TO: **Board Members – Vancouver Park Board**

FROM: **General Manager – Parks and Recreation**

SUBJECT: **Social media proposal**

RECOMMENDATION

That the Board use social media, including Facebook and Twitter, in order to enhance and expand its public consultation and advertising of major initiatives.

BACKGROUND

At the March 23, 2009 meeting, the Board passed the following motion:

> THAT staff be instructed to explore the feasibility of using Facebook, Twitter and other forms of social media to communicate with the public as to Park Board public consultation and to advertise activities and services.

Two directions of the 2005-2010 Park Board Strategic Plan are:
- Engaging People: Develop strategies for broader participation and develop multiple ways for users to participate and provide input
- Working Together: Develop and implement a public involvement process and fostering community partnerships

DISCUSSION

Currently the City of Vancouver is examining the use of social media as part of its overall communications strategy but does not have a formal policy yet. Mountain View Cemetery uses a number of social media applications including Facebook and Twitter. The City of Vancouver has a Facebook page for its Greenest City Action Team. A number of Park Board divisions including youth, golf and arts have expressed an interest in social media networks. Arts and culture groups maintain blogs related to specific projects and also contribute to Flickr photo streams.

The Park Board uses a wide range of tools to communicate, inform and keep in touch with its publics. These include the Park Board website, news releases, e-mail groups, newspaper ads, public open houses and various printed publications. The use of social media would be an opportunity for the Park Board to reach an even wider audience but particularly those not using traditional communication tools. Residents of all ages are

now using social media networks to not only connect with friends and family but also with businesses, governments, other agencies and their community.

Social media would provide new tools for the Park Board to listen to its publics and engage them accordingly. At the same time it would allow the community to dialogue through comments, discussion forums, online surveys and other two-way communication methods.

Park Board staff investigated the feasibility and uses of social media by other municipalities and government agencies locally and in other parts of North America. A number of these are using Facebook, Twitter and other networks to promote programs, events and public consultation opportunities. A few are enabling the live posting of comments and other online feedback mechanisms, though most instead drive comments to existing avenues such as e-mail, phone lines and public meetings. A summary can be found in Appendix 2.

Based on review and research, staff are proposing social media for:
Primary Use
- Public consultation around park development, facility planning, new policies
- Announcement and promotion of events such as park and facility openings, open houses, board meetings
- Advertising new programs or services

Secondary Use
- Providing updates on major projects or longer term initiatives such as facility renewals
- Alerting the public to breaking news such as road closures, fire hazards

Guidelines for moderating and managing online comments and feedback will be developed for Park Board social media pages. These guidelines would govern appropriate content and other obligations and requirements such as Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

Implementation
Staff propose that limited implementation of social media be carried out in phases to properly assess the merits, usage and staff resources. Communications staff would take the lead in site set up, creation of posts and content (drawn from other Park Board communication vehicles), editing, monitoring and moderating comments, and ensuring timely responses to questions as required. Staff from Planning would assist on public consultation processes and Information Technology would support on technical issues.

Implementation Action Plan:
Create a Park Board Facebook page and a Twitter account.
Use to promote events, share information, communicate news and gather comments and feedback.
Establish guidelines and processes for the compiling, tracking and retention of comments and feedback.
Launch sites and invite residents to join as fans or followers.

Establish an internal task force to monitor usage and ensure information needs are being met.

Timing: Late summer 2009

Three-month review/assessment:
Evaluate success of implementation including number of followers/fans and use of staff resources.

Timing: Fall 2009

Staff Resources and Costs
There are no incredmental costs associated with implementation of Facebook or Twitter. The additional workload associated with the introduction of these new initiatives will be met by existing Communications, Information Technology and Planning staff.

SUMMARY

The Park Board's use of social media applications will generate additional exposure for public consultation and advertising, allow us to reach new and broader audiences and is consistent with our strategic priorities.

Staff have investigated and reviewed the use of social media by other municipalities and government agencies and have deemed it to be feasible. Staff recommend a phased implementation beginning with Facebook and Twitter as outlined in this report.

Prepared by:
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Appendix 1: Social Media Definitions

Blog: A blog (a contraction of the term weblog) is an online journal or diary where regular entries are posted. Blogs are used for general commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video.

Facebook: Founded in 2004, Facebook is a free social utility that allows users to communicate with friends, family and coworkers. Users can become *friends* with others and become *fans* of groups including governments. There are 200 million active users worldwide with over 100 million logging on to Facebook at least once a day. Facebook was first embraced by college-age users but the utility is now popular with just about every age group. The fastest growing demographic is those 35-years-old and older.

Facebook Fan: A Facebook user who joins a Facebook business, government or celebrity page. Fans receive news, notifications and updates and can engage in two-way dialogue.

Flickr: Flickr is an image and video hosting website, web services suite, and online community platform. In addition to being a popular website for users to share personal photographs, the service is widely used by bloggers as a photo repository. As of November 2008, it claims to host more than 3 billion images.

Follower: A Twitter user who chooses to follow the tweets of another user.

RSS Feeds: RSS stands for Really Simple Syndication. And is a family of web feed formats used to publish frequently updated works such as blog entries, news headlines, audio, and video in a standardized format. An RSS document (or feed) includes full or summarized text, plus metadata such as publishing dates and authorship. Web feeds benefit publishers by letting them syndicate content automatically.

Social Media is information content created by people using highly accessible and scalable publishing technologies. It is a shift in how people discover, read and share news, information and content.

Twitter: Twitter is a relatively new free social networking and micro-blogging service with approximately six million users that enables its users to stay connected through the exchange of short, quick messages called *tweets*. Users can send and receive tweets via the Twitter website or on web-enabled hand-held devices such as Blackberries. The top demographic is the 45-54-year-old age range. The Los Angeles Fire Department successfully used Twitter to convey urgent information during the 2007 wildfire incident.

Tweet: A tweet is a post or status update sent to *followers* on Twitter that answers the question "What are you doing?" Because Twitter only allows messages of 140 characters or less, "tweet" is as much a play on the size of the message as it is on the audible similarity to Twitter.

Wall: An online bulletin board on a Facebook user or group page. Friends or fans can use the wall to write notes or post photos, links, videos, etc. Owners can disable their wall to prevent others from posting to it.

YouTube: YouTube is a video sharing website on which users can upload and share video clips, and view them in the MPEG-4 format.

July 8, 2009

Appendix 2: Social media used by other governments and agencies

Agency	Facebook Fans	Joined	Announcements	Feedback	Comments	Photos/ Virtual Tours/	Twitter Followers
Vancouver Greenest City Action Team	220	02/09	x		x	x	524
Mountainview Cemetery	53		x		x	x	19
Port Coquitlam	1032		x	x		x	172
Port Moody	455	03/08 unused in 09	x				
District of North Van	161	03/09	x				140
Saskatoon – staff page	101	01/09	x		x		
Toronto -Public Consultation Unit	29	Currently unused					
Toronto -Public Health	248		x	x	x	x	
Toronto City Clerk							1926 (Council Agendas)
Toronto -Communications Dept							552 (messaging, news and emerging isssues)
Toronto – Access Toronto							95 (updates on labour disruption)
Portland – Bureau of Development Services	34	01/09	x		x	x	773
San Francisco	269,397	11/08	x	x	x	X Also YouTube	232
Boston	1793		x	x	xx	X also RSVP	5995 (Crime Alerts)
New York Parks and Rec	798		x	x	x	X also RSVP	

Government of Canada (multiple pages within several areas of interest): Professional organizations, business (such as Services Canada), common interests, academic organizations
Government of B.C. (primarily personal pages): Candidates, affiliates such as Trails BC (62 fans)