



FRIENDS OF DUFFERIN GROVE PARK

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Rink Crisis Letters - 2003

Here is our first letter to the city about the crisis, and quite a few emails that we received from friends and neighbours in response.

Claire Tucker Reid, General Manager, Parks and Recreation

City of Toronto

Dear Claire,

I have just been informed that Dufferin Rink will be shut down, probably tomorrow, if we continue with the mixed use that we now have. Two health and safety inspectors came and quite evidently found the whole scene we run, abominable. I called James Dann to come down and they gave him all the details.

After 10 years of community-building at Dufferin Grove Park, it is a stunning experience for me to find that two gentleman can come and tell us that what our neighbourhood has built in this park is basically a giant heap of safety violations.

It is ironic and sad that as parks and recreation facilities all over the city, especially rinks, are crumbling before our eyes, one of the best outdoor rinks in the city would be closed. The Christmas holidays are set to begin. To have to face the end of our community dinners, the bread, the farmers' market, and much of what makes the rink work so well, will be a very serious blow for our neighbourhood.

The two health and safety inspectors who came today told me that it is a fallacy to think that parks belong to citizens: they belong to the corporate entity called Toronto. I hope that not everyone in city government feels this way. Please let us know where you stand.

Jutta Mason

I have participated in Shiny Hockey, Night of Dread and Harvest show on stilts and have enjoyed the benefits of your community. From the kitchen, market and the park itself. I can't believe that a pair of inspectors can have such power to ruin such a creative and interesting community. I would like to see the great tradition continue of bringing so many different kinds of people and events to an urban park that is at risk of being ignored and destroyed because of some rules that cannot be creatively

altered or changed to recognize Dufferin Grove's charm and draw.

Thanks
Drew Simmons

p.s

Don't punish the shinny players for not playing with helmets.

I was at the Edmonton heritage game and the great one did not have inspectors shutting down the game because he didn't wear one.

Dear Recipients,

I'm writing to add my voice to those protesting the confusion around the Dufferin Grove Park.

Here's how the situation appears to me: someone is under the impression that if the park is allowed to continue to build community and serve the needs of as many people as possible, someone, somewhere may sue. The juxtaposition of food, fun, education, and sports so close together could lead to someone getting hurt or eating something unsafe. I'm guessing, here, but I'm probably not far off the mark.

This reminds me of when my children were born, and I was instructed by all the experts to "child proof" my home. After 4 years of attempting to do so for 2 children, I learned the attempt was futile, and a waste of energy better spent actually caring for them. If you remove or pad every corner of your home and eliminate all furniture, placing your child in a bare padded room, they can still trip and put an eye out with their own thumb. Should I then have my children's thumbs padded? If I were to thoroughly child proof my children, they would be liable to become cases of Children's Aid, and I charged with failing to provide the necessities of life.

Dufferin Grove Park feels like a home to me. There's been some child proofing done, and there's been some leeway given because this park grew from the needs of the community it serves. I go there on the bus from Bathurst and St.Clair to enjoy the farmer's market and take my kids skating and to be awed by the Clay and Paper geniuses. This park is a shining gem in the city of Toronto, entity or parent or corporate party pooper. I tell people I meet on the Streetcar about the dinners at Dufferin Grove. What should be done about it? It should be studied and treasured and emulated city wide, of course.

In closing, I'd like to relate an incident that happened last year at the Wychwood Car barns Park, a fledgling baby park up in my area. Some volunteers were getting up every morning at 5am and going again at 8pm every day for a month to flood a rink for local kids to skate on. When the ice was really beautiful, and kids began to discover this fabulous thing and turn up in droves to skate there, the City Of Toronto's Real Estate Department sent salting trucks over to dump 80 or 100 lbs of salt on the rink. Twice in two days. Seems they'd got wind of the ice being slippery, and were worried someone might slip and hurt themselves. It is

simply and truly unCanadian to salt a rink. It is also simple and true that people can slip and fall on ice, but it is also fair to say that salting a rink is going too far.

So, here we are with a fabulous, treasured park that has the admiration of people across the world, and the undying loyalty of the community it serves. Dufferin Grove is not dangerous to those who treasure it, in any way. We won't slip on the ice, or choke on some fresh warm bread and sue. We love our park. Perhaps when goodwill can be tagged and weighed, we will be able judge real value, and to offset the cost of maintaining all that constructive joy. Then we'll know the real cost of shutting down a community jewel. Until then, it is going too far when you consider harming our treasure.

Ms. Roscoe Handford
Helena Ave.

Dear Mayor Miller, and Councillors,

I was extremely disappointed and angry with the news that the rink at dufferin grove is to be shut down. What the community has done at dufferin grove stands as a shining example of what community really is ... and it should be duplicated throughout the entire city -- not taken apart.

The rink, the farmer's market, the bread ovens, the friday night suppers, the wading pool and every other spectacular event that happens there makes me proud to live in this city.

What is going on at city hall to stop this? and why is something so vital to the wellbeing of the city being attacked?

Please help.

Sincerely,

mary myers

ward 18 resident, and weekly farmer's market shopper

" It is a fallacy to think that parks belong to citizens ?? "

Apparently this is what two health and safety inspectors, who came to inspect Dufferin grove park rink communicated to the staff after finding some safety violations.

I feel that our park has always been in the forefront of community involvement. We have wonderful Friday, Saturday dinners

(Where the heck are you going to find great food and atmosphere for \$5.00). The baking that goes on at that park is simply amazing. The number of people who use the park, rink, club house is incredible.

And now some bureaucrats, who think that this park does not belong to us want to shut the whole place down. As a tax paying citizen who has enjoyed this wonderful community park for years, I find this completely outrageous.

Please make sure that our rink and our club house are not closed down*

A very concerned citizen who believes that our parks really belong to us.

Shanti Nahata

Gladstone

Dear People in Charge,

That's enough. No more of this bureaucratization of people's everyday lives is going to happen if I can help it.

Dufferin Grove Park and the people who work and volunteer in it have given me a home away from home. It's a place I meet my friends for dinner and where I get to befriend people I would never have otherwise met. I go there and help out so that I can feel like I'm doing something good for the people in my neighbourhood. The food prepared there is done by people like myself for the enjoyment of our friends and neighbours. All profits go back into supplies and toys for the kids. It is a labour of love.

And yet the City of Toronto, and especially the exceptionally poorly managed Parks Department, resent and actively oppose anyone who does more than the absolute minimum required of them. When staff use their own initiative to make the most of their time and the resources at hand they get met with opposition by those who resent their efforts, which they seem to notice cast their own mediocre work and commitment into a poor light.

It's time for the Parks Department to acknowledge that, despite most of their efforts, Dufferin Grove Park makes them look good. People in the park see the City of Toronto actually working for them and providing them with a happy place to go. Little do they realize that the City wishes it would go away.

Please, I urge you, work with the people who care about this place and keep it going.

Happy Holidays,

Caitlin Shea

College Street

Hi there,

Yesterday two employee health inspectors from the City came to Dufferin Grove. These inspectors visit work sites to make sure they are safe for city employees. The inspectors visited the new kitchen in the garage and determined that there were health and safety violations in this area and that it was not a sufficiently "safe" area for city of Toronto employees to work in. They advised Jutta that this part of the rink and maybe all of the rink is about to be "shut down."

I see here some interesting coincidences in timing. For the past few weeks, Jutta and company, have been doing a "rink hotline" because right now, unless you live in the Dufferin Grove area, you cannot call your local rink and find out if it is open and functioning. (None of the other numbers are public.) As a result, the only way to find out if your rink is running is to actually go to it.

Dufferin Grove staff got their number put on the city rink recording so that people can phone Dufferin Grove and find out which city rinks are running. To do the hotline properly, Jutta and park staff have been doing some research, basically visiting rinks to see if they are in a working state. They have discovered many rinks get infrequent rink maintenance and in some parks, the rink guard cannot be found. After the Dufferin Grove group discovered that there was some disarray in Toronto rinks and started reporting this to city types, we got a "surprise" visit from the two employee health inspectors.

The bad feeling in my stomach, and I am speaking personally now, is that in the city bureaucracy, there are some people who are unhappy about the Friends of Dufferin Grove. They do not like the idea that we feel it is our place to tell them to do their job.

Now we are in a pickle because, in fact, these inspectors can probably always find another "infraction" to keep our cooking facilities shut down.

So what to do? I am not entirely sure. I called the Mayor 416-397-2489 and my Counselor — mine is Adam Giambrone 392-2012. I told them Dufferin Grove rink was really important to me and I want them to help us keep it running.

So if you feel like making some waves now is a good day to do it. Merry Christmas to all.

Jane Price

President of the Friends of Dufferin Grove

Like many decisions made in this city, this angers me so much that it makes me nauseous — how on earth do these type of people get to make these decisions? Do we have to get together to fight city hall every time something good is happening that

some bureaucrat disapproves of? Heaven forbid that we allow something to continue that is good for everyone except for those wanting more money or power..... My husband knows a journalist who was interested in doing an article on the wonderful things that go on at the park. We will definitely let him know about this! Also, our new city representatives.

Keep up the battle!

Jackie Monders

Dear Councillor Giambrone,

First let me offer you my congratulations on your victory. As a supporter, I was pleased to see a progressive voice representing my ward for the first time in quite a while.

Now to the point. I have just been informed of the potential closing of Dufferin Grove Rink. **THIS MUST BE STOPPED!** As you are well aware Dufferin Grove is a community success which has been written about in both the national and international press. More importantly, it is a place that me and my family have been going to for years. Our time there is something we look forward to on a weekly basis as it is one of the only opportunities we have to all go to one place and ENJOY ourselves (the challenges of teenagers who rarely want to be seen in public with their parents). I presume I do not have to sell you on its merits. Please do **WHATEVER** you can to prevent this. There are a lot of progressive voices on Council. Call for their support. Surely, it will not be difficult to get them **ON SIDE** for something as unique and special as Dufferin Grove. **IT IS A COMMUNITY BASED PARK, MADE FOR AND BY THE COMMUNITY. THIS IS ONE EXAMPLE OF CIVIC PARTICIPATION WORKING AT ITS BEST. PLEASE DON'T LET THIS HAPPEN!**

Please let me know how I, and my family can help.

Thanks for your support in this matter.

Loren Grebanier
Westmoreland Ave

Mr. Miller,

As a resident and regular user of the park and rink, I am shocked to learn that the city once again wants to flex its muscle to close the rink and the park in spite of all the efforts made by residents to build a valuable and meaningful resource within the city. At a time when city officials should be applauding the efforts of local residents, they appear instead to prefer to antagonize and punish those who have worked to make the park and rink a community within the city. Please look at the facts and stop this madness.

Tim Freeman P.Eng.
Stern Automation Limited

Hanna Avenue

I have only recently discovered the Dufferin Grove market and rink, dinners and everything else that goes on in the park and the whole feeling of it was so warm and inviting and HUMAN - COMMUNITY. It is a real healing happening I believe, where people can feel they are part of a community life and not just in a big anonymous city.

It is absolutely clear to me that the team of volunteers and workers who have invested so much love and care to build the atmosphere at Dufferin Grove are pioneers looking for a better way of city living. I was so inspired by that and so warmed that it exists.

What a mistake it would be to shut it down because it wasn't sterile enough. I do hope we can share out thoughts and feelings clearly enough, because we make Toronto, and I believe Dufferin Grove makes Toronto special.

Please feel free to pass this on to anyone who may be able to help.

Kathy Patterson

To Gloria Lindsay Luby

Vice Chair, Economic Development and Parks Committee:

I am the Executive Director of a private charitable foundation founded in 1987 by the late Geoffrey H Wood, a longtime resident of Etobicoke (both personally and business wise). You may remember his famous slogan 'sanitation for the nation'.

For some years now, our foundation has been making grants to the Friends of Dufferin Grove Park to assist them in their efforts to integrate the park into the community. The irony in all of this is that the park applied for and received a grant from the city to buy and install the kitchen equipment which now appears to another governmental authority to be problematic. For what it is worth, we agreed to an \$8,000 commitment to help with the kitchen which helped her secure the grant from the city.

I am not one to normally harass those who represent me/us in the political process but this situation is ridiculous. Anything you can do in your new role as Parks Vice-Chair would sure be appreciated.

Thanks for your help.

John Broley

The Geoffrey H. Wood Foundation

I am sending this message to you all in the hope that some quick, sensible action can be taken in the face of what seems to be an idiotic bureaucratic farce.

I have recently heard that the Dufferin Grove Rink is to be shut down this weekend. Through Jutta's efforts and those of other local residents, our park is a shining example of what a park should be. It is a hub of vibrant and lively activity that attracts youngsters of all ages together with adults who participate in the varied and inclusive activities that the park offers.

My two sons have used the rinks for many years. Every time I walk by the rinks which are invariably full, I think how wonderful it is that this city offers these kinds of activities that keep these young people active and fit.

The farmers' market has been a terrific addition to the park and has drawn another group of people into the park. The community suppers that are offered have given neighbours the opportunity to get to know one another a valued asset in a large city. Other activities such as the entertainment, the baking ovens, community gardens and so on, have all combined to create a wonderful sense of neighbourliness. The combination of all these activities have also created a much safer park than in the past.

I cannot tell you how angry and outraged the neighbourhood will be if the rink is closed. Where are the youngsters going to go who use the rink? Do you want them to hang out on Bloor Street and in the Dufferin Mall during the Christmas holidays? All this talk about the impact that overweight children will eventually have on our health services ... it seems to me that the kids skating might just save us a few health dollars! I just cannot believe that anyone would be so short sighted and mean spirited. However I do have faith that common sense and a belief in community and neighbourhood will prevail in our newly elected officials. Please prove me right.

Sincerely,

Vivienne Smietana

Havelock Street

Dear Joe,

The email below indicates something very wrong at the Parks & Recreation management level. This news is absolutely abominable, backward, and anti-neighborhood. The Dufferin Grove activities have been a model and a beacon of hope for all citizens of Toronto.

What can you do to help stop the rink and other activities being shut down? And what can we, as concerned neighbors, do?

Best — Michaelle McLean

Massey Street

Dear Councillor Giambrone,

Please re-consider the city's position on the use of the rink house at Dufferin Grove Park. This park is a prototype of what community usage of a park should be. There are many many people in this neighborhood who are very proud of our park, and if you start tearing down what is near and dear to the citizens of this area, and refuse to protect their values, you will alienate many voters, myself included. There will be a groundswell. Fore-warned is fore-armed.

Margaret Mikkilborg

Dear Councillor Giambrone:

I am writing to you, concerned about news about the rink at Dufferin Grove and potential conflict with the City's Health Inspectors.

I own 420 Gladstone Avenue which is the large house that faces the rink and if anyone in the neighbourhood has earned the right to comment about the current state of affairs, it would be me. You will notice in the subject header that I refer to the rink as a Community Centre because that is in fact what it has become--- the least funded and probably the best community centre in Toronto in the true sense of the word community. Living where I do, I am very much aware that Dufferin Grove, as a large inner city park, has the potential to change its character in a heartbeat and become a dangerous force in our neighbourhood. Skating at the rink 12 years ago was not a pleasant affair as teenage boys set the tone for how the facilities were used. Is this a stereotype? Probably, but that was my family's experience. Today the rink is a totally different place that has lots of room for teenage boys as well as everyone else. Bottom line is that the way the place is run(health inspectors or no health inspectors) it supports the activities that are meant to take place and that the community has decided it wants. While I don't appreciate hockey players climbing the fence and playing at 3:00am (I hear it every time the puck hits the boards) I'd rather hear pucks than gunshots. Keeping the park safe is a very tricky balancing act. It's working because everyone uses it, so please do what you can to make sure that this state of affairs continues or the city may well have much more serious problems on its hands than a few health infractions.

Sincerely,
Annick Mitchell

Dufferin Grove Park is one of the most used, community friendly, parks in Toronto. It has one of the richest varieties of activities, ranging from skating, through wood-fired ovens, to Friday night dinners for the locals, to name just a few. All this has

taken years to build up, and the park has developed a well-earned reputation as a result. The Park has learned to do 'more with less', and to more than fill its mandate, at a time when such lessons are much needed.

The City Bureaucrats who want to close it down should be taking the lessons learned there, and applying them to parks throughout the city. Instead, they apparently want to do 'less with less', complaining that the mixed use nature of the park (ie. making greatest use of the resources there) violates regulations. Could they not work with the park in constructive ways instead, to help spread community-friendly and cost-saving benefits to the rest of the city?

Henrik Bechmann,
Gladstone Ave.

I have asked staff for a report on the Health and Safety violations, and I will be receiving this information quite shortly. Please know that we will do whatever we can to ensure that the facility stays open for the residents. I will be in touch as soon as I have the information and a proposed solution.

All The Best,

Claire

Mayor Miller has asked me to respond directly to your e-mail regarding the Dufferin Grove Park. The Mayor understands the importance of Dufferin Grove Park to residents in the area and the role it has played in building and supporting a strong community.

We have received assurances from senior staff in Parks and Recreation that the arena will remain open. Staff have requested a report to address a number of Health & Safety concerns. Once the report is complete, Parks and Recreation staff will convene a meeting with members of the Friends of Dufferin Grove Park early in the new year to communicate further on the issues.

Carmen Smith
Community Liaison Assistant
Office of the Mayor