



April 18, 2019

MEMO TO : Park Board Commissioners

FROM : Shauna Wilton
Deputy General Manager, Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation

SUBJECT : **Park Board Success Plan – Board Update**

Dear Commissioners,

As a follow-up to my memo issued on January 31, 2019, this memo is to inform you of the next steps in the process for the Park Board Success Plan, as well as to outline how the process has evolved over time.

First of all, thank you for your participation in the individual interviews to help us better understand what outcomes and priorities you would like to see achieved during your term and for overall Park Board success. Your feedback has been summarized by Raymond Penner and his report is attached for your review. Your input on process has also been considered as we move forward in the development of this project.

The original vision was to integrate current and planned staff initiatives with the goals and objectives of Commissioners to produce a “4 year Board Success Plan”. At the onset of this project, we realized that the process would need to be flexible in order to integrate our planning processes and current initiatives with Board feedback. To that end, we have modified the project approach going forward to focus on foundational systems and tools, which will include discussions with the Board on core principles, roles and responsibilities, planning processes, and current work commitments. The goal of this modified approach will ensure that Board feedback and direction will be integrated within existing planning processes, and will give consideration to staff capacity for both active and future work. The outcome of this project aims to create a roadmap for the next 4 years that is reflective of shared processes and priorities within an achievable timeframe.

As a next step we will be holding a joint Board/staff workshop scheduled for Tuesday, May 14th from 5:30pm-9:30pm at Langara Golf Course. This workshop will be facilitated by Raymond and will focus on shared foundational principles, processes, and a review of current work commitments.

We look forward to working together on this exciting and important initiative.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Shauna Wilton'.

Shauna Wilton
Deputy General Manager - Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation

/si/clc

Copy to: PB Senior Leadership Team, Raymond Penner

Vancouver Park Board Success Plan - Amalgamated Commissioner Interviews

This document contains the amalgamated interview notes¹ of interviews I conducted with each of the Vancouver Park Board Commissioners as part of the development of a “Board Success Plan”. The content of the notes are as approved by each Commissioner but the structure of the amalgamation is mine. There are likely thoughts that have significance in areas other than where I have placed them so the reader is encouraged to keep an open mind in both the structure and content as we seek to identify the key outcomes expressed by the Board overall.

The intent of this initiative is to help bring into alignment current Park Board strategies, initiatives and plans with Commissioners’ desired outcomes for their term. This document is specifically intended for use by Park Board’s senior management team to inform the process going forward. Raymond Penner

Overall Goal

- as an overall goal, we need to make Vancouver better by making the park system better

Climate Change

- would like to see PB as a leader in climate change
 - look at all operations and systems through the lens of climate change with the first priority being mitigation and after that, adaptation
 - conversion of equipment away from fossil fuels is a good move and this needs to continue
 - need to ensure that our inventory of climate change impacts and opportunities is as complete as possible and regularly updated– not sure of where this is right now or what the practices are for updating
- PB should be at the forefront of the City in terms of climate mitigation
 - Vancouver as a port city is particularly vulnerable and PB can play an important role
 - we are already doing a good job in this area and need to both do more and to be seen to do more – i.e. we need to be better communicators of what we are doing in this area
- climate change mitigation
 - more support for active transportation (e.g. walking, cycling, in-line skating, roller blading, etc.); this should include more covered bike racks
 - together with the City and Translink, align better transportation to beaches (in the summer) and to CCs from all parts of the city

¹ After conducting the interviews, each Commissioner was provided with the opportunity to review the notes and make any edits they wanted to ensure that the notes accurately expressed what they wanted said.

February 19, 2019

- climate change adaptation – we need to ensure that we are acting now, not waiting for more severe impacts to be felt
 - set targets for improving marine barrier to address sea level rise (e.g. Stanley Park Seawall) – perhaps 1% per year and to do this where opportunities/needs arise
 - ensure that adequate plans are in place for forest canopy protection/replacement to address prolonged drought conditions – this includes fire protection systems that are up to date for current conditions and today’s technology
- the current move to emission reduction in transportation is positive but we are not capitalizing on opportunities this provides
 - we should be providing more charging stations both for private and commercial (i.e. busses) vehicles – this is both environmentally smart and a revenue generating opportunity

Sustainability

- need to develop a focus on food supply sustainability through whatever opportunities we have
 - review and improve procurement practices, concessions, restaurant partners (via language of leases)
 - it is important that practices and policies in this area are based on legitimate science as there is a lot of misleading understanding/information in this area
 - food supply sustainability opportunities also should include community gardens, gatherings, cultural events and community centre practices
- we need to have a strong focus on sustainability and biodiversity in our park planning and implementation
 - our forestry policy must reflect strong sustainability and biodiversity aspects
 - at this time, our policy on park facilities is net zero but we should consider changing that to net positive
 - we should daylight as many streams in our parks as possible
 - the transition away from fossil fuels is positive and needs to continue
- food security needs to be a key theme and we need to look at all the places that PB has some influence to provide strong leadership
 - sourcing
 - community events – how can we encourage and support CCAs in this way
 - community kitchens
 - community gardens

Social Justice and Inclusion

- PB needs to ensure that it is promoting and communicating fairness and social justice as a permeating theme
 - this includes providing space and encouraging art that has social commentary, value of green space and recreation
 - PB has a lot of overlap with other organizations in various arenas including political, social and economic – in all of these areas, we need to have a strong and continued focus on making our community better and stronger
- important that we do not allow complacency in doing business as usual and resting on our successes – need to strengthen the concept that whatever we are doing, what can be done to be better through the lens of making our community better through policies and practices
- it is important to ensure that there is equal access to parks and facilities for all Vancouver residents in all neighbourhoods
 - equity includes geographical distribution as well as barrier free access to parks, facilities and services
- address affordability as a barrier for core activities/programs with flexibility in other programs
 - remove fees for youth below the ages of 16 or maybe 18
 - provide an equitable subsidy across all CCs for low income
- we need to ensure that all seniors' needs are addressed and that a strong voice is clearly heard for their needs
 - we need to take actions so that all seniors (not just seniors with physical and/or mental challenges but for all older adults and able bodied seniors believe that the Park Board and all it encompasses are better and more responsive to them

Community Development

- community development needs to be a key theme in programs, facilities and services
 - implementation of the JOA needs to be done in a way that enhances the community centres' ability to strengthen their communities; perhaps a dedicated PB assistant at each centre would help in reinforcing some of PB's themes/initiatives
 - need to have stronger engagement of the CCAs
 - need to emphasize the community centres' role in developing strong communities e.g. in planning events, adopt lenses of indigenous inclusion, food security, etc.
 - find ways to provide traction for the community centres' to connect to all parts of their community; important to have a broad perspective of all elements of their community e.g. providing warming centres for homeless during cold spells

- inclusion as part of community development needs to include all “communities” within the community, however defined e.g. backgrounds, interests, sexual orientation, etc.
- we need to ensure all CCs are inclusive of all aspects of their communities – including homeless, sexual orientation, low income, ethnicity, etc.; there may be opportunities through the JOA and influence management to increase CC inclusiveness; Kitsilano CC is a good example with their shower program for homeless individuals; CCs should all offer warming centres in cold weather

Reconciliation

- reconciliation efforts are important and we need to keep moving ahead on these efforts
- reconciliation efforts underway are heading in the right direction
 - need to engage people where they live; engagement needs to be from the ground up
 - reconciliation needs both physical space and program space
 - reconciliation requires making and actualizing opportunities for exchanges of understanding and awareness of cultures
 - reconciliation needs to include visible markers e.g. Britannia’s new facilities include these
- reconciliation efforts are moving forward and these need to continue to be front and centre as a priority
 - our parks are land based and so is reconciliation – acknowledging in real ways the connection of land to First Nations
- reconciliation is happening but we need to move from the honorific to more substantive actions
 - some of our park lands are on territory taken from First Nations
 - we need to develop joint programming and infrastructure with First Nations as partners; this should also consider revenue sharing
 - we are in a position to help increase public knowledge and awareness of the importance of reconciliation and encourage action by others

Safety

- we need to ensure our parks are safe for everyone but we tend to have a narrow view of what this means – we need to take the broadest view possible of what safety entails
 - flagrant breaking of bylaws (e.g. smoking, bike riding where not allowed, dogs off leash where not allowed, loud music, etc.) without adequate enforcement – no consequences leads to complacency and these types of infractions have significant impacts on people’s feelings of safety, particularly for seniors but also families with you children
 - we do not allocate sufficient resources to address safety concerns

- if people don't feel safe, they might not say anything to people doing things that make them feel unsafe but they won't return
 - feeling of safety is intimately connected to the principle of inclusion
 - the public must feel that we "have their backs" on safety concerns
 - one example of unsafe conditions is the stretch of the Arbutus Greenway between King Edward Avenue and the Arbutus Club at night; suggestions for fixing this have been for lighting but it would still be unsafe at night – a better solution would be installing signage alerting people that this is not safe to walk through at night
- we need to stop paving paths in the parks except where absolutely needed
 - wheeled activities that paving is supposed to support (e.g. biking and wheelchairs) can take place on a compacted gravel surface
 - while the biking lobby is strong, we have listened to them too much and need to listen to all the voices including walkers and runners
 - paving is contra-indicated for running and walking as it leads to knee damage
 - hardened gravel paths are more environmentally friendly and support our goals of encouraging and supporting healthy life-style choices

Aquatics

- we need to have more aquatic facilities
- we need to protect and improve smaller aquatic facilities so that these are locally accessible
- we need to provide more opportunities for local aquatics with indoor and outdoor pools

Cycling

- recreational cycling should be fully incorporated into VanPlay, it is barely mentioned in the reports we have read so far
- much needed improvements to the Kitsilano section of the Seaside Greenway - should be complete by early 2020, given that considerable planning effort has already gone into improving the bicycle path in and around Kitsilano Beach

Park Space

- while affordable housing is a critical issue in the city, pressure on available space and a rising population means that we have to continue to focus on the need for park space and facilities
 - great there is a bylaw happening to protect our park space now
 - address the budget challenges – while we have more money in our budget, our portion of community amenity fees has gone down
 - we must protect our park lands from other uses

- commercialization of park space is an issue – this includes space required for parking and traffic, private corporations offering choices and price points that can be barriers for some Vancouver residents, etc.; taverns are not necessarily family oriented
- when activity such as Bacco Rosio takes place, we need to build in assurances that local arts and local employment opportunities are there; we also need to carefully consider the siting of activities that can have an adverse (even if short lived) impact on local residents
- where there are commercial food outlets we need to ensure that there are ethical food choices available, perhaps even organic
- we should build more pocket parks
 - these could take place through appropriations in some cases or purchases in others
 - include adjacent alleys and streets in activation
 - incorporate community gardens

Board Information and Processes

- the Board Success Plan is a good idea for our term but we also need to have a clear understanding of what the longer term direction and initiatives that are already underway; hopefully the Board Success Plan can both support these as well as provide a lens on how to evaluate and perhaps sharpen a focus on some elements/opportunities
- as a Board, our job is to set policy direction but we are not always as informed as we need to be to make the best choices
 - there are gaps between Commissioners and staff that have information
 - may be useful to explore ways of being able to access staff expertise in an honest and respectful manner while ensuring that there is not interference in operations
 - while it is important to listen to grievances we need to be careful in hearing the loudest voices without asking which voices are not being heard
 - feel somewhat “controlled” by management in terms of what information is shared; it is important to acknowledge that there is and will always be an inherent tension between the Board as elected representatives reflecting the public and management with the task of running an organization as effectively and efficiently as possible
 - would be worthwhile for the Board to explore the concept of how to use motions in a way that supports gathering more information prior to debating the substance of the motion – possibly a two step process
- overall, this initiative to develop a plan that the Board can agree on to strive for and measure the outcomes and priorities we would like to see is a very positive move
 - a lot of what I want to see is already being done; I would like to see it done better and truly incorporate institutional “lessons learned” into our planning process.

- concern that Commissioners may be asked to sign off on a Board Success Plan
 - if this is too prescriptive, it doesn't leave room for addressing emerging issues or changing conditions that we cannot see at this time
 - if this is too philosophic, it might not be meaningful
 - if this contains priorities for all Commissioners, it may have aspirations in it that I don't agree with
 - what is really needed is to have a clear roadmap from staff of where they see the next four years going and in particular the next year; at this time, we as a Board really don't know what is coming except for the next agenda

- there are issues with getting information to support fully informed Board motions
 - it would be worthwhile to revisit policy and practices to gather information for Board motions
 - the idea of a two-step motion process might be workable – the first step leading to gathering sufficient background information and the second step by the same Commissioner of putting forward a more comprehensive recommendation

- Board motions need to be as informed as possible
 - motions are sometimes required to get things started and sometimes to support what is already underway – sometime this is a tricky balance
 - I intend to understand what is already taking place or is likely to be able to be supported before making motions

- encourage the idea of using initial motions to ask for a report back from staff to ensure the substantive issue is dealt with at the Board level in an informed manner
 - since Commissioners represent different political parties with differing platforms, there will always be some element of competition and to some extent this works against collaboration
 - more alignment in this Board than previous Boards and encourage all Commissioners to work toward collaboration in our joint effort to build stronger communities and act as trustees for future generations for our park lands and resources

- as the Board makes decisions, we need to ensure we strive for what provides the greatest benefit for the most people
 - this requires us to hear all perspectives
 - we need to recognize that funding will be an ongoing challenge
 - making changes will also provide challenges but these can be addressed; it is important in making changes that those being impacted are brought into the process

- we need to accept that many of our decisions have an inherent tension for balancing interests that are not necessarily in harmony
 - e.g. dog owners want to be able to have off-leash parks in their neighbourhood while others see this as a loss of accessible park space
 - we need to have safety for everyone yet we also need to provide bicycle paths
 - installing artificial turf can be done for accessibility reasons but there is a loss of biodiversity
- Board motions are a bit of a balancing act
 - we must continue to be vigilant to ensure all points of view on issues are heard and that people feel heard
 - not sure if able to refer another Commissioner's motion to committee
 - some motions are time sensitive as there is an impending situation so there is time pressure to make a decision
 - sometimes we really need more information to make the best decision but am not always sure where that information can be found
 - it would be better if all Board members were informed about the upcoming agendas of PB meetings in camera; this would allow us to do research and more fully prepare for meetings, while keeping the agendas confidential; currently this information is kept confidential by the Board chair and the committee chair
- municipal government is the level closest to the people
 - public has the opportunity to have a greater impact on local decisions
 - public have an extremely strong sense of "ownership" of their neighbourhood and PB needs to be very conscious of this as our decisions often have a significant local effect; at the same time, we need to understand that we are constantly balancing at best meeting the needs of most while listening to those who feel adversely impacted by our decisions
- as a Board, we have seen a significant stretching of the time gap from discussing an issue to the actual acting on it – this means that any Board has a decreasing likelihood of seeing their ideas actualized
 - until funds are committed, there is lots of wheel spinning – we need to shorten the time between concept and commitment
 - it is very important that this Board is able to see some "quick wins"; this likely will require hiring more people to take on some projects
- while the Board may want something to happen, the organization is large and moves very bureaucratically – we might vote for an action but nothing might actually happen

Organization Considerations

- some organization improvements are needed
 - our communication with the public needs to improve; we need to do a better job to share information and our story, inform people as to why things are happening, consult when needed and listen to people
 - communication between departments needs to improve
 - staff morale could be improved if we develop more trust and respect in the union/management relationship
- as a Board, we need to be mindful that the organization is already working hard and we are uncertain as to the capacity to take on additional initiatives
- we need to develop leading class metrics to measure how we are doing as a park and recreation system
 - this will entail gathering information from other park systems
 - we can develop a data-based dashboard for budgeting and planning
- PB should be the best place in Canada to work
 - staff and management both need to feel highly valued
 - we need to be better change managers as many people are very resistant to change, particularly in their own neighbourhood – VanSplash is an example of an aspirational document that was not well understood by the public – we need to be better communicators as part of our role in change management

Asset Management

- we are not keeping our assets up
 - our marinas are effective cash generators but they are falling in disrepair
 - the hangar at Jericho is in poor shape; the only upgrade being contemplated is an accessible wharf but this is stalled at the concept stage
 - the concept of “wilding” is important where this means re-establishing natural areas but it is being used as a synonym for not doing required park management
 - invasive species are a significant threat to some of our park areas and these are not being adequately addressed
 - when we had control of the REFM, we were better able to speedily address more facility maintenance but with the City now controlling this, we are less well served; PB has more facilities than any other part of the City and we need to do something to bring back the level of maintenance service we require

Fiscal Issues

- our financial arrangements with the City need to change
 - we used to get 10% of the City budget but now 8.5% and not sure if further decreased are being contemplated
 - the City now considers our revenue generation and deducts this amount from their contribution – this is a significant issue and a disincentive to any additional revenue generation ventures – this has to change
 - our portion of the development levy used to be 42% but it is now 16%
 - the City views the surplus that we hold for future parks as “available funds”
- we need to roll back commercialization of our parks to meet budget needs
 - we need to have affordability and accessibility as a premise for leases –parks are public land forever – we must not sell or further commercialize our parks
 - we are trustees to look after these lands the best we can as today’s decisions will impact all future generations
- we need to create a philanthropic foundation to help raise money for significant projects
 - in the past, we have had significant philanthropic gifts but we no longer do direct “asks”; at the same time lots of large donations have been made to other civic organizations
 - the General Manager or perhaps someone else in the organization needs to become more political to support this
- we have outstanding horticultural assets that are part of what makes Vancouver special but they are not being showcased or adequately marketed
 - huge tourism opportunities but insufficient marketing
 - e.g. Butchart Gardens is not even in Victoria but still draws over 1 million visitors a year; we have the VanDusen Gardens right in the city and we only draw a quarter of that
 - our focus on these assets has been on keeping costs down but what is needed is a better value proposition that looks at how extra investments in these assets can produce a significant increase in revenue
 - parks attract visitation for a wide range of reasons from recreation, access to nature as well as a cultured landscape (flowers, trees, open areas, etc.) and it is important to not let this aspect of our parks be minimized in our vision and actions
 - Bloedel Conservatory needs an atrium at the front – this will support school groups, a gift shop, a coffee shop, food services and allow for more and better use of exhibition space
 - important to not let the VanDusen Gardens JOA process bog down doing anything of note there or at Bloedel Conservatory

Communications

- we have to do a better job of “telling our story” so that the public sees us as relevant
 - we have incredible stories to tell and we are not doing enough on that front
 - now we have a float in the Pride Parade but are absent from other public festivities where we could showcase our work
 - used to do a garden at the PNE but that has stopped
 - we need to communicate the importance of our temperate rain forest ecology and connect this to climate change initiatives

- we must significantly improve the public’s understanding of what we have and what we do in our park system
 - Vancouver residents as a whole are quite complacent about what we have because we don’t do a good job of telling them
 - the danger with public complacency is that the ongoing support for what we do and the resources we need to do this could erode; it is critical that Vancouverites value our park system
 - we need to use social media and other creative ways of getting our message out