

COUNCILLORS CONTINUE CALL FOR TRANSPARENCY ON BONNERWORTH REDEVELOPMENT PROJECT

Written by

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Peterborough City Councillors Alex Bierk (left), Joy Lachica, and Keith Riel.

Just after 4:00 PM on June 21st, Peterborough City Councillor Alex Bierk published a joint statement, drafted alongside fellow Councillors Joy Lachica and Keith Riel, on City of Peterborough letterhead, to his personal social media platforms concerning the [contentious redevelopment of Bonnerworth Park](#). The statement included three questions directed at City Staff and Councillors about the project which is set to cost the City \$4.4M between 2024 and 2025.

The brief statement states that it was released in order to “enhance transparency around the Bonnerworth Park Project,” with the intention of informing the public of the questions the three Councillors still have regarding how the project and related consultation efforts are unfolding.

The statement asks specifically when the technical studies will be completed and whether they will be posted publicly for review by residents on Connect Ptbo. The three Councillors also inquire as to whether the studies will be finalized only after citizens have had a chance to provide input.

The three Councillors are also seeking clarity on when the relevant advisory committees will hear from consultants on the project. The Councillors are also asking if the concept plan for the park will be made available to the public prior to the contract being finalized so that Staff can make changes that may improve the plan.

The invitation to tender, a copy of which has been obtained by *Arthur*, notes that both the Arenas, Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee (APRAC) and the Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) are to receive presentations from the project consultant, though neither have to this point.

May’s APRAC meeting was cancelled following the [resignation of the former Chair](#), Lynn Self, over her concerns about how the Bonnerworth project was handled. When notice of the meeting’s cancellation was published online, *Arthur* asked City staff about the reasoning but did not receive an answer.

According to emails obtained by *Arthur*, the questions from the Councillors were put to Social Services Commissioner, Sheldon Laidman, on June 19th and that Laidman's answers were subsequently forwarded to all of Council on Friday morning prior to Bierk's posts on social media.

In the email, Laidman addresses the three questions directed at Staff, noting that all of the studies will be completed by the end of August and that they will be posted to Connect Ptbo.

Laidman also notes that the public is always able to provide input which will be considered by City staff, consultants, and third party subject matter experts.

In response to the question regarding when advisory committees will be consulted, Laidman explained that "the agenda for APRAC is prepared in consultation with the Chair so how and when this information is provided to APRAC will be determined with input from the Chair and the Clerk's office."

Laidman also provided an answer to a question about the timeline for the project which does not appear in Bierk's social media posts.

To this, Laidman explains that "the schedule provided in any bid document is a guideline, it is typical practice to adjust as the project progresses" and that any bidding on the project's construction will occur after the final design has been reviewed by Staff.

When *Arthur* reached out to Mayor Jeff Leal for comment on this story Friday evening, he responded saying that he stands by City staff's responses to the question posed by Bierk, Lachica, and Riel.

In a phone interview, Bierk stated that he and his two colleagues decided to release the statement in order to publicly address the questions and concerns being brought to them by citizens but did not want to publish them prior to receiving answers from staff as that may have dissuaded or shaped the response.

“The statement is about being transparent with these conversations,” Bierk explained. “We're asking these questions of staff and the statement is a release to show the public that we're asking these questions.”

Resident calls Councillors' action “fantastic”:

Community members involved in advocacy efforts to make the City rethink their approach to the redevelopment have expressed their support for the actions of the three Councillors since the release of the statement.

John Gerelus, a Town Ward resident and advocate with the group Coalition to Save Bonnerworth Park told *Arthur* the statement was “fantastic” when asked to comment on Friday evening.

“We have been asking versions of those questions throughout this process,” Gerelus said. “I am happy they have acted and publicized them” adding that he hopes the City's response is as clear and concise as the questions posed to them by the three Councillors.

The release from Bierk, Lachica, and Riel comes just hours after the Coalition to Save Bonnerworth Park sent out an eight page rebuttal to a [May 31st statement by the City](#) concerning Bonnerworth Park.

The Coalition's response to the City promotes the idea that the redevelopment of the park is in effect privatizing the area for the use of a particular group at the expense of open green space available to a diverse group of residents who utilize the park.

D'Arcy Jenish, another member of the Coalition to Save Bonnerworth Park, told *Arthur* that the Bonnerworth redevelopment "is not a local facility to meet local needs" which he feels is highlighted in the Peterborough Pickleball Association's (PPA) intention to hold tournaments at the park.

"They want something large enough to host tournaments," he said. "You've got the McDonnell Street Community Center right across the street. It gives you, in effect, a club—so you're taking the park and privatizing it."

The Coalition's rebuttal goes on to state that "Bonnerworth Park's residential context renders it unsuitable for a 16-court pickleball facility capable of supporting 500-person tournaments with its associated noise, traffic, parking, and other disruption."

There are also major concerns about the approval of the plan by Council without first having seen the results of the tests. [This point has been repeated at Council](#) by Bierk, Lachica, and Riel as they have advocated for a reconsideration of the plan which would allow for greater Council oversight.

Notably, despite the plan for the 16 courts being approved by Council in October 2023, and \$2.035M being budgeted for the project's beginning for Fall 2024, the Coalition to Save Bonnerworth notes that this estimated and approved amount was made "on the basis of no

plan, no studies of noise mitigation, traffic and parking measures, soil conditions, and stormwater management requirements.”

Based on this fact alone it’s no wonder that Bierk, Lachica, and Riel have “walked back” their previous positions enough to say that there needs to be more oversight and that the process was and continues to be flawed, Jenish said.

“Clearly, when you come up with 16 pickleball courts, the formula to arrive at that number was flawed,” he added, noting too that he feels strongly the City should not be footing the bill for facilities that will primarily be used by specific groups and their activities.

“The primary purpose of this whole thing is for adult pickleball players to hold tournaments,” Jenish said. “There's something wrong with it no matter how you look at it.”

Despite attempts to reach out for comment, *Arthur* has been unable to connect with members of the PPA.