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COPE commissioner Loretta Woodcock: "It's about equal to the entire cricket area. And the park board is going to give it away for free." Photo-Dan Toulgoet

COPE stepping up opposition to bigger footprint

By Sandra Thomas-Staff writer

Parks commissioner Loretta Woodcock invited journalists to Brockton Point in Stanley Park this morning to demonstrate what 1.5 acres looks like.

"It's about equal to the entire cricket area," COPE's Woodcock told the Courier Wednesday. "And the park board is going to give it away for free."

The Vancouver Aquarium-Marine Science Centre wants to expand its footprint in the park by 1.5 acres, mostly south of the main entrance in an area once occupied by the city's defunct zoo, and build larger pools for the beluga whales, sea lions and dolphins. The proposal includes plans for two new galleries, meeting rooms, a larger gift shop and a new restaurant.

The first hurdle to the \$80 million expansion was removed in May when the majority NPA members of the parks board rescinded a 1995 decision requiring any aquarium expansion be put to a referendum. The expansion proposal goes to the parks board for approval Monday night. A public consultation is underway, which includes a survey that will go to aquarium members across B.C.

Woodcock believes people surveyed about the expansion have no idea how large the area under discussion is.

"When you use the old-school method it works out to 65,340 square feet. That's a lot of footage," said Woodcock. "We used to measure things by square foot, but now they use the new-school method and it comes out to 1.5 acres."

Woodcock notes that at a July 10 board meeting, the NPA commissioners supported a plan to allow the aquarium to increase its footprint by 27 per cent, or the equivalent of one acre. But after questions were raised regarding the public consultation, the decision was deferred until Sept. 10.

"Now in September the aquarium has come back with new expansion plans increasing its footprint by 50 per cent. This is 21 per cent more than in July."

NPA commissioner Ian Robertson said not all the land sought by the aquarium is green space.

Parks chair Heather Holden can't comment on the issue because she works at the aquarium, which put her in a conflict of interest.

"It's not all lawn with plants and trees," he said. "It's already a concrete plaza and that makes a big difference."

Robertson said from the time the park's zoo closed in 1997, the parks board had a plan to redevelop the plaza. He said the latest proposal is the eight or ninth design parks staff have considered for the area.

"It's not like we're taking down trees," said Robertson. "It's already concrete."

Woodcock said the staff technical report regarding the plan shows 32 trees will be cut down in Stanley Park.

"I want the public to come out [to Brockton Point] and see for themselves what this expansion involves," she said. "Imagine taking a public park this size and giving it away for free."

Aquarium president John Nightingale was away until after the Courier's press deadline yesterday.