

CITY COUNCIL

‘Who doesn’t like maple syrup?’: Bonnerworth Park could be an urban sugar bush: Mayor Jeff Leal

Peterborough mayor says planting 275 sugar maple trees, as part of park redevelopment, is an innovative approach to urban agriculture.

Updated Sept. 4, 2024 at 5:13 p.m. | Sept. 3, 2024 [🔖](#) [🔗](#)



Mayor Jeff Leal responds to questions from Examiner reporter Jöelle Kovach at City Hall in Peterborough on Thursday.

Clifford Skarstedt Metroland

By Joelle Kovach Reporter

Mayor Jeff Leal says planting 275 sugar maple trees, in the redeveloped Bonnerworth Park, would allow the park to someday have an urban sugar bush.

“It’s innovative. It’s urban agriculture. And who doesn’t like maple syrup?” Leal said, in an interview Thursday.

The city is planning to redevelop the park, at Monaghan Road and McDonnel Street, over the next two years, at a total cost of \$4.4 million.

Later this year, the city plans to begin by building 14 pickleball courts, at the park — a controversial plan that has drawn concern from neighbours and other residents who say the courts will generate constant noise and result in the paving over of some of the park's green space.

But city council plans to proceed and next year the park is scheduled to get a new bike track, as well as an upgrade of the existing skateboarding area.

The plan further includes planting 275 trees, and Leal said the city hasn't yet picked a tree species.

But if the mayor had his way, it would be all sugar maples — which he says have a 100-year lifespan at least.

It would take time for the trees to grow large enough to tap, Leal said; he consulted the owners of Staples Maple Syrup in Cavan, who told him trees need to be 10 inches in diameter, to produce sap for syrup (which would likely take years).

But the mayor is thinking far ahead, he said.

“We could tap those trees for maple syrup, and have an urban demonstration (farm) for the students at Saint Peter's, Saint Teresa's and Westmount,” Leal said, referring to the three schools located closest to the park.

“And you could do it, with 275 sugar maples,” Leal went on. “If we decided that that's what we want to plant there, I think that would be a great thing for the community.”

The idea came from Leal's past in politics: As a former agriculture minister for Ontario, the mayor said he knows about maple syrup production.

The 275 trees were mentioned in the city's revised park redevelopment plan that was released in August, and Leal was quoted in the Examiner at the time as saying the trees will make the park into a “carbon sink.”

But Richard Scott, a professional planner and neighbour to Bonnerworth Park, told the Examiner in August he wasn't buying it.

Scott said neighbours remain concerned about the way the park's redevelopment plans will come at the expense of green space and baseball diamonds.

“There's a lot of green-washing,” Scott said, regarding the aim to plant 275 trees. “Everyone loves trees, but to put 275 trees on a site that the whole community is saying needs to be used for community sports and informal uses ... you won't be able to use the space.”

But Leal said this week he sought feedback from Otonabee Conservation, on the matter. He read aloud to the Examiner an email from Otonabee Conservation CEO Janette Loveys Smith.

“The trees would certainly add to the urban canopy and mitigate climate change impacts,” Leal read, from the email.

“The trees would also help to naturally absorb sound and create an environmental green buffer, which is also good. I’m happy to endorse the tree planting at Bonnerworth Park,” the mayor read, from Loveys Smith’s letter.

“So I think that dispels the myth about greenwashing,” Leal said.

— *with files from Sebastian Johnston-Lindsay, Examiner*



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

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