

PROGRESS UPDATE REPORT

DATE: August 12, 2024
FROM: Sandra Singh, Deputy City Manager
SUBJECT: Parks and Recreation Governance Transition Planning: Progress Update

PURPOSE

To update on the work to prepare for the proposed transition of governance of parks and recreation services from an elected Park Board to the elected City Council.

BACKGROUND

On December 13, 2023, Council adopted a resolution requesting legislative amendments to the Vancouver Charter (“Charter”) from the Government of BC that would transition the governance of parks and recreation services in Vancouver from a separate, elected Park Board to the elected City Council.

This transition is intended to simplify governance for parks and recreation services as core City services, ensure efficient and effective service operations, reduce complexity in public service experiences, and reduce any duplication that has resulted from dual governance systems. These governance and operational changes are anticipated to result in service improvements, process simplification and financial savings that can be reinvested in parks and recreation and other City services.

Council also committed to enhancing parks protections and continuing the City’s commitment to meaningful public access to governance and governance process related to parks and recreation services.

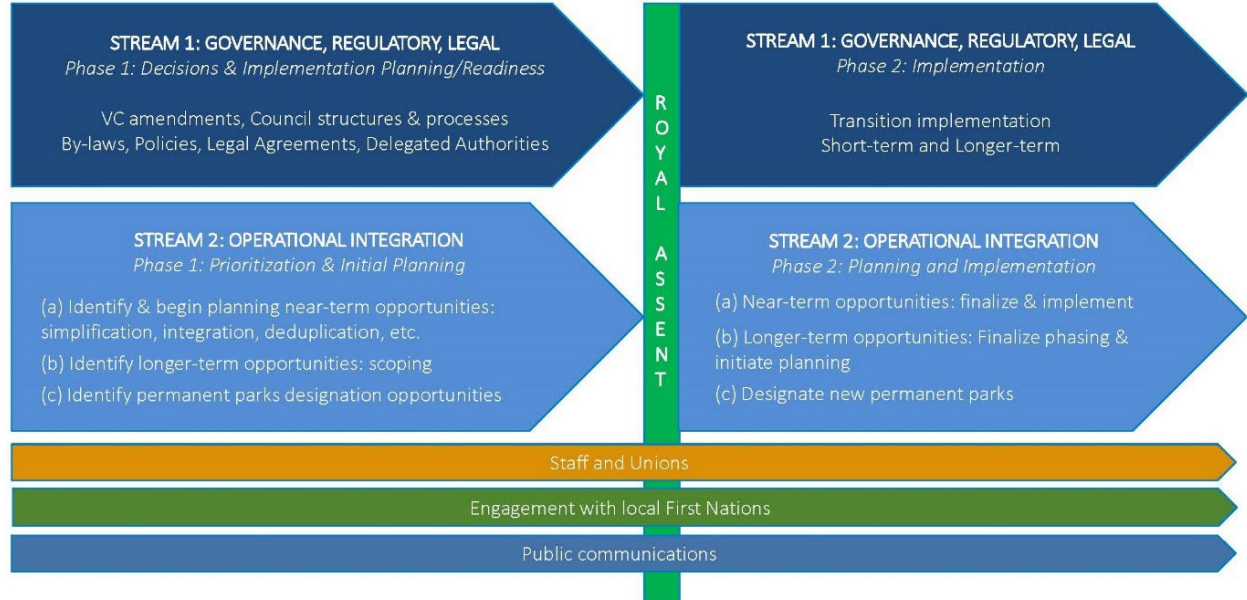
Approach to the Transition Planning

An overview of the Transition Plan (“Plan”) was presented to Mayor and Council on February 7, 2024, and has been posted publicly at [Parks and Recreation Services: Proposed Governance Transition - Transition Plan Summary \(vancouver.ca\)](#).

As noted in the Plan, recognizing the complexity of the proposed transition, initial focus was on addressing critical issues for transition – primarily legal and by-law matters – while laying the foundation for early post-transition service and operational improvements and longer-term transformative opportunities. Importantly, the City is approaching this potential transition as an opportunity to enable significant service improvements across the City’s operations; simplify processes and ensure faster decision-making for both the community and internally; reduce administrative duplication and inefficiencies; improve leveraging of expertise across City operations; and increase permanent park designations.

The overall work program was presented in the following diagram:

Overall Approach: Work Streams and Phases



Reporting to the City Manager’s Office, a project team from the Project and Strategy Support Office (formerly Business Planning and Project Support or BPPS) is coordinating the work.

PROGRESS UPDATE

Resolving Regulatory, Legal, and Governance Matters

- Staff have discussed with the Government of BC the requested amendments to the Charter to enable the governance transition. Based on previous communications from the provincial government, it is anticipated that proposed changes will be brought forward soon after the upcoming Provincial election.
- All Park Board policies and by-laws have been reviewed and recommendations related to these policies, including delegated authorities, have been confirmed. The main recommendations are anticipated to be adoption of public service strategies and alignment of delegated authorities for parks and recreation work with delegated authorities for other areas of City work.
- Work is now commencing to review all City by-laws.
- The Council-appointed Transition Working Group has reviewed information about how other City Councils organize their business related to parks and recreation and has also neared the end of its consultation with parks and recreation stakeholders and community partner organizations.
 - They have discussed these findings, and their next step is to develop recommendations to Council regarding efficient, effective, and meaningful pathways for community and stakeholder engagement with and input to Council in its proposed governance role for parks and recreation services.
 - These recommendations will be presented to Council in November 2024 as part of a broader public report back on the work to plan for the proposed transition.
 - The Working Group's appointments are being administratively extended to enable them to complete this work and report back to Council.

Advancing Planning for Operational Integration and/or Alignment

Integrating parks and recreation operations with City operations presents significant opportunities for service improvements, process simplification, policy and service coherence, and savings that could be reinvested into public services. These opportunities exist on both sides of the current operational structure – City and Park Board – and arise primarily from areas in which the current dual governance structure has resulted in duplication, service complexity, inefficiencies, and/or additional costs. This will be the single biggest opportunity in decades for transformative change and service improvements.

To be clear, as the Project Team works with Department staff to explore these opportunities, there is no intention to reduce public service levels or lay off staff. For all discussions, the following guiding principles that were outlined in the original Plan Summary will be applied:

- Deliver the greatest benefit to users, residents and taxpayers.
- Minimize disruption to public and ensure services continue to work.
- Seek administrative and service simplicity and efficiency.
- Be clear and transparent on the public and taxpayer benefit: Measurable outcomes – service experience, financial, etc.
- Recognize time is of the essence and be efficient and ensure informed decision-making.
- Be considerate as possible of the impacts of change and uncertainty on our employees.
- Respect labour and employee relation obligations.

Timelines

As noted above, amendments to the Vancouver Charter to enable the transition of parks and recreation governance are not expected until after the upcoming Provincial election. This extended timeline reinforces the need to begin operational integration discussions now in order to be in a place to realize financial and/or public service benefits once the Charter amendments are made. Practically, however, nothing has changed from the original plan: some straightforward opportunities will be implemented as soon as feasible after the transition and scoping of more complex opportunities will also begin now. In all cases, finalized plans for any service integration will need to wait until the Project Team can validate information with parks and recreation colleagues.

Commitments to Staff

Management recognizes that any type of service or operational restructuring can create uncertainty for employees. With respect to any future operational integration and impacts on specific positions or teams within Parks and Recreation or other City departments, the aim will be to manage those impacts through attrition and existing vacancies, and to communicate regularly with staff. Over the coming months, the Project Team will be seeking to work with the Unions to confirm a constructive transition process for positions impacted by integration efforts. Again, the aim is to provide continuing employment for staff involved with any service integration.

Importantly, the City will always respect the obligations in employment contracts and in collective agreements and will keep the unions apprised, seeking feedback and agreement on labour relations matters when appropriate.

City staff who deliver services under the governance of the Park Board

All staff currently under the governance of the Park Board are employees of the City and are subject to collective agreements or employment contracts negotiated with the City. While reporting to two distinct elected bodies, staff all operate as one team, and there is no distinction in approach to managing the impact of service integration.

The Park Board has given direction to parks and recreation staff to not engage on issues related to the proposed transition. This creates unique challenges not normally encountered in restructuring efforts and means that plans cannot be finalized until some information can be validated with the parks and recreation management team. As soon as the transition happens, the Project Team will connect with the parks and recreation management team to discuss this work and how to engage staff moving forward.

Operational Integration Planning

In consultation with City Department General Managers and Directors, the Project Team has identified a draft list of operational areas where there are opportunities for alignment, service improvements, and work or customer service efficiencies. The areas identified for initial exploration are outlined in the table below.

Example Areas to Explore Alignment and/or Integration	
Near Term, 0-6 months:	Longer-Term
<p>For this category, next steps will be to draft an approach to be validated with parks and recreation management once possible.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Road design, safety and maintenance* • Traffic management and transportation funding* • Water and sewer design and maintenance* • Seawall and structures maintenance* • Parking management • Park lighting • Decorative fountains maintenance • Small equipment management • Tree maintenance • Horticulture and green infrastructure maintenance • Film and special events permitting • Public art, arts and culture policy • Communications, engagement and Indigenous Relations • Sponsorships and donations • Board operations/clerk functions 	<p>For this category, next steps will be to draft a provisional project plan that outlines a project plan for the review and development of operational structure options.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management of bike share, e-scooters, street furniture • Development review • Management of marinas/docks • Signage, electrical and fabrication shops • Management of plazas • Lease management • Bylaw enforcement, urban issues/encampment response • Fleet management, radio systems
<p><i>* Park Board relies significantly on external contractors to deliver these public works. There is potential for Engineering to take on much of this work in house at a smaller incremental cost due to efficiencies of scale and internal reallocation.</i></p>	

To confirm at this point, what the above list represents are areas where it is generally well understood to be some duplication, potential policy misalignment, or potential to simplify delivery of operations or services. As has been consistently stated, it is anticipated that service levels will remain the same or improve. The significant changes will be in how staff work collectively to deliver these services to the public and the clarity and coherence that will create for everyone.

Any savings realized through the work above – whether through bringing contracted works in-house or through integration of operations – present Council with an opportunity to reinvest in parks and recreation service improvements and other public service priorities.

Designating More Permanent Parks

A review of all parcels of land currently utilized for park purposes has been completed. Should the governance transition proceed, staff anticipate bringing forward recommendations to convert a significant number of parcels of land to permanent park designation. Specific parcels are still to be confirmed.

NEXT STEPS

Next, the project team will meet with departmental leads to explore the areas of work in more detail, recognizing that there will be need to validate some information and ideas with parks and recreation staff before finalizing decisions.

The project team will continue to provide regular updates to union leaders and will share and discuss information as the work proceeds. The project team will also provide updates to staff at key milestones as the planning advances.

Staff are planning a progress update and public presentation to Council in November 2024, which as noted above, will be accompanied by the update from the Transition Working Group.

FINAL REMARKS

Parks and recreation services are critical to the health and well-being of the whole community. Successive Councils have supported extensive investments in parks and recreation services, deploying City land and capital dollars to expand and grow these community services. That commitment has not changed with this Council direction. However, in planning for the future, Council has charged staff to seek streamlined and simplified processes, both within operations and governance. As the City continues to plan for the anticipated transition, the Project Team and management will maintain our commitment to working responsibly, thoughtfully, and with care for our employees, community partners, users and stakeholders, and government partners.