



## Listen with open mind, open ears on Etobicoke park plan

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Etobicoke residents can be forgiven for the confusion they may be struggling with over the latest recreation proposal being considered for Colonel Samuel Smith Park. Just months after an ill-advised proposal for a concrete skateboard pad was removed from consideration, Ward 6 (Etobicoke-Lakeshore) Councillor Mark Grimes is advocating the creation of a \$1.8-million concrete skating trail in the park's meadow - the same ecologically sensitive area that was the basis for abandoning the skateboard plan.

Jessica Lobalu-Richardson, a director with the South Etobicoke Youth Assembly says this latest proposal sort of popped up "out of nowhere" and has no community support. Her organization, however, has long been calling for an indoor gym that can be used by area youth for many years to come. Furthermore, former area councillor Irene Jones noted last week that, in fact, the skating trail plan is an "old idea" whose time has passed. And Ruth Grier, a former provincial environment minister in Bob Rae's NDP government, says the community has been "blindsided" by this skating oval proposal.

With so little knowledge in the community of the proposal - not to mention what appears to be a complete lack of interest for it - why is Councillor Grimes promoting this project? It's particularly troubling considering that the skateboard park plan was rejected because of the ecologically sensitive wetland and meadow.

Residents have made it clear to Grimes that a skating oval is not a preferred use of the funding that's in place when the community has been clamouring for a new community facility for several years.

Thus, their suggestion to Grimes that he lobby on their behalf to have the money re-allocated and put towards a new facility makes sense.

The issue will require leadership and responsiveness from the Ward 6 councillor.

Residents in the community, with knowledge of their neighbourhoods and a keen desire to see better services, must surely be included in any future consultation on the direction of this project.

Nobody thus far who has taken part in any of the consultations has expressed support or interest in a new concrete skating oval. On that basis alone, Grimes should do the right thing and remove this proposal from the table in much the same way he ultimately rejected the skateboard park after community and expert consultation on the issue.

Should Grimes choose to ignore the clearly expressed wishes of his constituents, he does so at his political peril.

Residents can't be much more precise or forceful in letting the councillor know that a skating oval is just not a facility through which they see any benefit to the larger community.

Now, the councillor's and city's task is to continue to consult, with an open mind and open ears.

Is anyone listening?

***This editorial originally appeared on the Etobicoke Guardian website, but is not archived there.***