

# SUBMISSION TO AREA B POSAC FOR JUNE 18<sup>th</sup>, 2018 MEETING

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Area B POSAC

Category: Parks & Open Space Advisory Committee

Date: Jun 18, 2018, Time: 7 - 9pm, Location: Gabriola Arts & Heritage

As a handicapped resident of Gabriola and frequent user of Descanso Bay Regional Park, I would like to make a few observations about the park in the context of current conditions and the current management plan. My first point is that it may be time to revisit the 5 Year Master Plan for the park that expired 10 years ago. Park use, the regional population, public perceptions and government priorities have changed during this period.

A second observation is that some of the existing Objectives and Policies of the Master Plan are not being observed. For example, here are key component statements from the Management Plan for Descanso Bay Regional Park:

### **3.4 Objectives**

**3.4.1 Accessibility** *To provide a public Regional Park that is open and accessible for the benefit, enjoyment and use for all residents of the region and beyond.*

**3.4.2 Public Safety** *To create and operate a park that is secure, strives to protect public safety and minimizes hazards, both natural and man-made.*

And:

### **4.2.3 Policies 4.2.3 (a) Public Access 4.2.3(b) Universal Design**

***i.) Accessibility and universal design matters shall be considered in any new facility development or upgrading projects to accommodate park users with different levels of ability.***

There is a whole flock of relatively new picnic tables in the day use area and campground none of which were designed or built for accessibility. The difference in cost between a picnic table designed to accommodate a walker or wheelchair and all the *regular* picnic tables in the park is negligible. It is a very easy step in the right direction to convert half a dozen of these tables (on site) as part of a longer term vision for improved public accessibility.

Another step that could be taken is to provide designated handicapped parking stalls in both the day use area and the upper parking lots. This is about signage, stall width and surface materials and curbstones. These are low cost items that could be considered maintenance rather than requiring major capital expenditures and planning. In a similar vein, a couple of campstalls (close to toilets, level, larger living areas) could be chosen as suitable for minor

work to improve accessibility. The DBRP Campground doesn't have to be advertised as totally accessible to immediately get started on improving accessibility for all.

It has long been a real puzzle to me that there are no picnic tables or benches placed on the point of land on the upper level beyond the change room and washroom. It is a very heavily used area of the park and a key element in accessibility is to have a place to sit down and rest. The upper point is one of the sunniest locations in the park during the winter months and is a prime picnic spot. It is relatively easy to install a table or benches so they don't wander over the edge.

Speaking of the change room building, I think it is a new facility and there is a **trip-lip** from the gravel to the concrete pad. This is a minor maintenance issue. While the toilet buildings and change room may not be ideally accessible in design, it would be easy to install grab bars and even increase the door width to make them more accessible for all park users.

Driftwood logs at the beach and boat launch area are a regular public safety hazard in the park. This is a basic maintenance issue that should be dealt with on an ongoing basis as required. Crawling over driftwood logs carrying a kayak or rowboat is a dangerous proposition for an able bodied person, but is a total barrier for someone with reduced mobility.

A number of things can immediately be carried out at Descanso Bay Regional Park:

- Modify the maintenance contract for the park for this and future years,
- Work directly with local NGOs to achieve immediate improved accessibility,
- Install handicapped parking stall(s) in the day use area and upper parking lots,
- Accessible picnic tables provided by modification of existing tables,
- Regular maintenance is required to remove or cut passages through driftwood logs,
- Reducing the grade from the parking lot to the start of the pebble beach,
- Installation of an access mat (Mobi Mats illustrated below) from the parking lot to well within the ocean, and
- Amend the surface of the sandstone platform in the bay for improved accessibility. This could be done by adding concrete to fill and level the surface, and/or by cutting the sandstone rock surface to remove humps and provide texture to reduce the slip hazard.

What is required is a can-do approach to the management and operation of the Descanso Bay Regional Park rather than further postponing of what needs to be done. The funds needed for this work can be found through grant programs and other sources. The talents, labour and volunteers to do any and all the work that needs to be done can be brought to bear. **This a personal submission but it is compatible with the work of Gabriola Land and Trails Trust (Galtt) in cooperation with other agencies, groups and individuals that are working on a broader, long-term approach to the delivery of improved accessibility on trails and parks on the island.**



## Master Planning for Descanso Bay Regional Park

*It is my opinion that the opportunity for improved accessibility to the shore and ocean at Descanso Bay Regional Park is one of the best in the RDN and on Vancouver Island.*

A number of things should be considered immediately:

- Initiate the updating of the Master Plan and budgeting for the park in the context of stated policies of the province and the RDN for improving access for all users.
- Gabriolans have demonstrated a depth of talent, energy and resources that are remarkable and could be tapped by the Regional District of Nanaimo. There may be new ways of doing Regional and Community Parks business by the RDN to bring volunteers, funds and resources to bear.
- The potential and values of our Parks are not being fully realized because of limitations of the RDN staffing and budgeting process. Using RDN standards, specifications and guidelines, there is very little that is beyond citizen capabilities of big and small islanders. How can we get on with the tasks at hand?
- The distance and slope from the day use area to the existing toilet buildings is perhaps the biggest barrier to comprehensive improved accessibility at the shore and ocean for users. A suitable building and site plan in the day use area could be achieved outside a full master planning process and could be delivered on the ground within a year. It would make sense to put the long proposed picnic shelter into this interim plan for the day use area.

Observation about Gabriolan current RDN and comprehensive tax load:

- The average RDN Area B General Services property tax amount is \$353.00. In general, this amount is actually reduced through the Regular Home Owner Grant Process, and for many Gabriolans it is further reduced through the Additional Home Owner Grant.
- My personal situation is fairly typical for Gabriola, and I would pay a total of \$921.51 with a regular grant and \$646.51 with the additional grant for property taxes for 2018. This is all-in for: the province, the Island Trust, for the RDN Area B, for local services including the Gabriola Volunteer Fire Department. The point being made is that residents are not overly burdened by our property taxes.
- I fully realize that the RDN has made significant commitments for the future planning and development of the new parks that will result from the Potlatch density transfer process. There may be alternative ways to proceed with the planning and funding of these needs.