

City of Toronto's Economic Development and Parks Committee March 9<sup>th</sup> 2006

Proposed skateboard facility in Col. Samuel Smith Park

Presentation by Ruth Grier

In the last five years the City of Toronto has adopted environmental policies and practices of which we can all be proud. Your Official Plan is green, the waterfront redevelopment gives priority to the environment, you understand that smog days hurt our health and the health of our children, there is an Environmental Protection Office, Toronto's sewer use by-law is recognized around the continent, you do good storm water management, there's the pesticide ban, the tree protection by-law – and lots more that you know as well as I do.

That is why the recommendation to construct \$2.5 million worth of concrete surface in Sam Smith Park is dismaying and disappointing. It flies in the face of your other efforts and undermines some of the investments you have already made. The City's migratory bird protection policy for example. You have identified Humberwood Park in north Etobicoke as an important bird flyway – those birds use Sam Smith Park as a place to both prepare for and rest from their journey across Lake Ontario. The representative of the Toronto Ornithological Club has just explained the importance of Sam Smith to migratory birds. Environmentally everything is connected to everything else. We fear the loss of Sam Smith by way of death from a thousand cuts.

In April 2005 Council adopted modified wording for the Natural Heritage Section of the City's Official Plan. It reads as follows:

*“When development is proposed on or near lands shown as part of the natural heritage system, the proposed development's impact on the system is to be evaluated and an impact study may be required.”*

You plan to build a skateboard facility abutting the natural heritage area of Sam Smith Park. There has been no impact study. Instead we are told that there is a report by a biologist. An FOI request had to be made before CCFEW (Citizens Concerned about the Future of the Etobicoke Waterfront) was given the terms of reference for this report. The report itself is still kept secret. The terms of reference show that the biologist only looked at the skateboard facility not the newly approved skating rink. And it did not take into account the impact of a high school currently under construction as part of the land agreements that created the park in the first place.

I submit that the Parks Department is in danger of violating the City's own Official Plan. And the lack of transparency in the decision making process is unacceptable.

Sam Smith Park is the result of a long partnership between the City, the Province, Humber College and other tenants on the land and the Lakeshore community. CCFEW was at the table through all the planning and visioning that led to a Master Plan for a

passive waterfront park. It is worth remembering that the original plan showed a swimming lake as an amenity. It was the Ministry of the Environment that modified it's final approval of the Environmental Assessment in 1992 by replacing the swimming lake with marsh/wetland which was more in keeping with the TRCA's natural habitat initiative.

Sam Smith Park is a success story. Something to be celebrated and cherished. The TRCA won an International Award of Excellence for its construction in 1999.

In 1997 Etobicoke City Council approved the Master Design and Implementation Plan referred to in the TRCA resolution of Jan. 6<sup>th</sup> 2006. The interpretation of those guidelines in the staff report before you today is selective and ignores the entire context and history of Sam Smith Park.

In June 2005, when Mr. Rutherford and Councillor Grimes made it clear that Sam Smith Park was their preferred location for the skateboard facility, CCFEW and others raised a number of objections to that choice. After that the decision making seemed to go behind closed doors. And recently we discovered that a \$2 million skating rink had been added to the project. I agree that a skating path was shown conceptually by the consultants for the master plan in 1996 but it has never been seen as a priority. And nobody has consulted with the Lakeshore community and told them that there is \$2 million available for a capital project and asked what our priority would be. Were we asked the majority would say "A community centre, please". We were promised one 10 years ago and a Community Services and Facilities Study of South Etobicoke done in 1996 said we had lots of ice space – and needed a community centre.

There are two aspects of a skatepark in Sam Smith that should particularly concern you.

First, the proposed site has no surveillance from a public street. This is usually the first criteria when locating such a facility. On the City's website the fact that the Cummer skatepark is at the junction of two major streets is shown as an asset. I have reviewed the consultants' report that was done for the City of Markham and "eyes on the street" was a major consideration in their excellent report and public consultation about the best site for a skateboard facility. We fear that putting such a facility behind the Power House in Sam Smith will result in security problems which will then lead to the installation of lights and fences and even greater intrusion on the natural parkland.

The second concern you should have is what a facility in this location will cost. We have been assured by Ms. Librecz in a letter to CCFEW that \$500,000 is the total budget. I don't believe you can build a facility of the size you are contemplating for that amount. Cummer cost \$403,000 in 2001. Markham's estimate for theirs was \$530,000 and they went considerably over that. The Sam Smith site will require major storm water management if you are to avoid damage to the creek and wetland 100 feet away. How does cost figure in the evaluation you have done of the four possible parks where the skatepark could go?

In 2004 this Committee recommended and approved funding for a skateboard facility to serve South Etobicoke. And how South Etobicoke came to be defined as only Ward 6, I do not know. We are the oldest built up area of Etobicoke and there are few large parks. And the proposed site is almost on the shore of Lake Ontario so it is as far south as you can get. The Markham report describes the majority of skateboarders as coming from a seven kilometer radius around a site. A Sam Smith site has only a semi-circle of homes within 7 km.

Any proposed site will require trade-offs. Mr. Rutherford says that to build a skatepark in Ourland Park would require re-locating tennis courts. How do you measure moving tennis courts against possibly destroying a wetland, bird habitat and naturalized area?

It is clear from the report before you that either Don Russell Park or Ourland are viable options. It is clear that to build it in Sam Smith will be environmentally damaging, controversial and costly. I agree we should have a neighbourhood skateboard facility in South Etobicoke. I ask the committee to instruct staff to drop Sam Smith from consideration and to do a genuine evaluation of the advantages and disadvantages of Don Russell and Ourland Parks. I can assure you that if you do that you will have the full support of myself, CCFEW and many, many others.

Ruth Grier  
74 Arcadian Circle  
Toronto M8W2Y9  
416-259-1722  
[ruth.grier@sympatico.ca](mailto:ruth.grier@sympatico.ca)