



June 24, 2021

MEMO TO : Park Board Commissioners

FROM : Donnie Rosa - General Manager, Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation

SUBJECT : **New Park at Smithe & Richards Project Update – Board Briefing Memo**

---

Dear Commissioners,

The purpose of this memo is to provide an update on several items related to the delivery of the new park at Smithe and Richards, which is currently in the final stages of construction.

### **Background**

The construction contract for the new downtown park at Smithe and Richards was awarded to Smith Brothers Wilson in December 2019 for \$13.8M and construction started in January 2020. This 0.8 acre park will include a café building with public washrooms and a green roof, a flexible event and programming space, an accessible overhead walkway with hammocks and viewing platforms, an in-ground water spray feature with grey water recirculation, a large accessible playground, and lush plantings and trees connected to an integrated stormwater management system. The new park will be one of the hardest working public spaces in the city, supporting a significant number of residents and workers, nearly 30,000 within a five-minute walk, and is expected to attract a significant number of visitors and tourists from downtown.

### **Park Naming**

In 2017, the Park Board's Park Naming Policy Update process was paused in recognition that a consultation process with Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh (MST) Nations had not been undertaken. To address this policy and process gap, staff approached MST staff about their interest in engaging in a collaborative naming process for the new park at Smithe and Richards as a means to pilot a new consultation and naming process that would ultimately inform the update to the Park Naming Policy. Park Board staff have been collaborating with staff representatives from MST offices since September 2020 to name the park and plan to present park name recommendations to the Board this summer.

### **Public Art Banners on Skyframes**

One of the early outcomes of the MST park naming process was a request to see the gift of a name met in reciprocity through cultural programming including public art. To that end, staff have been working with community partners and the MST Park Naming Committee to develop a temporary public art installation by local Indigenous artists for the park opening. The intent is to develop a rotating public art program for MST artists that utilizes the skyframe infrastructure to display local Indigenous art.

### **Café Vendor Procurement and Park Programming**

The global pandemic has significantly and negatively impacted the hospitality sector, and successful small businesses are still struggling to adapt and operate under the ongoing public health restrictions. The current hardships faced by the food services industry, and required longer-term recovery, has created numerous challenges in securing a long-term café vendor for the park. This includes difficulty attracting a suitable tenant that would align with the values and objectives of the Park Board and complement the programs and activities in the park.



While securing a suitable interim vendor is crucial to anchor the park and contribute to its success, creating programming opportunities in the park is equally important to animate the space. This led to a successful partnership between the Downtown Vancouver Business Improvement Association (DVBIA) and the Park Board.

The DVBIA has supported the development of the downtown park since 2015, including contributing as a key stakeholder in the public engagement process. As a result of the DVBIA's ongoing engagement and involvement with this project, and its pulse on downtown businesses, the Park Board will be engaging the DVBIA to partner on delivering future park programming activities and to help secure an initial café tenant. The Park Board will conduct a longer-term RFP procurement process once the market has recovered from the impacts of COVID-19.

In order to meet immediate objectives, the DVBIA and Park Board have selected [Kafka's Coffee](#) (Kafka's) as the initial tenant for the café space. Kafka's is a local Vancouver-based vendor with three existing locations in the city, including Main Street, Great Northern Way, and Gastown. They offer a wide variety of products, including specialty coffees and teas, fresh sandwiches and pastries with plant-based options. Kafka's locations function as community hubs and proudly support local artists by providing them with affordable, high-visibility venues to exhibit their work. As a community-minded vendor, Kafka's aligns well with the values and objectives of the Park Board, and will be collaborating with the DVBIA and the Park Board on future park programming activities. The opening of Kafka's at the park will align with the opening date of the park.

### **Construction Schedule**

Originally slated for completion in early 2021, a number of items have affected the project timeline. Delays are largely attributable to unexpected site conditions, including the discovery of significant amounts of old and challenging infrastructure (including two old leaking oil tanks requiring remediation), several remnant building foundations and retaining walls, and considerable amounts of former building debris. Other challenges include: the need to carefully work around the existing trees on site; site servicing and utility work; challenges in procuring materials during the pandemic; and other issues related to building a complex park within the downtown core, including coordination with several concurrent City-led projects to improve the street infrastructure and public realm around the park. The current project completion date is now September 2021. Plans for an opening ceremony are underway and more details will be provided once a date has been set.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Donnie Rosa".

Donnie Rosa (*they/she*)  
General Manager - Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation

/amb/clc

Copy to: PB Senior Leadership Team  
PB Project Team  
PB Communications