



Report Date: October 24, 2025

VanRIMS No.: 08-3000-30

[Submit comments to the Board](#)

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

RECOMMENDATIONS

- A. THAT the Vancouver Park Board receive for information the report back on the Bard on the Beach Shakespeare Festival Pilot Program as outlined in this report; and
- B. THAT the Board approve the continuation of the program enabling the Festival's mainstage arches to remain onsite at Señákw/Vanier Park during the event's off-season between November 2025 and March 2026, and conditionally in future years.

PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

Established in 1990 and presented in Señákw/Vanier Park against a spectacular backdrop of mountains, sea, and sky, Bard on the Beach ("BOTB" or "Festival") is Western Canada's largest not-for-profit professional Shakespeare Festival. With the event'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 since 2024 to explore opportunities to address these issues. One such opportunity was identified last year and involved leaving the Festival's mainstage arches onsite at Señákw/Vanier Park during the event's off-season between November 2025 and March 2026; this initiative was subsequently implemented as a Pilot Program.

The purpose of this report is to provide a report back on the Pilot Program, and in accordance with the successful delivery and positive outcomes of the initiative, seek Park Board approval to continue the program in 2025/2026, and conditionally in future years.

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 Señákw/Vanier Park between the Park Board and the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish), and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) peoples ("MST" or "Host Nations"). This work would be undertaken jointly with various City of Vancouver departments. 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 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 referenced 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.

On October 21, 2024, at a public meeting, the Park Board [approved an application from Bard](#) on the Beach Shakespeare Festival for a Pilot Program enabling the Festival's mainstage arches to remain on site at Seákw/Vanier Park during the event's off-season between November 2024 and March 2025.

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Overview

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 Seákw/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.

Emerging Issues

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 pressures as well as impacts for BOTB, park users, and the Park Board.

Pilot Program

Staff from BOTB and the Park Board have been working collaboratively since 2024 to identify opportunities to address or reduce the impact of these issues for the mutual benefit of the Festival, park users, and the Park Board. Through these discussions, a specific initiative – leaving the Festival's mainstage arches onsite at Seákw/Vanier Park during the event's off-season – was approved by the Board and implemented immediately as a Pilot Program between November 2024 and March 2025.

The Pilot Program was successfully delivered as intended; some key observations/highlights of the initiative included:

Park Impacts

There were no significant impacts or damage to park assets as a result of the Pilot Program.

Neighbourhood/Stakeholder Impacts

The Festival organizers sought to minimize disruptions and impacts to neighbours and area stakeholders. No issues were raised and no enquiries or complaints were received during the Pilot Program's duration.

Security Impacts

No vandalism or safety issues were reported.

Pilot Program Benefits

The Pilot Program delivered immediate cost savings for the Festival, improved park safety and aesthetics, and provided operational efficiencies as outlined below:

- Operational efficiencies – Bard realized important savings in their seasonal setup/teardown activities as a result of the Pilot Program;
- Safety – the lighting added to the mainstage arches improved nighttime visibility at the site;
- Public access maintained – the site remained fully accessible and walkable year-round by park users; and
- Expanded use potential – the Pilot Program showcased the potential for expanded public use; exploration is now underway for potential winter activations/programming for 2025/2026 and in future years.

DISCUSSION

Given the positive outcomes of the Pilot Program, the Festival organizers are seeking to continue the program in 2025/2026, and conditionally in future years. It is anticipated that future programs will be executed in much the same manner as the 2024/2025 program, including overall duration. Notwithstanding the continuation of the Program:

- The initiative would be subject to annual reviews by Park Board staff before proceeding each year;
- Any major changes to the delivery of the program would be subject to Board approval; and
- The Park Board reserves the right to terminate the program if the event is not delivered as intended and/or the Board determines that it no longer wishes to continue the program.

For the Board's reference, the use period and event benefits of the initiative would remain largely the same.

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 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

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, involve no park user displacement, and received no enquiries or complaints during its inaugural year.

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 Señákw/Vanier Park. Faced with emerging financial and operational pressures, staff from both organizations engaged collaboratively to identify an immediate Pilot Program opportunity in 2024/2025 to enable Festival cost savings and improve park safety. The program was executed successfully, and Festival organizers are interested in continuing the initiative in 2025/2026, and conditionally in future years.

Park Board staff have carefully considered the various aspects of the Pilot Program and are confident that this initiative can be executed successfully and as intended in 2025/2026, and in future years. Accordingly, staff recommend that the Board approve the recommendations as outlined in this report.

* * * * *

APPENDIX A Pilot Program Site Photos

