

CITY COUNCIL

Redeveloped Bonnerworth Park will be a ‘carbon sink’: Peterborough Mayor Jeff Leal

Bonnerworth Coalition says “this re-worked plan changes nothing.”

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Arborists removed three trees that were dead or dying along the perimeter of Bonnerworth Park in June. The revised park re-development plan released Thursday calls for 275 large trees to be planted.

Clifford Skarstedt Metroland

By **Joelle Kovach** Reporter

Peterborough Mayor Jeff Leal says the newly revised plan for a redeveloped Bonnerworth Park — with 275 large trees planted, two fewer pickleball courts and half the parking spots — will make the park more environmentally sound than ever.

“It will be a carbon sink, taking 49.1 tonnes of carbon out of the air,” Leal said of the redeveloped park. “You know, in the climate change world, that’s pretty significant.”

Yet the Bonnerworth Coalition — a group of concerned neighbours — released a written statement Thursday evening (emailed by neighbour John Gerelus) saying they aren’t impressed with the revisions.

Neighbours have spoken up previously about the loss of green space in the park for pickleball courts, among other concerns.

“This reworked plan changes nothing,” the coalition statement says, adding that it ought to have been presented to the public much earlier, as a “starting point” for citizen feedback.

Bonnerworth Park, at McDonnell Street and Monaghan Road, is about to undergo major change.

On Thursday, the city released a new draft plan of the redevelopment for the park, which will be presented at a special virtual meeting Tuesday evening to both the Arenas, Parks and Recreation Advisory committee and the Accessibility Advisory committee.

The new draft plan, set to cost the city \$4.4 million over two years, can be viewed on the city's website.

The plan is from the Richmond Hill landscape architecture firm Landscape Planning (it has designed pickleball courts in municipal parks in St. Thomas, for example).

Their revised plan for Bonnerworth Park calls for 14 pickleball courts, down from 16 in the original proposal. And it has 44 parking spaces, down from the original plan for 80 spaces.

Leal emphasized that new the plan also includes 275 new trees.

"That is a big canopy," he said. "The trees we'll plant will not be little saplings. They will be a larger trees, and a variety (of species). So they have a head start, in terms of their growth."

Furthermore, a city press release from Thursday states that 63 per cent of the park will be green space.

"We're adding more grass area," Leal said. "And if the wonderful students from St. Peter's high school want to go over, kick the soccer ball around, or do other things, there will be ample space."

The redevelopment is expected to begin this fall, with the construction of the pickleball courts, and to continue in 2025 with the addition of a new bike track and upgrades to the existing skateboarding area.

Although neighbours have called it unconscionable to pave over any part of the park for pickleball courts or parking, Leal said the redevelopment will create a park that's "more environmentally sensitive, to what we have there right now."

"Because, you know, there were four trees on the site — four dead ash trees," he said. "And we're adding 275 trees."

While city council has approved the project and its funding, Coun. Keith Riel, Coun. Joy Lachica and Coun. Alex Bierk had voted, in the spring, to pause the project and consult again with neighbours who've said they weren't asked for their feedback.

Neighbours have said also said they are concerned about the potential for constant noise generated from pickleball (the new plan includes an acoustic curtain surrounding the courts, Leal pointed out Thursday).

Meanwhile, the chair of the local Catholic school board had written to Leal in June to express concern that the board hadn't been consulted, in the plans.

Chair Kevin MacKenzie further wrote that many students from nearby St. Peter's Secondary School currently use the Bonnerworth tennis courts (which will be moved to Knights of Columbus Park, on Park Street) and the Bonnerworth fields for outdoor physical education classes or for sports team training (soccer or rugby, for example).



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

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