

PETERBOROUGH REGION

‘Everything’s already been approved’: Advisory committee members discuss Bonnerworth Park draft plan

Public consultation period ends at 5 p.m. on Aug. 21

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More than 250 concerned residents, including a pair of baseball players, attended a May rally opposed to the redevelopment of Bonnerworth Park in Peterborough.

Clifford Skarstedt Metroland file photo

By **Sebastian Johnston-Lindsay** Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

A joint meeting of the City of Peterborough Arenas, Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee (APRAC) and the Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) to discuss an updated draft plan of the Bonnerworth Park Redevelopment project took place Tuesday evening.

Members of both committees were asked to receive the draft plan for information after hearing a presentation from the project’s lead designers at Landscape Planning Inc. The presentation of the draft plan included details around how studies, which include those on geotechnical considerations, archeological history, as well as noise and traffic impacts, have informed the company’s work to date.

Despite reporting in the Examiner, based on statements from city staff late last week, that the studies would not be made available until they are finalized alongside the final plan, the committee members and the public learned that in fact some had been completed dating back to February of 2024, with the most recent study being completed on Aug. 9. Two others — the traffic impact and geotechnical studies — were completed in mid-July.

The [reports are now available on the city's website for the remaining public consultation period](#), which has been extended to 5 p.m. on Aug. 21.

The draft plan released on Aug. 8, five days prior to the joint committee meeting seeking input, includes a reduction in parking from the previous plan to 44 spots at the north end off of Bonaccord Street, a 14-court pickleball facility with two accessible courts, increased green space alongside the planned renovated skate park and construction of a pump bike track.

The original plan had provided for 16 pickleball courts, which is in line with a 2023 Parks and Outdoor Recreation Facilities study that outlined a shortfall of 17.5 courts for an 86,000-person population.

For Bruce Bozec, an APRAC committee member and former president of the Peterborough Pickleball Association, the reduction in courts from the initial 16 to 14 was a sticking point that led him to ask if it were possible to perhaps split one of the accessible courts in two in order to get closer to the originally proposed 16 courts.

“I think the majority of the people that have contacted me have said they would rather see that number increase and maybe eliminate an accessible court so that one accessible could become two, so at least we get it up to 15,” Bozec said after asking how the decision was made to deviate from council’s direction for 16 courts.

“We just went through a tournament at Bonnerworth ... and we had almost 350 people registered for that event,” Bozec continued. “Sixteen courts would have helped out a great deal for scheduling and all that other stuff.”

In response, commissioner of social services Sheldon Laidman explained that the consultants and architects are trying the “balance the competing interests in this park” in order to determine “a suitable amount of overall usage.”

“It was felt that 14 was an appropriate compromise to still have a viable amount of pickleball courts for the pickleball community, while trying to address the balance of the other issues.”

The chair of the AAC, Sioux Dickson, would later speak to the fact that the committees had not been able to review relevant information prior to the meeting and that, because of this, a lot of context around accessibility had been lost, specifically when it came to the available washrooms on site.

Dickson noted that there is a difference between “technically accessible” and “actually accessible,” before adding that she had been unaware that the accessible courts were being doubly touted as tournament courts.



A copy of the updated draft plan for the proposed pickleball development at Bonnerworth Park in Peterborough.

City of Peterborough image

“It kind of makes me wonder why we’re calling it an accessible court if that is not the priority for that court,” Dickson said, before inviting the architects and design team to a future AAC meeting to “talk about the practicality and the necessity of accessibility and why it is important that disabled people are included beyond just having a court some of the time.”

The \$4.4-million Bonnerworth Park Redevelopment project was approved by council in October 2023, and financial backing for the project approved as part of council’s budget 2024 deliberations in December 2023, with \$2 million for the construction of pickleball courts this fall and the remaining improvements — set to cost \$2.39 million — in 2025.

Paul Gardner of Landscape Planning Inc. told members of the committee that the project to date has included a “dynamic” engagement process, which to date has seen numerous public protests outside of city hall and at Bonnerworth Park, and a petition that has garnered more than 8,000 signatures — both online and on paper — over concerns of losing green space and potential noise impacts associated with pickleball.

Despite these concerns, Gardner outlined a rigorous public consultation process had followed from council’s decision, including two public meetings, as well as discussion with stakeholder groups such as the Peterborough Pickleball Association, Peterborough Community Bike Shop, Peterborough Skatepark Coalition, and the Peterborough Cycling Club.

According to Julia Steele of Landscape Architects, the traffic study, which was completed by Tranplan Associates Inc. Aug. 5, meets the requirements for the anticipated number of parking spots.

The consultants did find, however, that over the course of two surveyed days the vast majority of trips to the park for the purposes of playing pickleball were taken by car while other user groups, including skateboarders and tennis players, were more likely to cycle, walk and use public transportation to get there.

The traffic study also notes that the largest contributor to traffic around Bonnerworth was baseball, with a number of users arriving via school buses for weekday play. This is associated with the much larger concentration of users using the baseball diamonds when compared to other facilities.

The findings of the noise attenuation study by Cambium Inc. presented to committee members noted that the consultant's findings predicted that the implementation of the planned redevelopment would not cause "increases in sound level that would be considered significant."

Coun. Kevin Duguay, who serves on the AAC as a council representative, sought clarification on the matter of noise, asking for confirmation that the Cambium study did not include estimations for noise levels that included the presence of a berm or mature vegetation.

The response was that it did not, prompting Duguay to conclude that "the combined realization of those two elements would serve to further reduce noise."

"I'm not a noise expert," he continued. "But I understand the purpose of berms and vegetation."

When discussion on next steps began, Coun. Lesley Parnell, who sits on APRAC and is co-chair of the community services (recreation and parks, fire services, and arenas) portfolio, reminded committed members that the meeting is an opportunity to provide feedback.

"We are not being asked to approve anything," she said. "Everything's already been approved. The (main) project, moving forward, has been approved by council."

Committee members ultimately voted to receive the report for information without further discussion.



Sebastian Johnston-Lindsay is a Local Journalism Initiative reporter for the Peterborough Examiner. His reporting is funded by the Canadian government through its Local Journalism Initiative. Reach him at sjohnstonlindsay@metroland.com

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