



## ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

Report Date: January 7, 2015  
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Meeting Date: January 20, 2015

TO: Vancouver City Council  
FROM: General Manager of Parks and Recreation and Deputy City Manager  
SUBJECT: Vancouver Bird Strategy Initiatives and Design Guidelines

### *RECOMMENDATION*

- A. THAT Council adopt the Vancouver Bird Strategy (Attachment A).
- B. THAT the draft Bird Friendly Design Guidelines (Appendix B of Attachment A and Attachment B) be applied on a voluntary basis to encourage bird friendly design of buildings and landscapes in Vancouver.
- C. THAT the Bird Friendly Landscape Operational Guidelines (Attachment C) be used to ensure bird friendly management practices in parks and other public open spaces.
- D. THAT staff review the effectiveness of the guidelines and report back to Council within two years with any revisions that may be required to better achieve the goals of the Strategy.

### *REPORT SUMMARY*

This report recommends that the Vancouver Bird Strategy (refer to Attachment A) be adopted; that the draft Design Guidelines (refer to Attachment A's Appendix B and to Attachment B) be applied on a voluntary basis; that the Bird Friendly Landscape Operational Guidelines be used to ensure bird friendly management practices in parks and other public open spaces (refer to Attachment C); and, that staff review the effectiveness of the guidelines and report back to Council within two years with any revisions that may be required to improve them.

The Vancouver Bird Strategy is intended to create the conditions for native birds to thrive in the city. The Bird Friendly Design Guidelines are intended for use by developers, planners, designers and public and private landowners. The guidelines are divided into Landscape Design Guidelines and Building Design Guidelines and are to be used in conjunction with other

regulations, policies and guidelines. The guidelines are intended to support the design and implementation of bird friendly development throughout the city.

### ***COUNCIL AUTHORITY/PREVIOUS DECISIONS***

The Greenest City Action Plan was approved by Vancouver City Council in July, 2011 and outlines ten goals and fifteen targets established to realize the vision of becoming the greenest city in the world by 2020. The access to nature goal “Vancouver residents enjoy incomparable access to green spaces, including the world’s most spectacular urban forest” is directly relevant to the Vancouver Bird Strategy.

In May 2013, within the context of the Greenest City Action Plan and Metro Vancouver’s Regional Biodiversity Strategy, Vancouver City Council and the Vancouver Park Board directed City staff to develop a Bird Strategy for Vancouver, which is directly aligned with the Park Board Strategic Plan.

Council directed staff to: report back on best practices for monitoring and protecting bird populations in an urban environment, including building and landscape guidelines; include birding tourism as part of the Vancouver Tourism Master Plan being developed with Tourism Vancouver; and, to work with the City’s World Migratory Bird Day partners to expand public education efforts for 2014.

Park Board directed staff to: work with the Park Board’s Bird Week partners to expand public education efforts for 2014; report back on efforts underway to improve bird habitat; and, report back on the feasibility of developing landscape design guidelines to enhance bird habitat values for landscapes across Vancouver.

### ***CITY MANAGER’S/GENERAL MANAGER’S COMMENTS***

The City Manager recommends approval of the foregoing recommendations.

## ***REPORT***

### ***Background/Context***

#### **Birds in Vancouver**

Birds bring Vancouver to life with their songs and flight: chatty Black-capped Chickadees, trilling Song Sparrows, soaring Bald Eagles, and colourful Rufous Hummingbirds animate our city and connect our residents to nature. The high visibility and audibility of birds makes them an experiential link between people and local biodiversity. Birds also provide ecosystem services in the form of pest control, pollination and seed-dispersal. Birding tourism contributes to local economies and accounted for approximately \$36 billion in expenditure in the United States in 2009. For the citizens of Vancouver, experiencing birds can be a daily activity that creates a physical and emotional link with nature.

What we do in Vancouver is particularly important for bird populations given our location on the Fraser River delta, a major stop along the Pacific Flyway extending north to Alaska and south to Central and South America. The variety of rich habitats from estuary shorelines to mature coniferous and deciduous forests creates a haven for weary migratory birds as well as resident birds that live in the region year round. There are four Important Bird Areas (a worldwide conservation initiative coordinated by BirdLife International) in Metro Vancouver: the Fraser River Estuary; English Bay and Burrard Inlet; the Greater Vancouver Watershed; and Pacific Spirit Regional Park, comprising an area over 1200 km<sup>2</sup>. Vancouver's proximity to these internationally recognized Important Bird Areas present a major opportunity to encourage the greatest diversity and abundance of native birds and thereby enhance access to nature for Vancouver's residents and visitors. Implementation of the Vancouver Bird Strategy is a priority with important economic, social and environmental benefits as we work towards the biodiversity targets which are part of becoming the Greenest City by 2020.

### Context for a Bird Strategy

The Greenest City Action Plan sets out ten goals to make Vancouver the greenest city in the world by 2020. *Goal 6: Access to Nature* addresses the need to incorporate nature in the urban environment, including a diversity of bird life. This goal has spurred the development of a number of related strategies that build upon the access to nature vision, including the Biodiversity Strategy (in development), Urban Forest Strategy, Green Operations Environmental Framework, the Vancouver Food Strategy, the Healthy City for All Action Plan and the Environmental Education and Stewardship Action Plan. The Park Board Strategic Plan, which includes commitments to being a leader in greening with a focus on healthy ecosystems, green operations and engaging people, also supports the Bird Strategy.

Vancouver is a leader in Canada when it comes to celebrating birds. World Migratory Bird Day (WMBD) is a United Nations sponsored initiative that recognizes the importance of birds as key indicators of the health of our environment. In 2011 and 2012, Mayor Gregor Robertson signed a proclamation that recognized WMBD in Vancouver. In 2013 and 2014, Bird Week was proclaimed by the Mayor with the City, Stanley Park Ecology Society, Bird Studies Canada, Nature Vancouver, Vancouver Public Library, Tourism Vancouver and others partnering in a week-long series of events. Bird Week in 2014 also included a highly-publicized City Bird competition in which over 700,000 votes were cast for an official city bird for Bird Week 2015.

### Vancouver Bird Advisory Committee

In 2011, the Park Board approved a motion that the City proclaim World Migratory Bird Day to recognize the importance of this global week of celebration for migratory birds. Park Board staff worked with Bird Studies Canada, Nature Vancouver and the Stanley Park Ecology Society to report back on the feasibility of mapping important bird areas within the City of Vancouver; the goal was to apply this information to sustain habitat as a source of food, nest sites and shelter to attract migratory birds to the city. These groups worked with staff to develop a proclamation for World Migratory Bird Day and associated events in 2011 and 2012 and for Bird Week in 2013 and 2014.

This informal group expanded as the scope of bird events increased and a working group with multiple additional organizations was formed. Throughout 2013 and 2014, the group

developed the Vancouver Bird Strategy. A complete list of participants is included in the Strategy.

### **Bird Week 2014**

Vancouver Bird Week 2014 ran from May 3<sup>rd</sup> to May 10<sup>th</sup>. This was Vancouver's second annual Bird Week and its fourth year celebrating World Migratory Bird Day, a United Nations-sponsored initiative that began globally in 2006 that typically falls on the second Saturday in May. Bird Week events are key in raising awareness of the importance of birds to our planet's ecosystems, and in conserving and protecting migrating and native birds and habitat in Vancouver and abroad.

Bird Week engaged participants through a variety of different types of events. A total of 22 events, including the author David Sibley's lecture, were organized for Bird Week that varied from workshops, talks, walks, lectures and art exhibitions. These events saw a total of 1624 attendees across all events with the majority attending events held in the Alice McKay Room of the Vancouver Public Library.

Bird Week was organized primarily by members of the Vancouver Bird Advisory Committee. Refer to Attachment D for a full summary of Bird Week 2014 compiled by the Stanley Park Ecology Society and Corporate Communications.

### **City Bird 2015 Competition**

Bird Week 2014 launched Vancouver's first ever City Bird competition. Its purpose was to raise awareness about bird species to new audiences through various media formats and to assist in the promotion of Bird Week events. Six species, all resident birds of the Lower Mainland (i.e. species that do not migrate to other regions for the winter or to breed), were nominated for City Bird 2015: Anna's Hummingbird; Pileated Woodpecker; Northern Flicker; Varied Thrush; Black-capped Chickadee; and Pacific Wren.

Members of the City of Vancouver communications team managed the City Bird competition mainly as a social media campaign strictly based in Twitter. Each bird candidate was represented by a separate twitter account. Local bird experts and Bird Week organizers worked alongside communications staff to create personality traits and unique characteristics for each bird that would manifest via twitter personas.

The competition ran from April 10<sup>th</sup> to May 10<sup>th</sup>, and saw the majority of interest (in terms of page views and interactions with twitter accounts) in the first and last weeks. Votes could be cast online at [vancouver.ca/citybird](http://vancouver.ca/citybird) through an online survey form or in-person at ballot stations in various locations across Vancouver. It is intended that the City Bird competition will be conducted annually alongside Bird Week and each year's nominees would be chosen by a categorical theme (e.g. water birds, raptors or migratory songbirds).

Over 700,000 votes were cast in the campaign which exceeded the anticipated goal by over 35,000% (the Black-capped Chickadee won with over 278,000 votes).

Results from a survey intended to determine how effective the campaign was were basically all positive. 88% of respondents could identify the six birds in the competition (they picked out that the Townsend's Warbler was not one of the contestants); 75% said they knew more about birds after the CityBird campaign; 71% thought about birds more often; 55% said they

noticed birds more in Vancouver after the competition; and 18% attended a Bird Week event as a result of the competition.

The City Bird for 2015 campaign vastly exceeded targets for voting, awareness and education. Reaction to the competition was intensely positive; people loved it and wanted more. Media coverage was very high. People put forward many ideas for improvement and expansion for next year and are clearly looking forward to the next campaign. For more details on the City Bird 2015 campaign, refer to the report compiled by the Stanley Park Ecology Society and Corporate Communications in Attachment D.

### ***Strategic Analysis***

Birds play important ecological, social and economic functions within the city. The actions of the City, Park Board, residents, businesses and institutions within Vancouver have a considerable impact on whether birds thrive within the city. Recognizing the importance of civic actions, other municipalities in North America have adopted bird strategies, including the City of Chicago's Bird Agenda (2006), Toronto Bird-Friendly Design Guidelines (2007), Calgary Bird-Friendly Urban Design Guidelines (2011) and San Francisco Standards for Bird-Safe Buildings (2011). Several cities in North America have city birds such as San Francisco (California Quail), Seattle (Great Blue Heron) and Washington DC (Wood Thrush) but Vancouver became the first in Canada.

### **Goal and Objectives**

In keeping with the Greenest City Action Plan, the goal of the Vancouver Bird Strategy is to create the conditions for native birds to thrive in Vancouver.

Five objectives were identified to achieve this goal:

1. Support Habitat: Protect, enhance and create habitats for a diversity of native birds.
2. Reduce Threats: Reduce threats to birds in the urban environment;
3. Enhance Access: Enhance access to nature for Vancouver residents and visitors to the city;
4. Enhance Awareness: Increase awareness of the importance of birds and their needs; and
5. Grow Bird Related Tourism: Encourage birding tourism and economic development opportunities related to birding.

The Vancouver Bird Strategy identifies five action areas under which recommendations are made regarding how to address these five objectives. Each of the five is fully elaborated in the Strategy and they all provide direction and a time frame for realization of the Strategy's goal and objectives. The five action areas are:

- a. Bird Friendly Landscape Design Guidelines (Voluntary)
- b. Bird Friendly Building Design Guidelines (Voluntary)
- c. Research and Monitoring
- d. Arts, Awareness and Education
- e. Economic Development and Tourism

Specific activities have been identified for each action area that the City, Park Board, Tourism Vancouver and other partners are currently implementing and recommendations to move forward. The recommendations are summarized on pages 30 and 31 in the Strategy. While there are multiple recommended actions within the Strategy to be pursued, Council is being asked to direct that the Bird Friendly Design Guidelines, included as Appendix B in Attachment A and an Explanatory Note in Attachment B, be applied on a voluntary basis. These guidelines, which are summarized in the Strategy, are intended for use by developers, planners, designers and public and private landowners. The guidelines are divided into Landscape Design Guidelines and Building Design Guidelines and are to be used in conjunction with other regulations, policies and guidelines. The guidelines are intended to support the design and implementation of bird friendly development throughout the city.

The guidelines were developed by combining lessons from other municipal guidelines in cities such as Chicago and Toronto with more recent scientific research. Staff reached out to the development community to seek their input into the guidelines, which reflect the input received to-date. Groups consulted include the Urban Development Institute, Building Owners and Managers Association, BC Society of Landscape Architects, Architectural Institute of BC and Planning Institute of BC. It is recommended that a review be conducted in two years of their adoption to evaluate their effectiveness and make any changes that may be warranted at that time to improve them.

It is anticipated that the recommendations of the Bird Friendly Design Guidelines will involve simple design responses in new developments. For example, adding fritted glass (glass with small dots on it) in areas where birds might fly, typically the lower four floors, makes the glass visible to birds, thereby drastically reducing bird collisions. Another example is the addition of a simple mesh over a roof vent, which could save the lives of hundreds of birds that would otherwise fly in to the pipe to nest and then be trapped. Also, placing landscaping in such a way that birds don't collide with nearby windows or doors can significantly reduce the number of bird collisions with glass walls, doors and windows. The results of the implementation of the guidelines would not be noticed by the average building occupant. It is not expected that these approaches will increase development costs, but staff will monitor uptake of these approaches to determine whether there were incremental costs to developers.

The City of Vancouver Bird Friendly Landscape Operational Guidelines (refer to Attachment C) were developed to complement the Landscape Design Guidelines and are intended to ensure bird friendly management practices in parks and other public open spaces. Staff will also review the effectiveness of these guidelines within two years and recommend any revisions that may be required to improve them.

It is anticipated that the recommendations of the Bird Friendly Landscape Operational Guidelines will involve simple strategies for landscape managers, such as defining seasonal work windows to limit disturbance of breeding activities, providing guidance for landscape preservation and design, encouraging use of native species, controlling light pollution from street or park lights, and using best management practices for managing invasive plant species. It is not expected that these approaches will increase landscape costs - some may realize cost savings - but staff will monitor uptake of these approaches and monitor whether there were incremental costs to developers.

## *Monitoring and Reporting*

Staff will report back to Council within two years on the results of the following:

- Voluntary Guidelines: How successfully were the guidelines utilized by developers or property managers? Were there barriers or challenges to implementing the guidelines? What changes should be made to the guidelines to make their implementation more universal and easy?
- Bird Collision Monitoring Initiatives: How will this be monitored? A monitoring program to track bird collisions in the city will be led by Bird Studies Canada in partnership with the Vancouver Bird Advisory Committee member organizations. Monitoring will assess whether the development of a monitoring program was successful and assess how many birds were found and where. This information will inform the implementation of additional mitigating measures in some areas of the city.
- Educational Initiatives: Did awareness increase? Are more people participating in bird conservation and bird watching?
- Economic Development: Did we attract birding conferences and conventions to Vancouver? How many more tourists were attracted to Vancouver to participate in birding initiatives?

The results of this evaluation will inform the recommendations Staff make to Council regarding potential changes to the guidelines and the Bird Strategy.

## *Implications/Related Issues/Risk (if applicable)*

### *Financial*

The implementation of this plan will be pursued with existing funding. Where appropriate, the Vancouver Bird Advisory Committee will seek outside funding from partners to assist in implementation of different components of the Strategy.

Based on the design guidelines, it is not anticipated that there will be financial implications for developers, property managers, or managers of landscapes, but staff will monitor the uptake and implications of the guidelines and report back to Council within two years.

### *Human Resources/Labour Relations*

This work is being done by partner organizations or existing staff within the City and the Park Board.

### *Environmental*

To ensure native birds can thrive, the Strategy will increase the amount and quality of urban habitat in Vancouver. Beyond the experiential link birds create between people and local biodiversity, they perform important ecosystem services; they disperse seeds, consume vast numbers of insects, reduce the transmission of disease, and provide pest control and pollination services for horticulture, agriculture and forestry. Aspects of the Building Design Guidelines complement energy saving design guidelines already being used in new buildings.

### *Legal*

There are no legal implications.

### *CONCLUSION*

This report recommends that the Vancouver Bird Strategy (refer to Attachment A) be adopted; that the draft Bird Friendly Design Guidelines be applied on a voluntary basis (refer to Attachment A's Appendix B and to Attachment B); that the Bird Friendly Landscape Operational Guidelines be used to ensure bird friendly management practices in parks and other public open spaces (refer to Attachment C); and, that staff review the effectiveness of the guidelines and report back to Council within two years with any revisions that may be required to improve them.

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