

CITY OF NANAIMO
PARKS AND RECREATION

HOMELESSNESS ISSUES & GARBAGE CONCERNS

Parks and Recreation is responsible for maintaining 1,200 hectares of parkland, over 120 km of trails, grounds at City Hall & SARC, and portions of the downtown including Diana Krall Plaza, etc., as well as all recreation centres throughout the City of Nanaimo.

2017 saw an increase in volume of garbage collected, numbers of needles removed, and the amount of vandalism and break-ins. It also saw an increase in negative interactions with the transient population. This continues to have an impact on workload for both staff and an increased reliance on contractors. With the increasing homeless population in Nanaimo, presence of homeless in parks has increased significantly.

The following is a summary of how garbage, sharps, encampments, and vandalism are handled by the Parks and Recreation department.

STAFF RESOURCES

Within the Parks and Recreation Department, the need for sharps and garbage clean up vary by area.

- 25 Parks Operations staff are trained and do clean up on a daily basis. There are an additional 10 seasonal staff through the summer that are also involved in the clean up.
- On the Recreation Services side of the department, finding needles is less common, especially since the installation of the needle boxes in the recreation centres. All Facility Operations staff, Custodians and Lifeguards will do needle clean up on an as-needed basis.

QUICK FACTS – P&R department

- 424 garbage cans in parks
- Daily clean up in the downtown core (& Comox Park)
- 34 needle boxes

Parks & Recreation make needle clean-up their number #1 priority at all times. Staff will attend as soon as possible once a needle(s) is reported or sighted.

STAFF TRAINING & ACCESS

- Sharps disposal and garbage are discussed formally monthly at tailgates.
- **Sharps containers are at every staff location, every parks vehicle (including lawnmowers, tractors, etc.), and a minimum of one per recreation centre in staff areas. These sharps containers are disposed of at Harris House.**
- Documentation provided to staff including the sharps containers map, information on disposal, safework procedures, etc.
- PPE provided through managers & Stores – Personal protective equipment – gloves, sharps-rated gloves, sharps containers, tongs, etc.
- All staff are able to receive the Twinrix vaccine. Personal choice, but most staff who have interaction with Bloodborne Pathogens have taken advantage of the program.

Changes in 2017

- Discussions at safety meetings regarding exposure to powder/airborne drugs, contaminated transient debris, use of naloxone, how to deal with exposure, etc.
- Large deposits of needles contaminated with debris make clean up difficult.

CPTED – Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design

Parks and Recreation staff have been employing CPTED principles throughout parkland and around recreation centres to reduce issues. CPTED is the design, maintenance, and use of built environment in order to enhance quality of life and to reduce both the incidence and fear of crime.

- Measures have been mainly taken with improvements to lighting and vegetation measures. Both measures have taken steps to remove areas that offer concealment or hiding spots and to increase visibility, allowing the public to observe their surroundings more easily.
- Principle of Territoriality, designating clearly the start of parkland, have been employed at areas such as Deverill Square Gyro Park with children's artwork placed on the perimeter fencing.
- Prompt repair of vandalism or removal of graffiti: P&R staff deal with the issues promptly to display that the property is maintained and unwanted behavior is not permitted.
- Irrigation: Staff have employed the use of irrigation to deter stopping in downtown park areas due to safety concerns. Grass will be made wet, making it uncomfortable for someone to stop and rest on.



Italian Fountain site prior to CPTED (above)
and after (below)



Meetings

Parks and Recreation staff meet bi-annually with RCMP, Bylaws, Animal Control and others to discuss and mitigate ongoing issues and discuss trends and prevention methods.

CONTRACTOR SERVICES

GARBAGE CONTRACT

Public garbage cans are provided throughout City parkland and trails. All **424 garbage cans** are serviced by a contractor. Cans are serviced based on location and volume from a weekly service to a daily servicing. The contractor also picks up any litter debris in a 3m radius of the can and will remove any graffiti on cans. Any other issues are reported promptly (same day) to the Parks Operations staff. **Needles are picked up by this contractor on a routine basis.**

ON DEMAND FOR ENCAMPMENT & CONTAMINATED DEBRIS

Encampments, once cleared with the assistance of the Bylaw Department, are mainly cleaned up by a contractor. Staff have now also been utilizing contractors when there is the risk of the transient debris being contaminated with drug powder and/or needles.

Work has been split between Acer Landscaping and Lone Pine Landscaping. Both companies have experience in removing the debris and will use equipment/machines where needed.

SHARPS DISPOSAL UNITS

There are now 34 units provided by Parks and Recreation divided by 22 units in 8 recreation centres, 7 units on parkland, and 5 units in the city-operated Community Services Building. Five units in parks had to be replaced with heavier duty anti-vandalism units after several thefts and tampering incidents. These units are serviced by a contractor, with a minimum of a monthly basis, depending on season and location.

JOHN HOWARD SOCIETY

Picking up garbage on hard surface trails (E&N Trail, etc.). **Picks up sharps as needed.**

PARKS OPERATIONS – Changes in Work Habits

Sweep of downtown parkland and gardens

The downtown grass crew routinely did a sweep of the downtown areas on a Monday. With ongoing issues, this was increased to a Monday / Friday sweep, then a 3-day a week sweep, and then a daily sweep. The clean up started to take too much time, so through the winter months, 1 staff person has been doing a daily sweep for a minimum of two hours, cleaning up needle debris and other garbage. Larger deposits of garbage are cleaned up by contractors. This amount of time spent on clean-up is not sustainable as we move into the busy summer season.

CHANGES AND TRENDS IN 2017 & 2018

LANDSCAPE HORTICULTURISTS

The Landscape Horticulturists have modified their work practices.

- Prior to starting work in a garden bed, depending on the size of the bed, they will devote 10 to 20 minutes doing a sweep for needles or other debris.
- Employees used to work in garden beds alone. Employees working downtown now work in pairs or teams.
- Work conducted in the early morning is now always done in teams.
- Modification of planting beds: Plantings are now spaced out more to reduce hidden areas. Types of plants have been switched to more streamline plants, reducing hiding spots.



Example of a needle found in a garden bed.

PARKS CUSTODIANS

Significant changes have taken place for the Parks Custodians. Parks Custodians used to work graveyard shifts on their own. Custodians, as of January, now work in pairs and now work an early morning shift. Venting is being installed in their vehicles to reduce the risk of being exposed to noxious fumes and risk of exposure.

FACILITY CHANGES - Bowen East washrooms

Washrooms on the east side of Bowen Park have been closed since November 2017 due to vandalism and misuse. Transient populations were using it as a shelter at times throughout the day. Since closing, the locks have been snapped off 3 times.

This washroom is not the first to be locked due to vandalism. Staff have used it as deterrent and will either lock completely or shorten opening hours.

HOT SPOTS

Most of the worse areas are in the downtown core. Maffeo Sutton Park, Nob Hill Park, Diana Krall Plaza & Wharf St Loo, City Hall / SARC, Anchor Way, Piper Park, and Comox Gyro Park. Other areas checked daily are Robins Park, Beaufort Park, and Bowen Park along the Millstone River.

Issues in Maffeo Sutton Park are concentrated around areas that offer concealment and/or shelter, including, washrooms, Lions Pavilion, Memorial Wall, etc.

Issues with encampments occur in Caledonia Park, Comox Park, Bowen Park, Colliery Dam Park and May Richards Bennett Pioneer Park.

Parks Operations has been in the process of removing all dugouts to remove shelter areas. Issues with dugouts are focused at May Richards Bennett Pioneer Park and Sid Clark Gyro Park.



Stash of brand new needles found in Maffeo Sutton Park

AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR

The transient population is becoming increasingly aggressive and confrontational towards City staff members. There were several incidents this past summer with Parks Operations staff that were reported through the Violent Incident process. Staff were assaulted in a few incidents while they were in the process of cleaning up areas of the downtown. There have also been incidents with a transient group that have dogs at May Richards Bennett Pioneer Park. Other times, staff have been threatened and then vacated the area prior to further confrontation.

Needles are being jammed into toilet paper rolls, presenting a risk to staff and the public. Needles that are concealed and not found through the safety check have been sent flying when staff are operating weed eaters. A knife was found concealed in a washroom stall in Maffeo Sutton Park.

ACROSS PROPERTY LINES

Network connections and reporting structure built up with other private property owners with issues including, but not limited to, Regional District of Nanaimo, Island Corridor Foundation, Ministry of Transportation, Ministry of Transportation. These areas always prove challenging as the transient population seems to recognize where property lines start and end.

VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS

Volunteer programs have been utilized for assisting with the maintenance of parks for several years. In the past, volunteers were focused on cleaning up garbage and reducing invasive plants and reporting issues to Parks Operations. Interaction with “sharps” was broken glass. There is now concern from staff whether it is still safe to have these groups working in certain areas and we are currently looking at revising documents to include information about drug paraphernalia and exposure risk.

PARK AMBASSADORS

We have 12 active Park Ambassadors and 24 others who participate on a casual basis. Park Ambassadors are individuals who frequent a park or trail on a regular basis. Some of them will utilize sharps containers and clean up needles but that is not expected from them. Parks Operations will clean up as soon as they are reported.

ADOPT-A-PARK

We have 4 active Adopt-A-Park groups who are specifically looking after one park each and 4 other groups who are doing consistent work parties. Sharps containers are provided to them but there is no expectation to clean up needles or drug paraphernalia.

WORK PARTIES

Work Parties are one-off groups who wish to do a clean-up in our parks. These groups range from children to adults and various areas from woodland areas to beaches.