

High Park Little League

300 Colborne Lodge Drive
Toronto, ON, M6S 2T9
HighParkLittleLeague@gmail.com



April 24, 2024

Infrastructure and Environment Committee
City of Toronto
100 Queen St. West
Toronto, ON
M5H 2N2

Subject: Item - 2023.IE3.7 (High Park Movement Strategy - Final Report)

Dear Councillors:

High Park Little League is one of Canada's oldest Little League organizations, playing in the crown jewel of Toronto's parks since 1952. Our league includes 500 players aged 6-12 years old – and is run entirely by volunteers, including 100 coaches and a board of directors that works on league business year-round. Our members come from across Toronto, from Etobicoke Creek to Bayview Avenue and from Lawrence Avenue to Lake Ontario.

We are pleased to be part of the discussion about the future of the park, and were happy to welcome city staff at a recent board meeting to tell us about their plan. Regrettably, we feel this level of engagement is too little, too late. Moreover, we believe it fails to account for the way families move around the park for youth sports; the increasing sense of unease surrounding personal safety; and, that this plan will worsen congestion and tension in the park.

Our league plays 350 games each year in High Park from April to October. Families see each other so often, they become friends with people on all teams, making the diamonds a gathering place that transcends baseball. We believe that the plan as presently constituted, will have a great detrimental effect on our program and diminish the sense of community we've worked so hard to foster.

Our concerns fall into three main categories.

1. The current plan does not address personal safety:

- The baseball fields are one of the only facilities in the park designed to be used after dark, and we use them weeknights and weekends until 10 pm. But, the current plan would continue to force families with young children to walk a considerable distance to their vehicles or access other transit options in poorly lit areas.



- Thankfully, the park is generally safe. However, recent cases of violent crime in the area are giving people pause about how they get around, particularly after dark. Last season, many parents noticed an increase in potentially dangerous behaviour including illegal drug use, unsafe fireworks, and at least one intensive police search for a potentially armed suspect.
- Staff acknowledged in our meeting that safety in relation to crime was not considered in planning. However, we believe **this in an urgent issue that must be addressed for the upcoming season** and in the long term. Staff also noted that better lighting to improve safety may not be possible in an Environmentally Significant Area.
- Drop-off for very young children traveling with only one parent is not a safe or practical option, particularly considering the lanes of cyclists and vehicle traffic they would have to cross. This is especially problematic for single parents and those who have other kids taking in activities elsewhere.
- During cases of severe weather, such as thunder storms and high winds, vehicles provide a practical and immediate form of shelter that is otherwise not abundant in the park.

2. Accessibility considerations are poorly implemented:

- While the vast majority of our players are able bodied, many of their parents or siblings are not. For them, a regular trek into the park is a considerable barrier. It also presents a considerable obstacle for coaches, who must routinely carry bulky and heavy equipment in and out of the park – and can prevent some members of the community from volunteering.
- Many players try to bring grandparents and other extended family to their games on weekends, which is usually their only option. However, those with mobility issues – even those who do not require accessible parking permits – would have trouble walking nearly 400 metres from the Grenadier Café parking lot, let alone 1.2 kilometres from the zoo parking lot or 2 kilometres from Bloor St.
- Approximately one-third of our games and practices happen on Sundays. The outright closure of the park to vehicles on those days means safety and access issues, however mitigated by this plan, would persist.

3. Congestion and parking would be worse than pre-pandemic:

- Parallel parking is time consuming, and an inefficient use of the space. Coupled with high volumes of traffic at concentrated times, we foresee additional tension as drivers try to move around the congestion. This would create additional hazards.

- Congestion and narrow lanes would impair the ability of emergency services to access the park, exactly at the busiest time when they are most likely to be needed. This is of particular concern for children in sport.
- While city staff might believe that there is ample parking in local neighbourhoods, families who live nearby would strongly disagree as they struggle to park near their own homes. Particularly on weekends, parking is very difficult to find on neighbouring streets, and creates a long “parking commute” to games and practices.

Our league is a strong contributor to the community. We invest thousands of dollars to park facilities every year, and support local businesses that help make High Park the vibrant and energetic centre we have come to love. However, rising safety concerns are becoming more acute, and poor access, leading to long commute times for nearby families, are creating a strain that is not sustainable in the long-term.

Over time, we are very concerned that these issues will force us to consider options outside of the only home our league has known for more than 70 years. We urge the committee to reject the staff proposal as it is currently written and direct them to consult more closely with sports organizations in the park. Our league is eager and ready to work collaboratively with city staff to help them better understand the ingress and egress patterns associated with permit-based activities, and improve their proposal to better account for safety and accessibility.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We would be very happy to meet with you or your staff to further discuss our concerns and help arrive at practical and agreeable solutions.

Sincerely,



Peter Paz
President



Jason Okamura,
Vice-President (Baseball)



Ivana Anusic
Vice-President (T-Ball)

CC: Councillor Gord Perks
Office of the Mayor of the City of Toronto

Enclosure: High Park Little League Fact Sheet

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