

Sutherland: Bonnerworth and loss of trust

The pickleball “deal” may be “done” — and so may some members of council.

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A site photo of Bonnerworth Park in Peterborough. Council decided to barge ahead with locating 16 pickleball courts there despite an attempt by Coun. Joy Lachica to put the brakes on proceeding.

Clifford Skarstedt Metroland file photo

By **Sylvia Sutherland**

Council should have listened to Richard Scott back in April when he told its members, “If people can trust the process, they can trust the outcome.”

The reverse is also true.

Scott, a retired professional planner, was addressing council at its April 8 meeting. At that meeting, council continued along its increasingly murky and tortuous path over the future of Bonnerworth Park.

It decided to barge ahead with locating 16 pickleball courts there despite an attempt by Coun. Joy Lachica to put the brakes on proceeding.

At a committee meeting on April 2, she served a notice of motion essentially asking council to rethink the project. She was supported only by councillors Alex Bierk and Keith Riel.

Co-chair of arenas, parks and recreation (APRAC), Coun. Lesley Parnell, argued that any delay with the project would result in increased costs.

But, hold on a minute.

The pickleball courts, scheduled for this fall, are only part of the \$4.4 million upgrade to Bonnerworth. A renewed skateboard park and a new pump track are the other part. They are planned for next year.

In addition to ignoring Scott's cautionary words regarding trust, the majority also ignored the suggestion of professional project manager Paul Sobanski. He advised that the pump track and skateboard park proceed this year and the pickleball courts next. That would have allowed time for missing studies on critical issues such as noise, soil conditions and loss of green space.

Never mind the impact on current park users, many of them children. Who knows — without studies — what the final cost, monetary and human, will be?

In fact, Sobanski and Scott told council not having done these studies first could end up costing the city far more than the roughly \$2 million it has set aside for the courts and their related 80-car parking lot.

Can you blame the more than 6,500 people who have signed a petition against the project for not trusting the process?

The disenchanted undoubtedly include the residents who were told by a councillor to take down their "Save Bonnerworth Park" signs because the decision "is a done deal." In fact, the councillor offered to take their signs down for them.

They saw that as intimidation, which it was. Their signs stayed up.

One of the selling points of the project to council was that it had been approved by APRAC. It turns out that wasn't quite true.

Lynn Self, the chair of APRAC when the plan was presented to the group in August, said last week that to say that APRAC approved the same plan that council did "is just the farthest thing from the truth."

APRAC merely "received for information" a staff report on plans for Bonnerworth.

Her questions regarding community feedback and issues around noise were not answered.

Self resigned from APRAC after that meeting, primarily for work-related reasons.

Brad Robinson, a current member of APRAC, attended the August meeting. He told Examiner reporter Joelle Kovach that the Bonnerworth project was presented as, guess what, "a done deal."

There is now talk that the city may eliminate the parking lot, maintain one of the two ball diamonds and reduce the number of pickleball courts.

There is no talk of the courts being eliminated. Research shows that pickleball courts should not be located in residential areas. Municipalities have lost lawsuits over this choice.

Then, there is the issue of trust and the next municipal election. The “deal” may be “done.” So may some members of council.



Sylvia Sutherland was Peterborough's mayor from 1985 to 1991 and from 1997 to 2006.

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