

Youth-Led Policy Recommendations for Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation Commissioner Candidates

Findings from BC Youth Council's Youth Advocacy Focus Group

Methodology

These recommendations are informed by a youth focus group discussion centered on experiences with parks, recreation centres, transit, and civic engagement in Vancouver. Participant feedback was analyzed using a **thematic analysis approach**, identifying recurring priorities, shared pain points, and practical policy solutions that youth believe are both necessary and achievable at the municipal and regional levels.

I. Key Youth Priorities (Ranked)

1. Equitable Access to High-Quality Green Space

Youth identified access to meaningful green space as their top priority. This includes not only proximity to parks, but the **quality, size, and usability** of those spaces. Participants emphasized that while Vancouver has parks, there is a shortage of **large, well-designed destination parks**, resulting in overcrowding and reduced enjoyment.

2. Affordable and Accessible Recreation and Transportation

Youth consistently highlighted barriers related to **cost, limited programming, and restricted hours** at recreation centres. These barriers are compounded by challenges in transportation, including expensive transit fares, slow expansion timelines, and inadequate cycling infrastructure connecting youth to parks and community spaces.

3. Community Connection and Belonging

Youth expressed a strong desire for parks to function as **social and cultural hubs**, not merely passive green spaces. Participants emphasized that community events, shared activities, and placemaking initiatives foster belonging, civic pride, and a stronger sense of responsibility toward public spaces.

II. Core Pain Points Identified

A. Access and Infrastructure

- Insufficient protected bike lanes leading to parks and recreation facilities
- Transit routes that are inconvenient or inaccessible for youth without cars
- Noise and air pollution from nearby SkyTrain lines diminishing park experiences

B. Overcrowding and Limited Design Diversity

- High concentration of users in a small number of parks
- Lack of distinct zones for different activities (e.g., recreation, quiet reflection, social gathering)
- Limited innovation in park design to accommodate diverse youth needs

C. Environmental and Safety Concerns

- Noise pollution and environmental stress impacting wildlife
- Ongoing issues with visitors feeding animals, harming local ecosystems
- Inconsistent cleanliness and insufficient waste collection

D. Awareness and Cost Barriers

- Overreliance on a few well-known parks, with limited promotion of smaller or neighbourhood parks
- Financial and bureaucratic barriers preventing nonprofits and youth groups from hosting events in parks

III. Policy Recommendations

1. Parks and Placemaking

- Invest in the development and expansion of **major destination parks** with unique identities to reduce overcrowding and foster long-term community attachment.
- Increase the number of **active-use recreation areas** (e.g., yoga platforms, sports courts, flexible event spaces).
- Adopt placemaking strategies that encourage repeat use and social interaction rather than one-time visits.

2. Community Programming and Grant Access

- Establish **small-scale, accessible grant programs** enabling nonprofits and youth-led organizations to host free or low-cost events in parks.
- Simplify and standardize permitting processes to lower administrative barriers for community programming.

3. Environmental Stewardship and Cleanliness

- Increase the frequency of waste collection and install clearly marked recycling and compost bins.
- Support **community-led cleanup initiatives** to strengthen civic engagement and environmental responsibility.
- Expand public education campaigns on wildlife protection, including the harms of feeding animals.

IV. Transit and Youth Mobility

Youth emphasized that access to parks and recreation is inseparable from transportation policy. Participants recommended advocacy through the **Mayor's Council on Regional Transportation** for:

- Reduced youth transit fares
- Faster transit expansion and construction timelines
- Improved reliability and connectivity to parks, schools, and community hubs

V. Youth Civic Engagement Asks

- Establish a **Youth Advisory Circle** connected to the **Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation** to ensure youth perspectives are consistently integrated into park planning and programming.
- Create formal channels for youth to advise municipal leaders and candidates, including park board and mayoral campaigns.
- Expand access to essential supports (e.g., free hygiene and childcare-related hampers) in **high schools and post-secondary institutions**, recognizing the intersection between social policy, access, and participation.

VI. Practical Policy Actions

Short-Term:

1. Launch a pilot micro-grant program for youth-led park programming.
2. Increase trash pickup schedules in high-traffic parks.
3. Improve promotion of underused neighbourhood parks.

Long-Term:

- Develop at least one new large-scale, multi-use park designed explicitly with youth input, integrating recreation, quiet space, and community programming.