

James Bay Parks and Green Space Inventory and Assessment 2011

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2009 (updated 2011) 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
Total city park area in James Bay*			35.49	14.37

* 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

Quadra Park	Belleville/Oswego		0.52	0.21
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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 – updated 2011

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 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. This report provides the city's park classification definitions, zoning information, standard ratios of park land to population, accessibility guidelines and suggests possibilities for increasing James Bay park space.

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 will be included in the city's Parks Master Plan and is used in this 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 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 your comments and suggestions.