



June 23, 2021

Mayor and Council
City of Victoria
1 Centennial Square
Victoria BC

RE: Public use of Royal Athletic Park (RAP)

Dear Mayor and Council,

The NPNA would like to once again voice its support for expanding the use of Royal Athletic Park (RAP) to include free community access and the ability to apply for a park permit to host community events. RAP is a valuable public asset that is currently underutilized and we believe that increasing public access is an important step in equitable accessibility to green space and in building the resilience of the neighbourhood.

The [staff report](#) before you today requests \$9,985.22. These funds, if awarded, will be used in their entirety to pay for the rental costs associated with providing free, accessible programming at Royal Athletic Park. The programs include the monthly Food & Farmers Market and free programs during July & August in collaboration with Silver Threads and the Mosque. Due to the Recreation Fee Bylaw No.06-056, there is no mechanism in place for community groups to book RAP at low or no cost.

The staff report notes that we could host the proposed programming at Central Park through the City's Build Back Victoria Program. Central Park is an extremely well used park. Both Central Park and Franklin Green are used by large daycare groups as well as kids programs and serve the needs of everyone from basketball and tennis players to children and seniors. It's worth noting that even the City run summer camp programs that are typically operated out of Central Park will be offered at RAP again this year. Furthermore, the Food & Farmers Market requires a significant footprint. Each vendor requires a 10x10 foot space, with 6 feet between booths and additional space for line ups allowing for adequate distancing, plus a separate entrance/exit. Furthermore, Central Park does not have washroom or hand washing facilities which are required by the vendors as well as market goers.

This year, we are requesting a direct award grant to cover the rental costs of \$92/hour. However, in the longer term, we are requesting a re-envisioning of how RAP can better suit the needs of the community based on the reasons outlined below.



1996 Local Area Plan

This request is supported by North Park's [1996 Local Area Plan](#) that supports increased community access to RAP. It states that "The City is to explore strategies to make Royal Athletic Park more available to free community use when not programmed for use as a stadium" (objective 8.4, pg. 27). The [1996 LAP \(pg. 32\)](#) has more to say on Royal Athletic Park. It states that:

- "Royal Athletic, Park, being a regional facility and not open-free to the public, is not considered an asset to the neighbourhood...Royal Athletic Stadium could be made much more friendly to the neighbourhood by providing direct access or at least visual access to portions of the site when not in use for organized activity."
- "There are many regional recreational facilities in North Park area that serve the entire City but do not necessarily provide programs for the neighbourhood."

Citing a 25 year old document demonstrates how long this issue has been impacting residents of North Park, and how long there has been no improvement at City of Victoria facilities in North Park to benefit the immediate community.

Underuse and Financial Cost

RAP is vastly underutilized, especially when considering its valuable status as green space in a dense urban core. Records show that RAP was only booked 25% of the year in 2019, leaving it empty and unused for 75% of the year. According to the 2020 Financial Plan, the deliverables of RAP is to facilitate "80 Operational days." Not only does this miss an opportunity for increasing green space access for locals, but it is costing the taxpayers a significant bill: RAP runs at a deficit of more than \$300,000 every year. The lack of regular public access cannot be justified by an economic argument, as the park already operates at a deficit; expanding the potential uses of the park would add little financial strain on the City while providing numerous benefits to the public.

Green Space

North Park is a greenspace deficient neighbourhood. According to City of Victoria documents, North Park has 1.23 hectares of park per 1000 residents, and this calculation includes RAP despite the lack of public access. This is well below the City average of 3.16 hectares of park per 1000 residents and an even starker contrast to some neighbourhoods that have over 90 hectares of park space per 1000 residents (James Bay and Fairfield).

COVID-19 has brought to light the extreme importance of public green space for public health. North Park is home to many residents without access to private green space, as well as many residents who may not have the resources (transportation, financial, time, etc) to access the many regional parks in the area.



It has become evident that urban green spaces and parks are vital to public health as a place to socialize, recreate, and access nature. RAP as it is currently operated is a lost opportunity to give more people this vital access. We also know that North Park residents highly value green space - in our 2020 community values survey, we found the following:

- 80% of respondents chose “access to green space/parks” as one of the broad values that should guide development in North Park
- 57% of respondents feel that North Park does not have enough park/green space
- 43% of respondents want to see open/flexible green space for a variety of uses
- 87% of respondents felt that RAP should be used for activities other than paid admission events
 - Most respondents felt that free or low-cost programming for both children and adults would be a good use for RAP

Demographics

North Park is one of the most diverse and lowest income neighbourhoods in the City and the region. Many residents live in lower income, higher density housing, and 79% of residents are renters, and 51% of residents live in core housing need. Many residents may not have the means to travel to regional parks, and the local parks may be their only reliable and regular access to green space. There are several City-owned facilities in the neighbourhood (Save on Foods Memorial Arena; Crystal Pool; RAP) that provide regional benefits but much less benefit to the local community as paid admission is generally required for the use of these spaces. An equitable approach to City facilities is needed and is especially prevalent in North Park, where open access green space is desperately needed.

Events Space

RAP has been operated as a regional events space but remains out of reach for smaller non-profits and community groups to book for events and activities. The minimum booking fee for RAP is just over \$300, and there is no possibility for leniency under the current Fees and Services Bylaw. With the number of regional assets in North Park, it makes sense for some community benefit to arise from these assets. Waiving the booking fee for community events such as food and craft markets; community fitness classes; and community arts and music events would allow grassroots and local organizations to provide valuable amenities to the local community.

Conclusion

The NPNA has been working with the City and Parks staff over the last year to provide expanded access to RAP. In 2020 the NPNA offered free community programming. If this grant request is



approved, will do so again in July and August with a schedule of free, all ages arts, performance, and fitness offerings for the community.

However, many barriers still remain to using the space in a way that most benefits the community and residents who need it most. The NPNA would like to request that the Mayor and Council support the staff recommendation to provide a grant to the NPNA for use of RAP in 2021, but we would like the City to go further and consider additional ways that RAP can be opened for public use, permanently.

Thank you for your consideration,

North Park Neighbourhood Association Board



Monthly Food & Farmers Market

Started September 2020 at the St. John the Divine Parking Lot, and has been hosted at RAP since November 2020. The Gift Certificates pictured above are made available to community members through the NPNA's weekly grocery hamper program, George Jay Elementary, the Intercultural Association, and Silver Threads.

Free Community Programs (2020)

Soccer for children ages 7-13 with the Muslim community, Pop-Up Performances by Theatre SKAM, and craft workshops with SUPPLY Victoria.

