

**TO:** MAYOR & COUNCIL

**FROM:** DEPUTY GENERAL MANAGER PARKS, RECREATION AND CULTURE

**SUBJECT:** **PARK PULSE PROGRAM: ACCELERATING COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE**

**PURPOSE:** To inform Council about the launch of the Park Pulse program to help accelerate access to park and recreation amenities and the delivery of community infrastructure funded under the federal Housing Accelerator Fund.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**THAT** the report titled “Park Pulse Program: Accelerating Community Infrastructure” dated May 27, 2024, be received for information.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Leveraging a portion of the Housing Accelerator Fund (HAF), Burnaby is launching the Park Pulse program, a strategic initiative aimed at enhancing community infrastructure through rapid park improvements. With a focus on stimulating increased park usage, improving accessibility, ensuring safety, and enhancing aesthetics, Park Pulse is set to make a significant impact. In 2024, the program will prioritize free, fun, and on-the-spot recreation enhancements at six key parks city wide. This initiative underscores the symbiotic relationship between housing and parks, contributing to the strengthening of communities and the advancement of Burnaby's goals for livability and inclusivity.

### 1.0 POLICY SECTION

The creation of a Park Pulse program supports community infrastructure that enables housing and is aligned with the following Council adopted policies, plans and strategies:

- *Corporate Strategic Plan (2022);*
- *HOME: Housing and Homelessness Strategy (2021);*
- *Burnaby Housing Needs Report (2021);*
- *Mayor's Task Force on Community Housing Final Report (2019);*
- *Burnaby Social Sustainability Strategy (2011);*
- *Burnaby Economic Development Strategy (2007); and*
- *Official Community Plan (1998).*

### 2.0 BACKGROUND

On March 17, 2023, the federal government launched the Housing Accelerator Fund (HAF), a \$4 billion program administered by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) to drive change within local governments and accelerate the supply of new housing. On December 19, 2023, the City was awarded \$43.4 million over a four year period under HAF, subject to the City meeting housing targets identified in its municipal action plan. As per the HAF, this funding may be used to support initiatives within the municipal action plan, affordable housing, housing-related infrastructure, and community-related infrastructure that supports housing.

Parks serve as community infrastructure by providing accessible green spaces for recreation, social interaction, and relaxation, while fostering a sense of community and well-being among residents. They also contribute to economic development, environmental sustainability, and social cohesion, making them essential components of thriving urban areas. Overall, parks play a crucial role in enabling higher density multi-family housing forms by providing shared green spaces, amenities, and recreational opportunities that enhance the attractiveness and livability of compact neighbourhoods. Parks offer important differentiating and competitive advantages by enhancing residents' quality of life and supporting the development of communities that are more affordable, diverse and climate-resilient.

Urban parks contribute to livability and affordability by increasing the desirability of neighborhoods, thus attracting residents and investment, which can lead to the development of more housing options. Additionally, parks offer low barrier recreational opportunities that provide free access, public programming, equitable distribution, and accessibility which all contribute to residents' overall affordability. This symbiotic relationship between housing and parks forms a self-supporting cycle, where the presence of quality housing enhances the value of parks, and vice versa, creating a mutually reinforcing dynamic that strengthens communities.

HAF funding allows the City to utilize its funding to launch a quick-wins community infrastructure initiative geared towards rapid and low-cost community infrastructure improvements to ignite the promotion, usage, access, safety, and beautification of city parks with targeted free, fun and on the spot recreation improvements. The Park Pulse program will accelerate community infrastructure delivery, actively demonstrating the potential for transformative change in public spaces, building momentum, and aligning with the delivery of the housing mandate.

**3.0 GENERAL INFORMATION**

City parks in urban neighbourhoods function as shared outdoor living rooms, offering social gathering spaces, recreational amenities, and green respite for residents. They contribute to environmental sustainability, increase property values, and enhance the sense of place and identity within the community, ultimately supporting housing by improving quality of life and attracting residents.

With Burnaby experiencing a 7% population growth in the past five Census years, especially within Town Centres and Urban Villages, the demand for resilient parks and open spaces is higher than ever. This growth is bringing more residents, particularly in residential high-rise buildings located near transit stations, into existing neighbourhoods. In these high-density urban areas, the provision of parks is essential for enhancing livability and supporting Burnaby's expanding population and families.

City parks also offer a range of benefits that can make housing developments more attractive to developers, including increased market demand, enhanced property values, improved marketability of projects, and overall enhanced quality of life for both existing and new residents. By leveraging the advantages of city parks as community infrastructure, developers can design housing projects that appeal to today's home buyers and renters, while also contributing to the creation of livable communities with access to green spaces and recreational amenities.

**3.1 Park Pulse Program**

The Park Pulse program is a community infrastructure initiative aimed at swiftly implementing cost-effective improvements to city parks to stimulate increased usage, accessibility, safety, and aesthetic enhancements. The program is designed to leverage external funding through HAF for park development while aligning with various city housing initiatives.

The Park Pulse program lays out park improvement projects for the next four years, with a focus on free, fun and on-the-spot recreation improvements at 6 priority parks in 2024. These projects will commence in early summer and are anticipated to include an additional two to three parks annually over the next 3 years, growing to about 12 to 15 parks or until funding capacity is reached (**Attachment 1**).

Additionally, another 5 to 10 parks are anticipated to benefit from various other Park Pulse program improvements over the next 4 years. This includes additional upgrades to playgrounds scheduled for revitalization, improvements to accessibility, climate action initiatives, and general park enhancements in alignment with existing Council approved priorities.

Rooted in the four fundamental principles listed below, the Park Pulse program offers a unique opportunity to advance both livability and community infrastructure goals, while being flexible to respond to community feedback and evolving needs. Staff have utilized these principles to strategically deploy community infrastructure improvements in parks and areas where the impacts of these enhancements are most impactful.

**Removing Barriers**

This principle targets projects that address existing service gaps in high-growth areas identified in the Official Community Plan (OCP) or within transit corridors designated for housing expansion. Enhancing parks in these areas holds significant potential to promote social, environmental, and equity in service provision throughout the city, in historically

underserved urban neighbourhoods. The Parks Pulse improvements will be prioritized and focused based on historic service gaps, with a specific emphasis on areas experiencing housing growth and development. Furthermore, priority will be given to areas where the primary housing form is multi-family, as access to outdoor spaces may be limited, maximizing the impact of the program on improving residents' quality of life and well-being. This approach aligns with projections indicating that over 80 percent of all new future housing in Burnaby is anticipated to be in multi-family form, emphasizing the importance of addressing outdoor access needs in these areas.

**Play for Everyone**

This principle emphasizes the program delivery model for park services, aiming to create a safe and welcoming environment that encourages all park users to participate in free activities. The objective is to offer on-the-spot attractions and activities that are accessible to everyone without the need for registration or pre-booking. Enhancements will include the installation of seating areas, game tables, outdoor equipment, and free play amenities, ensuring that parks cater to the diverse needs and interests of the community. Such initiatives in parks enhance community desirability, fostering social cohesion and promoting active, family-friendly environments that attract residents and support housing.

**Make it Safe & Accessible**

This principle centers on enhancing the safety and accessibility of existing park assets for all users. In older parks, the installation of new signage is crucial to ensure users feel safe and confident navigating larger park systems and locating essential amenities such as washrooms, rest areas, parking, and major facilities, particularly within expansive parks. Additionally, numerous minor enhancements can be implemented along pathways to improve accessibility to play areas and ensure accessibility on play structures. These improvements are prioritized to bring park facilities up to current accessibility standards and are planned for implementation across the entire parks system, fostering a sense of belonging and inclusivity while promoting a feeling of safety for all park users. Safe and accessible parks enhance the overall desirability of neighborhoods.

**Keeping Cool with Nature**

This principle acknowledges the impact of climate change and the importance of providing shaded areas, cooling amenities, and comfortable rest zones in urban parks. A variety of strategies, such as shade structures, water cooling systems, and natural tree canopies, can be incorporated into existing parks to achieve this objective. These improvements not only contribute to the City's resilience and climate action goals but also create microclimate comfort zones for relaxation and recreation within parks. Park cooling features create comfortable outdoor spaces, crucial in the face of global warming, especially for residents in multi-family and older housing stock, thereby enhancing neighborhood desirability and supporting livability.

**4.0 COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

Staff plan to implement a comprehensive communication plan that will highlight the initiatives under the Park Pulse program and appropriately acknowledge the CMHC’s HAF funding support, as required. A dedicated City webpage will be launched to disseminate program details and updates. Media releases, social media posts, eNewsletters, and other communication materials will be produced and distributed to inform and promote the Park Pulse program.

**5.0 FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

HAF represents a significant funding source for Burnaby over the next four years, with expenditure monitored through annual reporting to CMHC, the City’s budgeting process, and annual updates to Council on the Park Pulse program.

The 2024-2028 Financial Plan allocates \$7,148,100 (\$1.78 million annually) for the Park Pulse (previously noted as the Park Blitz) initiative. The Park Pulse program is designed to be easily scalable to accommodate additional community infrastructure improvements if more funding becomes available or if HAF funding from other initiatives is underspent and can be redeployed. Furthermore, the program streamlines funding allocation by utilizing existing staff within the Parks, Recreation, and Culture Department for program management, ensuring efficiency and maximizing the impact of investments on valuable improvements.

Respectfully submitted,

Carmen Gonzalez Deputy General Manager Parks, Recreation and Culture

**ATTACHMENT**

Attachment 1 – Park Pulse Program Presentation

**REPORT CONTRIBUTORS**

This report was prepared by Heather Edwards, Manager, Park Planning & Development, with input from Andre Isakov, Director, Parks, Recreation & Culture Planning; Steve Bruneau, Director, Parks; Marie Ishikawa, Director, Marketing & Communication; Richard Mester, Manager Business Process & Reporting; Wendy Tse, Director, Community Planning.