



ROUGE PARK ALLIANCE MINUTES - MEETING #3/09 - May 1, 2009

The Rouge Park Alliance met in the Main Boardroom of the Toronto Zoo. Alan Wells, Chair, welcomed everyone and thanked Calvin White, Toronto Zoo, for hosting the meeting. The Chair called the meeting to order at 9:10 a.m.

PRESENT

Members:

Alan Wells, Chair
Councillor Paul Ainslie, City of Toronto
Hon. Pauline Browes, Waterfront Regeneration Trust Corp.
Councillor David Cohen, Town of Richmond Hill
Glenn De Baeremaeker, Save the Rouge Valley System Inc.
Dr. Helena Jaczek, MPP, Province of Ontario
Councillor Ron Moeser, City of Toronto
Councillor Jennifer O'Connell, City of Pickering
Gerri Lynn O'Connor, TRCA
Councillor Clyde Smith, Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville
Calvin White, Toronto Zoo

Alternates:

Ian Buchanan, Region of York
Brian Denney, Toronto & Region Conservation Authority
Ron Dewell, Toronto & Region Conservation Authority
Jim Robb, Save the Rouge Valley System Inc.
Debbie Pella Keen, Province of Ontario

ABSENT

Members:

Hon. Michael Chong, MP, Government of Canada
Markham Deputy Mayor Jack Heath, Region of York
Regional Councillor Bonnie Littley, Region of Durham
Councillor Erin Shapero, Town of Markham

Alternates:

Councillor Raymond Cho, City of Toronto
Nestor Chornobay, Region of Durham
Mayor Wayne Emmerson, Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville
Tom Farrell, Province of Ontario
Adele Freeman, Toronto & Region Conservation Authority
Mark Graham, Save the Rouge Valley System Inc.
Sue Gunton, Toronto Zoo
Councillor Logan Kanapathi, Town of Markham
Keith Laushway, Waterfront Regeneration Trust Corp.
Councillor Chin Lee, City of Toronto
Tom Melymuk, City of Pickering
Carolyn Woodland, TRCA

Staff:

Bob Clay, Manager, Ecological Restoration
Michelle Holmes, Communications Specialist
Doreen McCarty, Administrative Coordinator

Vicki MacDonald, Biologist
Maria Papoulias, Manager, Natural Heritage
Sheryl Santos, Stewardship Coordinator
Lewis Yeager, General Manager

Observers:

Cat Beattie, Public Participant
Tom Boudreault, City of Toronto Parks
Gail Crossman, Transport Canada
Marvin Macaraig, Dept. Of Geography, U. Of T.
Andy McKinnon, Public Participant

Observers (Continued...)

Brent Mersey, Markham EAC
Learie Miller, Town of Markham

2. Proposed Toronto Park Ranger Initiatives

KEY ISSUE

A status report on the Toronto Parks ranger programme first proposed in 2007.

MOTION:
Res. #27/09

Moved by: Glenn De Baeremaeker
Seconded by: Ron Moeser

THAT the Rouge Park Alliance receive this report;

AND FURTHER THAT the Rouge Park Alliance encourage City of Toronto Council to move forward with funding a pilot park ranger programme in Rouge Park as soon as possible.

..... **DEFERRED**

ACTION

- Staff to report back to the Alliance with a more detailed report, including partnerships (MNR/TRCA/Markham/Toronto/Toronto Zoo, etc.), volunteers, costs for illegal garbage removal, by-law enforcement to the "whole" Park, cost proposals, etc.

BACKGROUND

In 2007, Rouge Park staff met with Bill Harding, Toronto's Manager of Parks for Scarborough district and Carol Cormier, Manager of Parks Standards and Innovation to discuss ideas related to establishing a park ranger pilot project in Rouge Park, loosely based upon a successful programme in New York city. If successful, the goal would be to expand the programme to include all Toronto Parks.

Essentially, the rangers were seen as enhanced by-law officers who would ensure that Rouge Park visitors were aware of rules and restrictions, but also that they would perform educational and visitor experience roles, by being a public face for Rouge Park. Experience in New York suggests that the visible presence of such rangers greatly reduced vandalism and unacceptable behaviour and increased the number of park visitors who now found a cleaner and more pleasant park environment. Reductions in repair and maintenance costs apparently exceeded the cost of the ranger programme, resulting in financial savings along with better reported visitor experiences.

In 2007, Toronto proposed the hiring, equipping and training of four to five rangers to cover the Toronto portion of the Park. Rouge Park would provide training on the Park's values and resources, visitor programmes and other outdoor education themes that rangers could discuss with the public so that their role would be wider than conventional enforcement. Toronto and Rouge Park would share branding on uniforms, vehicles, etc.

To improve public behaviour in recreational areas, the 3E (Education, Engineering and Enforcement) approach is most successful. The rangers would provide educational messages to the public, and advise when needed if by-laws were being broken. Their day-to-day experiences would help provide advice on possible engineering solutions to reduce garbage dumping, inappropriate off-trail activities and other problems.

As has been noted many times, enforcement is a huge challenge in a new park where years of inappropriate activities have been somewhat routine. As well, many jurisdictions and landowners presently make it difficult for the public to know who to turn to when they observe illegal or other inappropriate activities. While poaching, off-road vehicles, dogs running loose and large-scale littering are most prominent, there are many other aspects of maintaining a first-class park that need attention on the ground.

BACKGROUND

Many people are allowing dogs to run loose in Rouge Park, resulting in serious impacts upon birds, mammals and other wild animals and plants, particularly in breeding and rearing seasons (spring and summer). While there are other issues related to dog walking and dogs running loose in other urban parks, Rouge Park's ecological sensitivity is a special concern, particularly in Toronto where most of our hiking trails pass through Nature Reserve and Restoration Areas.

During our 2008 open house for Rouge Park's Heritage Appreciation and Visitor Experience (HAVE) Plan, many of the visitors to our reception centre proved to be people walking their dogs, so we had a good opportunity to discuss how they perceived the Park. Many indicated that they did allow their dogs off the leash on occasion; some regularly. Most had never heard that breeding wildlife species were particularly sensitive to the presence of dogs (who resemble wolves or coyotes to many animals and birds); or that some ground-nesting birds will abandon their nests if disturbed in this way. Several dog walkers indicated that such information, if posted, would have some effect upon their dog walking activities. Seasonal restrictions on dogs in sensitive areas or dedicated dog trails through more robust habitats were ideas suggested by our visitors. Some noted that in the winter, almost all our trail users are walking dogs. None felt that a fenced "dog-off-leash" area offered any of the benefits that walkers and their dogs were seeking.

Rouge Park's Visitor Guide (2008) presently provides the following guidance to dog owners (p. 22).

"Walking Your Dog?"

The trails in Rouge Park are a great place for you and your four-legged pal to get some fresh air and exercise. Keep these points in mind while you're enjoying the sights and sounds of this natural area, and help protect your park.

These trails wind through a designated nature reserve - home to many small wildlife species who may nest on the forest floor, or rely on ground cover for food and shelter. An encounter with an off-leash dog can prove stressful or fatal to these animals, and could disrupt breeding for the season.

While you consider your dog friendly and no danger to others, an off-leash dog can cause fear to other people and dogs.

Poison ivy can be prevalent in areas near the trails. Dogs can easily pick up and transfer this skin irritant onto you and others.

By leashing your dog, you are showing consideration for the Park, and all of its visitors."

While there are signs at our public use areas in Toronto which note that dogs are not to be off-leash, the signs do not provide explanations of possible impacts on sensitive wildlife breeding and rearing that might influence some dog owners. It is a challenge to provide such information in a firm but non-confrontational manner. However, since we lack rangers/wardens to enforce the present by-law and Rouge Park policy which do not permit dogs running loose, much disruption currently takes place, particularly on weekends, and by professional dog walkers who loose a number of dogs at a time. The Woodland Area is particularly victimized by this type of abuse.

During the preparation of Rouge Park's HAVE Plan, our consultant highlighted these difficulties (p. 4.89).

"Walking dogs off-leash is not permitted in Rouge Park. Rouge Park is the largest natural area on the eastern edge of Toronto and Markham. Yet many of the people living adjacent to or near to the park regularly walk their dogs in it, especially in the areas south of Steeles Avenue. Most dog owners feel that their dogs get better exercise when off leash.

Issues related to dogs walking with their owners in the Park off-leash include:

Environmental Issues

- dogs trampling sensitive habitat
 - damaged habitat can open the way for invasion by alien species, e.g. dog strangling vine and purple loosestrife
- scaring and killing wildlife

Social Issues

- conflict between dogs and other park visitors
 - including dogs scaring and even biting other park users
- confrontations between dog owners and other park users
- lack of enforcement reduces the overall respect for the park and the habitats and species that it protects.

As there is no local off-leash dog park in the area, it is likely that this will be an ongoing issue in the park unless specific steps beyond education are taken."

While the behaviour of some dog owners can be improved through education and enforcement, particularly since there seems to be good will by dog owners toward Rouge Park, this is a complex issue which is playing out throughout the GTA. From Rouge Park's point of view, signage telling dog owners where nearby areas which permit dogs off-leash can be found would be helpful if coupled with enforcement. The concept of having dedicated dog walking trails is problematic since most of Rouge Park, particularly in Toronto, comprises nature reserves and ecological restoration areas. Similarly, while Rouge Park may seem large, it is still too small to provide home ranges for many wildlife species, and the abandonment of rare ecological habitat to fenced dog off-leash areas within the Park would be sad indeed, and probably would not satisfy many of those that presently let their dogs run loose.

These concerns are assuredly not unique to Rouge Park. Attached is a Park Note from Alberta's Fish Creek Provincial Park which is adjacent to Calgary and shares many characteristics with our Park. This Note outlines their policies related to Dogs in the Park. Fish Creek has the advantage of strong enforcement by provincial and municipal personnel.

Also attached is a draft Toronto discussion paper which effectively summarizes much of the factual information about impacts of dogs running loose in parks. Since this is only a draft document, it should be consulted only for technical information rather than any policy implications. However, it does summarize the current background information well.

Rouge Park is a unique park, and we will likely need a unique strategy to deal with the problems of dogs running loose. Without dedicated enforcement of existing by-laws or new policies, it is difficult to predict a successful strategy to reduce damage by dogs to wildlife and vegetation.

Report prepared by: Lewis Yeager, General Manager, Rouge Park
For information contact: Lewis Yeager, 905-713-7374 - email: klyeager@rougepark.com
Date: April 23, 2009
Attachment

4. Toronto and Region Conservation Authority Report on Conveyance of Lands
In Bob Hunter Memorial Park to York Region

KEY ISSUE

York Region has requested that the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) convey about 5 acres of land for realignment of Don Cousens Parkway at 14th Avenue and grant a permanent easement of about 2 acres for the South East Collector Sewer.

MOTION: Moved by: David Cohen
Res. #29/09 Seconded by: Ian Buchanan

THAT the Rouge Park Alliance receive the attached letter and report from the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority on this matter.

..... **CARRIED**

BACKGROUND

York Region proposes to realign 14th Avenue at the future Don Cousens Parkway and the adjacent rail crossing to provide a safer route. As well, the Region has requested a permanent easement for the future South East Collector sewer which would pass under Rouge Park/Bob Hunter Memorial Park along 14th Avenue.

The TRCA holds title to these lands which were transferred for Rouge Park purposes by the Province of Ontario. Attached are a letter, report, and Resolution #A23/09 from the TRCA regarding this matter. Also attached is the executive summary of the appraisal of these lands which was completed for York Region.

Report prepared by: Lewis Yeager, General Manager, Rouge Park
For information contact: Lewis Yeager, 905-713-7374 - email: klyeager@rougepark.com
Date: April 23, 2009
Attachment

MOTION: Moved by: Glenn De Baeremaeker
Res. #30/09 Seconded by: Jennifer O’Connell

THAT the Rouge Park Alliance requests that York Region create an underpass for 14th Avenue at the Havelock Rail Line and an overpass for wildlife and people to safely move from the north to south side of 14th Avenue within Bob Hunter Memorial Park and Rouge Park, and forward to the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority for consideration.

..... **CARRIED**

MOTION: Moved by: Glenn De Baeremaeker
Res. #31/09 Seconded by: Jennifer O’Connell

THAT the Rouge Park Alliance requests that York Region further consider an alignment of the York-Durham Sanitary Sewer along 9th Line and Steeles Avenue to avoid piping raw sewage through Bob Hunter Memorial Park and to comply with the Greenbelt Act’s direction that infrastructure should be concentrated along major inter-regional corridors such as Steeles Avenue.

..... **DEFERRED**

MOTION: Moved by: Glenn De Baeremaeker
Res. #32/09 Seconded by: Jennifer O’Connell

THAT the Rouge Park Alliance invite York Region, Durham Region, and the City of Toronto to come to a

Special Rouge Park Alliance meeting on May 29, 2009 to discuss the Southeast Collector Trunk Sewer Project.

..... CARRIED

MOTION: Moved by: Jennifer O’Connell
Res. #33/09 Seconded by: Ron Moeser

THAT the Rouge Park Alliance endorse the position of Durham Regional Council and request York Region to locate the proposed Odour Control Facility within York Region and outside of Rouge Park.

..... CARRIED

MOTION: Moved by: Clyde Smith
Res. #34/09 Seconded by: Ron Moeser

THAT the Rouge Park Alliance staff report back to the Alliance on the merits of a policy to request market value contributions from agencies requiring expropriations or easements of lands within Rouge Park for infrastructure projects.

..... CARRIED

ACTION

- Staff to take appropriate action on the above resolutions.

5. Correspondence

MOTION: Moved by: Clyde Smith
Res. #35/09 Seconded by: Ron Moeser

THAT the Rouge Park Alliance receive the following correspondence:

1. Letter dated April 2, 2009 to Alan Wells, Rouge Park Alliance, from Tyrone Gan, P. Eng., iTRANS Consulting Inc., re: 16th Avenue Class EA Study, Donald Cousens Parkway to York-Durham Line, Notice of Study Completion.
2. Copy of Letter dated March 1, 2009 to Brian Denney, Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, from The Boyington Heights Ratepayers Association Inc., re: Proposed Multi-use Pathway and Bridges in Milne Conservation Area in Markham.
3. Copy of Letter dated April 8, 2009 to Sameer Dhalla, Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, from Phil Goodwin, Don Watershed Regeneration Council, re: Low Impact Development Stormwater Management Manual.
4. Copy of Letter dated April 21, 2009 to Hon. Donna Cansfield, Minister of Natural Resources, from Debi A. Wilcox, City of Pickering, re: Notice of Motion-Wildlife Hunting.

..... CARRIED

6. New Business

None

TERMINATION

ON MOTION, the meeting terminated at 11:15 a.m., on May 1, 2009.

Alan Wells
Chair, Rouge Park Alliance

Lewis Yeager
General Manager, Rouge Park