

# **James Bay Parks and Green Space**

**2009**

## **Inventory and Assessment**

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## 2009 Inventory of James Bay Parks and Green Space

### 1. City of Victoria Property

Name		Class	Acres	Hectares
Holland Point Park	561 Dallas Road	Community	13.78	5.58
MacDonald Park	212 Niagara St.	Community	8.92	3.61
Fisherman's Wharf	300 St. Lawrence St.	Community	4.69	1.90
South Park	677 Michigan St.	Leased/school	3.51	1.42
Irving Park	240 Menzies St.	Neighbourhood	1.93	0.78
Todd Parkette & Tennis	100 Montreal St.	Neighbourhood	0.96	0.39
Laurel Point Park	Quebec Street	Community	0.60	0.24
Centennial Park	200 Belleville St.	Community	0.27	0.11
Charles Redfern Park	100 Quebec St.	Green	0.54	0.22
Belleville Green	Belleville and Oswego	Green	0.15	0.06
Lewis Street Parkette	32 Lewis St.	Neighbourhood	0.12	0.05
Avalon Green	Avalon and Government	Green	0.02	0.01
<b>Total city park area in James Bay*</b>			<b>35.49</b>	<b>14.37</b>

\* The City of Victoria Neighbourhood Boundaries map allots approximately half of Beacon Hill Park to James Bay (the other half in Fairfield). The JBNA Parks Committee does not include Beacon Hill Park in neighbourhood area totals because it is a city-wide destination park. However, the city adds the following figures to James Bay's total:

Beacon Hill Park (1/2)	Cook/Dallas/Douglas	City Wide	91.54	37.06
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### 2. Property not owned by the city

#### Provincial Capital Commission Parks and Greenspace

		Acres	Hectares
Quadra Park	Belleville/Oswego	0.52	0.21

#### Legislative Assembly of British Columbia

Confederation Gardens Plaza	Menzies/Belleville	1.00	0.40
Legislature grounds	Menzies/Belleville/Government	9.14	3.70

#### Royal B.C. Museum

Thunderbird Park & Elliott Square	Douglas/Belleville	1.25	0.51
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#### Transport Canada

Federal Filled Foreshore	Laurel Point	2.25	0.91
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# James Bay Parks and Green Space 2009

## Introduction

This report was compiled by the James Bay Neighbourhood Association's Parks Committee to provide residents with current information about our community's parks and green space. The committee hopes to stimulate discussion about the city's park system and James Bay parks in particular. We welcome your comments and suggestions.

A complete list of 2009 James Bay parks and green space is provided, the first inventory update since the 1993 JBNA Neighbourhood Plan. Twelve city-owned parks and greens located in James Bay are listed in descending order of size. Five parcels of park and green space in James Bay *not* owned by the city are also listed. These include one property owned by the Provincial Capital Commission, two by the Legislative Assembly of B.C., one by the Royal B.C. Museum, and one by Transport Canada.

City-owned parks and greens are the focus of this report. Part One provides the city's park classification definitions, zoning information, standard ratios of park land to population, accessibility guidelines and possibilities for increasing James Bay park space. Part Two suggests ways to improve communications and consultation between the city and residents and focuses on possible improvements in six James Bay parks. We hope the JBNA membership will support these goals.

## Part One – City Parks in James Bay

### I. Status of city park land in James Bay

Most city park land is zoned residential. Public parks and green spaces are better protected when they are officially designated and zoned park land.

"The city does not have a park zone in its zoning bylaw," Gary Darrah, Manager of Park Planning and Design, explained. "Currently, parks are designated at least five different ways, each with a somewhat different level of protection. Park staff would like to change this." The new Parks Master Plan will recommend "new park zone(s) be included in the zoning bylaw...to require all existing park land to be rezoned from residential to park," according to Darrah. The JBNA Parks Committee commends current city staff for working to achieve that crucial park zoning.

## II. James Bay city parks classifications

A new park classification system is included in the city's Parks Master Plan and in the 2009 James Bay parks list. There are four classifications: City-wide, Community, Neighbourhood and Greens. The city definitions are:

1. **City-wide parks** regularly draw visitors from the entire municipality and beyond who specifically travel to spend time "in the park." Within this classification are three subsets:

- Destination parks (e.g. Beacon Hill Park)
- Special-purpose parks with unique facilities
- Urban parks in commercial areas

2. **Community Parks** serve several neighbourhoods, offer a range of services and are typically at least 2 ha (5 ac) in size.

Five are listed in James Bay: Holland Point Park, MacDonald Park, Fisherman's Wharf, Laurel Point Park and Centennial Park.

3. **Neighbourhood Parks** generally serve the catchment area of an elementary school and are at least 0.5 ha (1.2 ac).

One listed in James Bay: Irving Park.

"Tot Lots" are a sub-category in this classification. They are under-sized neighbourhood parks (under 0.25 ha. or 0.62 acre).

Two in James Bay: Todd Parkette & Tennis and Lewis Street Parkette.

4. **Greens** include green space within or adjacent to roads and include medians, traffic islands and some boulevards.

Three in James Bay: Charles Redfern Park, Belleville Green and Avalon Green.

## III. James Bay park land ratio per 1000 residents

Cities throughout North America set standards for the area of parkland per one thousand residents. Standards are used to compare neighbourhood ratios within a city and to compare public park area totals with other cities. The theory is good, but in practice, this exercise is of limited usefulness and often misleading. Accurate comparisons with other cities are impossible because some cities count boulevards, medians, school grounds and other green spaces and others don't.

Within the City of Victoria, one might expect a more meaningful comparison. Immediately, however, problems arise. In James Bay, the city usually includes half of Beacon Hill Park, a city-wide destination park, in the neighbourhood park area totals; the

city's "Neighbourhood boundaries" map divides the park in half between James Bay and Fairfield. A Parks Department parks list received in June, 2009 listed the entire 74.12 ha. (183.08 acres) of Beacon Hill Park in the James Bay park area total.

The JBNA 2009 park inventory lists Beacon Hill Park separately in order not to overwhelm the area figure for neighbourhood and community parks. The city classifies Beacon Hill Park as a "city wide destination park." According to a Parks Department statement, Victoria's largest park is visited by about two million people per year. It is heavily used by Greater Victoria residents who run their dogs at Finlayson Point, visit children's attractions (the Farm, two water play features, two playgrounds) and attend special events. The city promotes the park as an attraction, drawing tourists from around the world. It is clear James Bay residents are not the major users of Beacon Hill Park.

Some residents would like the city to stop counting any portion of the park in the James Bay total; others disagree, pointing out that James Bay could lose "special status" in regards to consultation that our community and Fairfield currently share. In any case, it is reasonable for the two neighbourhoods directly adjacent to Beacon Hill Park to be consulted on park issues.

The current Official Community Plan (OCP) standard for parkland in the City of Victoria is **1.54 ha. per 1000 residents**. Gary Darrah explained the actual overall city-wide figure is "more like 2.3 ha/1000, so the OCP standard is way out and will be amended when the master plan is approved by council." By comparison, Saanich claims 5.0 ha/1000 and Langford 6.0 ha/1000. Here are the official James Bay numbers:

James Bay population (2006): 11,260  
City-owned park land total (*without BHP*): 14.36 ha  
*Current James Bay park land ratio: 1.28 ha/1000*

However, the population figure is too low: it does not include the neighbourhood's large year-round transient population of about 3,000. Even using the base population number, the James Bay park area figure of 1.28 ha. per 1000 residents does not meet the city's current low standard of 1.54 ha. per 1000 residents. According to Darrah, however, the James Bay's ratio of parkland per 1000 residents "looks good" by comparison with other neighbourhoods. Darrah adds almost 40 ha. of Beacon Hill Park to James Bay's total, dramatically increasing the neighbourhood park ratio to about 4.57 ha/1000. Counting only neighbourhood parks, community parks and greens in the James Bay total provides a more realistic perspective and might enhance the possibility of acquiring more park land in James Bay in the future.

City staff uses the figure of 183.08 acres (74.12 ha) for Beacon Hill Park's total acreage despite the fact that about thirty of those acres have been permanently covered for decades by major city streets (Douglas, Dallas, Southgate, Heywood and Park). That means about fifteen acres of unusable asphalt-covered street are added to both James Bay and Fairfield neighbourhood park area totals. If 154 acres were used, the ratio of parkland to James Bay population would be lowered to about 4.04ha/1000.

The Parks Committee encourages the city to acknowledge thirty acres of Beacon Hill Park are inaccessibly buried under city streets and to return to the more realistic park area figure of 154 acres, the figure previously used by the city for at least five decades.

#### **IV. Accessibility Guidelines**

Proximity and accessibility to park land are key factors for residents. The U.S. NRPA standard recommends residents access a city park within six walking blocks of their homes. According to access guidelines used by the City of Victoria, neighbourhood parks should be within a 400m walking distance while community parks and city-wide destination parks should be within an 800m walking distance. Darrah states that under that standard, "James Bay is well covered." Unfortunately, park space is not evenly distributed in James Bay. Residents in the east and southeast live closer to large parks (Beacon Hill Park and Holland Point). Residents in other parts of the neighbourhood, especially the west, are less well served. Accessibility is further restricted when residents and parks are separated by busy arterials like Dallas Road and Douglas Street. These are formidable barriers for families with children and the elderly. Maximizing accessibility for the blind and others with disabilities is also essential.

#### **V. Increasing James Bay park space**

Increasing the city's parks and green space is a desirable goal. The new Parks Master Plan will ask council to support the concept of buying more land for parks. If approved, Darrah explained, "...staff will develop a more detailed land acquisition strategy where specific parcels will be identified."

James Bay is a long-established residential area with high property values and more park land than some other neighbourhoods; acquiring land to develop a new park or to expand an existing park in our community will be difficult. Other cities have managed to do that despite daunting challenges. Beginning in the late 1970's, Saanich began buying up derelict houses and properties; by 2001, twenty-four properties had been acquired. These were consolidated and developed into beautiful Rutledge Park. Gary Darrah, now the City of Victoria's top park planner, designed and led that successful project.

Some property acquisition in James Bay will be necessary to complete the proposed Harbour Pathway project, according to Darrah.

There are other possibilities for future land acquisition. Property or money to buy property could be donated by an individual, organization or governments. Portions of provincially owned land in James Bay covered by parking lots could become park or green space when land is developed. Decommissioning a street to create a park or dead-ending a street with a green space (e.g. Avalon Green) is possible. The city could acquire 2.25 acres owned by Transport Canada on Laurel Point - currently maintained by the city - if it were possible to avoid taking responsibility for contaminated soil on the site. When valuable waterfront land currently used by the Coast Guard on Dallas Road is declared surplus by the Government of Canada, the city could be ready with a proposal to create a harbour gateway park.

An innovative proposal for Ogden Point could provide more park land. "Decking" a large area of the parking lot would create an elevated area of playing fields and other park features while parking continued below. Decking would also have the benefit of buffering the community from the nuisances created at Ogden Point. Similar projects been successful at many locations around the world: parks have been constructed over sewage treatment plants and freeways as well as over parking areas.

Recognizing the many obstacles to acquiring additional park land, it is clear every existing piece of public open space in our community - no matter how small or undistinguished - should be valued, appreciated, protected, maintained and improved. The JBNA Parks Committee would like to work in partnership with the Parks Department to do that. We welcome discussion and seek the support of the Board and membership to move forward on the following concerns and suggestions.

## **Part Two - Proposals**

### **Communication between the Parks Department and James Bay residents:**

1. The JBNA Parks Committee proposes a Parks Department staff person provide regularly scheduled monthly information about James Bay parks. Monthly communications sharing detailed information about maintenance, repairs, planned changes, improvements and other issues is the goal. This could be accomplished with a monthly park update email and/or phone call. Information provided could be included in monthly Parks Committee Reports and in the *James Bay Beacon*.

Currently, the Parks Committee must respond to each park incident or issue after the fact by contacting a staff person for an explanation. Informing residents *before* a

change occurs is desirable. Providing information on a regular basis to residents is good public relations for the city and important for residents. More information increases resident understanding and appreciation of the city's work as well as reducing angry phone calls (both to the committee and park staff).

2. Signs should be posted on damaged structures in parks to inform residents that damage has been noted and repairs planned. Faced with visible damage for months and in the absence of information from the city, many residents become angry and conclude "repairs will never happen," "the city doesn't care," or "the city isn't doing their job." The piece of plywood nailed on the playground structure in Irving Park is one example. It has remained in place for many months; most residents do not know the city is awaiting delivery of a replacement metal slide. A laminated paper notice stapled on the plywood would be a simple and practical way to better inform park users.

### **City consultation and James Bay residents:**

1. A meaningful public consultation process should take place before important changes occur in a James Bay park or any other city park.

In the past, the City of Victoria has too often omitted or severely limited public consultation on important park issues in James Bay. There was no public consultation process before South Park was leased to the school district fifteen years ago. There was little public consultation when a mural was painted at Irving Park in August, 2009. In September, 2009, council voted to replace and enlarge the goat barn in the Beacon Hill Park Children's Farm without public consultation. The most important recent example, however, involved the loss of Fisherman's Wharf Park land. The City of Victoria did not inform or consult residents before granting a "License to Occupy" a portion of the park to the Greater Victoria Harbour Authority to use as roadway. This remains a major issue for residents since the City did not seek reasonable compensation through formal acquisition of other GVHA lands adjacent to the park that are currently de-facto parkland but owned by GVHA.

The JBNA Parks Committee strongly believes the city should continue public consultation in a meaningful way through every stage of the development of Fisherman's Wharf Park. Unfortunately, the city terminated formal public consultation after the initial design concept stage, though many key decisions lie ahead, including design changes, decisions on park furniture, materials, equipment and public art. Excluding residents from input into these decisions is not reasonable or acceptable.

2. A step should be added to the city's public art selection process to include more resident consultation when art is proposed in a city park or so placed as to impact a public park.

A review process for proposed art and other park installations was recommended but not implemented in the *Beacon Hill Park Heritage Landscape Management Plan 2004* (page 61). Consultants suggested a group be appointed and guidelines set for evaluating proposed installations. One specific recommendation was that new features should be considered only if the "person, event or achievement proposed to be commemorated has direct historical and/or geographical relevance to the Park."

It is important to have an evaluation process and guidelines in place for every city park, not just Beacon Hill. Proposed monuments, in particular, are emotional projects for families and groups. Good guidelines are the best way to deflect inappropriate plans. The Parks Committee recommends an appropriate group be appointed to evaluate the suitability of art, monuments, structures and other installations proposed for city parks or so placed as to impact a public park.

While the city is developing a more responsive and inclusive public art consultation process, an interim meaningful input process is needed for Fisherman's Wharf Park. Public art decisions are expected in the near future as part of the park's ongoing development plan; it is vital that James Bay residents be part of that public art selection process.

### **Improvements needed: Focus on Six James Bay Parks**

1. **Holland Point Park**, at fourteen acres, is the largest park in James Bay. The park is a unique expanse of grassy fields, wildflowers, trees and shrubs. Miraculously, the park remains mostly undeveloped: no road intrudes into this oasis; there are few built features except the yacht pond, benches and stairs down to pleasant beaches. A dog on-leash requirement in this park has provided a sanctuary for other walkers and protected vegetation from destruction (overuse by off-leash dogs and their owners destroyed camas fields at Finlayson Point). A well-used scenic waterfront pathway, running through the park along the Dallas Road cliffs, features spectacular views of the Strait of Juan de Fuca and Olympic Mountains. Holland Point Park is one of the few city parks not zoned residential because it was transferred from the Crown to the City of Victoria on February 21, 1882 at the same time Beacon Hill Park was transferred to the city; as a result, both parks have special status.

Standards of maintenance have declined steadily in the more natural areas of all city parks after staff cuts began in the 1990s; necessary annual work to keep invasive

species in check slowed, then halted. Natural areas in Holland Point Park are now overwhelmed by ivy, blackberries, elms and other invasive species which choke out native plants. Campers remain for days or weeks in clumps of trees and shrubs, littering the area with clothes, tarps and garbage. More city staff hours are needed to maintain natural areas.

Resident volunteers are also needed. A work session to cleanup and remove invasive species could be organized by the JBNA once or twice a year in cooperation with the Parks Department and possibly in concert with University of Victoria students.

**2. MacDonald Park** is James Bay's second largest park, with an area of almost nine acres. It was classified by the city in July as a "community park," which, according to the city's definition, should offer "a range of services." At this time, the park does not provide "a range of services" or primarily serve James Bay residents. Currently, a more accurate classification for MacDonald Park would be "city-wide, special-purpose park." This park consists almost entirely of vast sports fields and a sports change room building, heavily used by teams from the wider city and region, not the neighbourhood. Because of the single-use nature of this park for team sports, it is largely unavailable to residents.

In October, Darrah reported: "There is a license agreement in place between the city and school district for MacDonald Park. It seems to cover the entire park but specifically mentions the two ball diamonds, one rugby pitch and the playground. The general provisions are the same as South Park." This lease had been forgotten, yet no problems occurred in years of sharing the park, a strong indication a lease is not necessary.

The MacDonald sports fields should be part of a city-wide future discussion about balanced use of city park space as well as the cost of maintaining fields. According to David Speed, Assistant Director for Parks, Victoria has seventeen sports fields. The cost of maintaining these fields in 2008 was \$400,000, 6% of the Parks budget; approximately \$75,000 in fees was paid by sport field users. It seems reasonable adults should pay their full share of actual city costs to maintain the MacDonald Park fields and other fields they use in the city.

There are small scale improvements at MacDonald Park which could increase resident use and enjoyment of the park. One opportunity lies along Niagara Street at the south edge of the park. This block-long strip of land is about sixty feet wide. Standing at street level above the field, it appears like a separate linear park, dominated by row of large trees and grass. Trimming lower tree branches would open up the area for walking and providing good locations for picnic tables and benches. There are no picnic tables in the park at this time; the only benches are in the playground.

The west end of the park includes several small unused and neglected areas which might be improved. Five signs posted at the northwest corner parking lot, which is city property, are confusing and unwelcoming. Improved wording is needed.

The JBNA Parks Committee recommends park staff and nearby residents meet to discuss these suggestions and other ways to provide additional features and a variety of recreation uses for residents.

**3. Fisherman's Wharf Park** is the third largest James Bay park at 4.69 acres. Situated near the wharf and on the new Harbour Pathway, it has great potential but was neglected for years. A development plan has begun to improve the park. Two key issues relating to the development need action.

Issue #1: The city should continue public consultation in a meaningful way through every stage of the development of Fisherman's Wharf Park (see previous section).

Issue #2: The City of Victoria granted a "License to Occupy" a portion of Fisherman's Wharf Park to the Greater Victoria Harbour Authority for the purpose of roadway expansion. This was done without consultation with residents. The city missed an important opportunity to negotiate a land trade for this property. The GVHA owns lands which are currently used as parkland and which contain a line of mature trees along the extension of Dallas Road leading down to Fisherman's Wharf Park. An equitable exchange of land from the GVHA should be arranged that would benefit the park and the residents of James Bay. The amount of land acquired should be equal to or greater than the lands granted to the GVHA as a License to Occupy. The Parks Committee believes the JBNA should oppose any extension of the "License to Occupy" until such a land exchange is completed.

**4. South Park** is James Bay's fourth largest park, at three and a half acres. In 1993, South Park was classified as a "neighbourhood park." Though it still fits the definition of a "neighbourhood park" (over .5 ha. and near an elementary school), it was reclassified "park land leased to school" fifteen years ago. The lease of South Park to the school district was arranged without community consultation and has drastically curtailed use of this park by residents ever since.

Signs posted on the fences surrounding South Park state: "Reserved. South Park School Use Only. 8 a.m. - 4 p.m. Mon.-Fri." That wording indicates residents are completely excluded during school hours even when students are inside the school; no exceptions for holidays or summer are stated. By contrast, there are no exclusionary signs posted on the fences of MacDonald Park adjacent to the James Bay Community School grounds.

Gary Darrah, Manager of Park Planning and Design for City of Victoria Parks, Recreation and Community Development, told the Parks Committee in August, 2009: “As long as it is public property, you have a right to be on it if you aren’t doing anything unlawful...The lease itself says nothing about exclusive use during the day and we have drawn this to the attention of School District senior management.” Whether or not residents are legally excluded remains unclear; in practice, residents are told to leave or not depending on the zeal of individual adults supervising students.

Darrah said in August, 2009, that wording on the sign with the school district. “I fully expect it will be revised to eliminate any reference to exclusive use. In the meantime, James Bay residents should feel free to use the park Monday through Friday as they desire.” If appropriate improvements are not forthcoming, the JBNA should request a three-way meeting with the Parks Department and the School District to discuss ways to increase cooperative use of this park.

**5. Irving Park** is the fifth largest park in James Bay at almost two acres. Located in the centre of the neighbourhood, it has the potential to become the vibrant heart of the community but currently is underutilized.

A complete redesign of Irving Park, led by the community, must be undertaken to transform the park into a more open and welcoming meeting place with varied features. The current park configuration and design present major obstacles. Unwelcoming fences surround the park and restrict entry; an ugly concrete restroom building blocks one entrance. The playground is set too close to the street and needs new and more innovative play equipment. The labyrinth is unsuccessful and should be removed.

Irving Park should be James Bay’s next major park improvement project. Any redesign should consider long term plans for the “Five Corners” area and the possibility of redevelopment along the Menzies Street corridor to create a true Town Centre concept for the area. Irving Park would be a key feature of the Town Centre concept.

**6. Charles Redfern Park** is a small, mostly ignored and unappreciated city park at Quebec and Montreal. Anchored by four huge mature trees, it has the potential to be a more pleasant and interesting green space. Current features include brown lawn, meagre plantings, three benches and a dedication granite boulder explaining the park is named after Charles Redfern, who served as city Mayor from 1883 to 1897. This park is long overdue for an upgrade.