

Bigger Aquarium will cost 32 trees, says report
Critics say the proposal 'chips away' at Stanley Park's valuable green space

Nicholas Read, Vancouver Sun
Published: Friday, September 08, 2006

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VANCOUVER - A proposed plan to increase the size of the Vancouver Aquarium by 50 per cent would destroy 0.6 hectares of Stanley Park green space and require cutting down 32 trees, according to a technical report on the project prepared by the Vancouver park board.

The proposal is stirring up concern among some park board commissioners, who fear the project is "chipping away" at valuable land. Some of the trees that are slated to be chopped are more than 30 centimetres in diameter, including a Western red cedar that is more than 200 years old.

The report, which was posted on the Internet Thursday, said: "Of the green space, half is currently lawn, and the other half is currently areas with trees and plantings.

"About 60 per cent of the green space would be used for aquarium buildings and pools. About 40 per cent of the green space would be used for public open spaces (which will have hard surfaces), public washrooms and the new food service building."

The \$70-million expansion, which was introduced to the board in May, would include building larger habitats for the aquarium's marine life, new underwater viewing areas, new facilities for animal care, two new indoor galleries, plus expanded food services and gift shop.

Park Board commissioners will consider the report at a meeting on Monday prior to sending it and the proposal out to public consultation this fall.

Ron Rothwell, the former president of the Friends of Stanley Park Society, called it a "massive intrusion" on the park.

"And it's placing a burden on Stanley Park in terms of the loss of green space," said Rothwell. "A huge error was made many, many years ago when [the park board] allowed the aquarium to locate there.

"What this should teach Vancouverites is that every time someone comes to you wanting public land for free, you should turn them down."

Vancouver Aquarium President John Nightingale wasn't available for comment Thursday, but aquarium public relations manager Brenda Jones said of the proposal: "For a lot of people [the aquarium] is considered a gem within Stanley park, and a lot of

people, I think, would support our animals -- our marine mammals primarily -- getting larger, more diverse habitats."

Jones said despite the plan to build bigger dolphin and beluga pools, she did not expect the aquarium to acquire any more animals if the plan were approved.

"We don't have immediate plans for bringing in other animals."

COPE commissioner Spencer Herbert said the plan should go to a public referendum.

"From the beginning I said if we're going to take park space out of Stanley Park, we should put it to a referendum," Herbert said. "Vancouverites care about Stanley Park and don't take too kindly to the park board giving away park land.

"It's 1.5 acres, which in today's market is worth a lot of money, especially in such a location. I've always said a referendum makes sense."

Herbert added: "We need to be very sensitive about this. Maybe Vancouver will say sure, just give it away, but I doubt that very much."

In May, the Non-Partisan Association- dominated board voted 4-2 to rescind a 1995 park board decision demanding that any proposed aquarium expansion be put to a referendum first. (The 1995 board was also dominated by the NPA.)

Herbert and fellow COPE commissioner Loretta Woodcock plan to hold a press conference in Stanley Park at 10 a.m. this morning to show reporters just how big 1.5 acres is.

NPA commissioner Korina Houghton, who voted to rescind the requirement for a referendum, said Thursday: "We have to weigh the pros and concerns of the proposal, and that will come out in the public consultation. I'm looking forward to that.

"That being said, you do have to weigh the actual amount of land we're talking about in the context of Stanley Park. Stanley park is a huge area. Is it worth that reduction in green space and the removal of the trees, or is it not? I want to look at it more closely before I say."

NPA commissioner Allan De Genova, who angered fellow NPA commissioners when he insisted that a technical report be included as part of a public consultation, said he was concerned about the park's green space being lost.

"We're chipping away at it," he said.

De Genova also said he wanted to make sure that before the proposal was put to public consultation, any questionnaires it contained would be fair and not biased in favour of the aquarium.

"[Questionnaires] always lean towards how great everything is about the aquarium, and wouldn't you want to support something this great? That's wrong. They have to be fair and unbiased," said De Genova.

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Your Vancouver Sun

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- This story can be heard online after 10:30 a.m. today at www.vancouver.sun.com/readaloud.

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AQUARIUM EXPANSION

Numbers below correspond with proposed changes to the Vancouver Aquarium.

1. Larger dolphin pools
2. Larger pools for sea lions and sea otters
3. Larger beluga whale pools
4. Entrance gallery
5. Educational gallery
6. New facilities for animal care
7. New main entrance
8. Expanded gift shop
9. Expanded food service in aquarium
10. New loading dock
11. Reorganized pedestrian pathways
12. Redeveloped public open spaces

13. Bill Reid sculpture

14. Locations for free public viewing of aquarium animals

15. Extension to the fish-bearing section of the salmon stream

16. New, larger and publicly accessible salmon hatchery

17. New public washrooms

18. New food service building

19. Reorganization of car and bus parking

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