

BACKGROUND

The Site

Surrey Bend Park is the last undyked area of the lower Fraser River floodplain. It is a large peninsula of land near the conjuncture of the Pitt and Fraser Rivers, and Douglas and Barnston Islands. The Park is comprised of a combination of designated City of Surrey parkland and Metro Vancouver (formerly the GVRD) owned lands that were acquired during the mid-1990's under the umbrella of the Provincial Government's *Lower Mainland Nature Legacy Program*. Approximately 134 ha (331 acres) are owned by Surrey, with the balance of 220 ha (543 acres) owned by Metro Vancouver. All lands are protected by restrictive covenants that serve to protect the very high environmental sensitivity of this important area in Surrey. A map showing the land parcels that make up Surrey Bend Park is attached as Appendix A.

Located in the Guildford Community and Fraser Heights neighbourhood of Surrey, the park site is bounded by the CN Railway on the south, 164th Street to the west and the Fraser River to the north and east. The 354 ha (875 acre) site is characterized by birch and cottonwood floodplain forests, wet meadows, tidal freshwater marshes, bogs and shrub thickets. North of Barnston Ferry dock facility is an area that has been preloaded with hog fuel and aggregates, and there is potential for development of this portion of the property as a staging area for access to the park. A major trunk sewer also traverses the City lands and a utility access road currently exists on the site.

Work Carried out to Date

Several years ago, in response to public demand for access to waterfront lands, staff of both organizations met in a series of meetings to develop an understanding of how Surrey Bend Park would be planned, developed and operated in the future. It was envisioned by the parties that Surrey Bend Park would become a high quality local and regional wildlife viewing and heritage site.

Based on the meetings, a draft Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was developed. The draft MOU contained language that showed an intention to jointly develop a public park at Surrey Bend, with each agency retaining ownership of its lands into the future. The draft MOU stated that a Master Plan would be developed for the site, with Surrey taking the planning lead. Upon adoption of the Master Plan by City Council and the Metro Vancouver Board, the City and Metro Vancouver would jointly develop and jointly operate the site, following a partnership pattern previously established with Metro Vancouver at the very successful Mud Bay Park.

The final version of the draft MOU and associated negotiations between the City and Metro Vancouver were completed in 2006. However, in April 2007, Metro Vancouver informed the City of Surrey that they would not be in a position to further consider the draft MOU, based on concerns about developing and managing the site jointly with the City. Metro Vancouver stated that they were not prepared to entertain mixed tenure and management of the site as contemplated in the draft MOU, and that either one or the other agency must take a lead role through giving appropriate tenure over the property to the other party via a lease or other means. They also suggested at that time that two neighbouring, but separately managed parks would be legally acceptable.

DISCUSSION

Based on the concerns of Metro Vancouver, the parties met in the spring of 2007 to discuss options for future planning, design and operation of Surrey Bend Park. It was agreed by the parties that a Master Plan could be developed for the entire site without any changes in tenure. However, development and operation as originally intended in the draft MOU could not be undertaken without tenure changes.

Options for Development and Management of Surrey Bend

Option 1 - Develop and manage Surrey Bend as two separate parks

Pros:

- Each party could apply its Park By-laws and Regulations to its own lands, thus avoiding some of the mixed tenure concerns raised by Metro Vancouver.
- There would be a high degree of accountability for each party managing its own lands, in terms of Board and City Council

Cons:

- Loss of economy of scale in developing and operating the lands as park.
- Varying construction and operating standards between the two adjacent land parcels.
- Inconsistency in signage and interpretive information between the two parks.
- Confusion amongst the public on service request issues and public programming.
- Stakeholders (e.g. non-profit environmental groups; resident associations) would need to deal with two separate agencies for common issues.
- The City lacks staging areas (parking, washrooms, picnic areas) for the site, whereas the most logical staging area is the previously disturbed area on the Metro Vancouver lands that were once pre-loaded for future industrial use.

Staff do not recommend Option 1.

Option 2 – Develop and manage Surrey Bend as a single park

Pros:

- Full integration of pathways within a master network.
- Common standards for park infrastructure, maintenance and programming.
- Greater over-all efficiencies in development and operation of the site;
- Consistency in park regulations across the entire site.
- More effective management of wildlife.
- Effective utilization of suitable lands for staging.

Cons:

- Loss of direct management control for the party leasing their lands to the other agency.
- One party to bear the costs of operating the park, rather than being shared.

Staff recommend Option 2.

After further consideration of the issues, Metro Vancouver sent correspondence to the City in July 2007, stating that it would be willing to take responsibility for management of Surrey Bend as a Regional Park. (See Letter, Appendix B.) Some of the key points in Metro Vancouver's proposal are:

1. The City of Surrey would lease City lands within Surrey Bend to Metro Vancouver, as originally contemplated by both parties in 1995 as part of the *Lower Mainland Nature Legacy Program*, but was never acted upon.
2. The parties would share the capital costs of planning and for the basic facilities for the property, to enable the park lands to be opened to the public sooner than would be the case if relying on Metro Vancouver's capital alone.
3. Metro Vancouver would assume responsibility for all operating costs.
4. Appropriate guarantees would be put in place to ensure that the City has a continuing role in determining management strategies and priorities for Surrey Bend, and to allow joint Metro Vancouver - City public environmental programs to be carried out at the site from time to time.

Staff of the Parks, Recreation and Culture Department hold the view that the proposal from Metro Vancouver has considerable merit. The City presently has identified Park Planning capital funding for the Master Planning exercise in 2007, and has included a provision for Park Development capital for the project in the draft 2008 budget. In total, \$300,000 in capital can be made available for planning and development at Surrey Bend Park over the two year period 2007-2008. Based on this funding availability, a public planning process could be undertaken in the coming fall and winter, while concurrently working to effect a lease of the City lands to Metro Vancouver. Assuming Council and Board adoption of the resultant Master Plan, a staging area and a trail network could be developed in 2008.

Metro Vancouver presently operates several parks that it leases from local municipalities. These include:

- The Centennial Beach area at Boundary Bay, where 127 acres are leased from the Corporation of the District of Delta; and
- Burnaby Lake Park, where over 300 acres are leased from the City of Burnaby.

Metro Vancouver Parks does a good job of managing its environmentally focussed regional parks and there is no reason to believe that they would not do the same for Surrey Bend Park. A major advantage of the proposal is that it would relieve the City of the operating costs for the park, while at the same time allowing continued involvement by the City in jointly determining ongoing management strategies for Surrey Bend.

Comments from Legal Services

The Legal Services Department has reviewed this report, and has recommended that a lease is the appropriate form of tenure for Metro Vancouver to have on Surrey's parkland at Surrey Bend.

NEXT STEPS

If Council agrees with the concept of joint planning of the site and allowing Metro Vancouver to develop and operate Surrey Bend as a Regional Park, staff of the two parties would amend the existing draft MOU to reflect these significant changes, and would bring the draft MOU back to Council and the Board before the end of 2007 for consideration, and hopefully, adoption. Agreement in principle would also allow the Master Planning processes for Surrey Bend will begin this autumn. Should Council approve the MOU, a lease agreement would be prepared in accordance with the terms of the MOU, and would be brought before Council for adoption.

Laurie Cavan,
General Manager,
Parks, Recreation & Culture

OCC/lls

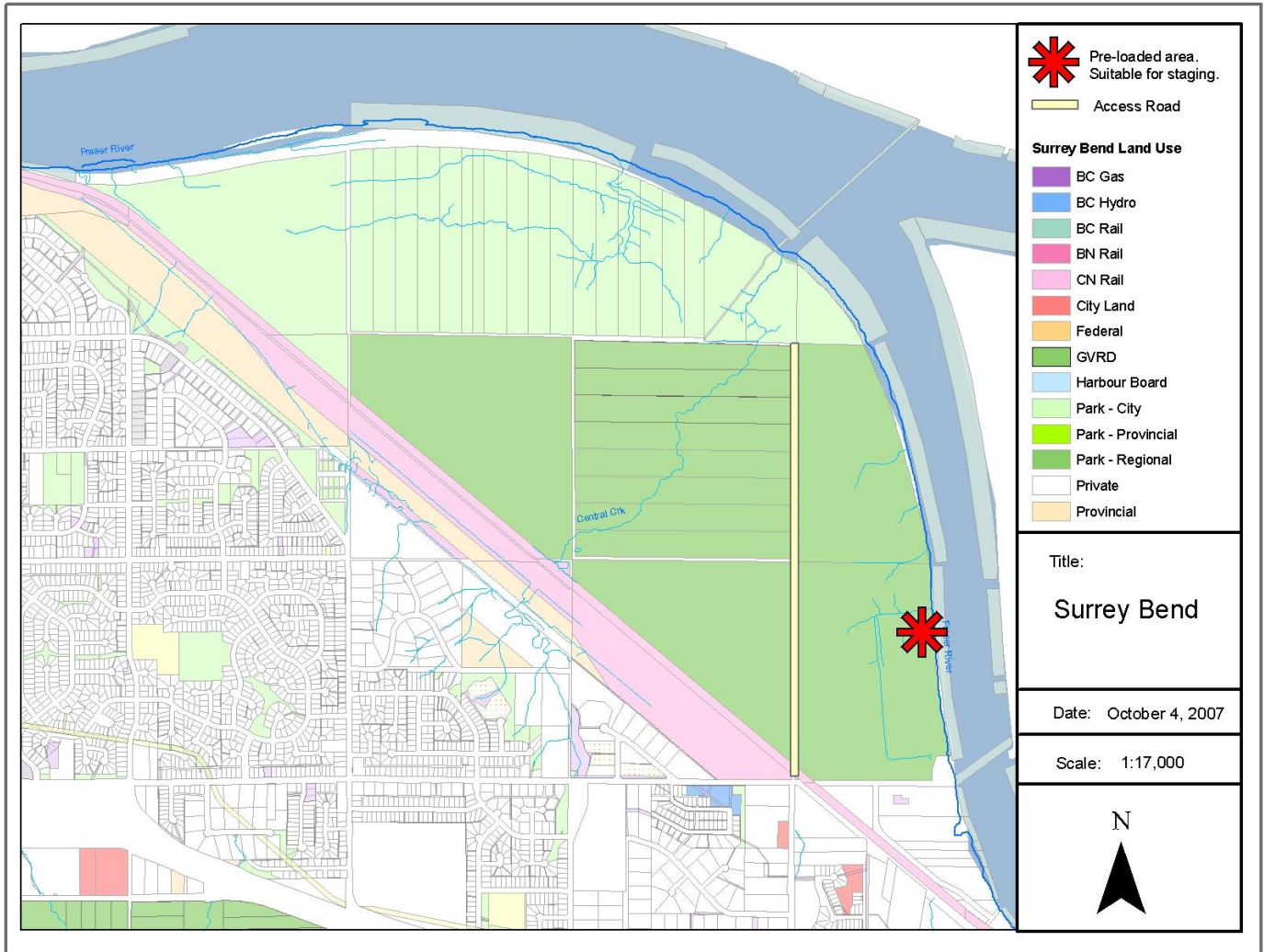
Attachments

APPENDIX A: Illustration of the Surrey Bend Land Division

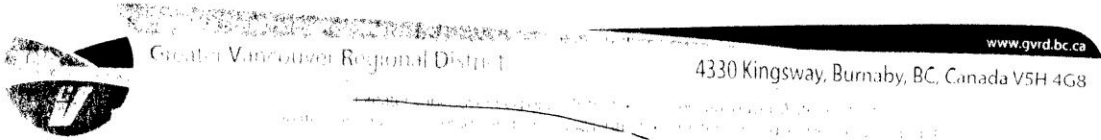
APPENDIX B: Correspondence From Metro Vancouver

APPENDIX A

Illustration of the Surrey Bend Land Division



APPENDIX B
Correspondence From Metro Vancouver



Greater Vancouver Regional District

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Parks Department
Tel. 604-432-6350 Fax 604-432-6296

July 5, 2007

File No. PA-03-01-SUR-02

Mr. Owen Croy, Manager
City of Surrey Parks and Recreation
14245 - 56th Avenue
Surrey, BC
V3X 3A2

Dear Mr Croy,

Re: Surrey Bend

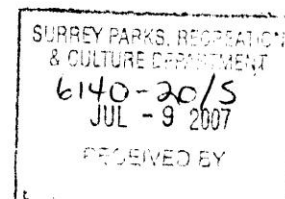
This letter is to serve as follow-up to recent meetings of City of Surrey and GVRD staff in which a new strategy for planning and development of the Surrey Bend park site was discussed, and to affirm the GVRD's position with respect to the park.

GVRD is committed to a joint planning and capital development program for Surrey Bend that would see this valuable piece of waterfront and wetland property opened for public use.

While considerable efforts were made last year by both parties in the development of a draft Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) our legal counsel advises that the MOU drafted in 2006 cannot be signed in its current form because there is not enough clarity about tenure and management responsibilities for the park.

GVRD is willing to take responsibility for management of Surrey Bend as a Regional Park. Under this scenario the City of Surrey would lease City lands within Surrey Bend to GVRD. Such an arrangement was contemplated by both parties in 1995 as part of the Lower Mainland Nature Legacy Program, but was never acted upon. Following through on this commitment would enable us to meet the goals that were jointly agreed to at that time.

GVRD and Surrey would share the capital costs of basic facilities for the property as originally proposed, to enable the land to be opened to the public sooner than would be the case, if relying on GVRD's capital alone. GVRD would assume responsibility for all operating costs. Appropriate guarantees can be put in place to ensure that the City has a continuing role in collaborating on developing management strategies and priorities for Surrey Bend, and to allow joint GVRD-City public environmental programs to be carried out at the site from time to time.



If this approach is acceptable to Surrey City Council, a Memorandum of Understanding could be completed in time for the park planning process to start in fall 2007. Under optimistic circumstances a new park could be opened to the public as early as fall 2008. This would be a significant achievement and would go a long way towards improving the access to waterfront land that is so highly prized by citizens of Surrey and the Region.

Yours truly,



Ed Andrusiak,
Parks Manager

EA/fs/mlt

cc: Frieda Schade, Parks Central Area Manager

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