

REPORT

Parks, Culture and Recreation Department

To: Mayor Wright and City Council **Date:** November 9, 2009
Committee of the Whole

From: Dean Gibson **Doc#** 119010
Director of Parks, Culture & Recreation

Subject: Everybody Active Consultation Findings

RECOMMENDATION

THAT this report be received for information.

ORIGIN/PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to inform Council of the findings of a recent initiative entitled “Everybody Active” which aims to identify and address barriers and challenges to participation in parks and recreation programs by low-income adults. This initiative has been funded by the BC Recreation and Parks Association.

SUMMARY

There are many benefits associated with participation in parks and recreation programs, including enhancing one’s physical health and wellbeing; developing confidence; making social connections; and fostering a sense of belonging within the larger community. For low-income adults between the ages of 35 and 54 years, recent research has documented very low-levels of participation in parks and recreation programs.

The Parks & Recreation Comprehensive Plan recommends that the City continue to address barriers to participation in parks and recreation services and take specific actions to increase access to leisure services. The City, through Parks, Culture and Recreation and Development Services (Social Planning) Departments, has received funding from the BC Recreation & Parks Association through the Everybody Active initiative to undertake a consultation process with low-income

adults in order to better understand their current levels of participation; the barriers and challenges that limit their participation; and the suggestions that they have for improving participation.

The consultation, which involved five social service organizations and 74 low-income adults, confirmed the research findings regarding very low-levels of participation. It also documented that the population in question faces multiple-barriers to participation. As such, strategies to improve participation will have to be multi-faceted, addressing issues related to cost, as well as other variables such as child minding, information, scheduling and transportation.

BACKGROUND

The Parks & Recreation Comprehensive Plan recommends that the City continue to address barriers to participation in parks and recreation services and take specific actions to increase access to leisure services. In October 2008, the City of New Westminster, through Parks, Culture and Recreation and Social Planning, submitted an application for seed grant funding under the Everybody Active Program, which is administered by the BC Recreation and Parks Association (BCRPA).

The Everybody Active Program “aims to increase physical activity among individuals who live disadvantaged situations by encouraging communities to work together and advocate for policies and programs that remove barriers to participation.” With regard to the seed grant funding, its primary focus is to “support community mobilization around access to physical activity for adults aged 35 to 54 years.”

As part of the application to the BCRPA, it was proposed that a series of focus groups be conducted with low-income adults in New Westminster. These focus groups would take place where these adults regularly congregate and their purpose would be to engage and inform. More specifically, consultation participants would be asked about barriers (e.g., child care, cost, scheduling, transportation, etc.) that may be inhibiting their participation in parks and recreation programs. The resultant feedback would be used to inform Parks, Culture and Recreation programming decisions and support initiatives.

Based on the consultation program that was developed, the five below cited social service organizations agreed to be involved:

- Elizabeth Fry Society – single women with low-incomes (6 participants)

- Pioneer House – men and women with serious mental health issues (17 participants)
- Cliff Block – men and women with a history of homelessness (4 participants)
- Hospitality Project – men and women with low-incomes (23 participants)
- New Westminster Family Place – men and women with lower-incomes, the majority of which are recent immigrants and single parents (9 participants)

In total, 74 people participated in the consultation, 59 by way of focus groups and 15 by way of questionnaire. Of this total, 44 or 59.5% of participants fell within the age range of 35 and 54 years. Given that the above programs serve all ages of adults with lower-incomes, a decision was made that the consultation would be inclusive and that interested clients would not be excluded if they fell outside of the targeted age range. Results reported are based on the responses provided by all 74 participants.

As part of the consultation, participants were provided with information about free or low-cost parks and recreational opportunities, including the subsidized access program (see appendix #1); they received a pedometer, pocket radio and free parks and recreation pass; and the social service organization to which they belonged had the opportunity to take part in a parks and recreation tour, orientation and/or activity. Regarding the latter, the Elizabeth Fry Society and Pioneer House took advantage of this opportunity.

EXISTING POLICY/PRACTICE

The City's Parks, Culture and Recreation Department is committed to providing leisure, parks and recreational opportunities for all residents of New Westminster, including those with low-incomes. To this end, the Department offers a subsidy program for low-income adults and families. Under this program, which is administered by Fraserside Community Services Society, eligible adults and families can receive a 50% cost subsidy on the majority of programs. It also offers an access pass for people on disability pension programs, which allows admission at the lowest posted drop-in fee.

ANALYSIS

The five focus groups and the questionnaire were designed to generate dialogue and gain feedback to the following questions:

- What do you do to get exercise or to stay active?
- What are some of your favorite leisure and recreational activities? What activities did you enjoy as a child or youth?

- Have you participated in a Parks, Culture and Recreation program in the past year and, if yes, did you feel welcome and was it a positive experience?
- What limits or prevents you, if anything, from participating in a Parks, Culture and Recreation program?
- Do you have any suggestions regarding Parks, Culture and Recreation programming that would address your specific abilities, interests and/or needs?

Based on the consultation, some of the highlights are as follows:

Current and Past Forms of Physical Activity:

While the majority of participants stated that they are physically active, the primary form of activity cited is walking. In many cases, walking was identified as a necessity and not a deliberate decision to gain exercise. Regarding the former, most participants stated that they did not have access to an automobile and that they limited their public transit usage given the associated cost.

Far fewer participants are currently engaged in other forms of exercise. In fact, the only forms of exercise that were cited by five or more participants are cycling, swimming and weight training.

When asked about their activity levels during their childhood and youth, the vast majority of participants reported that they were very active. About half of participants reported that they had previously participated in organized sports such as hockey, soccer and volleyball. In probing this question further, almost all participants reported that their activity levels had decreased with age, with the most significant drop-off occurring after high school.

Participation in Parks, Culture and Recreation Programs:

Only a minority of participants (31.1%) reported that they had visited a Parks, Culture and Recreation facility or participated in a Parks, Culture and Recreation program during the past year. The most often cited facility is the Canada Games Pool and most often cited programs are swimming and weight training. Of those who had visited a facility and/or participated in a program, the vast majority (78.3%) reported feeling welcome and (73.9%) also reported having a positive experience.

Barriers or Challenges to Participation:

Almost all participants reported at least one barrier or challenge that limited their ability to participate in Parks, Culture and Recreation programs. The most frequently cited barriers and challenges are:

- lack of discretionary income – i.e., basic necessities come first;
- high admission costs or program fees;
- high cost of transportation to access facilities or programs;
- inability for families to co-recreate due to programming or scheduling conflicts;
- inability to use the Active Living Guide – e.g., complicated and difficult to reference;
- program/facility operating hours;
- institutional ‘feeling’ facilities – i.e., not very inviting or welcoming;
- issues related to anxiety or low self-esteem;
- lack of accessible program information, including about subsidies;
- lack of companionship;
- lack of equipment and high costs to rent required equipment – e.g., ice skates;
- lack of information in different languages;
- lack of low-impact or novice activities;
- lack of motivation or will;
- limited opportunities to try new activities without committing to a full program;
- limitations associated with child minding – e.g., child must be potty trained, lack of qualified staff and limited hours of operation;
- limited social opportunities – e.g., games room or lounge;
- location of facilities – i.e., not within easy walking distance;
- use of exclusive programming – e.g., age limitations.

While the most often cited barrier or challenge is low-income, most participants face multiple barriers or challenges. As such, addressing one barrier (e.g., addressing low-incomes through free or subsidized access to Parks, Culture and Recreation programs) would not necessarily translate into increased participation.

Suggestions for Consideration:

Almost all participants made suggestions which they felt would improve access to and usage of Parks, Culture and Recreation programs for adults with low-incomes. These suggestions include:

- create a sense of belonging – i.e., “these are our facilities;”
- create truly welcoming places which incorporate lounge and meeting spaces;
- develop a barter program whereby low-income and marginalized people can volunteer in exchange for free parks and recreation passes;
- document benefits and provide testimonials that appeal to targeted groups;
- enhance customer service training so front line staff are more aware of the needs and issues faced by low-income and marginalized people;
- examine a combined, subsidized parks, culture and recreation pass which includes both bus fare and activity admission;
- hold more focus and outreach sessions like this one – i.e., “this is the first time that I have been asked for my opinion and feedback;”
- invest in low-income and marginalized children – i.e., “create good habits early;”
- offer free access to children who are accompanied by a low-income adult;
- offer free open houses and orientation sessions where the public can sample activities without committing to the cost of a full-program;
- offer subsidized group passes whereby ‘program clients’ can co-recreate together;
- provide coordinated and intergenerational programming which enables families to co-recreate;
- provide free or subsidized child minding services with fewer limitations – i.e., longer hours, no age restrictions and no requirements regarding being potty trained;
- provide free or subsidized equipment rental – e.g., ice skates;
- provide information, including about subsidies, to isolated and marginalized people where they congregate – e.g., cultural associations and social service organizations;
- provide information in multiple languages, including Brail;
- provide more evening programming;
- provide more ‘free’ programming in the parks;
- redo the Active Living Guide using plain English and easy to reference tables;
- provide plain English signage and use pictures to communicate information;
- take programming out-of-the-facility and to where targeted groups congregate – e.g., the Elizabeth Fry Society, the Hospitality Project and Pioneer House;
- work with social service organizations to develop ‘buddy’ programs in order to foster participation by individuals who are anxious or socially isolated.

With regard to the above suggestions, they will inform future facility, programming and operational decisions. They will also inform grant applications,

whereby funding could be accessed by way of foundations and governments to address barriers and challenges related to low-incomes or other socio-demographic factors.

Next Steps:

The City, through Parks, Culture and Recreation and Social Planning, has successfully applied for phase two funding from the BC Recreation and Parks Association. As part of this next phase, a facilitated session will be held with Parks, Culture and Recreation staff in late November. This session will provide an overview of the project and the results and will explore ways of improving access for low-income adults. The emphasis will be on new and innovative approaches to service delivery, which do not require additional funding or staff resources.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

The City accessed a small grant of \$1,500 to conduct the consultation sessions and to cover related expenses such as catering and transporting participants to recreation facilities.

INTERDEPARTMENTAL LIAISON

Parks, Culture and Recreation and Development Services collaborated to prepare the application for funding; to design and implement the consultation process; to consolidate the findings; and to prepare this Report for Council.

OPTIONS

There are two options for Council's consideration; they are:

Option #1: That Council receive this report for information.

Option #2: That Council provide staff with other direction.

Staff recommend option #1.

CONCLUSION

Everybody Active, by documenting current activity levels and identifying barriers and challenges to participation in parks and recreation programs by low-income adults, will inform Parks, Culture and Recreation program decisions and support initiatives.

This initiative and the follow-up grant will help to ensure that all residents, regardless of their income or age, can access and benefit from Parks, Culture and Recreation programs in New Westminster.

Renee Chadwick,
Manager, Recreation Facilities
Queensborough Community Centre

John Stark,
Senior Social Planner



Sandy Earle,
Programmer, Active Communities

Respectfully submitted,

Approved for Presentation
to Council

Dean Gibson
Director of Parks, Culture and
Recreation

Paul Daminato
City Administrator

Appendix #1

Program Information on Free/Low Cost Parks & Recreation Opportunities
in New Westminster

EVERYBODY ACTIVE!

with New Westminster Parks and Recreation

OPPORTUNITIES TO BE ACTIVE IN THE CENTRAL NEW WESTMINSTER AREA:

New West Walks		\$15.00 One-Time Fee
Centennial Community Centre		
Free Monthly Community Walks		
Queen's Park Millennium Trail, Cross-Town Greenway, And other park trails		Free
Tennis Courts		Free
Moody Park, Queen's Park, Simcoe Park		
Westburnco Courts		
Hockey	Queen's Park Arena	\$4.00
	M, T, W, F, 11:30 – 1:00 pm	
	Th, 9:00 – 10:30 am	
Volleyball	Queen's Park Arenex	\$3.50
	Th. 8:30 – 10:00 pm	
Soccer	Queen's Park Arenex	\$3.50
	T. 8:30 – 10:00 pm	
Drop-In Sports	Queen's Park Arenex	\$4.50
	T/Th. 6:50 – 8:30 pm	
50+ Activities	Century House	\$15.00/year
	No-cost and drop-in activities	
Skating	Moody Park Arena	\$4.00 10/\$31.50
	--Also offers Loonie (\$1.00) Skates	
Swimming	Canada Games Pool	\$5.30 10/\$42.40
	--Also offers Loonie (\$1.00) Family Swims	
Fitness Centre	Canada Games Pool	\$5.30 10/\$42.40
Workout Classes	Centennial Community Centre	\$5.15 10/\$41.20

DO YOU REQUIRE FINANCIAL HELP?

- 1. **Parks and Recreation offers a 50% cost subsidy on the majority of its programs. If you are a New Westminster resident needing financial help, please visit Fraserside Community Services. They can endorse a subsidy request to Parks and Recreation. Fraserside Community Services is located at 519 – 7th Street (2nd Floor) 604-522-3722.**

Fraserside staff will determine if you qualify for subsidized recreation services and if you do, they will complete a form with you that will be sent to the New Westminster Parks and Recreation Office. After one full working day, you will need to drop by the NWPR Office (600 Eighth Street, 604-527-4567) to complete the application

- 2. **Parks and Recreation offers people on disability pension programs an Access Pass that allows admission at the lowest posted drop-in fee. Documentation is required and the Access Passes are issued at the New Westminster Parks and Recreation Office (600 Eighth Street, 604-527-4567).**

FACILITIES:

CANADA GAMES POOL

65 East 6 th Avenue	604-526-4281
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CENTENNIAL COMMUNITY CENTRE & FITNESS NEW WEST

65 East 6 th Avenue	604-777-5100
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CENTURY HOUSE

620 Eighth Street	604-519-1066
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MOODY PARK ARENA

701 Eighth Avenue	604-525-5301
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QUEEN'S PARK ARENA AND ARENEX

First Street and Third Avenue	604-777-5111 (Arena) 604-777-5121 (Arenex)
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PARKS AND RECREATION MAIN OFFICE

600 Eighth Street	604-527-4567
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EVERYBODY ACTIVE CONTACT INFORMATION:

Renee Chadwick	604-525-7032
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John Stark	604-515-3777
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Sandy Earle	604-777-5103
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