

**Minutes of Sibelius Square Community Meeting
Tuesday, 7 March 2006 at Royal St George's College, 120 Howland Avenue**

Present: Helen Kennedy (Chair), Sandy Straw, Nena Hardie, Patrick Kennedy, Paul Martel, and approx. 75 members of the community + 15 children

The meeting begins at 7:05 pm.

1. Helen Kennedy (EA to interim City Councillor Martin Silva) confirmed the agenda and summarized the funds available for improvements to Sibelius Square: \$100,000 now, and \$215,000 upon issuance of above-ground building permit for 100 Spadina (anticipated within 12-18 months).
2. Sandy Straw introduced herself (Manager in City of Toronto Dept of Parks, Forestry and Recreation; Manager of Parks Bylaw Enforcement Unit).
3. Community organization to date:
 - A. Nena Hardie outlined activities of Annex Residents' Association and its subcommittees, including Parks & Trees, of which the Sibelius Square Working Group is a subcommittee. She also represents the immediate neighbours of Sibelius Square.
 - B. Patrick Kennedy described the work of the SSWG since September 2004 – an online survey of park users and neighbours, establishment of various groups of park users and ongoing consultation.
 - C. Paul Martel, Chair of ARA Parks & Trees Committee, described the committee's current audit of Annex parks with respect to infrastructure & use.
 - D. Caroline Harvey described the activities of the Community Gardens group, which maintains all beds in the park except the central circle, which is the City's responsibility.
 - E. Gillian Morton described the objectives of the Dog Owners Group; to meet city guidelines as outlined in the new City Dogs-in-parks policy.
 - F. PK introduced Fred Freedman who, for some years, has been the community member instrumental in maintaining the natural ice rink.
 - F. Matt Turner spoke for the Share the Square group, which has, through consultation with families, identified current difficulties in using the square experienced by children and elders as a result of off-leash dog activity. The group wishes to accommodate the needs of dog-owners with an enclosed off-leash area.

4. Sandy Straw described the process the City requires to plan and implement improvements to Sibelius Square: a formalized community group that will work with Parks Dept planning staff to present a plan to the community. The plan will accommodate various uses and interests, and be subject to community review. Helen Kennedy anticipated a public meeting for this purpose in late April – May, which would be broadly announced through the community.

5. HK asked for direction from the community on whether to continue work with the present committee structure, emphasizing that all meetings of the SSWG with the City would be open to all.

Motion (moved by Don McKenzie/seconded by Eric Fraterman): that as a community we support the Working Group. Passed by strong show of hands.

6. Discussion of the Community Design Objectives and related issues followed:

- A. Question: Is there a role for Toronto Public Health in this process – reference to Dr Sheela Basrur’s Healthy Kids and Growing Active Kids Initiatives which state the need for planning officials to be involved in measures to combat obesity in children. Sandy Straw welcomes all involvement – says physical activity one of top 3 priorities for City parks planning.
- B. Turf needs to be restored for any use of park by children – discussion of options for turf, soil quality is adequate but surface and sub-soil drainage is poor.
- C. Representative of Playground Lobby for Active Youth challenged City to recognize that they had torn out a playground that served a much greater number of children on false pretexts, and that no play structures remain for children over 3.
- D. Suggestion that representatives of local schools should be involved, such as Montessori, ICS, RSGC.
- E. Previous landscape features removed from park “too expensive to maintain” – what provision for ongoing maintenance of new park features? HK alluded to present budget (but later spoke of maintenance as an issue for the budget committee each year).
- F. Question: What is the new Dogs-in-Parks strategy, and how does it differ from the old policy, under which dogs would not technically have been allowed off-leash in the Square? Sandy Straw responded that old guidelines were completely removed, replaced with the goal of creating mutually beneficial park experiences through three guiding principles. She gave two – protection of the environment and assets of the park; community decision-

making. Communities decide whether dogs should be allowed off-leash (in non-playground areas of parks) – issues include removal of dog activity from environmentally sensitive areas, education on responsible dog ownership, education of children & dogs about each other, increased emphasis on bylaw enforcement, annual opportunities for community review. The new policy was to have gone to Council this week, but is postponed until May, awaiting input from Municipal Licensing & Standards, Public Health, and Animal Services.

- G. Request (from 2 speakers) to reword final Design Objective to remove suggestion that Square is not currently shared.
- H. Suggestion that all responsible dog-owners would be willing to pick up after the irresponsible ones.
- I. Intensification of use of park, by both dogs and children, means that changes are necessary to accommodate everyone—presently children are fenced but dogs are not, suggests a fenced area for dogs and a larger fenced area for children.
- J. Adults use the park too – all suggested improvements welcome, but strongly recommends adding a sidewalk on the west side.
- K. Suggestion that the committee and all users have a responsibility to children whether one has them or not, as they represent the future. Children's interests must come first.
- L. Dog-owners have nowhere else to go.
- M. Is it possible to explore the use of the Albany Parkette as a dog-run? HK replied that Parks can look at it, as it is presently wasted.
- N. Social uses of park, other than by dog-owners, very important – older children, single women, single mother and other groups. Possibly city policies are based on outdated data.
- O. Speaker's 90 year old mother is afraid to go to the park with free-running dogs – concerned that enforcement is a problem & dogs are off-leash at other hours. Asks how other communities have found ways to share parks. Sandy Straw says responsibility is threefold: 1. The Dogs Off Leash group should consist of owners and non-owners to set reasonable policies, 2. It ensure policies followed and contacts Bylaw & Animal Service Officers 3. Efficient liaison with enforcement officers ensures effective patrolling, and more emphasis will be given to patrolling and enforcement. Examples of successful parks are Withrow, Monarch Park, and Hideaway Park.

- P. Gillian said that dog-owners group is divided 50/50 on an enclosed area – they would like a meeting with city officials and parents group to discuss other potential solutions.
- Q. Once children outgrow the baby playground they need space to play and can't because the dogs interfere.
- R. Some children are allergic to dogs, and perhaps a separate dog area should be considered.
- S. Some children enjoy playing in the same space as the dogs.
- T. Too many dogs in too small a space to allow for other uses, and all other users are reluctant to go to the park – residue from dog droppings.
- U. Is there any reasonable expectation of a more sophisticated play structure by summer 2007? HK says it's on the table & they will take direction from the working group. SS cautions not to get rid of all toddler equipment.
- V. There is a need to recognize all users' common interests.
- W. Other issues to consider – how vehicles move around square, is it OK for cyclists to ride through, kids need fences to keep balls and frisbees in. Costs may top \$315,000 – can we establish priorities?
- X. Some children have developed a fear of dogs, as a result of exposure to them in park. Are there ways to ensure children can go safely to park by themselves?
- Y. Question whether washroom is reasonable use of space, or well-designed for its purpose. Esthetic consideration? HK says perhaps we can take it down.

7. HK wants direction on priorities – eg turf restoration. Recommends a plan that accomplishes goals in stages. Discusses possibility of fund-raising for the park, and making the ongoing maintenance an issue for the budget committee each year.

Meeting ends at 8:30 pm.