

TORONTO STAFF REPORT

March 6, 2006

To: Economic Development and Parks Committee

From: General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation

Subject: **Colonel Samuel Smith Park, Proposed Skateboard Facility Location**
(Ward 6 - Etobicoke Lakeshore)

Purpose:

To provide an overview of the site selection process for a proposed skateboard facility in South Etobicoke and to comment on a Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) motion respecting the Lakeshore Grounds as a skateboard facility site.

Financial Implications and Impact Statement:

There are no financial implications resulting from the receipt of this report.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that this report be received for information.

Background:

The Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division is in the process of selecting a site for a skateboard facility in South Etobicoke. The facility has approved capital funding of \$500,000.

Public consultation and other background work in support of the site selection process commenced in mid-2005.

Citizens Concerned About the Future of the Etobicoke Waterfront (CCFEW) is a community group that made a deputation to a meeting of the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) on January 6, 2006, to share their concerns about the proposed skateboard facility location in Colonel Samuel Smith Park (which is part of an area associated with the former

Lakeshore Psychiatric Hospital that has come to be known collectively as the Lakeshore Grounds).

At its meeting on January 6, 2006, the TRCA considered a staff report on the proposed facility location in Colonel Samuel Smith Park. The TRCA also adopted the following motion with respect to the matter:

“WHEREAS Etobicoke Council approved the Master Design and Implementation Plan on April 28, 1997, per Resolution 178;

THEREFORE LET IT BE RESOLVED THAT the City of Toronto be requested to review the status of any agreements that govern the overall management of the Lakeshore Grounds;

THAT the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) request that the City of Toronto continue the dialogue with interested stakeholders, including TRCA, regarding an appropriate level of environmental evaluation and the development of a skateboard facility design that will enhance the unique natural environment of the Lakeshore Grounds;

THAT TRCA request that the City of Toronto take this opportunity to prepare an integrated detailed site design for the skating facility as well as the skateboard park, to ensure all environmental concerns are addressed;

AND FURTHER THAT TRCA send a letter to the City of Toronto offering assistance in the creation of a habitat restoration master plan for all lands in the vicinity of the Lakeshore Grounds.”

The TRCA forwarded the motion to the City for information and any action deemed necessary.

CCFEW has requested that the TRCA motion be referred to the Economic Development and Parks Committee for discussion and that CCFEW be given an opportunity to make a deputation with respect to the matter.

This report provides a brief overview of the site selection work for the proposed skateboard facility and comments on the motion approved by the TRCA.

Comments:

Background on South Etobicoke Skateboard Facility

The City has approved capital funds for a skateboard facility in South Etobicoke.

The skatepark is considered a “district level” facility (i.e., concrete bowl or plaza facility, ranging in size between 1,500-3,000 sq metres in area), consistent with the recommendations in the Recreation Facilities Report approved by Council in September, 2004.

Although a number of potential sites had been discussed in previous years, the current site selection process commenced in mid-2005.

In essence, the site selection process involved reviewing a number of potential sites to determine which ones had the most potential and merited detailed evaluation (a “short-list”).

The detailed evaluation is based on a review of a number of criteria (such as size, access to site, compatibility with other uses/facilities in a given park, visibility, etc.) as well as public comments and input.

Public consultation with respect to site selection was pursued through an open house/public meeting in June, 2005. In addition to the open house and public meeting, City staff also met with interested community groups, including a meeting with the Lakeshore Grounds stakeholder group on May 9, 2005, and meetings with representatives of CCFEW.

Input and comments on the skateboard facility site were also received through other means, including:

- A comment form prepared and distributed by CCFEW at an Environment Day held at Colonel Samuel Smith Park
- Two petitions (one in support of Colonel Samuel Smith Park as a facility location, one against)
- Letters of support for Colonel Samuel Smith Park as a facility location from community organizations (such as BIAs)

City staff have also undertaken supplemental research on short-listed sites as well as looking into additional sites suggested by community members.

The four short-listed sites are Colonel Samuel Smith Park, Connorvale Park, Don Russell Park and Ourland Park.

Evaluation of the four short-listed sites identifies the following pros and cons:

Colonel Samuel Smith Park (Power House site)

Pros

- District/regional scale park has adequate area for facility
- Excellent TTC access (Lake Shore Blvd. streetcar and Kipling bus)
- Waterfront Trail goes through park
- Existing parking with passenger drop-off zone
- Power House location provides washrooms, compatible recreation programs, storage
- Power House is focal point of recreation activity in the park (including proposed pleasure skating loop)

- New high school with community centre component across the street from Power House
- Good distance from residential areas
- Good visibility from park road and parking lot
- Expressed support from skateboard community

Cons

- Some passive park uses in vicinity of facility (e.g., birding) may be impacted by skateboarding
- Adjacent habitat and areas undergoing regeneration are source of concern to some users/residents (e.g., impact on wildlife)
- Site not visible from major public road
- Expressed concerns from community include potential for vandalism, user/park safety, fit with plans for the park and overall Lakeshore Grounds

Ourland Park

Pros

- Good TTC access (Islington bus)
- Community centre elsewhere in the park
- Complementary facilities in park (outdoor pool, sports court, ball diamond, soccer field)
- Reasonable distance and buffer from residential area to east
- Good visibility from main roads
- Eyes on the facility from other park users, staff at other facilities
- No strong opposition has been expressed by any community group

Cons

- Park has very limited space for new facilities
- Would require removal of existing tennis courts
- Parking is very limited
- No access to trail system
- Washrooms in park but not adjacent to the facility
- No strong support from skateboard community

Don Russell Park

Pros

- Room for district-level facility (low end of range) but some constraints on size
- Good TTC access (Kipling bus)
- Existing parking at arena, health club
- City facilities in park (arena, health club)
- Secondary school nearby

Cons

- Site within park is remote from other uses and access points
- No visibility from public or park roads
- Relatively close to residential uses west of park
- Uncertainty with respect to timing and outcome of long-term plans for the park (arising from proposed development of multi-pad arena and related land exchange with TDSB)

Connorvale Park

Pros

- Large area within park for district-level facility
- Washrooms at ball diamond field house
- Visibility from local street and playground

Cons

- Park has neighbourhood character
- Poor TTC access
- Existing parking is limited and oriented to ball diamond users
- No support or storage facilities

As noted above, additional work on short-listed sites was undertaken to inform the selection and evaluation process.

With respect to the Colonel Samuel Smith Park location, a biologist was retained by the City to conduct a natural environment assessment of the proposed site at the Power House and to identify potential impacts and mitigation measures to protect any significant natural heritage features present.

The assessment of the natural heritage features of Colonel Sam Smith Park and the proposed Power House site did not identify any significant habitats or species that would be significantly impacted by the proposed facility. The type of habitat available at the proposed location is considered abundant and of better quality elsewhere within the expanse of the park. The biologist made several recommendations to avoid or mitigate potential impacts or effects associated with development of the Power House site for recreation facilities, which would be pursued at the time of detailed facility design.

TRCA staff reviewed and commented on the biologist's report in fall of 2005, and were in overall agreement with its findings.

The analysis of potential sites will be completed in March, 2006, allowing facility design and development to proceed in summer 2006. At this point, evaluation of the four short-listed sites suggests that Colonel Samuel Smith is, on balance, the preferred location for the skateboard facility.

TRCA Motion Approved January 6, 2006

The motion approved by the TRCA has several parts to it. The TRCA did not request or suggest that the motion be considered by City Council. In substance, the motion is considered advisory, and the actions requested of the City by the TRCA are being addressed in the course of work on the proposed skateboard facility.

The following are comments on the individual points within the motion approved by the TRCA.

1) The Lakeshore Grounds Master Design and Implementation Plan

“WHEREAS Etobicoke Council approved the Master Design and Implementation Plan on April 28, 1997, per Resolution 178;

THEREFORE LET IT BE RESOLVED THAT the City of Toronto be requested to review the status of any agreements that govern the overall management of the Lakeshore Grounds;

Colonel Samuel Smith Park is part of the Lakeshore Grounds, a large area (69 ha or 171 acres) of land at the foot of Kipling Avenue associated with the former Lakeshore Psychiatric Hospital.

The Master Design and Implementation Plan (MDIP) for the Lakeshore Grounds was undertaken in the mid-1990's. The MDIP built on a variety of planning efforts related to the redevelopment of the remaining lands of the former provincial hospital.

Attachment 1 shows Colonel Samuel Smith Park within the context of the Lakeshore Grounds and its various institutional uses and facilities.

The purpose of the MDIP was to guide the design and development activities of the various public agencies owning lands on the Lakeshore Grounds, providing a basis for an integrated approach to future development of the overall site.

The MDIP reviewed the area's natural and cultural heritage resources and various planned and potential uses by individual owners and agencies. The MDIP developed an overall goal for the Lakeshore Grounds and recommended a number of principles with respect to heritage conservation, ecological restoration, public accessibility, public education, public recreation and public restoration.

The MDIP was intended to be endorsed by the various public landowners as a basis for future development plans and design integration, and was not intended to be a formal document or be part of the secondary plan for this sector of Etobicoke. On this basis, the MDIP was considered by the various landowners and agencies, and the City of Etobicoke endorsed the MDIP in 1997 with some specific exceptions and suggested modifications.

In considering the Power House site for a skateboard facility, City staff have had regard for the MDIP.

With respect to recreational uses on the Lakeshore Grounds, the MDIP states:

“Parts of the former hospital grounds were specifically designed and constructed to provide a place for recreation. This use should be continued and expanded using the following principles:

- Areas and facilities for active and passive recreation should be provided with the qualification that passive recreation facilities should dominate at this location.
- Recreation facilities and areas should only be developed in a manner that is compatible with existing heritage and environmental features.
- Public recreation should be provided in a manner that encourages multiple use of areas. Single purpose facilities which occupy large land areas should be discouraged at this specific site.
- In recognition that this is a waterfront site, provide leisure facilities and services that are water dependent or related as top priority, especially within the waterfront viewshed area.”

With respect to the Power House site within the park, the MDIP states the following:

“The Power House

A second public park activity centre is proposed at the former Power House. It is recommended that this building be refurbished to support park activities. Facilities should include public activity rooms, interpretive/information centre, public washrooms, a change room for the proposed pleasure skating track and a concession or restaurant area if feasible. The building may also be used for park maintenance requirements. Most importantly, this area should be transformed into a major pedestrian entranceway park. A pedestrian bridge over the ravine is proposed to provide access to the Amusement Green (immediately east) which is one of the major recreation areas and a probable location for special events.

The parking lot access road is proposed to be centered on the Power House building. The traffic circle concept is repeated at this location to help reinforce the sense of arrival at a park centre. The vehicle parking lot should be designed in sections to reduce the scale and visual impact of one larger lot. Approximately 170 spaces are proposed.

A detailed site plan should be prepared for this area. This would include giving careful consideration to the existing vegetation located to the north of the Power House.”

In a nutshell, the MDIP proposes that the Lakeshore Grounds provide for both active and passive uses, but that passive uses and facilities should be dominant. It also views the Power House as a hub of activity in Colonel Samuel Smith Park, including the development of an outdoor pleasure skating facility.

The proposal to develop a skateboard facility at the Power House is relatively recent, and a skateboard facility was not contemplated at the time the MDIP was prepared.

Given the MDIP's approach to a blend of active and passive recreation facilities in the park and the proposed role of the Power House as a park activity centre, the proposed skateboard facility is consistent with the MDIP, both in terms of type of park use and potential location with other outdoor recreation facilities anticipated in the park.

In terms of other aspects of the MDIP (such as the conservation and restoration of natural and cultural heritage of the Lakeshore Grounds), the Power House site is considered a suitable location for the development of recreation facilities. As noted above, an assessment of the site did not identify any significant habitats or species that would be significantly impacted by the proposed facility.

In summary, the proposed skateboard facility can be accommodated at the Power House site, and can be integrated with the pleasure skating loop originally proposed for the site. Together, the skateboard facility and the skating loop will provide a more diverse set of opportunities for recreation within this section of the park, which is consistent with the MDIP.

2) An Appropriate Level of Environmental Evaluation

“THAT the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) request that the City of Toronto continue the dialogue with interested stakeholders, including TRCA, regarding an appropriate level of environmental evaluation and the development of a skateboard facility design that will enhance the unique natural environment of the Lakeshore Grounds;”

As outlined previously, a biologist was retained by the City to assess facility development at the Power House site with respect to the natural environment. A draft of this assessment was reviewed and commented on by TRCA staff in 2005.

The scope of work for the assessment has been shared with CCFEW, and City staff will provide CCFEW with the final version of the assessment.

By way of consultation with other stakeholders, the City convened a meeting of the Lakeshore Grounds stakeholders group (including TRCA, CCFEW, Toronto Catholic District School Board, Humber College, Lakeshore Yacht Club and others) early in the site selection process (May, 2005). Consultation with stakeholders will continue as part of detailed facility design work, including consideration of measures to avoid or mitigate any potential impacts.

3) An Integrated Detailed Site Design for the Skating Facility as Well as the Skateboard Park

“THAT TRCA request that the City of Toronto take this opportunity to prepare an integrated detailed site design for the skating facility as well as the skateboard park, to ensure all environmental concerns are addressed;”

The City has prepared an initial detailed concept showing the integration of the proposed skateboard facility with the proposed pleasure skating facility. This concept has been reviewed in discussion with CCFEW representative on January 30, 2006 and will be reviewed with others as the project advances.

4) A Habitat Restoration Master Plan for All Lands in the Vicinity of the Lakeshore Grounds

“AND FURTHER THAT TRCA send a letter to the City of Toronto offering assistance in the creation of a habitat restoration master plan for all lands in the vicinity of the Lakeshore Grounds.”

The City and the TRCA have worked with a number of groups, especially CCFEW, on habitat and other initiatives for Colonel Samuel Smith Park. A habitat master plan for the overall Lakeshore Grounds would be consistent with these efforts and the TRCA's involvement in such a plan would be welcome and appropriate.

Conclusions:

Parks, Forestry and Recreation is in the process of selecting a site for a skateboard facility in South Etobicoke. Public consultation and other background work in support of the site selection process commenced in mid-2005.

The analysis of potential sites will be completed in March, 2006, allowing facility design and development to proceed in summer 2006. At this point, evaluation of the four short-listed sites suggests that Colonel Samuel Smith is, on balance, the preferred location for the skateboard facility.

Citizens Concerned About the Future of the Etobicoke Waterfront (CCFEW) made a delegation to a meeting of the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) on January 6, 2006, to share their concerns about the proposed skateboard facility location in Colonel Samuel Smith Park (part of the area known as the Lakeshore Grounds).

The TRCA adopted a motion which addresses several aspects of the Lakeshore Grounds as a facility site, including reference to plans for the Lakeshore Grounds, an appropriate level of environmental evaluation for the facility, the preparation of an integrated design for the skateboard facility with a proposed pleasure skating facility, and the potential for a habitat plan for the Lakeshore Grounds.

The substance of the TRCA motions are being addressed in the course of the City's work on the skateboard facility.

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List of Attachments:

Attachment 1: Colonel Samuel Smith Park, Lakeshore Grounds