

Appendix 2

DOUGLAS PARK COMMUNITY CENTRE

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December 14, 2000

To Park Board Commissioners Laura McDiarmid, Clarence Hansen, Duncan Wilson, Allan De Genova, Roslyn Cassells, Dianne Ledingham and Christopher Richardson

Re: Heather Park -- Off-Leash Dog Program

INTRODUCTION

By our letter dated September 19, 2000 to Bill Manning, Manager of Operations Q.E. District, we requested that the Park Board undertake a review of the decision to designate Heather Park as a venue for the Off-Leash Dog Program (the "Program"). We enclose a copy of that letter.

A public meeting was held on October 30th to discuss the Program at Heather Park. As you may know, the designation of Heather Park in the Program is a matter of much controversy in the community. Complaints and comments have been received by the Douglas Park Community Association (the "DPCA"), neighbourhood surveys and petitions have been circulated, complaints have been filed with the Ombudsman's office and under the Waste Management Act, and enquiries made with City Councillors.

We understand that the Commissioners will make the final determination of whether Heather Park will remain a venue for the Program. As no Commissioners attended the Public Meeting, and as the minutes of the Public Meeting do not fully or accurately present the DPCA's position on this issue, we consider it necessary to present, in this letter, our position.

HEATHER PARK

Heather Park is a small neighbourhood park (measuring 0.97 hectares) contained in one city block. That space includes four tennis courts, a children' s playground and a small field. It is surrounded on all four sides by residences.

THE DPCA'S POSITION

The DPCA led an extensive community process to create a vision for redeveloping Heather Park. That community process led to an accepted plan for Heather Park which should be respected. It should be respected by allowing that plan to be completed without the incompatible designation of Heather Park in the Program. To ignore or over- ride this community plan is to ignore and disregard the vital importance of community participation in park planning and development.

Neither the DPCA, nor the community generally, was consulted about the designation of Heather Park as an off-leash site. for the Program. When the DPCA learned of the designation, we sought to express our concern about lack of neighbourhood consultation to the Commissioners at a Park Board meeting. Our enclosed letter also refers to our position. However, now that a review of the designation is apparently underway, we feel it is necessary to more fully explain the basis for our position.

We take no position on the merits of the Program generally.

THE BASIS FOR THE DPCA'S POSITION

The importance of allowing the existing plan to proceed can be understood by reviewing the process that led to the development of the plan.

1996 - At that time, Heather Park had a poorly draining field, with soccer goalposts seasonally installed. Many members of the community wished to see the Park improved. As well, the Park was slated to have its phyground equipment upgraded. The Park Board and the DPCA held public meetings, which led to a neighbourhood storey being distributed by the Park Board Planning Department. A further public meeting was held to consider the results of the survey.

1997 - In light of the interest in redeveloping the Park, and with the knowledge of the Planning department, the DPCA struck the Heather Park Improvement Committee (the "Committee"). The Committee's terms of reference were to consider measures to enhance Heather Park Membership was open to all members of the community, not just DPCA members. The Membership was broadly based, and the Committee's meetings over 1997-1998 attracted, at times, over 60 people. The Committee was chaired by a director and then Vice-President of the DPCA, and reported regularly to the DPCA. The Committee set specific criteria for considering and evaluating a variety of proposals for improving Heather Park. Significantly, the idea of off-leash dog use of the Park was specifically considered by the Committee. It was rejected, and did not form any part of the proposals put forward by the Committee.

1998 - The Committee continued to meet. There was considerable controversy in the community regarding one proposal being evaluated by the Committee: community gardens. The main concern of most residents was that community gardens would provide one user group with a degree of exclusivity over the use of the Park. The prevailing sentiment was that the redevelopment of the Park should not favour one user group to the exclusion of others. It was for this reason, among others, that off-leash dog use of the Park was rejected. The Committee presented its recommendations to the DPCA Board of Directors, and the DPCA in turn made its recommendations to the Park Board Planning Department. The Planning Department helped the DPCA refine the proposals and prepared drawings, which were presented to the community at further public meetings. The plan that was eventually accepted by the Planning Department and the community was to be carried out in two phases: Phase I involved improving the drainage and landscaping, and Phase 2 involved the installation of pathways, benches, tables, trees and redevelopment of the playground. To help defray the cost of this work, the DPCA committed \$9,000 to the project, a very significant expenditure for our Association. Additionally, the DPCA applied for, and received, approval for inclusion of the project in the 2000-02 Capital Plan.

1999 - Phase 1 of the plan commenced in the Fall of 1999, with the installation of drainage improvements, landscaping and grass re-seeding. The Park was closed for approximately nine months for this work to proceed. Public meetings continued to refine the playground redevelopment plans. Phase 2 was scheduled

to begin in the Fall of 2000.

However, without any consultation or notice to the DPCA or the community generally, Heather Park was designated as a venue for the Program. The Program commenced at Heather Park in May, 2000, after the Park re-opened. The Planning Department has put Phase 2 of the redevelopment plan on hold, pending the results of the current review of Heather Park' s designation in the Program.

It is hard to imagine that any other park designated in the Program had such a long and inclusive community consultation process, leading to an accepted plan for redevelopment. Given this process, we feel that it is imperative that the community has an opportunity to see the result of its work reach fruition. Designation of the Park as a site for the Program does not allow the community' s plan to be realized.

INCOMPATIBILITY WITH COMMUNITY' S PLAN

In the months that the Program has operated at Heather Park, it has become apparent that the Program is incompatible with the vision that the community had developed for the Park. The complaints received from the community and the Planning Department' s halt of Phase 2 are evidence of this incompatibility.

The community' s plan provided for a diverse use of the Park by a variety of user groups. Structured active recreational activities were discouraged by the removal of the goalposts, and by landscaping, pathways and benches, but informal small-scale active play was to be accommodated. Quiet contemplative areas were to be created.

However, the Program' s use of the Park does not allow the community' s vision to be achieved. The primary difficulty lies in the size of the field area of the Park. Taking into account the tennis courts, the playground and the 15 metre boundary to be respected from the playground, the area in which the Program is to operate is less than 0.5 hectares, the smallest area of any of the Program' s 29 designated parks in the City. The concentration of dogs running in that area is simply too great to allow for any other use of the field area, and inevitably infringes into the use of the playground. In that respect, the Program attracts exactly the same criticism and neighbourhood controversy that was raised about community gardens: the monopolization of the Park by one user group.

Other issues regarding the condition of the field, proximity of residences, parking, noise and observance of the rules of the Program have also arise; however, our position is nor based primarily on the application of the Program; instead, our position is based on the designation of the Program at Heather Park in light of the comprehensive community-based plan that was already slated to proceed.

The unilateral designation of the Program at Heather Park has effectively undermined the long and often difficult community process in which the DPCA and the community have participated. We feel that our considerable efforts to bring the community' s diverse interests together in the plan have been for nought, and that the premise upon which significant funds and volunteer energy have been devoted by the DPCA has been effectively rejected.

We know the Park Board strives to encourage community involvement and would not seek to undermine a process jointly carried out by the neighbourhood, the Community Association and the Park Board itself. The designation of Heather Park in the Program is contrary to the spirit and provisions of the Joint Operating Agreement with which the DPCA and the Park Board jointly approach decision regarding recreation facilities in the Douglas Park area. Most likely, if the Commissioners had known of this history of community involvement in the park redevelopment process, the decision to designate Heather Park in the Program would not have been made.

OPTIONS

At the October 30 public meetng, Bill Manning advised that the following three options were available:

- a) remove the designation of the Park in the Program;
- b) find a compromise solution; or
- c) leave the Park under the Program.

Bill advised that the Commissioners would make a decision. He has, however, subsequently recommended that the Commissioners support the option of a compromise solution. It is not clear what realistic compromise might be available in the circumstances, given the limited options the small scale of the Park could

allow. However, while compromise can often respect diverse views, the DPCA feels that it has already adopted a fair compromise in the plan it and the community has developed. Therefore, the DPCA considers the compromise option to be inconsistent with the existing community plan, particularly as the community previously rejected the concept of off-leash use of the Park. The only option compatible with the existing community plan is to remove the designation of Heather Park under the Program.

Bill has also asked the DPCA Board of Directors to consider a further option. He asked what the DPCA's position would be on designating a portion of Douglas Park under the Program. We do appreciate the opportunity to provide input into the decision. The DPCA Board considered this suggestion at its most recent Director's meeting, and rejected this option. Although a much larger space than Heather Park, Douglas Park has too many permitted-use fields to allow the Program to operate without conflict. It also has the largest childcare service and preschool in the Park Board system, one of the City's busiest playground and, beginning next spring, a jogging/walking path around the perimeter of the park.

CONCLUSION

The DPCA community's process created a vision for redeveloping Heather Park. That process involved some four years of community consultation, work with the Park Board's Planning Department and participation with the City's Capital Plan process. This extensive community process addressed the community's diverse and often opposing interests for the Park. The resulting plan was developed with the Planning Department, accepted by the community, and should be respected and allowed to proceed to fruition.

The Program is incompatible with that plan.

Therefore, to respect the community process, we urge you to remove the designation of Heather Park as a venue for the Program. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss this matter further with any of the Commissioners, and to make further submissions to a meeting of the Park Board or its staff.

Yours truly,
The Board of Directors,
Douglas Park Community Association

Per: Gordon Plottel, President

cc. Bill Manning (Manager, Operations, Q.E. District)
Gord Lindal (Manager, Recreation Services, Q.E. District)
Susan Mundick (General Manager)
Kate Davis-Johnson (Manager, Park Development)
Nancy Reynolds (CRC, Douglas Park Comm. Centre)