



1999/2000 Annual Report

Facilitating ongoing public input and assistance in the stewardship of High Park
for present and future generations of park users

High Park Citizens' Advisory Committee, Box 108, 95 Lavinia Ave., Toronto, ON M6S 3H9 Volunteer Hotline: (416) 392-1748

The Year in Review

Over the past year, the High Park Citizens' Advisory Committee continued to expand its programs and to strive to represent a broad range of public interests in the Park.

Charitable Status

We submitted an application to the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency for charitable status in December 1999 and are following up regularly to see how we are progressing through the approval process.

Parks & Recreation Division Capital Budget

We have become more closely involved this year in the development of the capital budget for the Parks & Recreation Division. The City has made an ongoing commitment of significant funds for the restoration of the Oak Savannah/Woodlands sections of the Park, as well as some allocation for the aquatic zones (partly through the Works budget). This has allowed the development of a comprehensive, long-range Vegetation Management Plan for the Park. Other budget items we supported that received some capital funding were improvements to washrooms, transportation/family area, trails/pathways and signage. The proposed budget will be revisited each year, so we are continuing our involvement.

1947-97 Bloor St. W.

Once again, a developer is proposing to build a large residential complex on the vacant lot beside the northwest corner of the Park. We are continuing to express our opposition to the variances which the developer is requesting, which include substantial increases over the permitted height and density limits. Our preferred option is to have this site annexed to the Park. Council has agreed to investigate this option further.

Off-Leash Dogs

We are experiencing problems with off-leash dogs in the Park. This is a complex and emotional matter and one that will probably require intervention from City Council to resolve. Therefore, we have requested that the City develop and enforce a policy that will address the safety of Park users and responsible stewardship of the natural environment.

Safety & Recreation Subcommittee

Our purpose is to promote the diverse cultural and recreational activities that High Park offers in a manner compatible with the natural environment and character of the park; to ensure personal safety needs of High Park users are met; and to promote safe use of the park.

High Park Adventure

The first annual maintenance of the playground was completed on Saturday, May 27th. This included moving and raking wood chips, tightening loose screws, removing graffiti and other fix-up chores. Community support has made our playground possible and, if we maintain it properly, children in our community will be using it many years from now.

Park Watch

Our purpose is to:

- ▲ keep High Park a safe and friendly place by maintaining a visible, friendly, trustworthy and welcoming presence in High Park
- ▲ provide information and assistance to Park users and
- ▲ promote safe and friendly behaviour among Park users.

Park Watch was launched in April 1997. Since then, the number of volunteer-hours spent in the Park has exceeded 3,800, with over 6,200 contacts or incidents recorded. The next scheduled training for new Park Watch volunteers is planned for Sept. 9th and 10th.

Annual Events

Proceeds from the following events assist in the maintenance of the High Park Adventure and other programs in the Park:

3rd Annual Pumpkin Float (Sunday, Oct. 24/99)

Over 25 children participated in carving pumpkins which were lit with candles and placed in the Duck Pond to float like sailboats set afire. The setting sun, the darkening park and shadowy trees all formed a glimmering background to a sea of jack-o-lanterns.

3rd Annual Winter Fun Day (Sunday, Jan. 16/00)

On one of the coldest days of the year, over 400 children participated in children's games, horse and wagon rides, pony rides and roasting marshmallows over a bonfire.

3rd Annual Spring Egg Hunt (Sunday, April 16/00)

Over 370 children hunted for Easter eggs, had their faces painted, dyed eggs, participated in egg races and had their pictures taken with the Easter Bunny.

Transportation Subcommittee

Is High Park a victim of its own success? It's disconcerting to environmentally conscious people to see the roads of High Park gridlocked with cars on an "Environment Day".

Going places in High Park? Trying to get to High Park?

Transportation to and through High Park can be a very sensitive issue. As those who live near the Park know, any changes in traffic patterns affect nearby neighbourhoods.

High Park Committee's Transportation Subcommittee has dealt with various issues, some of them quite contentious. Mountain biking on Park trails was dealt with early on, and the decision arrived at was to further the restoration of a sensitive ecosystem by not allowing bikes off-road. Commuter use of the Park as a "rat-run" was dealt with by changing the motor traffic patterns on Colborne Lodge Drive. Commuter parking was dealt with by rebuilding the north end of West Road. Motor traffic speed has been dealt with through the use of some traffic-calming devices.

Much work has yet to be done. The Transportation Subcommittee has yet to deal with traffic issues on the east side of the Park, including options for Parkside Drive. As well, pedestrian access issues need to be discussed, planned, and implemented. Safe bicycle access from the Queensway still needs to become a reality. Opportunities for road redesign and rebuilding are being looked at. The need for alternatives to car transport is another one of the ongoing issues.

The Transportation Subcommittee has as many viewpoints as members. We seek people who wish to share their energy and insights to help solve the puzzle that is transportation to and through High Park.

Natural Environment Subcommittee

The Natural Environment Subcommittee has had another productive year. Among the highlights were:

- 🦋 A second and expanded season of the **Nature Centre**
- 🦋 A new "**Adopt-a Plot**" initiative under the Volunteer Stewardship Program
- 🦋 An extensive **controlled burn** covering 5 separate sections of the Park (about 15 ha in all) carried out in April. This is part of an 8-year plan to systematically burn the fire-adapted portion of the natural areas in the Park which amount to about one third of the total 160 ha.
- 🦋 A pamphlet on "**The Benefits of Growing Native Plants**" prepared by a working group and produced by the City.
- 🦋 Both the Natural Environment Subcommittee and the Volunteer Stewardship Program received "**Thank you Green Toronto**" awards in recognition of our efforts to promote a healthy and green environment in the City.

Other developments during the year were as follows:

Walking Tours

Attendance at walks last summer and fall was somewhat disappointing although the Winter program was more successful. Partly as a result of this experience and partly because of the many competing activities in this, the Millennial Year, we are now offering walks every second Sunday afternoon all year round and every second Tuesday evening during the summer months. While this means a reduction in the number of summer walks, we are, on the other hand, extending the program to the end of November this year.

The walks continue to attract newcomers to the Park and have generated in excess of \$800 over the course of the year in support of this and other volunteer activities. As in the past, most walks end at Colborne Lodge (now part of the City's Culture Division) for a refreshing drink and a short tour of the premises.

High Park Vegetation Management Plan

An extensive long-range plan for restoring and managing the natural areas of High Park has been developed by the Parks & Recreation Division with input from our Subcommittee. The Plan includes prescribed burns (see above), aggressive removal of invasive plant species and widespread planting of native vegetation. The work of the Volunteer Stewardship Program is expected to dovetail with the Plan.

A comprehensive booklet on "Restoration Strategies for High Park" is being developed to support this Plan. The publication is aimed at teachers, educators, students and individuals who are interested in the detail of the proposed management efforts. It is hoped that a simplified version will be prepared for distribution to the average Park user.

Spring Creek Watershed

A treatment wetland has been constructed in the upper section of Lower Duck Pond to treat and purify a minor portion of Spring Creek before it enters the pond. The prototype wetland depends on aquatic vegetation and associated microbes and other organisms for removal of pollutants, and is also intended to provide improved habitat for wildlife.

To deal with puddling and allow natural water flow to the adjacent meadow, the hard road edge has been removed from the top third of Spring Road. Some creekbank erosion control measures have also been implemented by the Parks & Recreation Division. What is still needed is to enlarge and improve the efficiency of the settling ponds at the upper end of Spring Creek. An initial assessment of the cost has been made. We are continuing to pursue the idea of meanders and wetlands to create a more natural functioning creek.

Grenadier Pond Watershed

Last year, the north end of Grenadier Pond was deepened and the mudflats enlarged. This work has not yet been completed to our satisfaction.

A Stormwater Management Study covering the Grenadier Pond and Catfish Pond watersheds, and including the drainage area east and west of the lower part of Grenadier Pond, is in progress. Resulting recommendations to improve the quality of stormwater entering the Lake will likely include more

constructed wetlands and, possibly, the re-establishment of the wet meadow to the west of Lower Duck Pond.

A number of new informative and interpretive signs are currently being installed around the Pond. At the same time, old and damaged signs are being removed, including the series of signs designating the original oak woodlands research plots.

Toronto Environmental Task Force

Several of the Subcommittee members were active in the development of "A Plan for an Environmentally Sustainable Toronto", the report to City Council of the Toronto Environmental Task Force.

Another outcome of the Task Force's work was the convening of a very successful Stewardship Forum in February which brought together many of the volunteer groups involved in land and river valley restoration throughout the City and offered opportunities for networking. In this regard, we are supportive of the efforts of the Humber Watershed Alliance and associated groups to restore natural areas and the river corridor in the lower Humber River Valley.

Volunteer Stewardship Program

The VSP celebrated its fourth anniversary on June 18, 2000. Our purpose is to restore the ecosystems of the natural areas in High Park to presettlement conditions by:

- ♣ Working with the City to plan, coordinate, and implement restoration activities in High Park
- ♣ Facilitating community involvement in the Park
- ♣ Educating the public and communicating our efforts

The program continued its strong growth over the past year. We now have 190 volunteers, and have invested over 6,700 person hours since our launch. This translates to well over 16,000 containers of plants propagated and 31,000 plants reintroduced in the Park, in addition to the removal of invasive plants and the collection of native plant seed.

Our partnership with the City continues to evolve and now serves as a model for other municipalities across Ontario. To support similar partnerships, Christopher Harris, Co-chair of the VSP, and Arthur Beauregard, Manager of Natural Environment and Horticulture, City of Toronto, have been sharing our group's story. A video of one of our presentations is available to other groups through the Ontario Parks Association. The VSP also presented at a Parks & Recreation Ontario conference, the Mississauga Garden Council AGM, the High Park Baptist Church, a Mountain Equipment Co-op event and the City's Stewardship Forum.

Over the past year, we continued our outreach program, running several special events for local cub, brownie, scout and girl guide groups, as well as planting events for Earth Day, Harvest Festival, and the High Park Adventure Maintenance Day. This provided a wonderful opportunity to help families and people of all ages get involved in restoration.

Interest in our new Adopt-a-Plot program has grown tremendously. There are now 12 plots under the individual stewardship of volunteers who are responsible for planting, weeding and monitoring them.

Our native plant sales have been very important in "Expanding the Borders of High Park", an initiative to encourage people in

the neighbourhood to use native plants in their gardens. To "crack" the traditional horticulturalist market, we now package our native seeds according to bloom colour. Seeds and plants are sold at Earth Day, Harvest Festival, and the VSP annual plant sale.

With the launch of our Orientation Kits this year, which include a VSP t-shirt and cap, our committed volunteers are now an identifiable presence in High Park.

Thanks go to Ron Luft, who retired as co-chair of the VSP but continues as coordinator of the Adopt-a-Plot Program.

High Park Nature Centre

After a successful 4-week pilot last summer, the High Park Citizens' Advisory Committee is operating a Nature Centre in High Park for 16 weeks in spring/summer 2000. This year, the Nature Centre is located on Parkside Drive at the site of the former Parkside Lawn Bowling Club, with two full-time staff members.

The High Park Nature Centre is operated with financial support from the Kiwanis Club of Casa Loma, the Canada Trust Friends of the Environment Foundation, the HRDC Youth Employment Strategy and the City of Toronto, as well as contributions and/or in-kind support from the Toronto District School Board, Colborne Lodge, Parks & Recreation Division and a number of other businesses and organizations.

Our programs focus on developing a commitment to responsible stewardship of the natural environment, grounded in personal experience with the unique features of High Park and an understanding of the park's ecology, challenges and natural restoration efforts. The May/June program is targeted at school groups and features planting of native plants in the Oak Savannah to support the park's restoration program. Our summer program will include group bookings and public events on a variety of themes.

In a related project, the Toronto District School Board has started using the Howard Park Tennis Club clubhouse as a base for environmental education programs operated by the Toronto Urban Studies Centre.

Colborne Lodge Report

Restructuring

Effective January 1, 2000, Colborne Lodge was moved into the City's Economic Development, Culture and Tourism Department, Culture Division, Museums and Heritage Services. A new Board of Management was appointed for three historic houses, Colborne Lodge, Mackenzie House and Spadina. The HPCAC has offered a membership to the Board.

Joint Programming

Colborne Lodge staff and HPCAC volunteers cooperated on a number of programs and projects over the year:

- ♣ In summer, 1999, Colborne Lodge lent a few panels of its exhibit, *The History of High Park*, for display in the new High Park Nature Centre.
- ♣ Staff worked again with the Adventure Playground volunteers to conduct another successful Spring Egg Hunt

Fun Day, and "John and Jemima Howard" made an appearance at the High Park Pumpkin Float.

- ♣ Staff continue to provide administrative and logistical support for the High Park Walking Tours. Most afternoon tours end at Colborne Lodge for refreshments.
- ♣ The HPCAC continues to support Earth Day and the Harvest Festival through their substantial and varied participation in these events sponsored by Colborne Lodge.

Garden Restoration

This project continues to grow. Volunteer numbers are increasing and new garden plots have been added: a kitchen garden at the east side of the house; roses at the tomb area; and a new annual bed on the west lawn. A highlight this year was the spring bulb display. Charles Kinsley and Bohdan Kowalyk of the Natural Environment Subcommittee review all plant lists prior to planting to ensure that they do not pose any threat to the surrounding vegetation.

For information about
HPCAC activities and
volunteer
opportunities, please
call:

**High Park Volunteer Hotline
(416) 392-1748**

Treasurer's Report

Financial Statement June 1, 1999 to May 31, 2000

Walking Tours and General Programs

Opening Balance at June 1, 1999	\$1,084.63
Income from Walking Tour Donations	\$802.22
Expenses in Support of Volunteer Programs	<u>(\$704.03)</u>
Closing Balance at May 31, 2000	\$1,182.82

Volunteer Stewardship Program

Opening Balance at June 1, 1999	\$735.00
Income from Donations	\$3,561.50
Expenses	<u>(\$1,193.07)</u>
Closing Balance at May 31, 2000	\$3,103.43

Adventure Playground

Opening Balance at June 1, 1999	\$1,683.25
Income from Donations	\$3,771.42
Expenses	<u>(\$3,319.41)</u>
Closing Balance at May 31, 2000	\$2,135.26

Nature Centre

Opening Balance at June 1, 1999	nil
Income from Donations	\$6,709.25
Expenses	<u>(\$659.25)</u>
Closing Balance at May 31, 2000	\$6,050.00

The High Park Citizens' Advisory Committee

The High Park Citizens' Advisory Committee is a volunteer group made up of a broad range of park users, including individuals and organized groups. The Advisory Committee provides public input on park policies, goals and objectives; helps facilitate volunteer involvement in park initiatives; and promotes public awareness and responsible stewardship of the park. Meetings are open to the general public.

The HPCAC voting membership includes local ratepayer/residents associations, recreational stakeholders, long-term interest groups, business/park entrepreneurs and eleven members-at-large from the community.

Our meetings are open to the general public. Meetings are usually held at the Howard Park Tennis Club at 6.30 p.m. on the third Wednesday of September, November, January, March and May. The Annual General Meeting is usually held at the Grenadier Café and Tea House on the third Wednesday in June.

The executive members of the HPCAC for 2000/01 are:

- ♣ Robin Sorys and Don Barnett (co-chairs)
- ♣ Luther Dean (treasurer)
- ♣ Paul Rappell (secretary)

plus the chairs of the subcommittees and program groups.

The HPCAC is supported by three subcommittees:

- ♣ Safety & Recreation (Robin Sorys, chair);
- ♣ Transportation (Susan Flanagan, chair); and
- ♣ Natural Environment (Ron Allan & Karen Yukich, co-chairs).

In turn, these subcommittees sponsor a number of volunteer programs, including:

- ♣ Park Watch (Gloria Worth, chair)
- ♣ HP Adventure (Tereze Coutinho, chair);
- ♣ HP K-9 Committee (Robin Sorys, chair);
- ♣ Volunteer Stewardship Program (Christopher Harris & Tony Jovan, co-chairs);
- ♣ Adopt-a Plot Program (Ron Luft, coordinator)
- ♣ Nature Centre (Karen Yukich, Karyn Morris and Kathleen Keefe, steering committee) and
- ♣ Walking Tours (Ron Allan and Johanne Christensen, co-chairs).

Archival information about the HPCAC and the natural restoration of High Park is maintained at the Runnymede Public Library.

The HPCAC operates in partnership with the Toronto Parks and Recreation Division and Colborne Lodge.