



1715 Government Street, Victoria, BC
V8W 1Z4

June 24, 2021.

Dear Mayor, Council and City Parks Department,
Re: Support for free community access at Royal Athletic Park

On behalf of the Downtown Residents Association (DRA), I am writing in support of North Park Neighbourhood Association's request that free community access to Royal Athletic Park be provided.

Through partnering with non-profits and community groups Royal Athletic Park has the potential to provide opportunities for accessible economic development. RAP is a great venue to host free food security and craft markets, community fitness classes, arts performances, and concerts. However, as it is currently operated, it is very difficult for small scale community groups to use RAP. The minimum booking cost for Royal Athletic Park is just over \$300.00, and the Parks Department is unable to provide any leniency on this under the current Fees & Services Bylaw.

Royal Athletic Park is currently underused and operates at a deficit without providing sufficient benefit to the community. According to the annual report, Royal Athletic Park was booked 25% of the year in 2019 (92 bookings). This means that for 75% of the year the largest greenspace in North Park sat completely empty. RAP is considered an open-air stadium for sports games and events. However, this *alone* does not meet the needs of the community. The North Park and immediately surrounding communities are made up of some of the least affluent and most diverse residents in the city. Despite this fact, none of the city owned facilities (Save on Foods Memorial Arena, Crystal Pool, Royal Athletic Park) are free and accessible to the community.

There is a significant shortage of accessible green space in North Park. The 2012 Official Community Plan recommends that another park be added to the North Park neighbourhood. Currently, North Park falls significantly below the city average of 3.16 hectares of park space per 1000 residents. North Park is at 1.23 *including* Royal Athletic Park.

The need for increased green space is going to be felt more acutely in the next 20 years as increased density adds to the number of North Park residents. However, with increased pressure and urgency to address the housing crisis, dedicating valuable land to green space has its challenges and will become increasingly financially unfeasible. As a greenspace deficient neighbourhood as well as a neighbourhood without a community centre, providing free community access to Royal Athletic Park would immediately improve North Park's access to both. Two problems could be ameliorated in one step.

As a neighbourhood association, the DRA shares many of the same concerns and issues as challenge North Park. I am asking Mayor and Council to reimagine how Royal Athletic Park can serve North Park, an equity deserving neighbourhood, by making RAP freely accessible and available to book through a park permit when not in use for sports or special events.

Sincerely,

Sandra Severs
President
Downtown Residents Association