

Get outside... it's naturally fun!

Contributed by Sloane Elphinstone, Recreation Programmer, City of New Westminster Parks and Recreation

While the wise trend of 'walking meetings' has long been practiced, it was a specific gathering in 2015 that truly resonated with our team. The intent of this outdoor meeting was to ask what we are doing to connect ourselves and our residents to the outdoors. So we took off on foot and strolled through our parks and streets, right in the middle of the city. This casual three kilometre walk exposed us to meadows and creeks, plants and trees, puddles and ponds... we saw bugs and birds, turtles and fish, spiders and bees... we listened, we touched, we saw, we sniffed, we BREATHED... And then we returned to our desks.

But the resulting impact of this **one** meeting was immediate and clear. A group of us gathered to look at our programs, services and spaces and to share what was happening in other municipalities. We were inspired by the great work of Wild About Vancouver and their passion to connect people to the outdoors through fun, free educational opportunities. We knew we could be doing better. The formation of our committee initially consisted of Parks & Recreation's Horticultural Operations Coordinator, Recreation Programmers and a Recreation Manager and quickly evolved to include the City's Environmental Coordinator, Arts Programmer, Landscape Design Technician and a Carpenter. School District 40 and Fraser Health joined the committee and we connected with Douglas College, Metro Vancouver, and several local agencies, all already doing great work. We built on our current offerings, strengthened our partnerships and brought new energy to nature based initiatives in our community.

We call it "Naturally New West". We create fishing opportunities, horticultural programs, nature camps, educational programs, community walks and, most recently we even applied to be a Canadian "Bee City" to continue to grow local habitats for pollinators.

With nearly 300 acres of designated park land in New Westminster, we are lucky to celebrate the outdoors through the simple acts of walking, planting, meditating, playing, painting or exercising. "Naturally New West" highlights the environmental opportunities that take place outside and encourages creative play in nature. While we are proud of our past and current initiatives, we're extra-proud of the current movement to celebrate nature throughout our Province. We love hearing what everyone else is doing because we want do it too! We're so excited for what's ahead.

If you want to learn more about what we are doing, please contact selphinstone@newwestcity.ca

Location of our next meeting:

