

The Messenger LETTER

Beryl Gaffney Park a destination, not a neighbourhood park

The Editor,

If staff and some locals get their way, funding for Beryl Gaffney Park will go for asphalt and land acquisition. That's not in keeping with either best practice, or the 'City Park' vision.

How Did We Get Here?

Commencing in 1974, the former City of Nepean gradually acquired the 96 acres (39 ha) for what was originally Rideau Bend Park, and then re-named Beryl Gaffney Park in 1998, in honour of Nepean resident, Councillor, and Member of Parliament, Beryl Gaffney.

Since its inception, the park was envisaged as a destination park, not a neighbourhood park.

The 1999 Beryl Gaffney Park Master Plan - Developed in 1999, pre-amalgamation, by Landscape Architect, Steve Sunderland, Principal with Corush, Sunderland, & Wright, the BG Master Plan included: conservation of the existing forest, picnic area, pathways, a marsh boardwalk, adventure playground, outdoor skating pond, canoe/small boat rental and docks, fishing areas, amphitheatre, self-propelled channel ferry, parking and washroom amenities.

Post-Amalgamation

In 2006, Ottawa City Council approved the building of a headquarters facility for Rideau Valley Conservation Authority (RVCA), within Beryl Gaffney Park, with a remittance of \$32,000 annually to be invested in BG park development. In 2008 an updated Master Plan was done. A March 2008 staff report indicated that 'no substantive change to the original plan is needed.' A Park Development schedule identified the following items for construction between 2008-2018: signage, parking, washroom upgrades, trails, picnic area, picnic shelter, footbridge, lookout, lighting, site furnishings, and small boat docks.

Community Consultation & June 24 Meeting - After a decade and virtually none of the above accomplished, the City conducted two consultation sessions, and sought on-line input from the public on how to move forward with the updated 2008 Master Plan and priority spending for the park.

At the June 24, 2019 meeting, staff proposed two immediate actions for the \$1M BG Fund:

- Buy adjacent land to cre-

ate a fenced, off-leash dog park area (adjacent to Rideau Valley Drive) - \$400,000.

- Install a traffic light and parking lot off Prince of Wales, across from Capital Memorial Gardens - \$600,000.

Some residents opposed 'ANY' park development and the 'off-leash' crowd wanted assurances that the newly acquired 'off-leash' fenced area would not negate the whole park being retained as 'off-leash'.

Recommendations are Non-Starters - While adding acreage to Beryl Gaffney Park is fully aligned with the 'destination park' concept, there is no need to use the dedicated BG Park development funds. The City has city-wide cash-in-lieu of parkland funds and this is exactly how they could and should be used.

And why would another parking lot be put in, at this time, when the current parking lot is virtually NEVER at or near capacity?

Given our current fiscal climate, it's extremely difficult to secure 'park development' funds.

With \$1M allocated for Beryl Gaffney, the 'do nothing'

in the park approach, advocated by staff and some residents is, frankly, irresponsible.

Finding a Way Forward - It's now time to seriously invest in this destination park:

Put in the Picnic Areas and Shelter - replace the wild parsnip, tick-infested, dog-poop meadow that currently exists, with a well designed and maintained picnic space. - **Build the Adventure Play Area** - this was envisioned as a 'natural area' with climbing ropes and other amenities that both entertain and challenge children, fully complementary of both the picnic area and the natural features of the site.

Build the Marsh Boardwalk - there are very few opportunities where one can actually get to the Rideau waterfront and take in its beauty and serenity. Are kayaks and canoes really causing erosion? Surely, water access should be a priority - look at the success of Chapman Mills?

Build the Amphitheatre - there is a local group that is keen to work on this asset. Wouldn't it be wonderful to bike to BG Park, and listen to a Sunday afternoon concert, seated on a

blanket, on the natural incline the site offers?

Final Thoughts... - Beryl Gaffney Park will become another off-leash dog-walkers' paradise if it doesn't have the benefit of a Master Plan to guide it - just witness the nearby 35-acre David Bartlett Park where the organized Dog Walker's Association not only forced the removal of picnic tables, but opposed a waterfront pathway.

Poor maintenance is not the issue here - having a clear vision is. These are one-time capital dollars, not operating budgets. These are investments for the

future to serve many, not a few.

Unless City Council takes a broader and firmer stance, we'll get another 20 years and more wild parsnip. Let's hope that some of the former Nepean Councillors - Harder, Chiarelli - and others who can see beyond their own ward boundaries - provide some leadership.

If you have a broader vision for this precious park - a picnic area, play space, waterfront boardwalk -then get off your duff and send your thoughts today, to Beryl.Gaffney@ottawa.ca...and copy your Councillor.

Anne Robinson, Manotick

MANOTICK UNITED CHURCH

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