



REPORT

Report Date: March 15, 2022
Contact: Margaret Wittgens
Contact No.: 604-673-8227
RTS No.: 14987
VanRIMS No.: 08-2000-20
Meeting Date: March 30, 2022
[Submit comments to Council](#)

TO: Standing Committee on City Finance and Services

FROM: General Manager, Arts, Culture & Community Services
General Manager, Engineering Services

SUBJECT: Extension to Support Drinker's Lounge Alcohol Consumption Pilot

RECOMMENDATION

THAT Council approve, in principle, amendments to the City Land Regulation By-law No. 8735 to designate certain public places over which the City has jurisdiction as places where liquor may be consumed;

FURTHER THAT the Director of Legal Services be instructed to bring forward for enactment by Council a By-law to amend the City Land Regulation By-law to designate these places, generally as set out in Appendix A.

REPORT SUMMARY

Since March 2021, the parklet at 111 Princess Ave outside the Drinker's Lounge, a community-based managed alcohol and harm reduction program operated by Portland Hotel Society (PHS) Community Services Society, has provided a safe outdoor space for people drinking in the area. The parklet was introduced as part of a broader community harm reduction initiative aimed at bringing community partners together to provide more welcoming and safe public infrastructure for illicit drinkers in the Downtown Eastside.

In February 2021, Council passed a by-law to permit public consumption of alcohol at the Drinker's Lounge parklet from March 1, 2021 to July 31, 2021, which was then extended to December 31, 2021, and again to March 31, 2022. In tandem, the City provided one-time grants to support an increase in operating capacity for the Drinker's Lounge to be able to manage the parklet and provide outreach to surrounding areas where illicit drinkers would gather.

Given the success of the Drinker's Lounge parklet and confirmed ongoing core funding of \$325,000 annually from Vancouver Coastal Health, as well as an additional \$100,000 from the First Nations Health Authority, staff recommend that Council extend the by-law for public consumption of alcohol for two additional years until March 31, 2024.

COUNCIL AUTHORITY/PREVIOUS DECISIONS

December 8, 2021: Council approved, in principle, amendments to the City Land Regulation By-law No. 8735 to extend the pilot for liquor consumption at the parklet at 111 Princess Ave ("Drinker's Lounge") to March 31, 2022.

June 22, 2021: Council approved, in principle, amendments to the City Land Regulation By-law No. 8735 to allow a pilot for liquor consumption in three additional public plazas.

May 18, 2021: Council approved, in principle, amendments to the City Land Regulation By-law No. 8735 to allow a pilot for liquor consumption in three public plazas and to extend the pilot for liquor consumption at the parklet at 111 Princess Ave ("Drinker's Lounge") to December 31, 2021, 7 days a week.

February 24, 2021: Council approved, in principle, amendments to the City Land Regulation By-law No. 8735 to allow a pilot for liquor consumption at a proposed parklet at 111 Princess Ave ("Drinker's Lounge") from March 1 to July 31, 2021, and instructed staff to bring the by-law forward for enactment. Council also approved a Social Policy grant totalling \$25,000 to the PHS Community Services Society to expand the Drinker's Lounge Community Managed Alcohol Program (CMAP), providing operational support and oversight of the parklet, and directed staff to report back in Q2 2021 on the implementation of the parklet and program, and consider opportunities for extension.

October 7, 2021: Council endorsed the application of the Drug Users Liberation Front (DULF) and the Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users (VANDU) for a federal section 56 exemption for a compassion club model to supply safer drugs to people who use drugs.

November 25, 2020: Council directed a federal exemption pursuant to section 56 of the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act (CDSA) be sought to decriminalize personal possession of illicit substances within the City's boundaries for medical purposes, in order to address urgent public health concerns caused by the overdose crisis and COVID-19.

July 29, 2020: Council approved, in principle, amendments to the City Land Regulation By-law No. 8735 to allow a pilot for liquor consumption in four public plazas.

July 27, 2020: Council passed a motion to support the decriminalization of poverty and community-led safety initiatives, and to work with partners to prioritize community-led harm reduction and safety initiatives in the areas of mental health, substance use, homelessness and sex work.

June 23, 2020: Council directed staff to prepare a by-law pursuant to Section 73 subsections (2), (3) and (4) of the Liquor Control and Licensing Act, to allow a pilot for liquor consumption in select public places under jurisdiction of the City. Staff were directed to create limited spaces for responsible consumption of alcohol in public, and to consult with VPD, VCH, internal

stakeholders, local Business Improvement Associations and businesses, to recommend appropriate locations and hours for consumption of alcohol in specified public spaces.

December 20, 2018: Council approved over 30 recommendations outlined in the Mayor's Overdose Emergency Task Force Report, including immediate actions in the areas of harm reduction, safe supply, peer networks, treatment, Indigenous healing and wellness, low barrier employment, and collective action for change.

April 2001: Council approved The Four Pillars Strategy, a model that continues to guide the City's work in mental health and substance use and includes a harm reduction approach to all substances including drugs and alcohol.

CITY MANAGER'S COMMENTS

The City Manager recommends approval of the foregoing.

REPORT

Background/Context

Illicit drinking in the Downtown Eastside (DTES) has historically been an issue due to a number of factors, including increasing gentrification and lack of public spaces to gather, as well as restrictions on liquor licenses and few places to access affordable alcohol. Consequently, drinkers in the DTES who are experiencing homelessness or precarious housing have few places to safely gather and socialize, a situation exacerbated by COVID-19 public health restrictions on indoor gathering.

Through partnership with PHS's Drinker's Lounge, a community managed alcohol program, the parklet at 111 Princess St has been in operation since March 2021.

The parklet is one identified solution that was part of a multi-pronged strategy to provide safer spaces for drinkers and reduce drinking at the bus stop near the Astoria hotel. Related components of the strategy included:

- 1) A washroom trailer program in the community garden adjacent to the Astoria hotel;
- 2) Work with Parks and Recreation to create safer green spaces for people to gather and sit; and
- 3) The provision of three small picnic tables along Hawks Avenue beside the washroom trailer program and close to the bus stop near the Astoria.

Since the launch of the parklet in 2021, PHS has gathered data to assess the impact of the project and City staff have also engaged partners to evaluate the parklet.

Steering committee members who meet regularly include: Vancouver Coastal Health, First Nations Health Authority, Strathcona Business Improvement Association (SBIA), Strathcona Residents Association, PHS's Drinker's Lounge, Kilala Leleum Indigenous Health and Healing Cooperative, VANDU's program for illicit drinkers – EIDGE – Eastside Illicit Drinker's Group for Education, the DTES Neighbourhood House, and WISH.

Strategic Analysis

Evaluation and Feedback

Since the parklet and other components of the strategy have been implemented, the number of drinkers gathering at the Astoria bus stop has been significantly reduced. Although ongoing core funding from VCH will allow the continuation of operations beyond two years, this report is requesting a two year extension to the by-law that enables drinking at the parklet to ensure a periodic review of feedback on the parklet is completed and any changes or adjustments can be made as required. Below is a synopsis of current feedback from patrons, neighbours and partners.

Feedback from Parklet Patrons

Feedback continues to be highly positive and the parklet is being well-used by drinkers and for celebrations and community events. The parklet provides a safe place for drinkers, a place to create community and feel a sense of belonging, participate in programming, and access harm reduction and other services as needed. Staff continue to hear clear feedback from drinkers that providing safe, local public infrastructure intended for them to use has made them feel more like valued members of our city.

Feedback from Neighbours and Partners

City staff continue to work directly with Strathcona BIA to discuss the overall strategy and ongoing engagement of SBIA members in the Steering Committee. The SBIA members recently shared that they are impressed with the parklet and the positive impact on the community, and are fully supportive of this initiative.

PHS has not received any complaints or feedback on the parklet from neighbours.

Vancouver Police Department (VPD) reports that they are supportive and have no concerns with extending the parklet until March 2024.

Vancouver Coastal Health is committed to \$325,000 in core funding and the First Nations Health Authority is investing \$100,000 annually for the Drinker's Lounge operations that will continue to support the parklet and expanded programming.

Next Steps

Given the positive feedback received about the parklet and confirmed core funding from VCH, staff are recommending a by-law extension until March 31, 2024 to sustain the current program and use of this space.

If approved by Council, parklet upgrades to improve accessibility and design are planned for early 2023.

Implications/Related Issues/Risk***Financial***

If approved, the City will be upgrading the parklet to improve safety, accessibility, and design later in 2022 through existing public space capital funding.

Core operational funding for the Drinker's Lounge is provided annually by VCH, with additional contributions from First Nations Health Authority.

Legal

Section 73 of the Liquor Control and Licensing Act (BC) gives the City the authority to designate, by by-law, public places as places where liquor may be consumed, subject to certain requirements as set out in the Act and the Liquor Control and Licensing Regulation.

CONCLUSION

The Drinker's Lounge parklet has resulted in positive outcomes for drinkers in the DTES, increased safety in the community and among neighbours, and strengthened relationships among partners. Staff recommend extending the by-law amendment until March 31, 2024 in line with current available funding from VCH.

* * * * *

DRAFT

Note: A By-law will be prepared generally in accordance with the provisions listed below, subject to change and refinement prior to posting.

**A By-law to amend the City Land Regulation By-law No. 8735
regarding extension of end date for Designated Area 4**

THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF VANCOUVER, in public meeting, enacts as follows:

1. This By-law amends the indicated provisions of the City Land Regulation By-law.
2. Council amends section 4C(b)(i) by striking out “March 31, 2022” and substituting “March 31, 2024”.
3. A decision by a court that any part of this By-law is illegal, void, or unenforceable severs that part from this By-law, and is not to affect the balance of this By-law.
4. This By-law is to come into force and take effect on the date of its enactment.

ENACTED by Council this day of , 2022

_____ Mayor

EXPLANATION

**A By-law to amend the City Land Regulation By-law No. 8735
regarding extension of end date for Designated Area 4**

The attached By-law will implement Council's resolution of March 29, 2022 to amend the City Land Regulation By-law to extend the end date for Designated Area 4 to March 31, 2024.

Director of Legal Services
March 29, 2022