

**PETERBOROUGH REGION**

# Citizens' advisory committee never gave input on pickleball plan: former chair

Lynn Self had been chair of the arenas, parks and recreation advisory committee.

By **Joelle Kovach** Reporter

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Chris Dewar, president of Transitions Bike Parks Inc., back, left, responded to questions from residents attending a public consultation drop-in session to receive community feedback to help shape the future of Bonnerworth Park on March 21. Metroland file photo

**Note:** This article was updated late Thursday to include new comments from city spokesman Brendan Wedley, who stated via email the parks and recreation committee was presented with pickleball recommendations, at a meeting on Aug. 31: “It was not a done deal.”

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The citizens’ advisory committee on parks and recreation was asked for “no input” on a controversial city plan to add 16 pickleball courts to Bonnerworth Park, says the committee’s former chair.

Yet the committee had reviewed the plan — and received it for information — in a special meeting on Aug. 31, 2023, months before it was ever reviewed by city council.

Lynn Self had been chair of the arenas, parks and recreation advisory committee (APRAC) for that special meeting in August. But a few weeks later she stepped down, halfway through a four-year term, due to a change in her personal schedule that would prevent her from attending APRAC meetings.

Minutes of the Aug. 31 meeting show that APRAC heard — and received for information — a presentation from city staff, including the recommended Bonnerworth plans (which city council later approved, in a final vote, at a council meeting April 8).

The \$4.4-million plan includes 16 new courts for Bonnerworth Park (to be built this fall), plus a new bike track and improvements to the 20-year-old skateboard area (to be built in 2025).

But Self said in an interview that she had raised unanswered questions, at the meeting Aug. 31, about the potential for pickleball noise and whether neighbours had been consulted on the plans (several neighbours have since predicted the noise will be disturbing, and have said they had not been consulted).

She further said APRAC never saw the park layout in August. The layout was revealed at a public meeting on March 21, to the dismay of some neighbours who said they don't want to see green space lost to courts.

“The project is being touted as, we (APRAC) approved it and therefore the city council approved it. And it's just the furthest thing from the truth,” she said. “We approved something, but we did not approve what was brought to the community in March, when they had their meeting. So yeah, it disturbs me.”

A new detailed statement on the city's website explains the steps leading up to the park redevelopment plan. It notes the special APRAC meeting from Aug. 31, stating that members heard then about the city's overall recreation report (including the recommendation for 16 pickleball courts at Bonnerworth Park).

Yet Self said there had been no discussion at the meeting. She's convinced the committee's input wasn't wanted.

“We (committee members) were just receiving information, at a point where it (the plan) needed to have an advisory committee give it a stamp of approval,” she said. “If we were really to be advising, we should have been asked for input.”

Brad Robinson, a current member of APRAC, was at the meeting too, and said in an email that “the Bonnerworth project was presented (by city staff) as a done deal.”

“Billed as the best option, and vetted through all stakeholders,” Robinson said in his email. “This (vetting) clearly didn’t take place, or was done poorly.”

But city spokesman Brendan Wedley sent The Examiner the slide deck from the Aug. 31 meeting, in which details from the city’s overall recreation plans - including the proposed 16 pickleball courts at Bonnerworth Park - are clearly listed as “recommendations.”

“It was not a done deal,” Wedley said in his email.

Wedley added that the Aug. 31 meeting - which had been open to the public - was meant “to help inform the completion of the outdoor recreation facilities study,” and he points out that committee members had asked questions.

Coun. Lesley Parnell, the city’s co-chair of parks and recreation, had been at the meeting on Aug. 31, but did not want to comment for this article.

Parnell has said the city’s studies show it would take 36 pickleball courts to satisfy demand for the popular sport. And several pickleball players told councillors, at the council meeting April 8, that the courts are needed.

Yet Self says she thinks the 16 courts will be underutilized — at least on hot summer afternoons, when it’s easy to become overheated while playing on a paved surface.

“They (councillors) will end up with a lot of pavement for people to stare at,” Self said. “It doesn’t take much to realize that this is a mistake.”



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