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Friends of Trinity Bellwoods Park

Virtual park meeting Sept 16, 2020, 6:30pm to 8pmish

Minutes/notes

(taken by Carolyn Wong**)

Friends of Trinity Bellwoods Park (FoTBP) is a residential volunteer group that work together to improve and maintain the green space, cultural and recreational activities of Trinity Bellwoods Park. Since 2001, Friends of Trinity Bellwoods has been recognized by Parks & Recreation/City and by our Councillor as the vehicle of community consultation for the park. We are a diverse group who are willing to share new ideas, respect other points of view, and participate in a collaborative process to create a vibrant community park.

Intros of Friends managing meeting:

Katherine Money, Jess Hui, Carolyn Wong.

In attendance**, in no particular order: Justin Sharpe, Wendy Gold, Catherine McMonagle, Tara Noelle Bates, Ange B, Bob Whalen, Dawn Rzepka, Berenicci Hershorn, Elinor Galbraith, Phill Snel, Melissa Milkie, Sandra Pella, Ben Watt-Meyer, Frances Money, Matt Lee, Paula Bowley, Anna Hill, Kristina Fox, Mathew Hornick, Joe Cressy, Joan Wilson, Dan Breault, Grant Drygas, Richard Guttman, Terri-Lynn, Jessica Runge.

Overview of meeting agenda.

Welcome all to our first ever virtual Friends meeting. Thanks for your patience because of this.

Park during pandemic times

Intro to Dan Brenault of the City of TO.

Dan works with homeless and getting folks off the streets to safe shelters and homes. At meeting to talk about the encampments in park and some of the plans. You may contact him directly at dan.breault@toronto.ca, ph 437-238-3722. Note: he is extremely busy and responses/time may well be delayed.

Discusses the work and challenges with encampments. The City has not seen the volume like this ever before (amount of tents and people) and understand the seriousness of the situation. This year over 1500 have been housed in TO - phenomenal amount. Been working since April to move people into safer places. Locations are being cleared successfully. 54 encampments have been cleared across the City. Literally challenges of finding the space right now because of distancing required because of the pandemic. The housing system was bursting at the seams before COVID-19 - they are now clammering for beds. Trinity Bellwoods Park is a top priority for encampment work - it switches between TBP and Alexander Park. He repeats, TBP is a top priority and all departments - City, Parks, police, fire dept, Health are very aware of issues and actively working with addressing until they can get all the folks

housed. The Fire Dept did clear out propane tanks and gave safety instructions to encampments, as well as did health and safety assessment. Fires on site are a concern. Health issues with people living outside do get priority placement.

'Streets to Home' continue to engage them. There has been harm reduction education and there has been reversing overdose occurrences. PF&R ambassadors regularly visit people in park to gauge the encampments for safety. If you do find needles, call 311 with as exact location as possible for City come clear. Parks staff have been trained on how to dispose of safely.

Police do visit regularly to respond and do checks. Paramedics and nurses supply support. City is looking at supplying portable toilets to park - tbc. They do want to clear the park. Needle disposal is planning on being installed.

Note: there are several active community organizations that are doing regular checks on encampments i.e. supply food, water, ice in TBP. We are hoping to get a one-sheet list of them to include with these meeting notes.

Q&A

Joe Cressy: (needs to leave at 7:30)

There are about 100 encampments across the City. Trinity Bellwoods Park is at the top of the priority for everyone, including the neighbourhood. COVID-19 has magnified the homeless situation in City. The target, and what his office is pushing/working towards is moving people out of parks into permanent housing. Ending homeless, not just temp placing in shelters. Aim is to re-house. The idea is to resolve homelessness, not relocate the problem. Every day they are dealing with mitigating harm and focusing on re-housing every single day.

Dan - TBP and Alexander trade off with level of health and safety and vulnerability. Exploring option of proper needle disposal in the park. Brings up the dog attack on journalist last week. x2 people were arrested and he thanks TO Police for keeping things safe. Repeats that it's all about getting enough space to house inside. The plan is to continue to engage the folks of encampments to understand better their needs for appropriate placement.

Have moved 7 people out of TBP, it's slow and complex problem and he thanks the community for their patience.

Joe - 8000 estimate of homeless every night. This winter they will be trying to scale up accommodations to facilitate distancing and capacity.

FoTBP/Katherine asks - How can we, as a community engage to support the 'check in' process and frequency with the encampment folk.

Dan - Goes over some of the regular check-ins at TBP. Streets to Home, 5 times a week. X10 a week for housing options. PF&R staff regularly clean up and maintain the park green space. With some staff knowing folks names. 7 days a weeks TO police go through park. Volunteer groups are doing care work (food, sleeping bags, ice, water to dwellers). There are lots of resources going to TBP. Check ins are coming from all different organizations helping. Note: below are links to two mentioned by Dan

TBP falls in the catchment of Albion Neighbourhood services.

<https://www.albionneighbourhoodservices.ca>

Streets To Homes

<https://www.shhc.ca/streets-to-homes>

Joe - Short term and long term. Ending chronic homelessness is takes hard work and he will be pushing very hard all the time. What can we/you do as a neighbourhood? Check in with them, see how their doing. They are people just like us. If FoTBP want to initiate something, his office will support. Alternatively get involved with Albion Neighbourhood Services and other organizations. Parkdale Queen West Community Health Centre is doing good work. All agencies are strapped during the pandemic.

Noted: SPIDER: Specialized Program for Inter-Divisional Enhanced Responsiveness to Vulnerability

Ben/partner - Asks what kind of coordinating can happen?

Dan - Get to know your neighbours and local organizations to help them. It is known that TBP encampments, neighbourhood is relatively safe ie. Tents not being set on fire as in others. Mentions group 'Encampment Support Network' you can volunteer and donate. Their contact: Twitter @esn.to.4real Instagram @esn.to.4real email: report.on.toronto@gmail.com

Dawn - Liberty Village Cares supplied food and delivered to TBP where required. From her experience she says to not be afraid to approach, simple ask them what they need. Create a dialogue.

Joe - Will consolidate names of organizations mentioned in this meeting that all utilize to help and/or donate.

Katherine - From a question in 'zoom-chat box', about wildlife care in park and if it's been effected by the current conditions.

Grant Drygas PF&R Parks Supervisor Ward 10

Has not noticed significant changes in the park to wildlife and has had no specific reports. Trying to keep park safe and clean. They provide encampment folk with garbage bags to use and on large has had mostly positive reaction.

Katherine asks how different it is operating in park during the pandemic.

Grant - it's extremely challenging as PF&R is working with half-staff and alternating schedules to keep everyone safe. Recently they've been able to relax, a little and have more staff on. Most challenging is the needles in the park. Staff tries to focus on playgrounds, and where children tend to frequent and are cleaned up as much as they can be. Need to keep staff safe as well. Staff is getting to know campers and are helping them to keep their sites clean/safe.

Katherine - It is possible to get formal signage to warn patrons to watch out for needles?

Grant - Can definitely explore this and something to consider. Going into the winter PF&R will be losing staff. Crews will continue to patrol park interacting with park residents and keeping it clean and safe.

Katherine - Can washrooms stay open longer?

Grant - Looking into porta-potties, we do want to make sure there's a place for them to relieve themselves.

Katherine - The FoTBP is happy to share the word of whatever initiatives City is doing.

Joe - Dealing with dozens of dozens of encampments. My office is to address short term and permanent solutions, this takes compassion. Thanks to Grant, Dan for their time. Adding that he has seriously been touched by our meeting that has displayed so much more compassion than with some other park groups. Which some have been very mean spirited towards the encampments.

TO Police Services (Kyle?) 24/365 day service. City counterparts have covered pretty much all the bases. Please reach out, we are a funneling service. The police know many of the homelessness by name. Email: 14division@torontopolice.on.ca

Dan - Discusses his approach, how to work with them to get them inside. Addressing the 'hording' of stuff around their tents: He is not a psychologist, but the stuff they horde means more to them because they don't have enough. It's important to try to understand who they are and the complexity of the situation. They don't exist like us in homes. It's how to approach them without enforcement.

FRIENDS UPDATES:

Farmers Market, Carolyn

Spring was a crazy and stressful time for all FM organizers across the GTA/Province. It was a moving target and we had no idea of whether we'd be able to go or not at all. Eventually FMs with parks permits were shut out until at least June 30th. Mad scrambles, panic and many hours and zoom meetings ensued for a few months with organizations i.e. Greenbelt Markets, Farmers' Markets Ontario, TO Food Policy and individuals to figure things out and get FM recognized by Province as essential services, the first step. From there a huge amount of work went into getting Public Health protocols drafted to guide FMs in how to operate. Simultaneously FMs were encouraging vendors to boost up their online ordering model or get it going (easier said than done). It was very challenging because at that time, farmers were super busy working/planting the fields. Finally, with Provincial/City approved protocols and layout design we started July 14th (original start date was May 5th). Pre-COVID, I could set up on my own. Now, between two shifts we have about 27 community volunteers to operate protocols. During prep we had several orientations, and crossed fingers it was actually going to work. I had a campaign to get the word out about the rules to come. Most patrons have been awesome and totally respect the protocols. Average wait when it's busy is 15 mins, which is great. General patron feedback is that they feel safe coming and it's well organized. I am eternally grateful for the Volunteer Coordinator (her profession!), Amanda Pickup, who I could literally not do it without her help and of course the volunteers. The unfortunate upside of the pandemic there's lots of people home and available. I also want give a huge thank you to our Ward 10 Councillor, Joe Cressy and his Senior Advisor, Communications and Constituency, Joan Wilson for always being available to help the market out during certain and uncertain times.

I am committed to not slacking off on protocols because people are getting a little comfortable - it's about get in/out with your shop, no lingering please. The pandemic is still on and we have to keep sharp. There were extra expenses this year (about \$1400) spent to facilitate the layout required. The market is accepting donations to try and recoup some of the costs. There are donation vessels at the entrance (Crawford) and exit (Dundas). You may also e-transfer donations to info@tbfm.ca for direct deposit. No password required!

Please follow us on our social media platforms and our visit www.tbfm.ca for full COVID-19 protocols on coming to market. Please do not hesitate to reach out if you have any questions. Email via our website contact form, which is the best first mode of contact.

Adopt-A-Tree - Katherine

New trees have popped up and has managed to get them adopted out. Trying to connect with some new people to help coordinate the program. The Sakura Cherry trees are stressed or dead/ill. She asks Grant if he knows about this, can he supply and info about addressing?

Grant - Forestry is strapped and not responsive as usual. There are delays on attention to the trees in the park. And there are spending restrictions because of COVID-19. PF&R have lots of plans, but everything is legitimately on hold for the pandemic.

Katherine - Is there anything we can do to help the cherry trees, we are here to help. Let us know. I would like to untether some of the trees (a few meeting member offered to help K). We understand that forestry is overwhelmed and asks Grant/PF&R to advocate to help out the Sakuras.

Grant - Parks has no jurisdiction over their cue. Forestry has control over the city canopy (mature, ornamental) it is up to them to govern their own jurisdiction.

Greenhouse Clean up - Oct. 6th, time tbc - Jess

Call out to volunteers for clean up of the greenhouse and entail prep for winter/spring. Email greenhouse@trinitybellwoods.ca COVID-19 protocols will be in place.

Park clean up in the fall date TBC.

We may combine this with the greenhouse clean up. A two for one!

Question to Grant about outdoor rink and pumpkin parade.

Grant - The outdoor ice rink operating....waiting to see what happens with COVID-19, which may affect things. Hoping to get it going. **Pumpkin Parade** - Doesn't see why it couldn't, but would have to adhere to the standard protocols for permits issued ie. Operations like market. And also how virus effects things.

Note: Prior to meeting the Friends had discussed the possibilities of the pumpkin parade during COVID-19 conditions. We knew it would take a serious commitment from many and we decided that it just wasn't possible or even safe to do it this year.

Meeting adjourned approximately 8pm.

**Apologizes for any omissions or errors, if any most definitely not intentional. Notes taken as best as I could on the fly/memory - I am not stenographer ;-). Unfortunately we did not record the zoom meeting. If anyone is experienced and interested in taking notes/minutes at our next meeting, please let us know at friends@trinitybellwoods.ca