stanley Park as outlined in the report dated October 2, 2024, entitled “Stanley Park Hemlock Looper Response and Mitigation Plan” AND directed staff to advance a competitive procurement process for contracted services to support the final Phase 3 (Q4 2025 – Q1 2027) risk mitigation and restoration of the remaining untreated forest areas (64% of the forest area) with a report back to the Board for approval of the extent of treatment prior to implementation.

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Stanley Park is a 418 hectare (ha) park located in the City of Vancouver. The park has been a culturally significant place since time immemorial for the local First Nations, the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh (MST). Approximately 263ha (63%) of the park is forested with species associated with the Coastal Western Hemlock bio-geoclimatic zone including a mix of western hemlock, Douglas-fir, western red cedar, red alder, and big leaf maple.

The park has been leased from the Federal Government since 1908 with care and stewardship obligations falling under the jurisdiction of the Park Board. This includes authority to undertake on a regular basis and as may be required, all work necessary in the maintenance, planting, and the removal of dead or diseased trees and such other trees which may constitute a danger to the public or which might cause damage to property.

Stanley Park has approximately 20 million visitors to the park annually and according to Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure data, approximately 50,000 vehicles pass along the Stanley Park Causeway and over the Lion’s Gate Bridge daily, not including various modes of transportation that utilize internal park roads and trails.

Urban Forestry identified the looper moth infestation in Stanley Park in 2020 and monitored tree and forest conditions for tree-related risks associated with public safety and wildfire. In 2022, when the looper outbreak had not ceased and significant tree mortality was observed, professional forestry consultant B.A. Blackwell & Associates were engaged through a competitive procurement process. This project and treatments have been planned and implemented through ongoing consultation with several qualified professionals including but not limited to Registered

Professional Foresters; Ecologists; Registered Professional Biologists; Landscape Architects; and ISA Certified Arborists with Tree Risk Assessor Qualification (TRAQ).

There were three recent weather events which impacted Stanley Park, most notably the bomb cyclone on the evening of November 19, 2024, resulted in the park being closed for most of the following day, November 20, 2024. Although fallen trees and debris were removed from roadways to allow vehicular traffic, there are segments of trail that remain closed at this time.

Mitigation work to date has been delivered between October and March each year in respect of bird nesting season, wildlife habitat considerations and peak tourism season. The current Phase 2 contract is anticipated to extend into January 2025 but there remains a narrow window of time that staff recommend capitalizing on to urgently deliver mitigation in other impacted high use areas of the park to avoid additional and potentially significant closures in the park.

Implementation Timeline Update:

- Phase 1 – Completed from Q4 2023 – Q1 2024: mitigation and restoration of 25% of the forest area of Stanley Park;
- Phase 2 – Anticipated Completion Q1 2025: mitigation and restoration of 12.2% of the forest area of Stanley Park;
- Advanced portion of Phase 3 – Advance isolated areas of mitigation in Q1 2025 (Amended Phase 2); and
- Remainder of Phase 3 work set to take place between Q4 2025 – Q1 2027.

DISCUSSION

Recent weather events in October and November 2024 have demonstrated that the deterioration of dead trees is progressing much faster than anticipated, outpacing the phased plan for risk mitigation and restoration. Park Rangers, Urban Forestry and Park Operations staff responded by clearing park roads of fallen trees and debris to reopen for vehicular access, but some segments of trails remain closed at this time.

Tree failures were reported across the park during these events, but overall, the quantity and complexity are greatly reduced in areas that have already been treated. The hemlock looper outbreak in Stanley Park presents an added urban forest management challenge in that the longer dead trees remain standing, the less safe they are for workers to climb, remove and mitigate risks. This is likely to result in the need for use of additional equipment to ensure a site meets all WorkSafeBC requirements. Urban Forestry staff, including Registered Professional Foresters, ISA Certified Arborists, Tree Risk Assessors and Landscape Architects, have assessed impacted areas of the park. There is clear evidence that dead trees resulting from the hemlock looper outbreak are rapidly deteriorating and many are becoming structurally unstable. It is highly recommended that the internal park road network and the remainder of the seawall be treated as soon as possible in Q1 2025 and before the peak tourism season.

The current Phase 2 budget covers work up to early January 2025, however the work window that respects bird nesting season extends until the end of March. The procurement for Phase 3 treatments will take several months and will not allow the emerging priority risk mitigation work for Phase 3 to begin until Q4 of 2025. Recent significant increases in the frequency of tree failures and the deteriorating condition of dead trees in Stanley Park highlights the urgent need to advance the treatment of high use areas from the Phase 3 scope in Q1 2025 and capitalize on the

remaining window for treatment outside of the bird nesting window and in advance of peak tourism season.

Staff recommend that mitigation and restoration focus on the removal of high risk trees: on both sides of Stanley Park Drive and North Lagoon Drive on the west side of Stanley Park; along the remaining section of the seawall from the area referred to as Siwash Rock to Second Beach; and targeted clearing of obstructions in the areas where trails are currently closed to the public.

Urban Forestry has engaged independent third-party professionals, including Registered Professional Foresters, ISA Certified Arborists and Tree Risk Assessors, to undertake a review of the isolated high-use areas that require expedited treatment. They will use the TRAQ methodology, employing a Level 1 – Limited Visual Assessment to inform a professional memo stating the need and timeline in which mitigation work should be undertaken to limit risks to people.

Benefits of advancing this work as part of an amendment to the Phase 2 contract include: maintaining public access to high use areas of Stanley Park; avoiding long-term closures of the park that will impact park revenue and tourism; ensure business continuity; maximizing the available work time outside the bird nesting window; and avoiding further delays for the onboarding on an alternate contractor and capitalize on the current contractor's intimate knowledge of the park's condition and operations.

Not advancing additional high-priority mitigation work in Q1 2025 will necessitate longer term closures of forest areas and potential closures of adjacent roadways including Stanley Park Drive and North Lagoon Drive – this will impact traffic and visitors to the park. Public safety and worker safety will be jeopardized if this work is not advanced in the short-term and restricted access to the park will impact events in permitted use areas of the park that may need to be delayed or cancelled. Furthermore, dry woody surface fuel will build up, creating conditions that are more susceptible to natural and human-caused fire ignitions. Prolonging risk mitigation work will increase the risks for contracted forestry workers and internal Operations staff tasked with working in the affected forest areas.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

As previously shared, the total forecasted costs of the remediation and restoration work is expected to be \$17.9 million. This includes \$1.9 million Park Board operating budget surplus that was spent in Q4 of 2023, the Council-approved \$4.9 million on January 24, 2024, to support immediate work required in Q1 and Q4 of 2024 and the Council-approved \$11.1 million funding from City Reserves to support the remaining work from Q1 2025 to Q1 2027.

Council does not have jurisdiction over the decisions impacting Stanley Park, however, funding approvals and budget reallocations of this size are within Council's jurisdiction. Council's direction is limited purely to supporting the funding request and that has already been granted.

All consultant and contractor contracts related to this work have been and will continue to be in accordance with the City of Vancouver's Procurement Policy ADMIN-008 which is led by Finance, Risk and Supply Chain Management and Legal Services and applies to Park Board.

Staff are not seeking additional funding for this mitigation work. The change order will outline an advancement from the \$11.1 million funding already approved by Council to support the project.

RISK & LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

Per the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation *Tree Inspection Policy* (1993):

Park trees in high usage areas (e.g. facilities, trails, roads) are inspected annually for signs of defects which could result in their failure. Trees that are evaluated as hazardous are prioritized and scheduled for corrective action.

Per the British Columbia Professional Governance Act, the [Forest Professionals Regulation \(gov.bc.ca\)](http://gov.bc.ca) defines the practice and jurisdiction of professional forestry in the Province.

Per the International Society of Arboriculture [Ethics-Code-of-Ethics.pdf \(isa-arbor.com\)](http://isa-arbor.com), Certified Arborists have a responsibility to public safety.

With this background, the Park Board has an obligation to advance a Standard of Care that complies with existing policy and professional ethics such that tree risks are addressed to minimize impacts to public safety.

Not advancing ongoing risk mitigation efforts planned in Stanley Park will necessitate keeping trails closed and assessing the closure of additional areas of Stanley Park to public access as tree risk levels advance over time from high to extreme and exceed the City of Vancouver and Park Board's risk tolerance.

Closing off access roads and forest to public access presents key considerations/risks:

- Public Dissatisfaction: Loss of recreational opportunities and education may decrease public engagement and conservation backing.
- Economic Impact: Potential reduction to permits and tourism, trail use, and local business activity may negatively impact revenue to local economies.
- Higher Maintenance Costs: Limited staff access will delay infrastructure upkeep to fire hydrant infrastructure, service roads, increasing costs and risks of vandalism or deterioration.
- Environmental Issues: Restricted access could lead to overgrown ecosystems, increased fire risk, or unauthorized use, damaging habitats.
- Negative Public Perception: Community may have concerns if the closure is not managed or communicated effectively.

COMMUNICATION CONSIDERATIONS

Staff will be providing regular updates to the public at key milestones of the ongoing risk mitigation work using a variety of channels including web, social media, and media. Staff will use the Park Board's social channels and signage on-site to alert users of Stanley Park of closures related to the work. Staff will also use every opportunity to communicate progress, particularly throughout the various replanting efforts.

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

Upon the Board's decision, staff will prepare a Change Order to advance mitigation and restoration work in isolated high use areas of Phase 3 to be delivered in Q1 2025. The planned work will take into consideration information provided by qualified and reputable third-party assessors and will be scheduled to the end of March 2025 in consideration of the remaining bird nesting window available, with subsequent restoration taking place in April 2025.

Staff will prepare an update for the Board's first sitting on January 20, 2025 and Council's first sitting on January 21, 2025, in accordance with the procurement policy as well as continue to advance planning for the competitive procurement process for what would be the final phases of work to be advanced starting in late 2025. Staff will present the outcome of the procurement process for decision on contract award.

Staff will continue providing progress updates on the ongoing work program.