

**Community Centre Associations cite disappointment over
Vancouver Park Board's continued refusal to address community needs in
Joint Operating Agreement**

Vancouver, B.C. – After a three-hour meeting over the weekend (Sat, Dec. 3) with Vancouver Park Board staff to review a Joint Operating Agreement (JOA), a group from 15 Community Centre Associations (CCAs) is publicly stating their disappointment that their extensive input and feedback has essentially been ignored. The CCAs say that they are worried about what happens next because, while progress has been made with the JOA, there is concern that the Park Board has identified this draft as “final” and CCAs have been told that if they don’t sign, they will be terminated.

In early Nov., representatives from the 15 CCAs, all of whom are volunteers who work directly in their communities, provided an in-depth proposal to the Park Board. They put in hundreds of hours of work in the evenings and on weekends to develop this document. Upon submission, the group had informed the Park Board that they would recommend signing the JOA to their respective boards of directors, if the next draft of the JOA addressed and resolved the issues as set out in their proposal. The Park Board acknowledged receipt of the proposal, but did not provide any other response regarding the document. At the meeting over the weekend, the CCAs were discouraged that the draft presented did not reflect any significant changes and that some essential components of their proposal had not been incorporated.

The CCAs are hoping that at a Park Board meeting set for Dec. 12, the Commissioners will ask key questions and direct staff to address the elements that continue to be problematic.

Said Ainslie Kwan, Killarney CCA past-president: “This draft of the JOA is a great disappointment. We believed that we had come a long way in working with the Park Board and that we were making good progress in developing a JOA that would work for the Park Board and for each of our communities. The current draft of the JOA misses the mark. It’s clear that there is still much to be done.” She explained: “We bring decades of knowledge, expertise and experience in successfully running community centres to the table. We feel strongly that the needs of our communities are not being addressed by the Park Board and that is unacceptable. The approach the Park Board has taken has not been consultative and that is clearly reflected in a document that fails to take our primary concerns into account. It is crucial that we find a way to come together and develop a JOA that meets the needs of the Park Board and each of our unique communities.”

The key areas of CCA concern are:

- Dispute resolution
- Membership

- Financial costs
- Multiple provisions for termination of the relationship
- Association governance and autonomy

Community centres serve an important purpose in each of Vancouver's unique and diverse communities. Said Alex Burton, Board member of Mount Pleasant CCA: "Let's be clear here. We have a strong group of 15 Community Centre Associations that have come together in collaboration and consensus on what must be included in the JOA – this is unprecedented. The JOA sets the foundation of how we move forward in partnership with the Park Board for the next 15 years." He added: "We are committed to ensuring that we continue to provide affordable and accessible programs in each of our unique Vancouver neighbourhoods. We are calling on the Park Board Commissioners to step forward and get involved in working with us to resolve this issue. As elected officials, they have a responsibility to the community – and we need their leadership in improving this agreement so that it works for the Park Board and for our unique communities."

The 15 associations have clearly stated that unless changes are made to the JOA that address their major concerns, a successful outcome for a completed JOA is in jeopardy. The CCA group believes that Park Board Commissioners want a completed JOA as much as they do and the group is asking Commissioners to get involved now. They are hopeful that the Commissioners will agree to work with them to develop a mutually acceptable agreement that each of the 15 CCAs can put forward to their individual boards with a recommendation to sign. Said Burton: "We are hopeful that we can move this process forward to a successful conclusion with the involvement of the Commissioners."