

Community Meeting Minutes – May 15, 2007

Public Consultation on Sibelius Square Redesign

at Royal St. George's School

Introduction by Adam Vaughan:

The City's *People, Dogs and Parks Strategy* will be unveiled next week.

- 4 consultations city-wide
- July 4 at Parks and Environment Committee
- Then the political decision needs to be made.

The general idea is based on a permitting system, not based on the proximity to another off-leash area. Many questions, details have not been shared yet—will be unveiled next week and discussed through public consultation process.

Introduction to the meeting objectives:

- The working group is proposing an experiment for Sibelius Square.
- Understand that this is a very emotional and difficult decision.
- Looking for consensus for the redesign of Sibelius Square.
- There is a consensus on need for redesign, NOT the status Quo
- It can be more beautiful and better accommodate all users

Introduction by Patrick Kennedy:

Welcome. There is lots of creative energy in the neighbourhood.
Break out into smaller groups to discuss 3 key issues.

The meeting will start by reviewing process and background

SSWG goal is for a more beautiful park and useable opportunities. The purpose of this meeting is to hear opposing view points in a constructive way.

SSWG Communication with the community has included: meetings, survey, conversations, open meetings, public minutes.

SSWG has been working closely with City staff and Councillor's Office

Budget for the redesign: Our greatest asset is the land itself. Because more than 1000 units of new residential housing have been approved in the immediate neighbourhood, more park use of Sibelius Square.

Funding. \$315,00 from section 37 funds Possible Fundraising

Website: managed by volunteers. Input to send ideas and feedback to SSWG.

3 topics tonight. Objective summary.

I. Play area:

Julie Markle survey results on website, 185 families

“Grass for field,” “boundary formed” lack of equip for kids over 4. “Ice rink”

II. Dogs off Leash in the Square?

In exploring this question, we realized that there are really 3 alternatives.

1. Providing an enclosure that would be suited to exercising dogs and to other uses, and be pleasingly integrated in the square’s landscaping with a boundary formed by some combination of hedging, a small ha-ha, or other “soft” enclosure. Dogs would be allowed off leash only in this enclosure, and only during waking hours.
2. Requiring dogs to be on leash at all times in the square, while working aggressively with the city to find other spaces in the neighbourhood where dogs can be exercised off-leash.
3. Allowing dogs off-leash in some or all open areas of the square, without enclosure, and with possible changes to the time restrictions, i.e. a modified status quo.

1. Enclosure

Pro

- a) Separates dogs off leash from other uses in the square.
- b) If it is broadly acceptable, such a compromise may allow community to move forward
- c) May reduce social tension by confirming an existing use, while reducing conflicts of use.
- d) A precisely defined off leash area may contribute to self-monitoring and a self-enforcing bylaw compliance by dog owners.
- e) Retaining dogs-off-leash owners may sustain a sense of security by retaining eyes and ears on the park.
- f) Extended hours for off-leash use will be more convenient for some dog owners
- g) Protects dogs from running away or into traffic
- h) Provides the opportunity to design a dog-friendly space with amenities such as benches and water.

Con

- a) Carving up the park; aesthetic issues; interrupted view-lines
- b) Parks have a natural capacity; this park may be too small for an enclosure.
- c) Enclosure could become a "dead space" when not in use, if there are no secondary uses of the space.

- d) May result in noise.
- e) Users may continue to let dogs run in the rest of the square in spite of an enclosure.
- f) Dogs may be brought from other areas to use the enclosure, worsening the overcrowding.

2. Modified Status Quo

Pro

- a) Open approach may allow a broader interpretation of the park, and responsiveness to changing demographics
- b) Cheaper
- c) Retains eyes on park
- d) There may not be so many dogs off leash if the hours were reduced.

Con

- a) Does not address the use conflicts described above
- b) Relies on community effort for enforcement.

3. Requiring Dogs To Be On Leash

Pro

- a) Some feel the square is too small for dogs off leash
- b) Some feel that the pack behaviour of dogs off leash is incompatible with other uses
- c) Other spaces in the neighbourhood may be found for off-leash activity
- d) Removes a use that some feel is incompatible with all others
- e) Dogs on leashes would still be welcome.

Con

- a) It may be impossible to convince dog owners to use another space if they did not want to.
- b) It is not clear that we have any alternative spaces that would be acceptable to the community.

III. Regardless of your long term view - Is it worthwhile to try a temporary enclosure?

Trial Enclosure:

1. more people can enjoy the park this summer
2. better informed for long term decision
3. Design issues for feedback
4. Scope of change the community would like to see.

Questions can be addressed by working group members—wearing tags

Gillian presented process for the discussion groups.

- “what are the opinions and the differences”

- Community volunteers are the facilitators. Their goal is inclusive and civil dialogues
- Each group will discuss in a different order.

THE MEETING BREAKS OUT INTO DISCUSSION GROUPS

Report Back from Discussion Groups:

Group 1 - Ann:

- Children need to be the centre of this really small park
- reduce speed
- more shade
- creative space for kids
- off leash dogs not the only problem with the park design
- tables, benches, lighting
- Dog issues
- Temp enclosure planned in the nicest part of the park
- too small for dogs
- there are better areas
- Trial enclosure won't give an accurate read because other improvements over 4 being made at the same time.
- hours will be changed

Group 2 – Micky:

- Professional redesign— to include benches, washrooms, Tree replacements, More flowers, More stimulating play structures.
- Dogs off leash:
 - What are the benchmarks?
 - How will success be measured?
 - More enforcement
- Perimeter to sidewalk

Group 3 – Ko:

- Design objectives
- Don't want to expand north
- Don't like wood chips
- Do like community planting
- Rink (like) Keep it.

Group 4 – Stefanie:

- Design:
- Tai-Chi
- Teens in the park
- Lots of uses

- Structures for older users
- May be unsafe
- Field building - good wall for ball playing
- Dogs not favoured
- -need for a regional approach
- ie. Hydro line, Cawthra Park in the area
- perimeter from the street not the grass
- North expansion—yes
- Temp end—necessary enl.
- Field house—dog/bathrooms
- Irrigation=No
- Ground water pump

Group 6 – Jessica:

- Consensus: 4 of 5 in favour of enclosure
- Tires not working
- Kid focused part
- Street (don't narrow): Stop sign
- More garbage and recycling
- Ice rink yes
- Performance space: multigenerational
- Kiosk by field house for cooking sales etc
- No irrigation: drought resistant perennials

Group 7 - Johan:

- Design—layout is good. Better quality furniture
- Maintenance
- Enclose the whole park
- Dogs: no trial enclosure on principle –squeezing out dogs
- Play area: nice larger equipment

Group 8 - Christine:

- good balance of demographic
- Better use of vertical space with existing equipment for older kids
- Plastic sheets for temp protection?
- Drainage for playing field
- Dog enclosure
- Need better balance
- Different off leash areas
- Better communication
- space concerns
- shift enclosure space without enclosing it
- Design objectives
- More seating
- Tables
- Creative design

- Sidewalk west wide-yes
- Not variety to lose green space
- Need for traffic calming
- North expanding on: support
- Bernard “local traffic only”
- Field house: needs to be cleaned up
- Murals
- Lighting—create hub

Group 9 - Mary?

- Charming space, paths functional
- Enclosure: no consensus
- -postpone inevitable
- status quo like/
- Play space: more challenging for older children
- Sidewalk off west side yes!
- More benches and tables
- Mike and Joel
- Good mix of demographics
- Reserving broaden range of ages with play structure
- Field house: not the zenith of Annex Architecture
- Cappuccino machine
- Rink – yes!

Group 10.

- Play equipment—for all ages
- Irrigation for green grass
- Cappuccino yes
- No enclosure
- Too small yes to break the dog path
- Prohibit off-leash dogs
- Design objectives
- Rink – yes!
- Expand west sidewalk into Brunswick not the park

Concluding Remarks, Adam Vaughan:

Leading up to this meeting, I was told to be careful because people have lots of emotions and love about their children, their pets and parks.

Occasionally, these kinds of discussions bring out the worst in people, but tonight brought out the best in the community.

I have been impressed by the civility and the care given not to hurt or offend a neighbour.

Based on what I have heard, there are 2 key areas of consensus:

1. Expanded play area that will accommodate multi-generational use
2. Clear and profound aspirations for the park, with the delicacy of the square to be brought back and that Sibelius become a park filled with play; but more than a playground.

The focus of tonight's discussions was largely on the proposed experiment.

The logistics of the enclosure could be worked out if people liked the concept, But there was no consensus on the concept.

The *Status quo* is not accepted.

The off-leash experiment started long ago (in 1999) is to expire with the new city policy. I recognize this is tough for the ward because there are not many other options.

We could have tried a shorter temporary enclosure experiment or a different configuration, but I believe this would only delay the inevitable **“a beautiful park, designed for families with dogs on leash.”** The clear consensus seems to be here.

The proposal for the temporary enclosure:

- No support for experiment
- Qualified/conditional support with significant concerns about the risk to the trees or turf in another quadrant of the park

As your Councillor, I don't have the power now, to put dogs on leash in the park, so the western area of the park will remain leash free for the rest of the summer

Based on the outcomes of this meeting, the Working Group is charged with designing an on-leash park

What is often missing from politics is the ability to experiment.

We need to move forward in investing in the park and the kids and the neighbourhood. We also need to be tolerant of dog owners, families with dogs and dog walkers.

In the current political dynamic the by-law cannot be repealed right now because of the moratorium.

The City's new policy will be announced next week, and there will be public consultations.

The final policy should be before Council Committees for approval in July. If these committees defer the adoption of the policy at this time, Councillor Vaughan will move that the current off-leash by-law for Sibelius be repealed.

This is the clear consensus.

Question from Play at the Park?

Proposal for off leash area in hydro corridors.

Response:

The Hydro corridors may be a worthwhile initiative, but there are limited resources and this will take time, they are also located in a no development zone which limits opportunities for section 37 funding.

Councillor Vaughan won't oppose this solution, but it is not a quick fix and is not an option located in Ward 20, but the Councillor will work to expand leash free areas in the ward under the terms of the City's leash free policy.