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CITY COUNCIL

Plan for 16 pickleball courts at Bonnerworth Park in Peterborough is final, after all

Many neighbours have said they were never consulted about the plan.

By **Joelle Kovach** Reporter

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This is a concept of what the new pickleball courts at Bonnerworth Park in Peterborough will look like. Council voted to go ahead with the project on April 8.

City of Peterborough photo

Several people in the public gallery stood and yelled “Shame!” at city council on Monday night, following a vote to stick with a \$4.4-million redevelopment plan for Bonnerworth Park that includes 16 pickleball courts.

Pickleball players have been happy with the plan, but many neighbours have said they were never consulted — and that the courts will pave over much of the park's green space.

Neighbours had packed the gallery Monday night, and when council stuck with its plan, at the very end of the meeting, people stood and voiced their disappointment before leaving the room.

"You're a disgrace to this city," one woman shouted at council.

"So much for democracy," yelled another woman.

The redevelopment plan for Bonnerworth Park — which is located at 550 McDonnell St. — is a done deal. Council had voted at a meeting April 8, and on Monday they stuck with it, even though Coun. Joy Lachica had proposed another, final step to the process.

Lachica had introduced a notice of motion that would have given council a chance to review all the project's final details — site plan, noise study related to the pickleball courts and cost details, for instance — before ground is broken (starting with the pickleball courts, which go under construction in fall).

But Coun. Andrew Beamer, who was chairing the meeting, ruled the motion out of order at Monday's meeting, saying it contradicts council's previous vote from April 8, which had been the final vote.

Beamer said council had previously directed city staff to oversee the project — including all the planning and reviewing of technical studies. He added that council had also already set a budget of \$4.4 million.

"I am ruling that this motion is contrary to the direction previously provided by council," Beamer said.

"Once the chair rules and motion out of order, there is no debate," he continued, adding that Lachica could challenge the chair — and if she did, she could then explain how she believes the motion ought to be allowed.

Lachica did challenge Beamer, arguing that she wasn't asking for the plan to be set aside, redesigned or even paused. She only wanted council to receive more information, she said — like the site plan, cost breakdown and noise study — before construction starts.

Lachica added it wouldn't be responsible of council not to examine that information before starting the project.

"For this to remain only with staff — and not be reviewed by elected decision-makers — this is problematic," Lachica said. "It's our duty to listen, to learn and to be open to the recommendations of the studies."

"Will it cost more than expected for sound and lighting mitigation? If so, this is crucial to inform our upcoming budget talks," Lachica added.

Coun. Lesley Parnell — the co-chair of parks — said Lachica was straying from explaining the procedural reasons why she thought her motion was in order.

Chair Beamer agreed; he tried to silence Lachica.

"I'd like to just finish my sentence," Lachica said (which Beamer allowed).

"If 16 courts were to be installed 50 metres from any of our own homes, we would want to know the measures that were in place to assuage our fear and uncertainty of a new normal," she said. "If this is the will of council — to see the site plan and the technical studies before work commences — a motion to request this is absolutely in order."

But the vote was 6-5 to uphold Beamer's ruling, meaning the motion couldn't be discussed any further or go to a vote.

Voting to uphold the chair’s ruling were Beamer, plus Coun. Gary Baldwin, Mayor Jeff Leal, Coun. Don Vassiliadis, Coun. Kevin Duguay and Coun. Lesley Parnell.

Voting against it the chair’s ruling — meaning they wanted to discuss the motion, and vote on it — were Lachica plus Coun. Alex Bierk, Coun. Keith Riel, Coun. Dave Haacke and Coun. Matt Crowley.

Bonnerworth Park has four tennis courts, a 20-year-old skateboard facility, two ball diamonds and green space.

City council is planning a \$4.4-million redevelopment in 2024 and 2025 that will see it transformed. Under the plan, the ball diamonds won’t be replaced, but the tennis courts are relocating to Knights of Columbus Park (on Park Street North), and the pickleball courts there will move to Bonnerworth.

The pickleball courts are expected to go under construction first, in the fall, and then in 2025, the city plans to expand the existing skateboard area, plus add a specialized new bike track.

At the meeting April 8, several pickleball players had asked council to stay with the plan.

Parnell said at that meeting the city would need 36 pickleball courts to satisfy demand — and that since the city is short of land, there is no other place than the expansive Bonnerworth Park to build courts.



Joelle Kovach is the City Hall reporter for the Peterborough Examiner.

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