

# Memorandum

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To: Parks and Recreation Commission  
CC: Anna Mathewson  
Julie Pavey-Tomlinson  
From: City of Port Moody Environment  
File #: 590747  
Date: October 4, 2022  
Subject: **Bert Flinn Park Forest Decorating – Management & Recommendations**

## 1. Summary

This memo concerns annual winter holiday decorating by residents in natural off-trail areas of Bert Flinn Park. This memo outlines issues related to ongoing (and increasing) decorating in Bert Flinn Park as identified by Environment staff and offers possible management strategies.

### History and Background

- Residents have been installing holiday decorations through Bert Flinn Park since approximately 2016 (+5 years). This initiative appears to have gained traction during Covid.
- Decorations are generally hung off of trees and shrubs along the pedestrian pathways, but extend into wetland and habitat areas. The total area affected area is approximate 30,000 m<sup>2</sup> (the majority of the pedestrian pathway).
- Over 70 trees were decorated in December 2021, per Urban Forestry.
- Decorations are typically installed through December and largely cleaned up after New Years.
- Decorating does not appear to be part of an organized community initiative.
- Decoration materials include tinsel, fine plastics, glass, wood, and arts/crafts (e.g., pipe-cleaners, pompoms, etc.).
- Public involvement appears to be increasing over time (more decorations, larger area).
- Strong opinions on Facebook with around 10 vocal players (decorating advocates).

### Issues Identified by Parks & Environment Staff

- Decorating encourages off-trail foot traffic to install, remove, and observe decorations. This may contribute to off-trail erosion, trampling of vegetation, and ecological disturbance.
- Staff have observed decorating to-date to be relatively minor, but a growing trend.
- Despite cleanups, some forgotten items and plastics persist in the natural environment.
- The use of glass or tinsel may pose harm to wildlife (injury, entanglement). Some items may be mistaken by wildlife as prey or food.
- The use of food (e.g., candy canes) may attract wildlife or make dogs sick.
- Decorating in Bert Flinn Park is not compatible with Environment's restoration and conservation efforts in park spaces.

# Considered at October 12, 2022

## Parks and Recreation Commission Meeting

Bert Flinn Park Forest Decorating – Management & Recommendations

October 2022

### Key Resident Comments, 2019-2021 (Facebook)

- Decorating in Bert Flinn Park is an important tradition for some local families. The rationale for decorating includes general fun and enjoyment, faith-based or cultural reasons, or memorializing a loved one.
- Decorating advocates remark that the City would have intervened by now if it was a problem.
- Decorating opposition has highlighted concerns for wildlife, remnant/persistent materials in the Park, that decorating is a form of garbage, and that it is a shared space and decorating should be limited to private property.
- Recommendations include the City installing signage and providing education/outreach.

## 2. Opportunities and Recommendations

The following section highlights opportunities for public engagement and education, options for minimizing environmental impacts, and Environment's recommendations for managing public decorating in Bert Flinn Park.

### City-Led Engagement Opportunities

- Wildlife, forest, and habitat education (Environment, Urban Forestry)
- Leave-no-trace education (Environment, Parks)
- Microplastics and single-use-plastics education (Environment, Parks, Solid Waste)
- Attractant management education (Environment, Solid Waste)
- Promotion of alternative 'eco-friendly' decorations/crafts, including weekend craft events for children, seniors, youth, and families (Environment, Parks, Arts Centre, Library, Recreation)
- Post-holiday tree planting event (Urban Forestry)
- Post-holiday cleanup of Bert Flinn Park (Environment, Parks, Solid Waste)

### Options for Minimizing Environmental Impacts

- Restrict or redirect off-trail foot traffic through signage or fencing
- Prohibit all decorating in Bert Flinn Park
- Prohibit all decorating in all City Parks
- Prohibit the use of certain decoration materials (e.g., glass, tinsel, food/candy, single-use plastics) and encourage the use of 'eco-friendly' decoration alternatives
- Provide alternative decorating mediums or spaces for residents in open, urbanized areas of Bert Flinn Park (e.g., along the forest trail or off-leash/gravel trail)

### Considerations

- Vandalism (removal of décor by residents)
- Appropriate budget and staff time necessary to carry out proposed management strategies
- One-size-fits-all approach, and potential exclusion of other City neighbourhoods by focusing on one park area (equitable distribution)

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### Recommendations

#### 1. Option 1: Do Nothing

##### Low Cost, Low Staff Effort

- Allows decorating activities to continue and/or increase over time.
- No budget or planning required. Staff effort as needed.
- Encroachment into off-trail areas will continue.
- Community tensions may increase over issue and lack of City involvement. Residents will intervene and manage the issue.
- City does not take a stance either way.

HIGH	\$\$\$ > \$5,000	3 people > 3 Depts.
MEDIUM	\$\$\$ \$500 - \$2,000	2 people 2 – 3 Depts.
LOW	\$ \$0 - \$500	1 person 0 – 1 Depts.
	COST	EFFORT

#### 2. Option 2: Prohibit Decorating in all City Parks

##### Low Cost, Medium Staff Effort

- City takes clear stance and uses opportunity for education (wildlife, plastics, etc.).
- Can involve signage, fencing, and social media.
- Can involve a City policy.
- May not stop issue at hand.
- May give rise to 'City hates Christmas' perception.

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LOW	\$ \$0 - \$500	1 person 0 – 1 Depts.
	COST	EFFORT

#### 3. Option 3: Provide Decorating Guidelines and Outreach

##### Medium Cost, Medium Staff Effort

- Develop a document that includes outdoor decorating guidelines, including prohibited materials and recommended low-waste ('eco-friendly') alternatives.
- Can host a community craft event with the Library, Arts Centre, and/or Rec Centre.
- Does not prohibit decorating of natural vegetation in Parks.
- May not stop issue at hand.
- May not sufficiently discourage off-trail foot traffic.

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MEDIUM	\$\$\$ \$500 - \$2,000	2 people 2 – 3 Depts.
LOW	\$ \$0 - \$500	1 person 0 – 1 Depts.
	COST	EFFORT

#### 4. Option 4: Develop a 2022 Pilot Event in Bert Flinn Park

##### Medium Cost, High Staff Effort

- Develop a pilot decorating event for 2022 in Bert Flinn Park, using guidelines developed as described in Option 3.
- Install fifty (50) potted fir trees along the off-leash/gravel trail for residents to decorate (see West Vancouver's annual 'Forest of Miracles'). In the New Year, trees can be replanted in natural areas under the Urban Forestry Management Strategy. The cost for trees is approximately \$3,500.
- Allows decorating in open, urbanized areas of the Park while discouraging decorating in sensitive natural areas.
- With the focus on one Park only, may exclude other neighbourhoods from this initiative.
- Pioneer Park has not been considered as the majority of residents decorating in Bert Flinn Park appear to live in the immediate vicinity and may not be persuaded to decorate elsewhere.

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