

Vancouver Mayor Ken Sim Seeks Amendment to the Vancouver Charter to Remove the Elected Park Board

Vancouver, B.C., December 6, 2023 – Mayor Ken Sim announced this morning that he is bringing forward a motion asking the Province to remove the requirement for an elected Park Board under the Vancouver Charter.

To accomplish this change, Mayor Sim will be introducing a motion at next Wednesday's Council meeting requesting that the Province amend and repeal the relevant sections of the Vancouver Charter, and for the legal powers currently held by the Park Board to be transferred to City Council.

Mayor Sim's motion states that in recent years, "it has become abundantly clear, given the poor state of Vancouver's parks, recreation services, and infrastructure, that a fundamental change in the governance structure is not only needed, it is the only viable path forward to efficient and effective parks and recreation services for the people of Vancouver."

"Make no mistake about it. Vancouver's parks, recreation services, and cultural assets are prized by Vancouverites and visitors alike and must be protected, maintained, and preserved indefinitely for future generations," said Mayor Sim. "The commitment I'm making to the people of our city today includes establishing stronger protections around any changes to our parks. This will be a new era for parks and recreation in our city."

Vancouver is the only municipality in the entire country with an elected park board. In every other city in Canada, parks and recreation services are managed directly by a parks and recreation department under the direction of their respective city councils.

Recently, Vancouver's independent Auditor General released a performance audit of the Park Board's revenue management practices. The audit determined that the Park Board did not operate an effective framework for achieving revenue-related objectives. Moreover, it found that the Park Board was not proactively engaging with City Council to align its priorities with available funding, despite the fact that all Park Board expenditures require the approval of City Council.

Vancouver's park and recreation assets include 250 public parks and beaches, including Stanley Park, VanDusen Botanical Garden, Bloedel Conservatory, a large public recreation system of 24 community centres, swimming pools, rinks and arenas, sports playing fields, playgrounds, fitness centres, three championship golf courses, street trees, and marinas among other services and facilities.

Mayor Sim's motion also calls for the creation of a Parks and Recreation Transition Working Group to facilitate a smooth transition of responsibility for park and recreation services from the current oversight by the Park Board to the oversight of City Council. The working group would be in place for six months to coordinate ongoing engagement and relationships with park and recreation stakeholders. It would be supported by City staff through the City Manager's Office.

Quotes:

Chief Wayne Sparrow - Musqueam First Nation

“This is definitely a step in the right direction. Having a single department with authority for park land in the city will benefit everyone, including the Musqueam Indian Band. As a local nation with many levels of formal and informal interaction with the City, the proposed streamlined structure will provide clarity and a single point of contact for engaging with the City on the issues that matter most to our people.”

Lorraine Lowe - Executive Director, Dr. Sun-Yat Sen Garden Society

“The Dr. Sun-Yat Sen Garden Society of Vancouver provides engaging cultural events for the Vancouver community throughout the year. Since 2016, we have not been able to negotiate a renewed lease agreement with the Parks Board resulting in ongoing challenges around maintenance and investment in the space. I am optimistic that the motion being brought forward will alleviate some of the challenges our organization has faced over the years.”

Mike Burdick – President, Marpole Community Board of Directors

“I am, along with our Community, all for change that will help simplify city processes. In our experience, this cannot happen soon enough. We look forward to working with Council directly to support the Marpole community, including the work currently underway to build the long awaited Marpole-Oakridge Community Centre. If these changes can make it easier for another Community to achieve their goals then we are all for it!”

Mia Kohout – General Manager, Vancouver Bike Share Inc. (Mobi)

“We are excited to see this motion come forward. Historically, establishing new Mobi Bike stations in parks has been complicated and slow because we have to work with two governmental bodies within the City of Vancouver. This change would simplify and speed up the approval process for Mobi stations in parks, eliminating unnecessary bureaucracy and allowing us to bring more active transportation services to our city.”

Pall Beesla - South Asian Community Advocate + Vaisakhi Organizer

“South Vancouver has been overlooked for too long by past Park Boards. I applaud Mayor Ken Sim for proposing to collapse the Park Board. It’s been clear for a very long time that things are not working well under the current structure, and change is overdue. There is a significant park and recreation deficit in the city, particularly in South Vancouver. Through organizing community events, we have seen many challenges and redundancy that make community building difficult because of inefficient processes.”

Mark Cylwa – President, Vancouver United Football Club

“At Vancouver United our motto is ‘Game, Club, Community’. With that in mind, we strive to develop young soccer players, not only as players who we hope will enjoy involvement in the game for their lifetime, but as individuals who will be active in the club, supportive of other club members, and contribute to the well-being of the community as a whole. A key issue in obtaining our goals is access to a safe, reliable inventory of field space on which to run programming and accommodate our growth. At Vancouver United FC, we support any initiative which has the goal of improving equal field access to all stakeholders in a fair, efficient and effective manner.”

Paul Runnals – Executive Producer, Honda Celebration of Light

“As a company that specializes in festivals and major events, we are focused on delivering safe, exciting and innovative events in the region. I support this motion as I believe it will streamline the

festival permitting and approval process and will help to create a financially sustainable environment where organizers can bring even more diverse and engaging events to our city.”

Leigh Ramsden + Rod Akizuki, President + Treasurer of Vancouver Minor Softball Association

“The Vancouver Minor Softball Association, which provides softball for hundreds of girls and young women in Vancouver, is motivated to bring the benefits of youth sports to the next generation of female athletes in our city. As such, we are supportive of any measures which improve the fields and facilities we use, and their administration. We look forward to working hand in hand with the City to help engage with more girls and young women, and increase their opportunity to play sports as we move forward.”

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Motion:

Amendment to the Vancouver Charter

Submitted by: Mayor Ken Sim

WHEREAS

1. The City of Vancouver, including the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation (“Park Board”), is primarily created and governed by the *Vancouver Charter (VC)*, a provincial statute enacted in 1953 that incorporates the City of Vancouver;
2. The *VC* sets out the statutory powers and authorities which govern the City of Vancouver, and provides a range of powers and responsibilities different from those of other communities governed primarily by the *Community Charter (CC)* and the *Local Government Act (LGA)*;
3. The *VC* governs how the City operates, what by-laws Council can enact, and how budgets are determined. Under the *VC*, Council has the authority to enact by-laws to regulate such things as noise and land use, to buy and sell property, to collect certain taxes, to approve expenditures, and to take on debt, give grants, and hire and discharge employees;
4. The Park Board is established by section 485 of the *VC* (Part XXIII – Parks), which reads;

“A board of commissioners, to be known as the "Board of Parks and Recreation" or "Park Board," shall be elected as hereinafter provided, and shall consist of seven members or such other number as the Council may by by-law prescribe. The Board has the legal capacity to exercise the powers bestowed on it and to enforce those powers and the exercise thereof by actions, proceeding or prosecution.”;
5. The Park Board looks after 250 public parks and beaches, including Stanley Park, VanDusen Botanical Garden, Bloedel Conservatory, and a large public recreation

system of 24 community centres, swimming pools, rinks and arenas, sport playing fields, playgrounds, fitness centres, three championship golf courses, street trees, and marinas, among other services and facilities;

6. The City of Vancouver is the only municipality in Canada with an elected park board, with the exception of the Cultus Lake Park Board which is made up of five elected Commissioners (i.e., three elected from the Cultus Lake Park jurisdiction and two elected from the City of Chilliwack jurisdiction);
7. Vancouver's Auditor General (AGO) recently released a performance audit report of the revenue management practices of the Park Board. The audit determined that while some processes were used to inform fee-setting, the Park Board did not operate an effective framework for achieving revenue-related objectives for its revenue-generating assets and services;
8. The AGO's audit report further noted that the Park Board's overall funding structure, as set out in the VC, requires it to obtain City Council approval for all expenditures, including the expenditure of funds generated from revenue-generating activities. The audit found that while the Park Board has strategies to guide the delivery of parks and recreation services, it had not proactively engaged with City Council to align its priorities with available funding;
9. Vancouver's parks, recreation, and cultural assets are prized by Vancouverites and visitors alike and must be protected, maintained, and preserved sustainably and in good working order for future generations;
10. The Park Board, for most practical intents, functions like any other department of the City, albeit as a separate entity with significant independent authority through its elected board;
11. Over the years, the Province has amended the VC numerous times to accommodate the changing needs and priorities of the city. Some amendments have been significant while others have been consequential and/or incidental to other legislation introduced by the Province; and
12. In recent years it has become abundantly clear, given the poor state of Vancouver's parks, recreation services, and infrastructure, that a fundamental change in governance structure is not only needed, it is the only viable path forward to an efficient and effective parks and recreation service for the people of Vancouver.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED

- A. THAT Council formally request that the Province of British Columbia amend or repeal section 485 of the *Vancouver Charter* ("VC") to remove the requirement for an elected board of commissioners, variously referenced in legislation and elsewhere as the "Board of Parks and Recreation" and/or "Park Board", including any and all consequential and/or incidental amendments required to the VC and/or other related legislation, including that any and all legal obligations of the Park Board be assumed by the City, and

FURTHER THAT the legal capacity to exercise the powers currently bestowed on the Park Board under the VC, and the authority to enforce those powers, shall be devolved

to and bestowed upon Council, and the delivery of parks and recreation services shall be administered by the City in accordance with Council direction, and

FURTHER THAT, in accordance with the above, Council formally request that the Province of British Columbia amend the process for revoking and/or cancelling the designation of areas designated as permanent public parks of the City under the VC, notably under section 488 of the VC (“Parks in care of Board”), to a unanimous vote of all Council members, along with provisions for a public referendum.

- B. THAT a Parks and Recreation Transition Working Group (“PRTWG”) (Type D advisory body) be convened to facilitate the smooth transition of responsibility for park and recreation services, from the current oversight by an elected Park Board to the oversight of Council, and

FURTHER THAT the PRTWG shall have a time-limited mandate of six (6) months to coordinate the ongoing engagement and relationships with park and recreation stakeholders, supported by City staff, and be comprised of the Mayor, the Mayor’s Chief of Staff, two City Councillors appointed by the Mayor, a current Park Board Commissioner appointed by the Mayor, and up to six (6) members of the public appointed by the Mayor, with Terms of Reference for the working group to be determined by the Mayor in consultation with, and under the advisement of, the City Manager and the General Manager of Parks and Recreation.

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