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ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

Report Date: November 15, 2010
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VanRIMS No.: 08-2000-20
Meeting Date: November 30, 2010

TO: Vancouver City Council
FROM: Director of Planning
SUBJECT: Downtown Eastside Capital Budget Funding Allocation - Oppenheimer Park Improvements

RECOMMENDATION

THAT subject to a Park Board contribution of \$30,000 for commemorative elements in Oppenheimer Park, Council approve an allocation of up to \$25,000 to install glass with a fritted "Legacy Sakura" in the Oppenheimer Field House, as a commemoration to the cherry trees planted in the park by Japanese-Canadians to mark the centennial of the first generation of Japanese who came to settle in Canada;

FURTHER THAT Council approve an allocation of \$150,000 to contribute to the installation of corner bulges adjacent to the newly improved Oppenheimer Park (on Dunlevy and Jackson), in order to improve the pedestrian environment.

Source of funds is the 2008 Capital Budget for Downtown Eastside Revitalization (Strathcona/Oppenheimer Revitalization).

GENERAL MANAGER'S COMMENTS

The General Manager of Community Services RECOMMENDS approval of the foregoing.

CITY MANAGER'S COMMENTS

The City Manager RECOMMENDS approval of the foregoing.

COUNCIL POLICY

In July 28, 1998, Council confirmed a set of principles to guide a program of strategic actions in the Downtown Eastside, Chinatown, Gastown and Strathcona, which includes encouraging

legitimate commercial activities, improving conditions at the street level, improving existing SROs, reducing crime, and helping community people find allies and seek a common future.

On May 27, 1997, Council approved the Vancouver Transportation Plan which emphasizes the need for improved pedestrian facilities.

On July 9, 2002, Council approved the Downtown Transportation Plan with recommendations to improve the pedestrian environment and promoting walking.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to seek Council approval to allocate \$175,000 from the 2008 Capital Budget for two initiatives to support of Downtown Eastside (DTES) Revitalization in Strathcona/Oppenheimer. These two projects support on-going community-building and public realm improvement objectives in the area around Oppenheimer Park, and meet Council's priorities to building strong, safe and inclusive communities.

BACKGROUND

History and Redevelopment of Oppenheimer Park

Oppenheimer Park, named for Vancouver's second Mayor, David Oppenheimer, was officially opened in 1898. Occupying a city block, this .98 hectare park is located in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DTES) neighbourhood, at the corner of Powell and Jackson Streets. The park's features include many shaded seating areas, a children's playground, shuffleboard, basketball courts, field house, softball pitch and open grassy areas.

Funding for the redevelopment of the park was approved in the 2006-2008 Capital Plan. The Oppenheimer Park Redevelopment Committee was formed to guide the redevelopment of the park and consisted of members of the local community, area residents, representatives from the Powell Street Festival, Aboriginal Elders Council, Watari, Strathcona BIA, Vancouver Buddhist Temple, and the Salvation Army, as well as staff from the Carnegie Community Centre Association, the Life Skills Centre, and the DTES Planning Team. Completed in the spring of 2010, the redeveloped park is beautiful and inspirational and embraces elements of green design and sustainability, while also engendering interest and a sense of ownership amongst park users.

DTES Capital Plan

DTES Capital Plan funds have been strategically used implement a number of important projects to help achieve Council priorities of building strong, safe and inclusive communities and secure long-term planning objectives in the area. The 2008 DTES Capital Budget strategic priorities focus on community and economic development, physical/public realm improvements and community capacity building initiatives. More specifically, the 2008 DTES Capital Budget allocations include funding envelopes for the following programs/initiatives:

1. Hastings Street Renaissance Program
2. Chinatown Society Buildings Planning Grant Program (Phase 1)
3. Community and Social Economic Development Projects
4. Chinatown Public Realm Improvements
5. Gastown Public Realm Improvements
6. Strathcona/Oppenheimer Revitalization

The projects proposed in this report focus on (6) Strathcona/Oppenheimer Revitalization. The two projects recommended in this report grew out of on-going community-building initiatives, with particular focus on the commemoration of Japantown, as well as public realm improvements to increase safety and generally improve the quality of life for Oppenheimer Park users and the surrounding community residents. The two projects are also being proposed on the basis that staff are confident they will be implemented over the next year.

The City's funding will ensure that the projects are delivered in the community in a way that creates opportunities for ongoing community dialogue in advance of the DTES Community Strategy, as well as the area-wide zoning review for the Downtown Eastside Oppenheimer District and M1.

DISCUSSION

The two projects recommended for funding have been developed with significant local community input and will help complete the \$1.4 million redevelopment of the park, while also contributing to important historical commemorative elements in the park.

The following paragraphs describe each project and identify the recommended level of funding.

1. Oppenheimer Park Field House Glass Fritting

The Vancouver Park Board worked closely with DTES community members on the re-design and re-development of Oppenheimer Park. In Spring 2008, community concerns arose over the proposed removal of a number of cherry trees resulting from relocation of the field house in the approved concept plan for the redevelopment of Oppenheimer Park. There were twenty-one original cherry trees ("Legacy Sakura") planted in 1977 to commemorate the centennial of the first generation of Japanese who came to settle in Canada.

In response to that community concern, the park concept plan was revised, and approved by the Park Board in July 2008. The newly developed park has retained all but two trees. Park staff continue to work with the community to develop appropriate historical commemorative elements in Oppenheimer Park. The Park Board has committed \$30,000 to commemorate the following key themes in Oppenheimer Park as identified by the community:

- Japanese-Canadian settlement;
- First Nations presence;
- Resilience of the community against social exclusion; and
- The community as a common ground and a welcoming gathering place.

The revised concept plan approved in 2008 included fritting of a "legacy Sakura" on the windows of the field house. Due to a number of factors related to the completion of the field house prior to the 2010 Games, the fritting was not completed. This report recommends \$25,000 from the 2008 Capital Budget for Downtown Eastside Revitalization (Strathcona/Oppenheimer Revitalization) be allocated to support the completion of this important commemorative element. The Park Board will contribute a total of \$30,000 - \$5,000 for the installation of Aboriginal House Posts and \$25,000 to other commemorative elements as defined with the community.

2. Oppenheimer Park Corner Bulges

The completion of the redevelopment of Oppenheimer Park is a critical component in achieving the objectives of the revitalization of Strathcona/Oppenheimer. Rich in history and culture, the Park is the community's "backyard" and the centre of many events and community celebrations. Upgrades include a new field house and washrooms, universally accessible walkways, children's playground, sports court with a basketball hoop, horseshoe pitch, patio spaces, picnic tables and seating areas, central lawn area, trees and flowers, sub-surface drainage and a new irrigation system.

This report recommends allocating \$150,000 from the 2008 DTES Capital Budget (Strathcona/Oppenheimer Revitalization) towards improving the pedestrian environment on City sidewalks surrounding Oppenheimer Park. Council approved a similar DTES Capital fund expenditure for sidewalk improvements related to the redevelopment of Pigeon Park (RTS 0811). The Engineering Department is in the process of finalizing the design and the \$150,000 contribution would help fund the installation of the corner bulges adjacent to Oppenheimer Park. Geometric modifications such as pedestrian corner bulges have been identified as an effective, relatively low cost means of enhancing the pedestrian environment and are therefore recommended for installation.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Funding of \$175,000 is requested in this report to support two community-based projects to meet the City's overall revitalization goals for Strathcona/Oppenheimer. Source of funds is the 2008 Capital Budget for DTES Revitalization (Strathcona/Oppenheimer Revitalization). Funding of \$260,720 is currently available in this budget, before the allocation requested in this report.

CONCLUSION

This report recommends Council approve \$175,000 for two projects from the 2008 Capital Budget for DTES Revitalization (Strathcona/Oppenheimer). This funding will support the completion of physical improvements to the pedestrian environment and commemorative elements in the redeveloped Oppenheimer Park area. The projects will build bridges between past and present communities and provide an opportunity to embrace a shared and common future.

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