

November 1, 2022

Re: An open letter of apology to xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵwx̱wú7mesh (Squamish), and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations

As the Chair of the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation, I am here to deliver a long overdue apology for the Park Board's actions and inactions in relation to colonialism and the harm inflicted on xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵwx̱wú7mesh (Squamish), and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) peoples both historically and in the present day.

For over 130 years, the Vancouver Park Board has been complicit in acts of wrongdoing against Indigenous people who resided in many historic village communities and continue to reside in the place now known as Vancouver. Colonial decision-making, actions and belief systems caused extensive harm to individuals, communities, and complex cultural societies. Stripping away Indigenous cultural knowledge, silencing Indigenous language and voice, taking land, and changing dominant narratives to those of colonizing peoples has had, and continues to have, significant negative impacts on local Indigenous peoples.

Wrongdoings committed by the Vancouver Park Board include but are not limited to:

- Displacement- From the 1880s forward, the Park Board requested that the City of Vancouver remove and dismantle traditional villages in what is known now as “Stanley Park”. These evictions were acts of cultural and economic violence, forcing families from their communities, disrupting cultural practices and ceremonies, and fracturing families. Ancestral burial locations along with spiritual sites were lost and damaged in this process.
- Buildings – The Park Board, past and present, continues to build on the lands once occupied by thriving Indigenous communities. These buildings benefit non-Indigenous peoples and rarely reflect the interests of the local Nations. The buildings do not represent Indigenous culture, design or technology in construct, and local Indigenous people do not govern them. The activities in these buildings are designed to serve non-Indigenous uses for primarily non-Indigenous people and often do not represent local Indigenous peoples' priorities and sensitivities.
- Narratives – The Park Board has created, allowed, permitted and continues to support public colonial narratives about the places and spaces within its control. These public acknowledgements memorialize – even valorize - colonial conquest and do not reflect the millennia of histories and traditions of local Indigenous peoples, their territories, and Nations.
- Relationship with Place – Past and present colonial actions have prevented and continue to prevent local Indigenous peoples from using places and spaces within their territory. Currently, Park Board permission is required to use many park spaces for organized activities. Park Board regulations, including rental and booking systems create barriers and interrupt local Indigenous access to important places.

- Decision-making - The Park Board under the Vancouver Charter continues to exercise jurisdictional control and decision-making over what happens in parks and related community spaces. Until very recently, the Park Board has neglected to consult with the xʷməθkʷəy̅əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations. The Park Board acknowledges that as of this time, the power bestowed upon it by the Provincial government via the Vancouver Charter fails to share meaningful decision-making power in the matters the Park Board governs.
- Park and Community Centre Users. The power that the Park Board wields ensures that primarily dominant-culture (i.e. Western European cultures) are practiced and supported in the public realm. The erasure of Indigenous culture to the benefit of others through decision-making held by colonial powers continues today.

The Park Board has been and continues to be complicit in colonial and intergenerational harm inflicted on local Indigenous peoples.

Some specific examples of ways the Park Board's jurisdiction and control of park lands interrupts or fails to benefit local Indigenous peoples include but are not limited to:

- Local Indigenous people's ability to pass on land-specific teachings through their generations, including the unimpeded access to harvest Indigenous plants, hunt, and fish on these unceded territories.
- Local Indigenous management of their territory. Currently there are limited mechanisms in place for local Nations to participate fully in park planning and governance in Vancouver.
- Hindering local Nations' ability to perform ceremony in appropriate places in their territory. Recent Indigenous ceremonial work on the land now known as Stanley Park required a substantial staff team and budget to remove many systemic barriers.
- Wealth generation that would otherwise benefit Nation-members and their cultural cohesion. For example, there are no Indigenous run businesses in Vancouver parks.

We, the Park Board, have committed significant wrongdoings and we are both regretful and sorry for these significant transgressions.

To date the Park Board has supported the development and affirmation of a "Reconciliation: Mission, Vision & Values Statement," the "Stanley Park Intergovernmental Committee," a Truth Telling report and now a colonial audit. In 2022 the Park Board has put forward a motion to explore co-management of lands with xʷməθkʷəy̅əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh Nations. We acknowledge that these actions mark only a beginning and we commit to continuing the work of Reconciliation and decolonization from here forward.

In closing, I turn to the Park Board Reconciliation Mission, Vision, and Values: Colonialism did not happen overnight. Untangling it will take time. The Park Board is committed to the ongoing work of Reconciliation and to taking the time necessary for right relations and respectful practice. While staff and elected officials are inheriting a system not of our making, we will be rigorous in examining the systems we uphold, and working to dismantle the ways colonialism continues to do damage and harm and to systematically exclude local First Nations. Our mistakes are

diagnostic tools. We consent to learn in public. We sit with our mistakes, are transparent about them, and use them both to learn and to teach.

We offer this humble apology and commitment to the ongoing necessary work of decolonizing.

Sincerely,




Stuart Mackinnon
Board Chair



Camil Dumont
Committee Chair




Tricia Barker
Commissioner



John Coupar
Commissioner



Dave Demers
Commissioner



Gwen Giesbrecht
Commissioner



John Irwin
Commissioner

/jk

Copy to: PB Commissioners
PB Senior Leadership Team
PB Communications