



Largest protest yet from citizens concerned about Peterborough's Bonnerworth Park redevelopment

Despite chants of "We want Jeff!," Mayor Leal did not emerge from city hall Monday evening.

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There was a large protest outside Peterborough City Hall on Monday evening against the redevelopment of Bonnerworth Park that includes 16 new pickleball courts.

Joelle Kovach Metroland

By Joelle Kovach Reporter

The largest protest yet of city council's plan to redevelop Bonnerworth Park happened outside city hall on Monday evening, with people chanting in vain for Mayor Jeff Leal to come outside.

"We want Jeff!" people chanted repeatedly, but the mayor did not emerge from the building.

Leal was inside, chairing the last city council meeting before August (council takes a break from meetings in July).

Into a megaphone, Bonnerworth Park neighbour John Gerelus reminded the crowd that council meetings will take a rest for part of the summer.

“But we’re not going away!” shouted one man from the crowd.

“We’re not going away,” repeated Gerelus. “Keep pounding them with letters, questions, with letters to the editor ... We have to keep the momentum going.”

The issue is a \$4.4-million redevelopment plan of Bonnerworth Park, on McDonnell Street at Monaghan Road, to include a new bike track, upgrades to the skateboard area and 16 new pickleball courts.

Many neighbours said they are concerned the courts will be noisy and take up much of the park’s green space.

Others have said they’re unhappy that the two ball diamonds that exist in the park will be removed — though the city has said diamonds in other parks in Peterborough will be upgraded.

At least a dozen children protested in their baseball uniforms on Monday, standing on the steps of city hall with placards that said, “It’s My Park Too!”

Furthermore, many people have said there has been a lack of consultation by the city.

Neighbours wrote to council on Friday (and forwarded the document to reporters) to refute a detailed statement about the park redevelopment that the city posted to its website May 31.

In the rebuttal, the neighbours state the city “made no active effort” to get input from neighbours such as those in the nearest apartment buildings (they mention Hunt Terraces, on Bonaccord Street, and Marycrest at Inglewood, across Monaghan Road from the park).

But Brendan Wedley, the city communications director, said in an interview Friday there had been notices dropped off at homes all around the park ahead of a public meeting on March 21, and that the meeting “was extremely well attended” (about 100 people were there, he said, “including many, many neighbours, who provided input.”)

Council also discussed the topic at two meetings in April, where citizens were allowed to give delegations, and Wedley said councillors continue to hear from citizens.

“That community consultation and commenting is ongoing,” he said.

There have been a few other protests, but none as large as the one on Monday: the crowd spilled over onto the sidewalk across George Street in front of Confederation Square.

At one point people started chanting, “Gobble, gobble, gobble!” a reference to a comment that Leal apologized for, directed at Coun. Alex Bierk, during a debate about the redevelopment plan at a meeting April 2.

Leal was reported by Trent University’s Arthur newspaper as having told Bierk, off microphone, that he would “carve” him “like a Thanksgiving turkey.”

Bierk, along with councillors Joy Lachica and Keith Riel, voted to pause the redevelopment plans. The rest of council voted to go forward — and start construction of the pickleball courts this fall.

Although The Examiner did not hear the comment reportedly made by the mayor on April 2, Bierk and one other city councillor (who did not want to be named) later told The Examiner they heard Leal utter those words.

When asked whether he indeed made that statement, in an interview in April, Leal said he didn't recall what he said in the heat of the moment — but he did apologize at the next council meeting for having used “intemperate language.”

Tim Noble and Judith Richardson wore novelty Thanksgiving turkey hats to the protest on Monday.

Richardson said she doubts a comment such as the one reportedly made by Leal would be tolerated in any other workplace: “Any other manager would have been fired from his job.”



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

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