

MINUTES

Sibelius Square Working Group (SSWG) Meeting

Wednesday 24 May 2006

RSGC, 120 Howland Avenue

Present: Patrick Kennedy (Chair, SSWG), Gillian Morton (SSWG), Kristina Reinders (SSWG), Roger Horst, Erica Horst-Vander Linden, Elizabeth Sanfilippo, Jay Thiessen (Assistant to Councillor Silva), David Mills, Ginny Brett (SSWG), Tom Friedland (SSWG), Fred Freedman (SSWG), Louise Morin, Sandy Straw (Manager, Toronto Parks), James Cantor, Alan Shapiro, Shawn Austin, Paul Martel (SSWG), Mike Coleman (SSWG), Margaret Lloyd, Tara Cohen, Sarah Scott (SSWG)

1. Minutes of the meeting of 3 May 2006

The following two amendments were proposed: a) that the list of those present should indicate that Paul Martel is a standing member of SSWG; b) that item 4 should include the proposal that a watering team be formed, co-ordinated by Kristina Reinders, in the event that the park is seeded or sodded this year.

Motion (Fred/Ginny) to accept the minutes as amended. Passed.

2. Clarification of relationship of the SSWG to the ARA, the city and the community at large

Sandy Straw described the present process as a “multi-use operational review” in which the general interests of groups including children, youth, seniors, dog-owners, and rink-users are represented by members with standing in the SSWG. These representatives communicate back and forth between SSWG, their group and the larger community. The community should be updated regularly on work done by the WG. There should be continuity in the reps who are actively doing the work, in order to promote the WG functioning as a team in which “different interests are equally important.” Her own role is to support the Chair and to ensure that the result meets the needs and wants of the community.

There was discussion of the role of non-SSWG members of the community at meetings. It was agreed that all are welcome. The Chair’s right to set time limits on comment by community members was re-affirmed as an important way to avoid repetition. Where possible, community members should be directed to the representatives of the appropriate groups.

In answer to concerns that the numbers of people at SSWG meetings, as well as the proportion of representation on the WG itself, might not

correspond to all the interests of the larger community, the Chair and Sandy Straw clarified that large issues and all final decisions will always be referred to the community.

The Chair traced the relationship of the SSWG and the ARA back to a community meeting about Sibelius Square, held by the ARA in September 2004, which resulted in the creation of an informal working group. This group conducted a survey of park users and local residents, consulted with other groups and the Councillor's office, and proposed the agenda for the community meeting called by the Councillor's office for 7 March 2006. At this meeting, the city staff, the Councillor's office, and a majority of the approximately 150 community members present endorsed the creation of a formal Sibelius Square Working Group.

The working group has operated under the auspices of the Annex Residents Association, which has an interest in the process being conducted with respect to Sibelius Square. The group had a reporting relationship to the ARA, and received from it the benefit of its experience in park redesign issues through the participation of Paul Martel, Chair of the ARA Parks & Trees Committee, and benefited from the contributions of Nena Hardie, who also sits on the ARA board.

While all acknowledged the immense value of Paul's contribution, there were objections to continuing with this structure: the SSWG was created at the instigation of the Councillor, the city and the community; not all members of the community feel that the ARA represents their interests; Sandy Straw commented that a reporting relationship implied that the ARA could veto decisions, and the city would like to see the SSWG as autonomous and representative.

Motion (Fred/Ginny) that the Sibelius Square Working Group is a standing neighbourhood committee, with representation from the Annex Residents Association and other community groups, which reports to the community at large. Passed unanimously.

On the subject of communication with the larger community, Mike, a web programmer, proposed a website to represent the park, SSWG, ADO, STS and other groups, on which we could post material like minutes, and upcoming events. There was general agreement on what would be suitable content.

Motion (Fred/Tom) that we ask Mike to proceed to set up a SSWG website, that moderation will be dealt with at future meetings and that controversial material will be removed pending discussion.

3. Greening

Patrick and Fred had met with Mark Emslie, of Toronto Parks, regarding progress on greening the western field, which was approved in principle at the March 7 community meeting. He has advised that no work can proceed until after Hydro has signed off on the stake-out, still at least a week from now. He also noted that the field, whether sodded or seeded, might need to be fenced for 8 weeks. Sandy Straw said that the costs to the city would be approx. \$3,000 for sodding including labour vs \$250-300 for seed, plus \$1,000 for fencing in either case. She admitted that her earlier estimate of 3 weeks for sod to take had been optimistic and pointed out that sodding or seeding might fail, given the forecasts of a hot, dry summer, even if community volunteers irrigate the area, particularly because irrigation would have to stop in the case of a drought. She also said that although Mark Emslie felt seeding was feasible, the city was not seeding, except as top-dressing, after the end of May.

There was discussion of the impact on the community of having the field closed off for June and July, the wear and tear on the rest of the park, and the reasonableness of spending city funds to achieve a short season of turf when the field will need to be dug up for repair of the irrigation system next year.

Motion (Fred/Mike) that we leave the west field as it is this year, communicating the reasons to the larger community; and that Toronto Parks will work with the community, represented by Kristina and Fred, to investigate the future irrigation and drainage needs of the field. Passed.

4. Design process

Kristina presented the three options for redesign of Sibelius Square:

1. SSWG works with Sandy Straw and her staff, and the resulting design is implemented by city staff. The cost would be very low (nil, says Sandy Straw).
2. A Request for Proposals process - the SSWG contributes design guidelines or principles for the RFP, and the city is responsible for evaluating the proposals submitted and selecting a winner. Sandy Straw will provide Kristina with information about changes to city purchasing policies concerning RFPs that might alter the feasibility of this option.
3. The SSWG raises funds to hire a consultant, and works with the consultant and the city to implement the redesign. Variations on this option are:
 - if the SSWG wishes to issue tax receipts for donations, it must incorporate and establish a reserve fund;

alternatively, people could contribute money without a tax receipt; a design professional from the community might volunteer their time to the design process, and perhaps have their out-of-pocket expenses covered; or, a suitable charitable foundation, such as Evergreen, might form a partnership with SSWG.

Kristina advised that fees for a designer to go through the entire design process would be approximately 15% of the project cost, i.e. on \$300,000 perhaps \$35,000-\$40,000.

There was discussion of the pros and cons of looking beyond the Parks design staff for design advice. Sandy Straw emphasized that the Parks dept has an obligation to create the park the community wants, and would only reject design suggestions because they would not function well or would be illegal. In favour of a non-city designer, others mentioned the wealth of design expertise in the neighbourhood, the desirability of not feeling obligated to the city, design excellence, and possibly a quicker process. Further discussion was deferred, and Sandy Straw asked Kristina to contact her for an update on the city's new RFP procedures.

5. Proposals for long-term arrangements for dogs at Sibelius

Tom presented some options for discussion on behalf of Share the Square: a) no off-leash dogs; b) dogs permitted off-leash under some form of space-sharing; c) dogs permitted off-leash under substantially revised time-sharing; d) the status quo (a form of time-sharing). He reported that the most common response from STS members was that in an ideal world, there would be an off-leash area elsewhere and Sibelius should be on-leash only. Choice between space- and time-sharing was evenly divided, and all options should stay on the table until the next community meeting. STS believes discussion will lead to substantial consensus, which will be assisted by requiring a review of whatever arrangement is chosen after some specific time, e.g. 6-18 months.

Gillian felt that a solution would have to represent more constituencies than parents and dog-owners. She presented an idea Annex Dog Owners favours, from the city's proposed Dogs in Parks strategy (presently on hold): a Park Team, people in the park during high-activity times to moderate interactions between dog-owners, dogs, parents and children, who could head off trouble before it occurs, educate, and do follow-up reports on problems. Others commented that these reports would be useful at a by-law review, and that a way should be found to communicate to all park users that there is a protocol for solving problems and how to contact the Park Team.

Other dog-owners suggested that more research was needed on how Sibelius was used, and at what times, and that this should be compared with use of similar parks without off-leash hours. Sandy Straw said that the city does not research park use in Toronto enough to be useful, but that she could provide research from around the world on dogs in parks. She also said that while the DIP strategy is on hold, no new by-laws will be considered - the status quo prevails although hours could be adjusted. She promised to ask the crews that collect garbage in the park not to remove the stoop & scoop bags left by ADO.

There was general agreement that in order to present a proposal to the community there would have to be broad support for it across the SSWG, which would represent satisfactory community consensus to the city. More dialogue will be required before the next community meeting. Several SSWG members felt that discussion should continue through the summer on topics such as the park team, and a survey of park use. Patrick will circulate the earlier survey and a summary of the results. There was lots of support for doing a new survey, and possibly repeating it at intervals, using the website. **Motion (Tom/Sarah) that at its September meeting the SSWG discuss a date for the next community meeting.**

6. The next meeting will be Wednesday, 21 June 2006. Sarah Scott was asked and agreed to act as chair through the summer months during Patrick's absence.