

GREENEST CITY SCHOLARS PROGRAM - 2014 PROJECT

Project title

Exploring the feasibility of converting a Park Board fieldhouse into an outdoor school

Greenest City goal(s) supported

GCAP: Access to Nature; Lighter Footprint
Healthy City Strategy (in process)

Project context, scope, and value to City

There is much interest in outdoor education programs, where K-12 students experience full immersion programs learning all subjects through nature-based experiences. This is becoming increasingly important in cities, where residents have limited access to wild spaces and children grow up not knowing much about the world around them and why it is valuable and important.

The Park Board manages many fieldhouses in Vancouver parks. They often contain washrooms, storage, change rooms, and a caretakers suite. The Park Board is currently exploring ways to use these facilities to support changing parks and recreation priorities, including artist fieldhouse residencies, enhanced facilities for sports user groups, and centres for local food activity. One area of interest is to convert a fieldhouse to an outdoor education centre that would be accessible to Vancouver schools. Capital requests are being made in the 2015-17 capital plan for fieldhouse upgrades and programming, and if this project proves feasible staff resources, community partnerships, and capital will be sought for implementation.

This project will research outdoor education models and facilities from the Netherlands to North Vancouver. The scholar will explore the following questions:

- What defines an outdoor school, and what are some of the benefits and challenges of outdoor schools?
- What are the different outdoor school models (i.e. full year, shorter residencies, within/outside public school system, etc.)?
- What kind of partnerships would need to be established, what are viable funding models, and what would be the space requirements to operate an outdoor school in a fieldhouse, accessible to multiple lower mainland schools? What could the organisational model look like?
- How might this type of outdoor school be programmed and supported, and what would be the role(s) of the Park Board?

Research methods used by the scholar will include a literature review, case study research, interviews, and site visits.

Deliverables

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- Summary of relevant literature and case studies
- Development of (a) outdoor school concept(s) that could operate out of a Park Board fieldhouse including design and location requirements, partnerships, operational and organisation model, and others
- Recommendations and next steps
- Final report summarizing project deliverables

Mentor department

Park Board

Candidate skill set/background

- Excellent research and writing skills
- Understanding of environmental, outdoor, sustainability, and experiential education literature, models and best practices
- Good communicator and team player