

MOTION

6. Allowing Responsible Alcohol Consumption in Vancouver Parks and Beaches

At the Council meeting on May 26, 2020, Council referred the following motion to the Standing Committee on Policy and Strategic Priorities meeting on May 27, 2020, in order to hear from speakers.

Submitted by: Councillor Boyle

WHEREAS

1. Increasing numbers of Vancouver residents, particularly renters and low or middle income residents, are living in multi-family housing with limited access to private outdoor space (e.g. backyards, etc.) that only a minority of more affluent residents have the luxury to enjoy. This increased density provides more affordability and a lower ecological footprint, and it results in more Vancouver residents relying on public outdoor space such as parks and beaches as an extension of their living space;
2. While we don't have race or class-disaggregated data on local enforcement of existing bylaws, unconscious class and race biases are commonly acknowledged to exist, and may play a role both in what incidents enforcement officers are called to respond to, and how they respond to those incidents. Where bylaws such as existing restrictions on the responsible consumption of alcohol in public parks and beaches are regularly not adhered to by a wide swath of people, enforcement of the bylaw is at the discretion of individual police or bylaw officers, which may result in a real or perceived inequality in the application of the rules;
3. The COVID-19 Public Health Emergency has resulted in changes in nearly every aspect of civic life, including restrictions on in-house dining in local restaurants, pubs and breweries, restrictions on travel, and the cancellation of large public events and festivals. These restrictions, though necessary and appropriate, have had significant financial impacts on local businesses;
4. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Province has allowed restaurants to sell packaged liquor products accompanying a meal purchase, for pick-up or delivery, as a way to support local businesses and allow those businesses to keep as many staff working as possible;
5. BC's Provincial Health Officer, Dr. Bonnie Henry, has said that the coronavirus is less likely to be transmitted outdoors than indoors, and has encouraged people to go outside while keeping a safe physical distance from those outside their immediate circle. Dr Henry has also advised British Columbians that going for walks and spending time in parks is important for mental health;

6. As spring weather has arrived, an increasing number of Vancouver residents can be seen socializing and eating meals outdoors, frequently while responsibly consuming local beer or wine. While not everyone is respecting public health directions to maintain a 2m distance from those not in your immediate circle, the vast majority of Vancouver residents have been acting safely and responsibly;
7. Many countries and cities around the world have adopted more lenient policies, bylaws and legislations, permitting the responsible consumption of alcohol in public spaces. Countries such as the UK, Germany and Japan permit drinking in public places. Some places, including Montreal, permit the drinking of alcoholic beverages within parks but only when accompanied by a meal or a picnic. While other places, including New South Wales, permit the public consumption of alcohol outside of specifically designated no-drinking areas, which must be publicly marked;
8. In September 2018, the Vancouver Park Board approved an updated Park Board Concession Strategy which included a recommendation to “Assess the feasibility of offering alcohol sales at select Park Board run concessions though an alcohol sales pilot at the English Bay and Kitsilano Beach concessions, in collaboration with the current restaurant operators”;
9. In developing this updated strategy, the Park Board completed a comprehensive stakeholder and public engagement program, including research which showed that “79% of survey respondents agree or strongly agree with the sale of alcoholic beverages at concessions”;
10. In December 2018, the Vancouver Park Board unanimously approved a motion from Commissioner Dave Demers to “conduct a feasibility study for a pilot project that would allow the public to consume their own alcoholic beverages on select parks and beaches.” This feasibility study was to be completed at the end of 2019, but has been slightly delayed;
11. Due to COVID related travel restriction, the summer of 2020 will see fewer visitors and festivals in Vancouver;
12. Laws at the provincial and federal levels prohibiting public intoxication, causing a public disturbance, or consuming alcohol under-age, apply across Vancouver. Vancouver also has local noise by-laws to limit public disturbance, and Vancouver Parks and Beaches close to the public at 10 pm unless otherwise posted on site; and
13. It is the Park Board’s understanding that consumption of alcoholic beverages at parks and beaches is within the Park Board’s jurisdiction, and is currently prohibited through the Parks Control By-laws.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED

- A. THAT in light of equity considerations and changes related to COVID-19, Council encourages the Vancouver Park Board to urgently amend the

Parks Control By-laws to allow responsible alcohol consumption in parks and beaches within Park Board jurisdiction, as quickly as possible.

- B. THAT, if required, Council directs city staff to collaborate with provincial partners to clarify appropriate processes and jurisdictional concerns and report back to Council with a recommended process for legalizing the responsible alcohol consumption in parks and beaches as quickly as possible;

FURTHER THAT, if a report back is necessary, a copy of it be shared with the Park Board.

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