



Review of Victoria's Boulevard Program

The City of Victoria has approximately 300 kilometres of boulevards within its boundaries. Most of these boulevards are maintained by property owners who own the land adjacent to the boulevard.

Currently the City offers a maintenance service (for a fee of approximately \$2.50 per square metre) to mow, water, and fertilize boulevard grass. This service fee is applied to a property owner's tax bill as a 'boulevard tax' and it is adjusted annually to cover costs. Dependent upon the size of boulevard that fronts a property, an owner could pay from \$30 up to \$575 per year to have the City maintain the boulevard.

Property owners can choose to opt out of this service and do their own maintenance. Fewer than 28% of Victoria property owners pay for the City to maintain the boulevard with the balance preferring to manage the boulevard themselves.

As more and more property owners choose to maintain the boulevards themselves, and as the City's maintenance service continues to rise due to resource costs, the City is reviewing the Boulevard Taxation Program to determine if it is viable and sustainable.

As part of this review, the City is also looking at possible alternatives for boulevards other than grass. This fall, the Parks Division will present a report to Council on the Boulevard Taxation Program and options for boulevard maintenance and would like your opinion and suggestions.

What are "boulevards"?

Generally speaking, boulevards are the grassy strip of land between a property and the street and are owned by the City. The majority of boulevards have grass and trees between the sidewalk and the curb. Boulevards are also corridors for utilities such as hydro and gas lines and must be maintained so there is always easy access to these services.

How did we get here?

Boulevards date back to 1907 when the City started constructing them as part of a local improvement program. Around that same time period, a bylaw was adopted that imposed a tax that was later enhanced in 1911 to include all future boulevards in the "boulevard taxation program."

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

David Speed, Assistant Director, Parks Division
Parks, Recreation and Community Development Department

T 250.361.0600
E parks@victoria.ca

1 CENTENNIAL SQUARE, VICTORIA, BC V8W 1P6 | www.victoria.ca



In 1920, the boulevard tax was incorporated into the Victoria City Act that expressly gave Council power to impose this tax to provide for the cost of boulevard maintenance. By the 1950s, boulevard construction had increased and property owners that fronted the boulevards were encouraged to top-dress and seed them, with the City supplying the soil and seed for free. There was no "boulevard tax" levied for these property owners.

In the mid-1980s, property owners who were still having the City maintain their boulevard could opt out of the program and maintain the boulevards themselves if 67% of the block was in favour. By 1997, 17 blocks had withdrawn from the Boulevard Taxation Program and the trend continued through until today when only 28% of property owners remain within the program.

What alternatives to grass are being considered?

In other jurisdictions, like the City of Vancouver, gardens are allowed on boulevards as long as easy access to utilities is maintained, do not hinder pedestrians, and do not pose a safety hazard. The City of Victoria is considering alternatives including flower and/or vegetable gardens, and is looking for input from the community.

What if there are trees on the boulevard?

Boulevard trees are part of Victoria's urban forest and the City would maintain them regardless of any changes to the Boulevard Taxation Program. More information about Victoria's urban forest can be found at www.victoria.ca/urbanforest

What are some possible alternatives to the current Boulevard Taxation Program?

1. Eliminate the Boulevard Taxation Program:
 - Boulevards would be maintained by adjacent property owners (residential, institutional, and business).
2. Reorganize the boulevard maintenance program:
 - Eliminate the Boulevard Taxation Program (adjacent property owners would maintain) and;
 - The City would continue to maintain non-residential and high profile boulevards that are in strategic tourist areas (e.g., along main corridors leading into downtown).
3. Eliminate the Boulevard Taxation Program and have the City maintain all City-owned boulevards using general tax funds.

What if boulevards are not being maintained by property owners and become unsightly or a potential hazard?

Many municipalities have a boulevard maintenance bylaw that regulates the maintenance of boulevards by adjacent property owners. The City will be looking at this type of bylaw as part of the Boulevard Taxation Program review.

How can residents provide input?

From now until the end of June, the City is encouraging residents – particularly property owners – to share their ideas by completing a survey or sending an email or letter so that a balanced report can be provided to Council in the fall.

Tell Us What You Think

Please take 10 minutes to fill out a survey and let us know what you think about the City's Boulevard Taxation Program.

- An online survey is available at www.victoria.ca/boulevards
- Print copies of the survey are available at the Public Service Centre at City Hall, local libraries, and at the Crystal Pool and Fitness Centre.
- Emails can be sent to David Speed, Assistant Director of Parks at parcs@victoria.ca
- Completed surveys or letters can be faxed to 250.361.0615 or mailed to:

David Speed
Assistant Director, Parks Division
Parks, Recreation and Community Development
City of Victoria
1 Centennial Square
Victoria, BC V8W 1P6

For more information, visit www.victoria.ca/boulevards