

Date: September 11, 2009



TO: Board Members – Vancouver Park Board
FROM: General Manager – Parks and Recreation
SUBJECT: Bicycle Skills Area - Vanier Park

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Board approve the installation of a BMX/Mountain Bike skills area in Vanier Park, as detailed in this report.

POLICY

The Vancouver Charter states in Section 489.1(b) that “the Board shall have power to provide for accommodation for sports and games, and spectators thereof, and setting aside and reserving portions of the parks for specified kinds of sports and games”.

In 1995, Council and the Park Board approved the Civic Youth Strategy, which included a policy that all civic departments and boards work towards: a) ensuring that youth have “a place” in the city; b) ensuring a strong youth voice in decision-making; c) promoting youth as a resource to the City; and d) strengthening the support base for youth in the City.

On June 13, 2005, the Board directed staff “to work with the BMX/mountain biking community to find an appropriate location for development of a youth park facility suitable to their needs”, as a replacement for a user-built dirt jump course eliminated through the development of the Oak & 37th park site (now Oak Meadows Park).

On January 19, 2009 the Board directed staff to “conduct a consultation process with the public, the BMX/mountain biking community and other stakeholders with respect to a proposed BMX/mountain bike jump park in a section of Vanier Park.”

BACKGROUND

At the January 19, 2009 meeting of the Park Board, staff identified a potential site for a BMX/mountain bike skills park within Vanier Park (Appendix A), as a replacement facility for the installation at Oak Meadows Park which was removed through a park renewal process.

Subsequently, as directed by the Board, staff conducted a public consultation on this initiative and reported back to the Planning and Environment Committee with a summary of inputs received from an Open House and via the e-mail and other correspondence. In terms of general opinion on the proposed skills park an aggregate 82% of respondents indicated support for the project and 16% were opposed. Amongst respondents living within a two block radius of Vanier Park the ratio was 52% in support of the project and 40% opposed (see summary in Appendix B).

The Committee gave approval for the proposal to move on to the next step, with staff asked to consider measures to address the concerns of residents and other stakeholders, as reported from the consultation and expressed by delegations to the meeting. In relation to these concerns, staff have followed up by querying other Parks and Recreation administrations with respect to the operation of comparable facilities in other municipalities.

Also at the Committee meeting the extensive First Nations history associated with Vanier Park and lands to the south and east was referenced, and staff noted that the Inter-governmental Relations office of the Squamish Nation had raised concerns about the proposed project, and in particular with respect to potential archaeological resources at or near their former village site. Since the Committee meeting a site review was arranged and conducted by a professional archaeologist in accordance with Provincial regulations and guidelines.

DISCUSSION

This report recommends that the proposed BMX/Mountain Bike skills area in Vanier Park proceed to the design stage, with the project implemented in a manner sensitive to the concerns raised by the local residents' association, by other park stakeholders, and by the Squamish First Nation.

The rationale for provision of a bicycle skills park and the suitability of the proposed site was outlined previously in the January 19, 2009 report to the Board. The subsequent public consultation indicated wide support for the project, certainly amongst the constituency of potential users but also amongst residents in the surrounding neighbourhood. Other jurisdictions confirm that similar skills parks are well regarded, well used, and generate few if any complaints from other park users and nearby residents.

Questions were raised during the public process about how introduction of the skills park might affect current activities and possible future development in the surrounding park areas. The two main lines of concern were (1) compatibility with the annual festival programming in the open grass area west of the site and (2) the fit of an active play area in the context of the perceived environmental and passive recreational values of the larger wooded area around the site.

Specific issues raised, proposed mitigation measures (which will be further developed in the project design phase) are summarized below:

Noise generation: Cycling activity is not inherently noisy but amplified sound and event activity will need to be controlled. There will be minimal spectator capacity designed in and events will be discouraged. No event permits will be issued during the periods of operation of the Children's Festival and Bard on the Beach. Design consideration will be given to noise buffering through berming and the overall skills park layout. The park will operate only during daylight hours; no artificial lighting will be installed.

Parking: In the expectation that the majority of users will cycle to the skills park, only minimal parking will be provided. The informal parking lot adjacent to the site will be reduced in scope and in future controlled in a manner consistent with other parking provision in Vanier Park. Alternate arrangements will be made for parking by event and marina employees, insofar as they currently use the informal lot.

Access: Designated cycling routes to the skills park will be established and signed. At the same time the skills park area will be separated by berms and or fencing to contain cycling activity and reduce potential conflicts with the walking, jogging and nature appreciation in the rest of the wooded area.

Future development of the wooded area: The "Alder Wood" is about eight acres in extent, of which the proposed skills park would take up just over one acre. Up to the 1960s, this was the site of several military buildings which were demolished when the site became park and the ground left covered with construction waste and imported fill to a depth of up to five meters. The alder growth has spontaneously regenerated since that time, mixed with other indigenous and invasive plant species. Homeless encampments are evident, considerable illegal dumping has taken place, and access is difficult because of poor drainage and thick undergrowth. However, the site has clear potential for a range of park uses.

The Kitsilano Point Residents Association, along with other stakeholders, have proposed development of a master plan for the Alder Wood. Staff concur, but note that this would be a major undertaking far beyond the scope of the current project and planning resources immediately available. The Board may wish to give consideration to such an initiative funded from the next Capital Plan.

Potential archaeological resources: As noted above, an archaeological overview assessment was conducted in connection with concerns raised by the Squamish First Nation. This study concluded that the lands affected by the proposed development have low potential for archaeological sites and, given the depth of existing fill material over the area, there is low probability that any archaeological remains would be disturbed by construction of the bicycle skills park (the executive summary of this study can be found in Appendix C). Staff will continue communications with the Squamish Nation on this project if it goes forward.

If approved by the Board, the mitigation measures discussed above will be further developed and reported back to the Board at the design approval phase.

SUMMARY

The Board is asked to approve implementation of the proposed BMX/Mountain Bike skills area in Vanier Park, subject to the conditions outlined in this report.

Prepared by:
Planning and Operations Division
Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation
Vancouver, BC

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APPENDIX A
Proposed site of Bike Skills Park



**APPENDIX B
Public Response**

	# All respondents (n=102)		Percent For/Against	# Kits Residents (n=56)		Percent Total For/Against Kits Residents	Percent Total For/Against < 2 blocks (n=25)
Strongly Support	76	74.5%	82.3%	34	60.7%	73.2%	52%
Somewhat Support	8	7.8%		7	12.5%		
Neutral	2	2.0%		2	3.6%		
Somewhat Oppose	8	7.8%	15.6%	6	10.7%	23.2%	40%
Strongly Oppose	8	7.8%		7	12.5%		
TOTAL	102	100		56	100%		

Comments from Open House March 31, 2009		
Those in support	Need a facility in Vancouver/Area	40%
	Positive youth activity	21%
	Increased site activity = increased safety/cleanliness	17%
	Healthy Activity	16%
	Safe place improving cycling skills	4%
Those opposed	Noise	8%
	Increased drug/criminal activity/garbage	6%
	More traffic/area too busy already	5%
	Area should be kept natural/passive	5%
	Good idea, bad location	4%
	Park is a cultural precinct	2%
Comments	Built jumps are safer than illegal jumps	12%
	Not big enough	5%
	Overall park plan needed	4%
	No sound amplification	2%

APPENDIX C

Executive Summary- AMEC Archaeological Overview Assessment

An archaeological overview assessment was carried out for a land parcel proposed for development as a Bicycle Skills Park in Vanier Park, City of Vancouver. As part of this assessment, extensive background research was conducted, including a review of historic aerial photographs and other archaeological assessments in and around Vanier Park, to understand the scope of past land use activities on the proposed development property.

This assessment concludes that, although the proposed development is located within a traditional use site (DhRs-236) and approximately 50 m north of the Squamish First Nation reverse lands Kitsilano I.R. No. 6 (*Snauq*), there is low potential for archaeological remains to be present. Some archaeological materials have reportedly been identified along the shoreline of Vanier Park, but they were never formally recorded. Additional intact or partially disturbed cultural deposits may exist along the historic shoreline of Vanier Park underlying fill, or possibly embedded within natural beach deposits. However, it is unlikely that any deposits extend as far west as the proposed development area, due to the intensity of historic land alterations. There is a slight possibility that deeply buried, intact sediments containing archaeological materials may be present below the disturbed fill, but due to the nature of the proposed development only minimal ground disturbance is anticipated, and therefore no further investigations are recommended.