

Lifeforce opposed to aquarium expansion
Society says 'there is enough wildlife to enjoy without spending millions on animal prisons'

Kent Spencer, The Province
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Lifeforce Foundation is speaking out against expansion of the Vancouver Aquarium.

"There is enough wildlife to enjoy without spending millions on animal prisons," said Peter Hamilton, 56, a founding director of the non-profit society. "Aquarium expansion means more animals suffering."

The aquarium is undertaking a \$300,000 public-consultation process as part of an \$80-million proposal to expand. The plan requires approval from the Vancouver parks board.

Canada's largest sea-life exhibitor wants to deepen pools for dolphins, belugas and sea lions. A larger gift shop, two new galleries and expanded food services would also be included.

Hamilton said the "zoo industry" needs to be prevented from contributing to the "destruction of public green space."

Beavers, seals, raccoons, squirrels, jays, geese and herons are already on view for free in nature, said Hamilton.

"The aquarium is talking about a seabird facility. You can see seabirds flying freely as you walk around the seawall," he said.

Hamilton said Lifeforce, which is celebrating its 25th anniversary, has a "few hundred" members.

Aquarium president John Nightingale said the facility contributes to society.

"People are telling us we have been a valuable contributor to the community for years," he said.

Nightingale said Hamilton "is entitled to his views" but notes that in the past he has given out "a lot of disinformation and distortion."

"His facts have been questionable," Nightingale said.

The parks board is awaiting a report from the aquarium on the public-consultation process, which wraps up on Oct. 30. Parks commissioners will vote at the end of November.

Aquarium supporters note that only 30 trees would need to come out and less than a hectare of land is required out of the park's 400 hectares.

"Nobody seems hugely upset about the trees," said Nightingale. "We have offered to plant two-for-one. People are glad the lower zoo would get rebuilt. The old cage areas have been planted with flowers and that's not something they're designed for."

A three-dimensional model is on display at the West End Community Centre, 870 Denman Street.

More info can be obtained at www.aquariumconsultation.ca.

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WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Tell us by e-mail at provletters@png.canwest.com or by fax to 604-605-2223. Please include your name and address.

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