

REPORT

Parks & Recreation

To: Mayor Cote and Members of Council **Date:** January 10, 2022

From: Dean Gibson,
Director of Parks and Recreation **File:** 1978576

Item #: 2022-18

Subject: **Alcohol in Parks Program – 2021 Review**

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Alcohol in Parks Program, as enabled through Bylaw No. 8264, 2021, continue in seven designated zones with administrative changes for improvement as outlined in this report.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to share a summary of the feedback received from the community and an interdepartmental staff team as part of the evaluation of the new 2021 Alcohol in Parks Program. The findings from the review are presented in this report to identify what worked well and areas for improvement going forward.

SUMMARY

The Alcohol in Parks Program, the “Program”, was officially launched on May 17, 2021 to respond to community needs for socializing safely outdoors in the wake of COVID-19; to provide more outdoor spaces for social connectivity (especially for those without access to private backyards); and to test and monitor the implications of allowing alcohol consumption in parks.

Post Program implementation engagement activities included an inter-departmental City staff workshop, a community survey and other feedback tools on the [Be Heard New West](#) engagement website. With approximately 196 active participants in the engagement process, staff are now reporting back to City Council on the engagement results and proposed next steps.

BACKGROUND

On May 17, 2021 Council adopted Bylaw No. 8264, 2021, a bylaw to permit the consumption of liquor in public spaces. Key elements of the Bylaw include:

- Permitted spaces where liquor may be consumed – Designated zones within seven City parks (as illustrated in Schedule “A” of the Bylaw) including:
 - Port Royal Park
 - Grimston Park
 - Moody Park
 - Hume Park
 - Sapperton Park
 - Westminster Pier Park
 - Queen’s Park
- Permitted hours of consumption – 11:00 a.m. until dusk, seven days a week, for those 19+ years of age.
- Requirement to post signs setting out the boundaries at each site and the hours during which liquor may be consumed. Requirements as to the locations and size of signs.
- Provision for enforcement and offences in accordance with the *Liquor Control and Licensing Act*.

A complete copy of the Bylaw is included with this report as Attachment A.

Concurrent with the adoption of the Consumption of Liquor in Public Places Bylaw, staff committed to undertaking a review of the Program in the fall of 2021.

EXISTING POLICY AND PRACTICE

Bylaw No. 8264, 2021, permits the consumption of liquor in public spaces in New Westminster. The provisions of the Provincial Liquor Control and Licensing Act remain in effect.

The City’s public engagement practices are guided by the Public Engagement Strategy (2016) and Public Engagement Policy (2021). Staff from the Public Engagement Team (Office of the CAO) worked closely with Parks & Recreation staff to plan, implement and report back on engagement to seek feedback on the 2021 Alcohol in Parks Program.

ANALYSIS

In late September 2021, a dedicated Be Heard New West webpage was created and an internal staff workshop was hosted to collect feedback on the Program. The primary objective was to hear back on the public's and staff experience of consumption of alcohol in the designated zones within the seven city parks through the spring/ summer months of 2021. With this feedback and analysis, staff are now in a position to recommend administrative improvements to the Program, largely associated with park grounds and facilities maintenance and operations.

The engagement activities included:

- Be Heard New West Project Web Page launched on September 29, 2021 (308 unique visitors)
- Online survey active from September 29th to October 27th (186 responses)
- Online Poll (14 responses)
- Online Mapping Tool (4 responses)
- Interdepartmental Workshop with City staff on September 17th (10 participants)

The results of the online survey and staff workshop are summarized below. For a fulsome analysis of all feedback, please see Attachment B, the Engagement Summary Report.

Community Engagement Feedback

In response to the evaluation of the Alcohol in Parks Program online engagement, 71% (132/186) respondents reported that they took advantage of the Program; 29% (54/186) did not. Other key feedback included:

- Majority of participants consumed alcohol in Queen's Park (77/129), Westminster Pier Park (71/129) and Hume Park (33/129).
- 81% (148/184) of participants agree that the Program worked well.
- 82% (151/185) of participants are satisfied with how the community is managing their consumption and behavior in parks where alcohol is permitted.
- 65% (118/183) of participants are satisfied with the level of enforcement and oversight of the Program, 11% (20/183) are neutral and 14% (25/ 183) disagree.
- 33% (61/184) of participants think the designated zones are good as-is; 46% (85/184) think they could be expanded; and 21% (38/184) feel the zones should be reconsidered.
- 48% (86/180) rate the program as excellent, 39% (71/180) as good/ alright and 13% (23/180) as not good/ terrible.

The online survey also included an open-ended question regarding suggestions on how the Program can be improved. With 102 responses, the key themes included:

- 1) Offer recycling bins/ Concerns about litter / garbage with the program (29 comments)
- 2) Expand the program to other parks / areas of the city (23)
- 3) General Support/ continue the program (16)
- 4) Expand the existing zones (10)
- 5) End the program / general opposition (9)
- 6) Increase enforcement / monitoring (7)
- 7) Improve signage / add signage about not leaving litter (7)

Interdepartmental Staff Workshop

Overall, staff did not identify any major concerns related to the Alcohol in Parks program, and, did not report a large increase in workloads related to increased cleaning and garbage collection. However, staff did not recommend expanding the program to additional parks, as additional staffing resources would be needed to increase cleaning and maintenance levels any further. Overall, staff participants in the workshop were supportive of continuing the program.

Suggestions for improvements from staff included:

- Explore potential solutions for clearer / better separation of recycling and waste, such as trying different containers, container designs, etc.
- Continue to monitor garbage volumes in parks where alcohol is allowed, and increase pick-ups as needed / possible.
- Continue to monitor how the alcohol-allowed zones are being used for gatherings/events, and consider developing guidelines for staff and the public when it comes to larger gatherings and bookable spaces in New West parks.
- Observe how the use of the Alcohol in Parks program may change / need to adapt based on changing restrictions and behaviours related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

NEXT STEPS

As a result of positive feedback, coupled with minimal concerns, the continuation of the Program is supported with staff review and implementation of improvements related to:

- 1) On-site signage locations and information to mitigate any confusion related to the designated zone boundaries, public washroom locations and how to report issues;
- 2) Number/ type/ location/ servicing of receptacles for disposing of waste/ recycling properly at each park;
- 3) Where and how additional seating may be accommodated in the designated zones;
- 4) How to receive specific feedback from users of bookable picnic shelters and implement changes as required; *and*
- 5) Increased monitoring of each park site to ensure they are safe and welcoming for all.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

This Program provides an opportunity to enjoy the benefits of socializing outdoors, especially to those who do not have access to a private backyard. This has been particularly important for maintaining social connections during the pandemic. In addition, as a result of the Program, residents are spending more time in local parks and connecting with nature/ the environment.

Continuing the program will likely have a neutral economic impact. At the beginning of the Program there may have been concerns from local restaurants, however, many started to offer take away or “picnic” options through the pandemic. The impact to businesses should continue to be monitored as the program continues.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no additional financial implications for continuing the Program anticipated at this time.

INTERDEPARTMENTAL LIAISON

Staff from the following Departments participated in the evaluation of the 2021 Alcohol in Parks Program: Office of the CAO, Climate Action, Planning and Development Department, Engineering Services Department, Parks and Recreation Department. The City’s Police Department has reviewed this report.

OPTIONS

The following are options for Council's consideration:

- 1) Continue the Alcohol in Parks Program, as endorsed by Bylaw No. 8264, 2021, in seven designated zones with administrative changes for improvement as outlined in this report.; or
- 2) Provide alternate direction to staff.

Option #1 is recommended.

CONCLUSION

Continuation of the Program provides residents who are gathering in parks for a picnic or special occasion with friends or family, the opportunity to enjoy a beverage outdoors safely and responsibly. Adults who choose to drink in the designated zones within the seven parks are expected to manage their consumption, appropriately dispose of litter, and conduct themselves in a responsible manner. This has largely been the case during the spring and summer of 2021. As City of New Westminster parks are for everyone, it is important that sites remain welcoming and safe for all.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: Bylaw No. 8264, 2021

Attachment B: What We Heard: Alcohol in Parks Pilot – Community Engagement (November 2021)

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