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Presented by

A glimmer of reason on skating ban

Peter Kuitenbrouwer, National Post

In deciding the other day not to seek re-election, veteran city councillor Kyle Rae (Toronto Centre-Rosedale) blasted the can't-do attitude at City Hall -- particularly bureaucrats who are "more interested in risk management than delivery of programs."

Case in point: the city's Activities on Frozen Open Bodies of Water Policy, a dumb document produced by a risk-management culture. The policy -- which council never saw -- bans all skating on city ponds, forevermore.

But yesterday a glimmer of reason reached City Hall. The Parks, Forestry and Recreation committee told city staff to review the policy, and potentially to permit skating on Grenadier Pond in High Park -- and possibly other ponds too.

Councillor Paula Fletcher pushed for the change in a letter to Brenda Patterson, general manager of parks, which Ms. Fletcher, chair of the Parks committee, circulated at a meeting in Committee Room 2 yesterday. She had learned of the policy only when I wrote about it on Tuesday.

"Whether speed skating, family skating, shinny or simply enjoying a casual skate under a blue sky, the community continues the long standing tradition of using Grenadier Pond as an outdoor ice surface," Ms. Fletcher (Toronto-Danforth) writes. "There are many skaters and shinny players who are active in keeping the ice surface cleared and ensuring safety considerations.

"There is a lack of rink space in the city with many rinks overcrowded and very many rinks with few pleasure skating time slots. Grenadier Pond fills important skating needs in the city and has been a popular skating venue for many decades. I look forward to your review of the current policy to look at how Grenadier Pond can be used safely as outdoor ice surface, as well as seeing whether there are any other similar ice surfaces in other parts of the city which are being used by the community in such a way."

After the meeting, Ms. Patterson -- after admitting she has never seen Grenadier Pond -- conceded that the 2007 pond skating ban is not very well thought out.

"It may very well be that as opposed to to saying, 'You don't skate on any body of water in the city that freezes,' like water-retention ponds, that there may be places where it's quite appropriate, and Grenadier may be one of them," Ms. Patterson said. "We don't have additional staff resources to start to manage Grenadier Pond as an artificial --" she corrected herself "-- as a natural ice rink. We will determine whether there is a way to work with existing users for example.

"What as happened here is that, as opposed to making a determination about to whether the ice is safe

or unsafe, the policy basically says that any natural body of water is inherently unpredictable and therefore unsafe. Whether ultimately that's the kind of signage that should be there, or whether there should be signage that says, be aware of the following things before you get on the ice, skate at your own risk ... " she trailed off before inserting a verb.

The staff report on pond ice won't get to committee until March. The pond will likely have melted. Please don't wait for the bureaucrats, and come on out to High Park. Take the streetcar to Howard Park, or leave your car at the Grenadier Restaurant and walk down the hill. Bring a shovel. The ice is fine!

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