

PETERBOROUGH REGION

Hundreds gather for rally against redevelopment of Peterborough's Bonnerworth Park

Citizens rally outside of Peterborough's city hall to protest planned Bonnerworth Park redevelopment.

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Coun. Joy Lachica (right) greeted a large rally of people concerned about the planned redevelopment of Bonnerworth Park. The rally was held outside city hall on Monday evening, while a council meeting was taking place inside. Many citizens are concerned about city council's plan to add 16 new pickleball courts to the park; they have said it will mean loss of some green space, and they're also concerned about pickleball noise in a residential neighbourhood.

Joelle Kovach Metroland photo

By Joelle Kovach Reporter

Hundreds of citizens gathered outside city hall on Monday evening to object to city council's plan to build 16 pickleball courts in Bonnerworth Park — and they weren't happy with the mayor.

At one point many began chanting for Mayor Jeff Leal to come outside and be confronted — never mind that he was inside, chairing a city council meeting.

Coun. Joy Lachica, Coun. Alex Bierk and Coun. Keith Riel did emerge from the building briefly, to wave to people and shake hands before heading back into the council meeting.

redevelopment plan in a final vote at a city council meeting, April 8 (they were the only dissenters — the vote had been 8-3 in favour).

“Where’s Jeff?” people chanted angrily, when the mayor did not emerge from the building.

Soon, they were chanting for the mayor to be replaced: “Leal’s got to go!” people yelled.

The issue is a redevelopment plan for Bonnerworth Park, on McDonnel Street at Monaghan Road.

Many area residents have said they don’t want pickleball noise in their neighbourhood, and they don’t want to lose green space to the courts.

Furthermore, many neighbours have said they weren’t consulted by the city, before the final vote at a council meeting April 8.

Council’s plan is to redevelop the park over two years, starting this fall with the pickleball courts. Then in 2025, there will be a new bike track and improvements to the skateboarding area. Total cost is expected to be \$4.4 million.

Following Monday’s council meeting — which included nothing about the pickleball plan — Leal told reporters that he hadn’t gone outside, during the rally, because he had to preside over the council meeting.

“I had to be here fulfilling my responsibilities to all citizens of the city of Peterborough,” he said. “That’s what I’m charged to do.”

Leal furthermore said he’d campaigned on adding recreational facilities — including pickleball courts — to Peterborough, adding that pickleball had been mentioned in his campaign brochure.

Yet outside, neighbours held up placards stating they are concerned about the noise from pickleball (“No to pickleball courts! Incessant clatter — does our peace not matter?”) or highlighting their concerns about losing green space (“Don’t erase green space!”).

Richard Scott, who lives near the park on Middleton Drive, is a retired planner who worked both for the National Capital Commission in Ottawa and for Parks Canada. He made remarks into a megaphone.

“You have too many political leaders who feel it’s OK to circumvent political process and citizen involvement,” he said.

Scott said the concerned citizens demand “civil discourse, consultation, sensible information, and sharing information,” from city politicians.

“Yes, this is a flagship issue, and we will save Bonnerworth Park, one way or another!” he said, to raucous cheers.

Dave Wesley, another neighbour, made remarks into a megaphone as well.

“Yes, this is a fight about the pickleball courts, but it’s also much more: it’s about the democratic process. It’s about citizen involvement,” he said.

generated by pickleball at Bonnerworth Park are still being carried out. Yet council voted April 8 to go ahead with the redevelopment.

Wesley, a former Examiner reporter, referred to a recent Examiner editorial stating that council has already held a democratic vote, on the matter.

But since council didn't have the results of a noise study when it voted, Wesley said, and neighbours hadn't been consulted, "then that vote is meaningless. It's not democratic at all."

Later, Leal said that both acoustical and soil studies are indeed underway.

"Our staff have put forward a very vigorous work plan," he said.

As for the loss of green space, Leal said there are 70 acres of it in the neighbourhood, when you add up Jackson Park, Hamilton Park, and the playgrounds and sports fields at nearby St. Peter's Secondary School, St. Teresa School and Westmount School.

Leal also refuted the idea that citizens had no opportunity to give feedback.

For instance: The Examiner recently quoted the former chair of the citizens' parks and recreation advisory committee as saying the city had been uninterested in receiving committee input, on the pickleball plan.

Not true, Leal said. The committee heard a presentation, at a meeting on Aug. 31, that mentioned a recommendation to add 16 pickleball courts to Bonnerworth Park.

The committee members could then have rejected any of those recommendations, Leal said, but they didn't. They voted to receive the recommendations for information.

While one current committee member, Brad Robinson, was quoted by The Examiner as saying he felt the plan was "a done deal" already, at that meeting Aug. 31, Leal said those were recommendations only.

"There's this notion of running around that — quote, unquote — it was a done deal," Leal said. "Well, nothing could be further from the truth."



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

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