

SUITE 208 · 101 SPADINA AVENUE TORONTO ONTARIO M5V 2K2 CANADA 416-979-2012 FAX 416-979-1283

PROJECT : Vermont Square Park
PROJECT NO : 1054
DATE : 2010.10.05
LOCATION : Vermont Square
MEETING NO : 04
PURPOSE : **Open Public Meeting/ Community Sounding**

WE TRANSMIT BY HAND BY COURIER BY MAIL BY FACSIMILE EMAIL
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THE FOLLOWING SUMMARIZES ALL SUBJECTS DISCUSSED AND DECISIONS REACHED AT THE ABOVE-NOTED MEETING.
PLEASE ADVISE THE ARCHITECT OF ANY ERRORS OR OMISSIONS.

Present:
PLANT Architect (PAI):
Lisa Rapoport lisa@branchplant.com
Suzanne Ernst suzanne@branchplant.com
Elise Shelley elise@branchplant.com

Community

Item

**Action
Required**

1 GENERAL

- 1.1 VSPRC held a public meeting, the first community sounding, in order for local residents to share their thoughts, ideas and concerns about Vermont Square Park. The meeting was divided into five topics for discussion: Teen + Youth/ Adult Play/ Social Spaces/ Playground + Young Children/ Dog Play. Community members were asked to keep their statements brief and were given the opportunity to write their comment on clipboards and idea boards located at the entrance of the gymnasium. The following is a summary of the community comments and suggestions.
- 1.2 The importance of maintaining free, flexible, large, shared unprogrammed open space and the natural and uncluttered beauty of the park was stressed repeatedly throughout the night. The drive to sustain more use and activities should not chop up or clog the park. The park quiet should be maintained.
- 1.3 There will need to be a sifting of ideas in order to ensure that the overall character as well as the free space, the unstructured activity spaces and the gathering areas will be maintained. [This was repeated several times in different contexts].
- 1.4 Do not overbuild the park. The simplicity and the beauty of the established trees in the park are highly valued. The final park design should be easily maintained.
- 1.5 There is an appreciation for the green-space, the quiet-spaces within the park. Simply

walking through the trees in the park is an important activity for many. The entire park does not and should not only focus on games.

- 1.6 One community member re-iterated that the park should not be over-run by programmed activities, that the original design of Vermont Square Park was to be an open space within the neighbourhood. He suggested that the community should look at what is existing in the park and work with these qualities without taking away the “natural” qualities of the park.

2 TEEN AND YOUTH PLAY

- 2.1 Community members were asked what activities teens and youth would like to see in the park:

- .1 Bill Bolton Arena and St. Albans provide extensive programs for teens and it would be good to see these programs brought into the park. Bill Bolton expressed their desire to hear suggestions from the community as to how they can become more involved and maintain a greater park presence.
- .2 A small area in the park, a single curb or bench, an “artful thing”, to be dedicated to skateboarders to enjoy.
- .3 Chess tables that could double as table for board games or small coffee table.
- .4 Berry hedges/ edible landscapes.
- .5 Accessible children’s areas, including the sandboxes.
- .6 A stage similar to Franklin’s Garden. The stage could double as a storage space for moveable chairs and other park equipment. [This was mentioned in the context of all topics].
- .7 An inexpensive and healthy snack bar.
- .8 A skate park on the roof of one of the buildings to restrict access and prevent noise throughout the day and night.
- .9 A physical fitness area within the park for pull-ups and push ups.
- .10 Replace the bocce courts with a space for ball hockey as there is no practice times at Bill Bolton Arena. It is a good child/ parent activity to include in the park.
- .11 A gazebo/ assembly space/ stage offering a place for community gathering with roof cover for inclement weather. [This was mentioned in the context of all topics].
- .12 A climbing wall/ climbing space. [It was also noted that there is a climbing wall inside St. Albans].
- .13 A playground area for older children, not just little kids.
- .14 It was noted that the bocce courts are important to all age groups including teens, but that of the existing bocce courts, only 2 of 3 courts are used. The third court

should be kept as a flexible area for other informal activities such as hopscotch and shuffleboard.

- .15 The large open field should be maintained for kids to run, to play soccer, football, and Frisbee.
- .16 Fitness stations.
- .17 A basketball net in the space between the buildings- not a full court.
- .18 An outdoor skating rink during the winter months. The rink in Sibelius Park is maintained by teenagers and this could work in Vermont Square Park if the city could provide a water supply.
- .19 There was a suggestion made to set up a facebook page where teens and youths can make their own comments and suggestions about the park revitalization.

3 TEEN AND YOUTH PLAY - ADDITIONAL COMMENTS FROM CLIP BOARDS

- .1 The tether ball could be taken out of the playground area and moved into a more open location outside the fenced area.
- .2 A putting green.
- .3 A sand volleyball court.
- .4 A splash pad.
- .5 Community oven/ cooking area.
- .6 Opportunities for active, long-term management of the park by youth and teens, including decision making responsibilities.

4 ADULTS AND PLAY

- 4.1 Community members were asked what activities adults take part in and what they would like to do in the park:
 - .1 The field is highly valued for active play.
 - .2 Safe pathways.
 - .3 Sidewalk circuit around the park interior.
 - .4 Accessibility for motorized wheelchairs, currently there is no access into the corners of the site.
 - .5 The sidewalks surrounding the park need revitalization. In the winter, water runoff from the park makes the sidewalks icy, dangerous and nearly impossible to

manoeuvre.

- .6 Sustainable groundcover throughout the park. Improving the grass on the field is a priority, but do not want areas of the park to be barricaded during the winter in order to do this, because it ruins the winter beauty of the park.
- .7 More seating areas within the park, including moveable seating that will enable adults to interact more with their children while playing. A park organizer from Christie Pitts acknowledged that having moveable furniture within the park helps greatly with social interaction. Storage for moveable seating would be great.
- .8 The lighting in the park is ugly, sparse and too dim. It limits the park use at night. There needs to be a balance however and community members do not want the park to be lit too brightly at night.
- .9 Nice benches located beneath the trees.
- .10 The site features such as gates, fences, lighting and benches should be considered “art pieces” and money should be spent to ensure beautiful park infrastructure.
- .11 A curved bench at the corner of Olive Street and Palmerston Avenue as an element to facilitate conversation.
- .12 Exercise circuit, or place for collective exercises.
- .13 Walking in and around and watching the park change colour and activity with the seasons.
- .14 The northeast corner of the site at Rossmore and Vermont Avenue is an abandoned corner, and would be an ideal place for a community garden.
- .15 The Seaton Village Pumpkin Patch event the day after Halloween is a highly valued community event.
- .16 Meeting neighbours. The great thing about the park is that even compost pick-up is a community event as well.
- .17 The older generation in the neighbourhood have used the park since it's design in the 1970's. The open space in the park was to allow for events to take place and there is concern about a total redesign of the park. It was noted that PLANT must be careful not to change the character of the park and should have respect for the design of its predecessors. Andrew Ignatieff assured that there is no intention for a total redesign of the park hence the name, Vermont Square Park “Renewal” or “Revitalization”.
- .18 Adults also requested chess/game tables.
- .19 Bocce. Young people are also playing bocce.
- .20 It was mentioned that a small paved space just for shooting basketball, not a full court, would be a nice addition to the park as well as a space for tether ball.

- .21 Additional seating along the periphery of the park was suggested as a means to creating a usable barrier that could also help to prevent kids from running directly out into the street for stray balls.
- .22 Moveable seating was suggested as a way to enable adults to play and interact more with children in the park.
- .23 It was suggested that logs could be used as an inexpensive seating alternative in the park, and that they could second as a play element for kids. A park organizer from Christie Pits noted that they have log benches at Christie Pits and that they make uncomfortable benches.
- .24 One of the most important qualities of the park is its flexibility and constant change in terms of users and uses throughout the day and the seasons. Several people who live across from the park spoke of the joy of just watching this drama. The value of the park is its innate flexibility and what people bring to the park.
- .25 Speed bumps are needed on the streets around the park in order to slow through traffic.

5 ADULTS AND PLAY - ADDITIONAL COMMENTS FROM CLIP BOARDS

- .1 Chinese community exercise group in the mornings in the children's playground is a wonderful addition to the park.
- .2 The exchange of goods and services within the park should be encouraged, promoting "economically sustainable" values of the park.
- .3 More plant life, trees and flowerbeds within the park and around the perimeter.
- .4 Toronto has more pressing needs than to beautify the park. A percentage of the money allocated to the park revitalization should be donated to other less fortunate neighbourhoods who have greater needs to be met.
- .5 A design that enables and encourages more community events. In the past three years there has been a decline in planned events within the park. These events are important for bringing the community together.
- .6 Maintain the sight-lines into the park from the surrounding houses.
- .7 More art and sculpture in the park, including some interactive pieces.
- .8 The space adjacent to Bill Bolton Arena, West of Rossmore Road, could be transformed into a long, tree lined boulevard or walkway. It could become a place within the park for informal gathering and community interaction.
- .9 Remove the planter at the corner of Olive Ave. and Palmerston Ave. and replace it with a water fountain.
- .10 Adult recreational/ playground equipment.

- .11 Bike lanes around the park.
- .12 More bike racks in and around the park.

6 SOCIAL SPACES

6.1 Community members were asked to speak about social aspects of the park (in addition to above):

- .1 Watching others in the park.
- .2 Having a place for people to play music.
- .3 Films in the park.
- .4 A place to play board games.
- .5 Community dinners as a place to meet other neighbours, a place to share food.
- .6 When asked what a community garden might mean, one community member replied that the northeast corner of the site is underutilized and that it needs people to tend to it and to work with it. Someone else suggested this could be a “living wall” at Bill Bolton Arena that could re-use captured rain water.
- .7 An edible community garden somewhere in the park could be cared for and maintained by school children which would be a nice addition to the park and a way to teach children about food and stewardship at a young age. This could be a program run together by Palmerston School and St. Albans.
- .8 St. Albans has community garden beds in the northwest corner that need redesign and revitalization. This could be a good place to provide gardens for children to look after. Community gardens could also be a way to promote inter-generational interaction. Older community residents could teach the children what they know about gardening.
- .9 A park director from Christie Pits suggested that social space is achieved through organized community events and agreed that community gardens can become good social spaces. She also noted the usefulness of having a storage area within the park for tools as well as moveable furniture.
- .10 Some activities that are important within the park are the annual Father’s Day picnic.
- .11 Music would be a nice addition to the park.
- .12 Walking and sitting in the open park are important, but some members of the community suggested that they would not be against adding to what is there in order to allow more flexibility in use and activities.
- .13 It was suggested by the Christie Pits park organizer that co-ordinating efforts with

other parks in the area would be valuable in providing a variety of amenities to local residents.

- .14 It was noted that dog walking is in itself a very social activity within the park and that it is a way of bringing people of all ages together. Another resident noted that the dog presence kept her away from the large park space, as some people do not conform to off leash hours.

7 SOCIAL SPACES - ADDITIONAL COMMENTS FROM CLIP BOARDS

- .1 Orchard.
- .2 Wood burning community oven for pizza and breads.
- .3 Fire pit.
- .4 Re-inforced connections between the park, St. Albans and Bill Bolton Arena.
- .5 An artful climbing structure.
- .6 More leisure skating time at Bill Bolton Arena.
- .7 Improvements to the wall of Bill Bolton Arena, create a boulevard along Rossmore Road.
- .8 A public bulletin board.

8 CHILDREN'S PLAY/ PLAYGROUNDS

8.1 Community members were asked to provide suggestions for the children's play area:

- .1 The children's playground should be enjoyable for kids up to age 8 or 9.
- .2 Right now the children's play area is very one dimensional and some parents would like a more naturalized and creative play area with elements such as boulders, stumps, water-play, log balance beams and other forms of constructive play that will focus on intellectual play as well as gross motor skills. Nature in parks improves cognitive and social skills and promotes creative expression. It would also help to bring some "magic" into the space for not only the children, but also for the parents who use the playground every day.
- .3 Right now the playground feels like a jail to many parents, they have to really pry their children out of the playground to play in the rest of the park.
- .4 Water conservation should be a priority and there should not be water play incorporated into the playground.
- .5 Parents noted that care is needed in the re-design of the playground. At Wychwood Barns, the playground equipment installed in the park gets so hot it would burn the children. Ensure shade is maintained.

- .6 Provide a space for performances, movie nights, theatres, social access.
- .7 Swings are great, but should be moved away from the fence as it is dangerous. Kids risk impalement should they fall off.
- .8 Shaded play space.
- .9 Playground should not be “dumbed down”. Right now it satisfies few age groups.
- .10 The current playground is working, kids don’t want to leave.
- .11 There should be climbing structures aimed at different age groups: 2-5 years and 5-10 years.
- .12 Like the wading pool because babies and older children can use it. The splash pads get co-opted by older kids. Why isn’t the fountain in the middle turned on?
- .13 Continued playground maintenance needs to be ensured. This has not been demonstrated in the past.
- .14 The idea of kids caged within a fence is strange. Can the idea of the fence be re-thought? Could the existing buildings act as part of the enclosure? There is safety in monitoring with a fence, but it would be nice to walk through the children’s area without it feeling like an island on its own within the park. The playground needs connectivity.
- .15 Need naturalized areas within the playground not just outside.
- .16 The fence provides ease to parents who don’t have to be on constant watch while kids are playing. It is a real safety feature that needs to stay.
- .17 The plastic toys being left within the playground are a nuisance.
- .18 The playground should be the first priority during the construction phase and should be completed as quickly as possible so that children will have use of the facilities this summer.
- .19 A climber for kids to climb, a place to run and space to play tag.
- .20 Sand, like at Dufferin Grove. The kids love sand play.
- .21 Kids love to slide down the hills with the sleds in winter.

9 CHILDREN’S PLAY/ PLAYGROUNDS - ADDITIONAL COMMENTS FROM CLIP BOARDS

- .1 Ground surfacing that is suitable in all weather. Spongy asphalt.
- .2 Visible sign on the gates to the park permitting seeing eye dogs in the children’s

playground area.

- .3 Tire swings or disc swings like those found in Christy Pits.
- .4 Narrative about the park/ neighbourhood history within the playground.
- .5 Add garbage cans within the playground.
- .6 Create zones separating younger and older kids.
- .7 Measures need to be put in place to limit the dumping of plastic toys in the playground.
- .8 A general and flexible hard surfaced area that could be used for multiple-uses, hopscotch, basketball, ball hockey etc...
- .9 Moveable play features and seating.

10 DOGS AT PLAY

- .1 The area north of St. Albans could be planted with more trees, fenced and used for dogs.
- .2 While playing bocce, dogs will run after the balls and make it impossible to play, there should be a way to use the space at the same time.
- .3 The major problem with the park is not the park as it is set up, but rather the lack of communication between dog owners and other park users. This renewal process should rephrase the issue to enable communication and dialogue between these users, rather than being about how to separate uses.
- .4 If the park off-leash hours are followed, there are no problems. The conflicts arise when the off-leash hours are not respected.
- .5 There needs to be a form of enforcement or fines within the park. Could residents call upon the city for more policing?
- .6 The conflict between dogs and park users cannot be solved with a fence. Dog owners who do not follow the off-leash hours will not respect the fence either.
- .7 Currently there is a lack of respect by some for park regulations.
- .8 There should be a shared responsibility by park users to enforce regulations.
- .9 Dogs are a beneficial addition to the park. The problem is that there is an increasing density within the neighbourhood and a diminishing dog capacity within the Annex. More dog owners are coming to Vermont Square Park.
- .10 Guide dog signs should be added to the park signage for the seeing impaired.

- .11 If the community and park users don't enforce rules then fines will not work either. This can be a way to bring the neighbourhood together, a way to communicate. Good dog owners must work to police the bad.
- .12 Inventive design will help to create spaces that can work together. Everyone likes the big open space.
- .13 Dog licensing fees could be used to fund enforcing. There need to be enforcement blitzes and Seaton Village should push for it.
- .14 Dogs are important for kids and different generations. They are a way to promote interaction and conversation between park users.
- .15 Dog owners walk their dogs at night and early morning, so are eyes in the park which is good for safety.
- .16 A fenced area for dogs will become a wasteland that no park user will want to use including dog owners.
- .17 Dog owners are generally very lax about the off-leash hours and even encourage new park users to dismiss the regulations.
- .18 Clear, well placed signage throughout the park about park regulations will enable conversation and enforcement by the community and will take pressure off regular park users to have to argue to enforce the rules, all they should need to do is point. This needs to be one component of the communication strategy to bring people contravening the dog hours in line.
- .19 There is a physical impact on the park from the use of dogs. The grass cannot sustain it.
- .20 There are two issues to be addressed, off-leash/ on-leash and the physical impact of the dogs on the park.

11 DOGS AT PLAY - ADDITIONAL COMMENTS FROM CLIP BOARDS

- .1 Doggy Bag stations at each edge of the off-leash area.
- .2 Dog agility course.
- .3 To make off-leash hours easier to follow, have only "summer hours" time change from June to Labour Day, the rest of the year the hours remain constant.
- .4 Better placement of signage with park rules and off-leash hours to ensure clarity and understanding for new visitors.
- .5 The off-leash hours in the park promote interaction and connection between many park users.

12 OTHER COMMENTS

12.1 TRAFFIC ISSUES

- .1 Add large plantings to traffic barriers.
- .2 Provide Bill Bolton Arena with parking.
- .3 Provide a safe pull in area for drop offs and pick-ups at St. Albans.
- .4 A semi-circular driveway in front of St. Albans for pick-ups and drop-offs. It could be a way to ease congestion on Palmerston Ave.
- .5 There is a traffic problem at the northeast corner of the site where bicyclists travelling from Palmerston Ave. towards Bathurst Street on the park path cross into the street in the opposite direction of traffic flow at speed. There is great concern from surrounding neighbours that this will be an inevitable cause for a serious collision. It was suggested that the path be altered to prevent bicyclist from accelerating out into the street. It was noted that bike riding in the park is against park rules.
- .6 Speed bumps are needed on the streets around the park in order to slow through traffic.

13 COUNCILLOR COMMENTS

13.1 The councillor had the following comments:

- .1 Bill Bolton Arena has a city sanctioned board. They provide a great service and can be used to better the park by providing governance for the park. Their services could perhaps be extended to include park maintenance, a café and storage as suggested. Their revenue could be used to hire a caretaker to maintain the park.
- .2 The park could grow, and the streets could be narrowed to “neighbourhood width” to deal with some of the traffic and cycling issues.
- .3 Spaces for activities could be dispersed throughout the neighbourhood. Existing parking lots could be used for basketball hoops to sustain the quietness of the park. He can shop around some of these types of uses to other public space in the neighbourhood.
- .4 Flat roofs could be used to house activities such as gardens and creative play areas here or elsewhere in the neighbourhood.

14 NEXT STEPS

- .1 Community members would like access to the briefs and meeting notes that have been submitted. These will be posted on the Seaton Village Website:
<http://seatonvillage.ca>

VSPRC

.2 Two charettes, October 23 and November 1.

END